THE MIDDLE EAST

Prospects for Settlement and Stability?

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL UNIVERSITY

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Prospects for Settlement and Stability?

edited by

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Monograph No. 17

Published on behalf of the
Centre for Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies
by the
Peace Research Centre
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
Australian National University
Canberra
1995

17136416

Printed and Published in Australia
at the Australian National University
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National Library of Australia
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

The Middle East: prospects for settlement and stability?

Includes index.
ISBN 0 7315 2172 2. ISSN 1030-3154

1. Democracy - Middle East - Congresses. 2. Islam and politics - Middle East - Congresses. 3. Women in politics - Middle East - Congresses. 4. Middle East - Politics and government - 1979- - Congresses. I. Saikal, Amin, 1950- . II. Jukes, Geoffrey. III. Australian National University. Peace Research Centre. IV. Australian National University. Centre for Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies. (Series : PRC monograph ; no. 17).

320.956

Unless otherwise stated, publications of the Peace Research Centre are presented without endorsement as contributions to the public record and debate. Authors are responsible for their own analysis and conclusions.

Cover design by Kate Shackleford, ANU Graphics
Cover photograph courtesy of Embassy of Israel, Canberra
Printed by ANU Central Printery
Published by:
Peace Research Centre
Research School of Pacific and Asian Studies
The Australian National University
Canberra ACT 0200
AUSTRALIA

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Preface

This volume is based on the proceedings of an international conference held on 7–8 October 1994 for the Australasian Middle East Studies Association (AMESA) by the Centre for Middle Eastern and Central Asian Studies (CMECAS), The Faculties, at The Australian National University (ANU). The conference was opened by the Hon. Tim Fischer, the leader of the National Party and Shadow Minister for Trade, who made time in a busy schedule to contribute a thoughtful address on the importance of the Middle East and the peace process to Australia as well as of the CMECAS for its role in helping to raise public awareness of the Middle East in Australia. The Chairman of the Board of the Faculties of the ANU, Professor Richard Campbell, kindly chaired the opening session. The Guest Speaker at the conference dinner was the Hon. Justice Michael Kirby, who delivered a highly stimulating talk with a focus on human rights. The contributors to the conference were asked to prepare papers on specified aspects of the Middle East which fell within their individual areas of expertise. Beyond this, they were in no way obliged to adopt a particular methodological approach or line of argument. This book contains the revised versions of most of those papers, together with introductory and concluding essays by the editors.

We wish to register our sincere thanks to Mr Fischer, Professor Campbell and Justice Kirby and the contributors. We are also very grateful to the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the Department of International Relations, RSPAS, ANU, for their moral and financial support. There are many other people and institutions who also played valuable roles in making the conference possible. We thank all of them, in particular Mrs Barbara Phillips and Ms Christine Kertesz, the

Administrator and Research Assistant respectively of CMECAS, without whose organisational skills and hard work the conference could not have been managed. Our thanks also go to Professor Bill Logan, the President of AMESA for 1993–94, for his advice on organising the conference. Last, but not least, we are grateful to Professor Ramesh Thakur and Mrs Chris Wilson of the Peace Research Centre, RSPAS, ANU, for facilitating, with great speed and efficiency, the publication of this volume on behalf of CMECAS as a monograph of the Peace Research Centre.

Amin Saikal and Geoffrey Jukes
Canberra
May 1995

Abbreviations

AWU	Arab Women's Union
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency
CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
DFLP	Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine
DOP	Declaration of Principles
EAP	economically active population
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FIS	Front for Islamic Salvation
FLN	*Front de Libération National* (National Liberation Front)
GUPW	General Union of Palestinian Women
IDF	Israeli Defence Force
MK	Member of the Knesset
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NDP	National Democratic Party (Egypt)
NGO	non-governmental organisation
PECDAR	Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction
PFLP	Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine
PFWAC	Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
PNA	Palestinian National Authority
PNC	Palestine National Council
UNCEDAW	United Nations Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women
UNLU	United National Leadership of the Uprising
UNRWA	United Nations Relief and Works Agency
UPMRC	United Palestinian Medical Relief Committees
UPWC	Union of Palestinian Women's Committees
UPWWC	Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees

USFP	*Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires*
UWCSW	Union of Women's Committees for Social Work
WWC	Working Women's Committees

Introduction

The Middle East Peace Process and the PLO's Problems

Amin Saikal

The Middle East peace process is going through a minefield. The Israeli Government of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) under Chairman Yasser Arafat are finding it increasingly difficult to accommodate each other's wants and needs. The implementation of the Declaration of Principles, signed between the two sides on 13 September 1993, is already running one year behind schedule. At the same time, albeit under pressure from US Secretary of State Warren Christopher, Israel and Syria resumed negotiations at ambassadorial level in late March 1995. However, a settlement between these two arch enemies is not likely to be easy either. This means that the Israel–Lebanon disputes are equally going to be very difficult to manage, given the nature of Lebanon's relationship of dependence with Syria.

Relations between Israel and Jordan is the only area in which there has thus far been some progress. The Peace Treaty of October 1994 between these two countries has led to a visible degree of normalisation of relations between them. But even in this case, further development is contingent upon how the two sides eventually achieve full implementation of their peace treaty, and how they overcome interrelated obstacles in the Israeli–Palestinian dispute and wider Israeli–Arab disputes. By the same token, since the signing of the Camp David Accords in

September 1978 the relationship between Israel and Egypt has not progressed much beyond a cold peace. There are already signs that, under pressure from Islamic opposition at home and from the slow progress of the peace process in general, Egypt is shifting its position from being a peace partner to becoming a regional competitor with Israel. A clear example of this shift was shown in Cairo's insistence that its support for the indefinite renewal of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) should be matched by Israel's also becoming a signatory to the Treaty.

While in the absence of a better alternative all the parties involved may hang on to the peace process, the process has lost much of its initial momentum. It has already become so twisted that even if the interested parties agreed to settle a further number of disputes and problems as a precondition for a durable peace, they may not in the end achieve anything more than what might be described as functional peace in the region. Many factors continue to bedevil the process, with several still having the potential easily to subvert the process.

The Palestinians remain fragmented over the peace process and its outcomes so far. The PLO leadership under Yasser Arafat—the only Palestinian partner in negotiations with Israel—has not succeeded in removing some of the basic causes of this fragmentation nor in generating greater Palestinian support for the peace process. If anything, the Palestinians have become increasingly polarised between supporters and opponents of the process. Nor has the PLO been able to establish a strong and credible autonomous administration in Gaza and Jericho, and to embark on a solid and speedy program of reconstruction. Consequently, it has not improved its negotiating position with Israel to one of such strength as to make the achievement of the Palestinian goal of a sovereign state a certainty. Ever since the signing of the Joint Declaration of Principles, the Palestinian leadership has remained constrained by rifts within its own ranks, undermining its capacity to persuade a number of hostile Palestinian groups and their regional supporters to back, or at least acquiesce in, its peace efforts.

Of the nearly half of the PLO's Executive Committee members who resigned in opposition to Arafat's signing of the Declaration of Principles, which they viewed as a sell-out of the Palestinian cause, none has so far changed their mind. Some of them have contributed, either individually or through group action, to a

campaign of opposition. In this respect, none has been as public as George Habash, whose Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine commands a small but none the less quite disruptive following in Gaza and the West Bank. The ranks of these elements have swollen with more prominent PLO supporters expressing—some publicly and some quietly—disillusionment not only with Arafat's peace deals, but also with his style of centralised leadership and decision-making. They include the famous Palestinian intellectual and once committed admirer of Arafat, Edward Said, who since the signing of the Declaration of Principles has turned into one of the most vocal critics of Arafat, calling for his replacement. Even Palestinian spokesperson Hanan Ashrawi has discreetly sought to distance herself from the peace deals by declining to take up a position on the Palestinian Autonomy Council, set up under Arafat's chairmanship as the highest decision-making body to govern Gaza and Jericho. Instead, Ashrawi has founded the Palestinian Commission for Citizens' Rights, to 'safeguard [people's] basic rights, to work against the abuse of authority and misuse of public funds' as part of nation-building.

A further divisive blow to the PLO's leadership has come from the organisation's most senior foreign affairs spokesman, Farouk Quddoumi. He has become increasingly outspoken in frustration with the slow pace of the peace process, intimating frequently that the PLO must not achieve peace at the cost of surrendering to Israel. He has adopted a position which places him as a potential alternative to Arafat within the framework of the PLO's nationalist politics.

Meanwhile, and more crucially, the PLO has not been able to bring on board two of its main ideological rivals: the Palestinian radical Islamic movement of *Hamas* and its sister group, Islamic Jihad. Although the latter has a following of no more than 3 per cent of the population in Gaza and the West Bank, the same cannot be said about *Hamas*. Whatever outside perceptions may be, *Hamas* is a formidable ideological and political force, with a popular support of some 25–35 per cent in Gaza and about 15–20 per cent in the West Bank. It has a solid political structure, with considerably more educational and welfare projects among Gaza citizens than the PLO can boast at present. The movement, which is ideologically dedicated to the rule of *Shari'a* (Islamic law) and the creation of a Palestinian political and social system

which would at least be in conformity with Islamic values, is distrustful of the PLO, and regards the PLO's secularist vision of a Palestinian state as incompatible with its own. Although *Hamas* initially agreed to a truce with the PLO, relations between the two have progressively deteriorated.

While refusing to participate in any power-sharing with the PLO in administering Gaza and Jericho, *Hamas* has remained vehemently opposed to the peace process. It has not refrained from the type of activities which could undermine the PLO's negotiations with Israel. *Hamas* and Islamic Jihad have persisted with acts of revenge against the Israelis. They have carried out a number of spectacular suicide missions against Israeli targets, killing and wounding more Israelis in the nine months since the implementation of the Gaza–Jericho accord of May 1994 than in the previous three years. In the process, they have jeopardised the peace process. The Rabin government has seized on their actions to slow the peace process down markedly, to pursue collective punitive measures against the Palestinians by restricting movement between Israel and Gaza and between Israel and the West Bank, and to pressure Arafat for greater security guarantees as a condition for further concessions.

This has confronted the PLO's leadership with a serious dilemma. On the one hand, it has wanted to limit *Hamas* and Islamic Jihad, preventing them from frustrating the peace process and challenging the PLO's position as the sole body having legitimate authority to negotiate with Israel towards a final settlement. On the other hand, the PLO leaders have been careful not to provoke a civil war—a development which could badly impair the Palestinian nationalist movement and erode the PLO's authority altogether. The sight of Palestinians fighting amongst themselves and killing one another could only benefit Israel. As a result, the PLO leadership has so far found it expedient to adopt a two-pronged approach. One is to take certain tough security measures. These have included the setting-up in early 1995 of a military tribunal, arresting some three hundred alleged supporters of *Hamas* and Islamic Jihad and sentencing three of them—two for fifteen years each and one for life—for acting against the peace and carrying out specific violent actions against Israeli targets. Another is to be cautious not to go so far in these measures as to cause an all-out confrontation. To this end Arafat has combined his increasingly tough stance with

a concessionary policy towards his opponents. Hence he has sought not only to raise the PLO's own Islamic credentials—as illustrated by his call in mid-1994 for a *Jihad* to liberate Jerusalem, which brought swift condemnation from the Israeli leaders—but also to allow *Hamas* a necessary degree of freedom of activity and propaganda.

However, the ability of the PLO to act more persuasively towards *Hamas* and Islamic Jihad has also been limited by a number of other factors, with three main issues dominating. The first is the range of ideological limits within which Arafat is operating. On the one hand, in order to maintain the backing of his own supporters he has to make sure he is still on course with his secularist vision of a Palestinian state. On the other, in order to build bridges of trust and confidence with *Hamas* so as to keep the movement at bay at this critical juncture, Arafat needs to convince *Hamas* that he shares its Islamic political values. Yet to keep the Israeli government on the peace track, he has had to demonstrate constantly that the PLO is in control of the Palestinian nationalist movement, with the necessary authority to negotiate on its behalf. His task is made no easier by growing disillusionment with the peace process among the Israeli public. The mood of optimism described by Dr Avi Shlaim in his paper in this volume is dissipating, and recent polls show Israelis almost evenly divided between supporters and opponents of continuing the peace process.

The second concerns the fact that of the US$2.2 billion of aid promised by the West to the PLO for reconstruction, only a limited amount has so far been disbursed. This, together with Arafat's failure to persuade the oil-rich Arab states (particularly Saudi Arabia and Kuwait) to forgive him for his sympathy with President Saddam Hussein over the August 1990 Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, and to resume their financial support, has severely limited the PLO's capacity to fund its autonomous administration adequately and to embark on a reconstruction program which could speedily bring tangible benefits to the Palestinians. This limitation is nowhere more consequential than in Gaza, where a majority of the nearly one million inhabitants live in abject poverty, with an unemployment rate as high as 58 per cent. Thus, the PLO has not so far been in a position to provide the people of Gaza with more incentives and services than *Hamas* does. The irony is that the harder Arafat has tried to gain the confidence of

potential and actual aid donors, the more the donors have demanded evidence of the PLO's competence and accountability as preconditions for dispensing assistance. And the longer this situation continues, the more difficult it will become for Arafat to meet the preconditions for the disbursement of aid on a substantial scale.

The third factor is that while the PLO has become increasingly preoccupied with the difficult task of transforming itself from a 'liberationist' to a 'governing' body, the Israelis have remained in firm control of every step in the peace process, with a clear ability to exploit the PLO's weaknesses and make sure that the organisation remains amenable to Israeli policies. The Rabin government's determination to have the peace process evolve on Israeli terms, and hence its continued efforts not only to maintain but also to expand Jewish settlements, involving confiscation of more Palestinian land in Jerusalem, and to make East Jerusalem inseparable from West Jerusalem as the permanent capital of Israel, has left Arafat and his administration little room to manoeuvre. This is a situation that clearly plays into the hands of the PLO's opponents, helping them to sustain their criticism that the PLO leadership is acting in collusion with Israel against them.

It would be best for the PLO if *Hamas* and Islamic Jihad transformed themselves into a loyal opposition. This possibility, however, may not arise unless there are substantial changes in the position of the PLO and of *Hamas*'s regional supporters. The PLO leadership will need to hold a free, democratic election for a broad-based legitimate legislative council, in order to fulfil its long-standing promise in this respect, to dispel the impression that Arafat is essentially autocratic, secretive and unwilling to share power, and to widen public participation in achieving the goal of an independent Palestinian state.

Yet two developments have dimmed the prospects for holding such an election. The first is Israel's reluctance to redeploy its forces from Gaza and the West Bank, as an essential prerequisite to allow the election to be conducted freely and fairly. The second is that, as time has progressed since the inception of autonomous rule by the PLO, the chances of the Organisation winning an election have diminished considerably. Many PLO insiders, including Farouk Quddoumi, believe that if an election had been held in mid-1995, the PLO could not have pulled off a majority.

In this context, the Israeli reluctance over force redeployment has interacted quite well with the PLO's fear about its electoral chances, to allow the election date to be postponed from late 1994 to mid-1995. Even this date has already proved to be quite unrealistic, given Israel's constant demand that the PLO control its opponents as a precondition for further progress towards a final settlement, and the amount of time which is required to prepare for the election.

Moreover, the PLO will have to convince a number of regional forces, most importantly *Hezbullah* and its main backer, the Iranian Islamic regime (neither of which are directly linked to *Hamas* but which share many of the latter's ideological and political goals), that its peace process with Israel is not at the core of a regional–international strategy aimed at containing them, as is so often implied by Israel, Egypt and the United States.

So far, the PLO leadership has not scored very highly in this area either. Its lack of success is quite understandable. Any substantial progress in these areas will depend not just on the PLO, but also on what Israel and the United States and its regional supporters want to achieve out of the peace process, on whether the Israel–Jordan peace treaty will produce the mutually desired results, and on whether Israel's disputes with Syria and Lebanon are settled. At present it is abundantly clear that Israel and the USA want the peace process to move forward, with the aim of stemming the tide of Islamic radicalism in the region. They want it to be conducted in such a way as to reinforce what they have declared as a policy of containment of the Iranian regime and its Islamic radical push against their interests in the area.

While this remains their manifest objective, the path to achieving a comprehensive and lasting peace in the region will be very long, and probably beyond reach within the foreseeable future. Even if the PLO succeeds in building constructive links to *Hamas* and winning an election as a real test of its popularity, even if Israel achieves peace with Syria, and even if a resolution is found for the problems of southern Lebanon, Israeli settlements and Jerusalem—although the last two will be the most difficult of all, given Israel's profound political difficulties in dismantling the settlements and insistence on Jerusalem as its united capital—the forces of political Islam, as important players, cannot be

expected either to melt away or to be contained through regional political intrigues and manipulations. These forces do not draw their strength just from the continuation of the Palestinian problem or the general Arab–Israeli conflict. They may have been aided by these factors, but whether in the occupied territories or Lebanon or Egypt or Sudan or Algeria, they have their real roots in serious social and economic frustrations, and in the failure of national administrations to allow significant popular groups to become legitimate participants in national affairs. While they may so far have failed to present themselves as philosophically viable alternatives, as some analysts have argued, they are unlikely to remain incapacitated as the most effective opposition in the region.

Undoubtedly, like any other self-seeking actor, Iran is keen to penetrate and control these forces to advance its own regional interests, as it has done with *Hezbullah* in Lebanon. It likes to be in a position to use them whenever it needs to prove to its adversaries that it has the ability to make life difficult for them at a regional level. Ultimately, this must not be allowed to camouflage the fact that many Islamic movements in the region, including *Hamas*, have neither been created by Iran nor necessarily emulate the Iranian leadership. Most of them are home-grown, thriving on the impoverished living conditions and problems of political legitimacy which are so widespread in the Arab world. In the same vein, *Hamas*'s policy approach and objectives are reflective of and nurtured by the political–social frustrations and economic destitution of those Palestinians whose suffering in the squalor of Gaza has made them seek refuge in Islam as the only ideology of hope and salvation.

The way forward for the PLO, Israel and their supporters in the peace process is not to aim to suppress *Hamas* or its sister movements in the region, but to work towards the creation of such political, social and economic conditions as would lead them to political moderation, on the basis of legitimate, institutionalised processes of participation in rebuilding and governing their societies. This cannot materialise unless the attitudes and priorities of all the principal actors change to the point that they can distinguish between what brings functional peace and what creates comprehensive peace. It is the latter, not just the former, that the Middle East needs.

The objective of this book is to focus on some of the

fundamentals underlying the complexities of politics, society and inter-regional relationships in the Middle East. Its aim is not to provide a comprehensive analysis of all the factors and issues which characterise the processes of change, development and continuity, but to analyse those salient features which underpin the current problems and opportunities confronting the peoples of the region. In so doing, the ultimate purpose is to canvass some of the basic trends and movements in order to determine where the region is likely to head beyond this century.

In the first of seven chapters Avi Shlaim provides an historical perspective on the Arab–Israeli conflict, with a focus on Israeli politics after the Jericho–Gaza settlement. He examines the peace policy of the Labour-led government, the differences in approach between Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and Foreign Minister Shimon Peres, the reaction of the Likud to the Gaza–Jericho settlement, as well as the attitude of the Israeli public, and concludes that the Labour government's peace policy significantly enhanced its domestic support, thus placing it in a strong position to continue the quest for comprehensive peace in the Middle East.

Chapter 2, by Ahmad Shboul, provides sociological and historical perspectives on the current debate over radical Islamic movements, cautions against interpretations grounded in the threat-perceptions of Western *realpolitik* or authoritarian Arab regimes, and stresses the role of radicalism as a feature of a crisis in Arab society caused largely by the failure of Arab regimes to deliver on promises of 'modernisation'.

Jim Piscatori assesses the problems and prospects of democratisation in the Middle East in Chapter 3. He challenges tendencies to stereotype Islamic political discourse as inherently anti-democratic, while acknowledging that some of those involved in it denounce democracy as a Western contrivance predicated on immoral majoritarianism. Piscatori concludes that democratisation is part of Islamic political discourse, but that there are silences in that discourse, including in regard to the civil rights of women.

Chapter 4, by Amin Saikal, considers why Middle East regimes have so far failed to move beyond overt or veiled authoritarianism, and advocates concentration on creating conditions for good government and civil society, in the spirit of the Islamic 'virtuous polity', rather than pressing for Western-

style democratisation.

Women's rights and problems are discussed in two chapters. In Chapter 5 Samina Yasmeen raises the issue of women in politics in the Middle East, arguing that, by any criteria, women remain under-represented in politics there. She describes the extent of women's participation in Middle Eastern political institutions and higher echelons of government, and argues that their under-representation constitutes part of a global tendency to deny women access to political power, but that several factors indigenous to the region, of which Islam is only one, have also been important. She concludes that while women remain under-represented in Middle Eastern parliaments, they nonetheless participate in politics through non-traditional means and in non-traditional domains, and concludes that lack of representation is not necessarily synonymous with lack of participation.

In Chapter 6 Ron Macintyre focuses on the socio-economic priorities of Palestinian women under Israeli occupation. He examines the degree of social organisation and politicisation of the women's movement and its contribution towards (a) the national struggle and (b) women's rights, with reference to the emergence of a new Palestinian society wherein more than half the population will be female.

In Chapter 7 Geoffrey Jukes draws some conclusions.

Chapter 1

Israeli Politics and the Gaza–Jericho Settlement

Avi Shlaim

Israel, Henry Kissinger once remarked, has no foreign policy, only domestic politics. Although this remark involves an obvious over-simplification, it raises an interesting question about the relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy in Israel. Domestic politics influences foreign policy in all countries, of course. In the case of Israel, however, the impact of domestic politics on foreign policy is particularly profound, because foreign policy involves existential questions and questions of national identity which weigh much more heavily on the mind of the Israeli public than on the minds of the people of most other countries.

The relationship between domestic politics and foreign policy is not a one-way street. Just as internal political forces influence foreign policy decisions, developments in the sphere of external relations feed into the domestic political scene in a never-ending process. The purpose of this article is to examine the interplay between domestic politics and the Middle East peace process since the June 1992 elections, at which the Labour Party regained power after fifteen years of dominance by the rightwing Likud bloc. The thesis to be advanced here is that the peace policy pursued by the Labour Party since it regained power has enhanced its appeal at home and put it in a stronger position to continue the process towards a comprehensive settlement of the Arab–Israeli conflict.

There is a broad consensus in Israel, encompassing both the Likud and the Labour parties, which places national security

above peace with the country's Arab neighbours. This consensus militates against making concessions for the sake of peace that are liable to undermine Israel's security. No similar consensus, however, exists regarding peace agreements that do not appear to detract from Israel's security. To be more precise, there is no consensus on whether or not Israel should be prepared to trade the territories it captured in June 1967 for peace with her neighbours.

Here lies the most fundamental difference between the foreign policy outlook of the Likud and that of the Labour Party. Likud is committed to the ideology of Greater Israel which claims the West Bank—Judea and Samaria in its terminology—as an integral and inalienable part of the Land of Israel. Labour is a pragmatic party which places security above all other values. For Likud, the Land of Israel is sacred; for Labour, Israel's security is sacred. Likud's approach to the occupied territories is governed primarily by ideological imperatives; Labour's approach is governed primarily by security considerations. To say this is not to suggest that Likud is indifferent to security or that Labour is untouched by the ideal of Greater Israel, but simply to point to the different emphases that colour the world view of these two parties.

On the Palestinian question, until very recently there has been a curious convergence between Likud and Labour. Both parties have suffered from a general Israeli blind spot when it came to the Palestinians. Both parties have been extremely slow to come to terms with the reality of Palestinian nationalism. Both parties, when in power, displayed a distinct preference for dealing with the rulers of Arab states rather than the representatives of the Palestinian people. Both parties were vehemently opposed to negotiations with the PLO, and both remain opposed to the establishment of an independent Palestinian state.

The Labour Party advocated territorial compromise over the West Bank after 1967, but what it had in mind was compromise with King Hussein of Jordan, not with the Palestinians. The infamous statement that there is no such thing as a Palestinian people came not from the Likud, but from Labour's Golda Meir. Yitzhak Rabin, who succeeded Mrs Meir as prime minister after the October War, stood before a joint session of Congress in 1976, and declared that Israel would not commit suicide by meeting with the PLO. He insisted that the Palestinians were not the core

of the conflict, and that to consider them as such was 'to put the cart before the horse'.

This solid national consensus began to crack after the Middle East peace conference convened in Madrid in October 1991. The American sponsors of this conference excluded the PLO, but allowed for Palestinian representation within the framework of a joint Jordanian–Palestinian delegation. Negotiations between Israel and her opponents were to proceed on the basis of UN Resolutions 242 and 338, and the principle of trading land for peace which lay at the heart of these resolutions.

Yitzhak Shamir, Israel's Prime Minister at the time, made no attempt to conceal his hostility to the American-sponsored peace process. The basic issue in the Arab–Israeli conflict, he insisted, was not territory, but the Arab refusal to recognise the legitimacy of the State of Israel. Following the Madrid conference, bilateral talks were held in Washington along two tracks: an Israeli–Arab track and an Israeli–Palestinian track. Shamir maintained his unyielding position in both tracks. His proposals for Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip were derisory. In defiance of international opinion, his government continued to build new settlements in the occupied territories. Shamir's intransigence not only doomed the bilateral talks to failure, but also provoked a serious crisis in the relations between Israel and the United States.

It was against this background that the general elections of June 1992 took place. In the lead-up to the elections, Yitzhak Rabin succeeded in wresting the leadership of the Labour Party from the hands of his old rival Shimon Peres, who had lost the previous three general elections. Peres represented the moderate wing of the party, whereas Rabin represented the hawkish wing. A former Chief of Staff and a renowned security hawk, Rabin was well placed to fight for the middle ground and even appeal to Likud waverers. He was widely considered to be the only person within the Labour Party capable of defeating the Likud. During the election campaign, Rabin's reputation as a man who could be relied upon to uphold Israel's security was exploited to the full by the party managers. Indeed, the party's banner during the election read 'The Labour Party under the leadership of Yitzhak Rabin'.

To a very large extent the electoral contest revolved around Israel's position in the ongoing peace talks. Yitzhak Shamir

represented the Likud's traditional line of refusing to bow to external pressure, of defending the integrity of the Land of Israel and of supporting an ever-growing number of Jewish settlements in the occupied territories. Yitzhak Rabin represented the Labour Party's traditional line of territorial compromise, of trading land for peace, provided it did not jeopardise Israel's security. He proposed changing the order of national priorities, to spend less on the settlements in the occupied territories and more on improving the quality of life within Israel's pre-1967 borders. He also promised a freeze on the building of what he termed 'ppolitical settlements', to distinguish them from settlements which served a genuine security need. The distinction was not entirely realilid, but it served to discredit the Likud. In general, Rabin promised a considerably more positive attitude towards the ongoing peace process than that of his political rivals, with priority to reaching an agreement on Palestinian autonomy in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

The verdict of the electorate was unusually clear-cut: it rejected the territorial expansionism of the Likud, and opted for the territorial compromise advocated by the Labour Party under the leadership of Yitzhak Rabin. Likud's representation in the 120-member Knesset fell from 40 to 32, while that of the Labour Party increased from 39 to 44. At long last, after fifteen years either in opposition or in a frustrating power-sharing coalition with the Likud, the Labour Party won a clear popular mandate to implement its own foreign policy program.

Since the Labour Party did not win an absolute majority, it had to find coalition partners from among the smaller parties to give the government it formed a majority in the Knesset. Coalition-building is never a simple matter in Israel, where the proportional representation system encourages a multitude of parties. But the principle that guided Yitzhak Rabin, a principle first formulated by David Ben-Gurion, was to reserve foreign affairs and security for his own party, and to offer coalition partners some of the less important ministries. *Meretz*, a left-of-centre party which won twelve seats, and *Shas*, a moderate religious party composed mainly of Oriental Jews which won six seats, signed on as junior partners in the Labour-led coalition, giving the new government a narrow but dependable majority of 62 members of the Knesset.

Yitzhak Rabin claimed for himself all the credit for the

Labour Party's electoral victory. Like David Ben-Gurion, he doubled up as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. As Foreign Minister in the new government Rabin reluctantly appointed Shimon Peres, but he did so on the clear understanding that he himself would be in overall charge of the country's foreign policy. The division of labour between the two men was that the Prime Minister would direct all the bilateral peace talks, while the foreign minister would direct the much less important multilateral talks. Thus, from the very start, Rabin enjoyed a position of towering dominance in the making of his government's foreign and defence policy.

Despite this dominant position, from the very beginning there was a certain duality in the making of Israeli foreign policy under the new management. This duality stemmed from the different outlooks, preferences and time-frames of the Prime Minister and the Foreign Minister. A professional soldier turned politician, Rabin tends to approach diplomacy as the extension of war by other means. His aim is to divide and rule his Arab opponents, in order to reassert the strategic dominance that Israel enjoyed in the Middle East prior to the 1991 Gulf War. Consequently, rather than strive towards a comprehensive settlement of the Arab–Israel conflict, Rabin is a great believer in one peace at a time. The idea behind this approach is to break the united Arab front, to deal with each party separately, and to pay the lowest possible price in terms of territory in return for each bilateral agreement. Rabin has no empathy whatsoever for the Arabs, no understanding of economics, and no vision of a new Middle East. He is no Churchill and no de Gaulle. He is no statesman, but he is a highly successful politician.

If Yitzhak Rabin is the politician concerned with short-term advantage, Shimon Peres is the statesman intent on changing the course of history. Peres has much more empathy for the Arabs, a better understanding of economics, a clearer appreciation of the declining utility of military force in the modern world, and a vision of a new Middle East. His vision, articulated in his 1993 book *A New Middle East*,[1] is inspired by the example of the European Economic Community. A prior condition for the realisation of this vision is a comprehensive settlement of the Arab-Israeli problem. Security, to Peres' way of thinking, is

1. Shimon Peres with Arye Naor, *A New Middle East* (New York: Holt, 1993).

measured not just in military terms, but also in psychological, political and economic terms. In his view it would be a mistake for Israel to try to perpetuate the territorial status quo and to continue to base her national security on massive and costly armed forces. The alternative he believes in is Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, a resolution of the conflict with the Arabs, and open borders which would enable Israel to extend its economic influence throughout the region, from North Africa to the Persian Gulf.

The change of government in Israel did not produce a dramatic change in Israel's position in the bilateral peace talks which resumed in Washington. True to his election promises and tactical preference for one peace at a time, Rabin began by giving priority to the Palestinian track. But the stalemate in this track persisted, because Rabin's offer of autonomy to the Palestinians did not go significantly beyond that of his predecessor. When it became clear that the Palestinian delegation was not prepared to accept his terms, Rabin switched his attention to Syria. His statement that in return for real peace Israel would be prepared to pay by territorial withdrawal on the Golan Heights broke the ice in the Israeli–Syrian track. The Syrians responded by saying that they were ready for total peace with Israel, but only in return for total withdrawal. But when Rabin made it clear that total withdrawal was out of the question, the negotiators were back to square one. The year 1992 thus ended with very little sign of progress in any of the tracks of the bilateral talks.

In January 1993, while the official negotiations continued to mark time, secret talks began in Oslo between two Israeli academics and representatives of the PLO. The academics were soon joined by two senior officials from the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Shimon Peres and his deputy, Yossi Beilin, gave unstinting support and encouragement to the Israeli team. Peres informed Rabin about these talks but Rabin was rather sceptical at first. He did not give the final go-ahead until after it became evident that the marginalised and demoralised PLO leadership in Tunis would settle for considerably less than the official Palestinian delegation in Washington. The upshot was the agreement, which took the entire world by surprise, between Israel and the PLO on interim Palestinian self-government in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank town of Jericho. Rabin gave his blessing to this agreement, but all the heaving and lifting on the Israeli side had been done by his foreign minister. Without

Rabin's blessing, the Oslo accord would have remained a dead letter; without Peres' heavy lifting there would probably have been no accord at all.

The Declaration of Principles on Interim Self-Government Arrangements, signed by Israel and the PLO in Washington on 13 September 1993, represents a major watershed in Israeli politics. In the first place, the Declaration of Principles was preceded by mutual recognition between Israel and the PLO—an abrupt departure from the long-standing bipartisan stand of denouncing the PLO as a terrorist organisation and refusing to talk to it. Second, it was the first-ever formal agreement between Israel and the Palestinians—a departure from the bipartisan preference for negotiating with the governments of the Arab states and bypassing the Palestinians. Third, in the Declaration of Principles Israel recognised for the first time that the Palestinian people have national rights—a departure from the bipartisan insistence that the Palestinian problem is essentially a refugee problem.

To be sure, the Declaration of Principles fell a long way short of the Palestinian claim to full independence and statehood. As its title makes clear, the Declaration of Principles only provided for interim Palestinian self-government arrangements in Gaza and Jericho. Moreover, the document signed in Washington was not a full-blown agreement, but a declaration of principles accompanied by a detailed timetable for negotiations between Israel and the PLO. This timetable allowed two months for reaching an agreement on the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and Jericho; four months for the completion of the Israeli withdrawal and the transfer of limited powers to a Palestinian authority; nine months for the holding of elections for a Palestinian Council; and a five-year transitional period leading to a permanent settlement based on UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338.

The shape of the final settlement is not spelled out in the Declaration of Principles. All the options, including a perpetuation of the interim arrangements, an independent Palestinian state, and a confederation between a Palestinian entity and Jordan, are left open. Similarly, all the most contentious and sensitive issues in Israeli–Palestinian relations are left in abeyance for the negotiations on the final status of the territories, due to begin not later than the third year of the transitional period. These issues include the future of Jerusalem,

the status of the Jewish settlements in the occupied territories, the rights of the 1948 Palestinian refugees, and the borders of the Palestinian entity.

The ambiguities and contradictions that pervade the Declaration of Principles are best illustrated by the status of the Jewish settlements. Under the terms of the Declaration of Principles, the Israeli government is committed to the principle of Palestinian self-government not only in Gaza and Jericho, but throughout the West Bank, excluding Jerusalem. While negotiations over the borders between Israel and the self-governing Palestinian area are deferred to a later stage, the mention of borders is in itself significant. It implies a commitment by the Israeli government to a territorial settlement with the Palestinians. But at the same time, for security and domestic political reasons, the Israeli government insisted that at least for the transitional period of five years, the settlements must remain exactly where they are, under its own jurisdiction, and under the protection of the Israeli army.

The settlements have been repeatedly denounced by the international community as illegal, and as an obstacle to peace. Inside Israel, however, the settlements remain a very delicate and difficult issue. In numerical terms, the settlers amount to roughly 10,000 on the Golan Heights, 5000 in the Gaza Strip, and 120,000 on the West Bank, not counting the greater Jerusalem area. But although they form a tiny minority of the Israeli public, the settlers are a militant, vociferous and highly organised minority whose spearhead is *Gush Emunim*, the Bloc of the Faithful. Possibly as many as 80 or 85 per cent of the settlers were attracted to the occupied territories by material incentives like cheap housing and a better quality of life, rather than by an ideological commitment to rebuild the Land of Israel. But that still leaves a hard core of ultra-nationalist settlers who are unyielding in their opposition to any territorial compromise with the Arabs, and who have at their disposal a highly effective settlement lobby. It is true that the political clout of the settlement lobby has diminished in the wake of Likud's fall from power, but it is still a force to be reckoned with in Israeli politics.

The Labour government which came to power in the summer of 1992 is sometimes portrayed as the unfortunate heir to fifteen years of frenetic settlement activity by its Likud predecessors. But the reality is more complicated. Both Labour and Likud govern-

ments built settlements on the West Bank after it was captured from Jordan in 1967, but they did so for somewhat different reasons. While Labour's approach to settlements was governed primarily by security considerations, that of the Likud was governed primarily by ideological considerations. Labour, in line with the Allon Plan, favoured the building of settlements in areas considered crucial to Israel security (about 30 per cent of the West Bank), and the return of the heavily populated areas to Jordanian rule. Likud governments, on the other hand, were opposed to any territorial withdrawal on the West Bank, whether in favour of Jordan or in favour of the Palestinians. They therefore planted settlements across the length and breadth of the West Bank, including the heavily populated areas, in order to ensure permanent Israeli control, and to foreclose the option of territorial withdrawal in the event of a Labour return to power. The Rabin government is thus impaled on the horns of a dilemma: it has embarked on the quest for a territorial settlement with the Palestinians but it is also committed, at least in the interim period, to maintain the Jewish settlements which its domestic political opponents had deliberately erected as an obstacle on the road to a settlement.

The fact that the Gaza–Jericho deal did not involve the immediate dismantling of settlements made it easier to sell to the Israeli public. But support for the accord was far from unanimous. Likud leaders, and the leaders of the smaller parties further to the right, such as *Tsomet* and *Moledet*, denounced the deal as a sell-out of Israel's patrimony, as a betrayal of the settlers, as the beginning of the end of the Land of Israel, and as the thin end of the wedge of an independent Palestinian state. These leaders greatly exaggerated the significance of the concessions that the Israeli government had made to secure this deal, while ignoring the concessions that the Palestinians had to make.

These sweeping denunciations and prophecies of gloom and doom did not cut much ice with the Israeli public. The great majority of Israelis responded to the deal which their government had struck through the Oslo channel in a much more balanced and mature fashion than the politicians of the right. A Gallup poll conducted for CNN Television showed that 65 per cent of those polled approved of the accord, with only 13 per cent describing themselves as 'very much against'. More than 50 per cent of those polled believed a Palestinian state would come into existence alongside Israel within twenty years. These figures suggest that

the majority of Israelis were less troubled by the prospect of Palestinian statehood than the politicians of the right.

On 23 September 1993, at the end of a debate which lasted three days, the Knesset endorsed the government's peace strategy, voting by 61 to 50 in favour of the accord with the PLO. Right-wing members of the Knesset (MK) hurled insults at the Prime Minister and his colleagues, while several thousand protesters, many of them settlers from the West Bank and Gaza, staged demonstrations outside the Knesset building. During the debate the Opposition appeared to be much more divided than the government. Benyamin Netanyahu, who had succeeded Yitzhak Shamir as the leader of the Likud in the aftermath of its electoral defeat, was unable to enforce party discipline. Nor did he have any coherent alternative to offer to the government's cautious peace strategy. The margin of victory exceeded Rabin's expectations, and provided him with a significant boost in the face of opposition demands for a national referendum or new elections. He was particularly pleased that a majority of the Jewish MKs from all parties voted for his peace initiative, so he did not have to rely on the support of the Arab MKs, which was naturally forthcoming.

Having secured parliamentary ratification for the accord it struck with the PLO, the government moved to the next stage of implementing the accord. At this stage, however, the lack of consensus within the government became increasingly apparent. Government leaders were divided into two groups. One group wanted to spin out the negotiations with the PLO, with a view to maintaining Israeli control over as much of the the West Bank as possible for as long as possible, and blocking any real progress towards Palestinian statehood. The other group accepted that the accord meant complete Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank and, in the longer run, an independent Palestinian state alongside the State of Israel. The first group wanted to use the transitional period of five years to perpetuate as far as possible the political and territorial status quo; the second group wanted to use the transitional period to develop a different type of relationship with the Palestinians. It is widely suspected that Yitzhak Rabin belongs to the first group, although he himself denies it. On the other hand, no one doubts that Shimon Peres and his deputy belong to the second group, and they themselves make little effort to conceal it.

Two committees were set up in early October 1993 to negotiate the implementation of the lofty-sounding declaration signed in Washington. The first committee was chaired by Shimon Peres and Mahmoud Abbas, the leader who signed the declaration on behalf of the PLO. This ministerial-level committee was supposed to meet in Cairo every two or three weeks. The other committee, the nuts and bolts committee, consisted of experts who were supposed to meet for two or three days each week in the Egyptian resort of Taba on the Red Sea. The heads of the delegations to these talks were Nabil Shaath and Major-General Amnon Shahak, the number two man in the Israeli Defence Force (IDF) and head of its Military Intelligence. The two sides managed to hammer out an agenda and formed two groups of experts, one to deal with military affairs, the other with the transfer of authority.

Fluctuations in the Israeli–Palestinian negotiations were directly linked to the unresolved rivalry between Rabin and Peres, and to the involvement of senior IDF officers in this rivalry. These officers had been kept completely in the dark about the secret talks in the Norwegian capital, and they felt bitter at not having been consulted about the security implications of the accord. Chief of Staff Ehud Barak believed that, in their haste to secure their place in history, the politicians had conceded too much to the PLO, and that when the time came to implement the agreement, it was the responsibility of the army to tackle the security problems. Rabin's decision to put army generals in charge of the detailed negotiations with the PLO was due partly to his desire to mollify the generals for their earlier exclusion, and partly to his desire to limit Peres' latitude for making further concessions. But, as some of Rabin's own party colleagues pointed out at the time, his heavy reliance on the generals created an unhealthy precedent for the intervention of the military in matters of high policy.

Underlying the labyrinthine negotiations at Taba there was a basic conceptual divide. The Israeli representatives wanted a gradual and strictly limited transfer of powers, while maintaining overall responsibility for security in the occupied territories in their own hands. They wanted to repackage rather than end Israel's military occupation. The Palestinians wanted an early and extensive transfer of power, to enable them to start laying the foundations for an independent state. They were anxious to get rid of the Israeli occupation, and they struggled to

gain every possible symbol of sovereignty.

As a result of this basic conceptual divide the Taba negotiations plunged repeatedly into crisis, and took considerably longer to complete than the two months allowed for in the original timetable. Another complicating factor was the tension between the army officers and the foreign minister. The generals directed some of their fire at Shimon Peres for his apparent willingness to concede ground on vital security issues, such as full Israeli control of border crossings and access roads to settlements in the occupied territories. Ever the grand visionary, Peres mocked the generals for their obsession with minute details. When the negotiations got stuck, it was usually Peres, the consummate diplomat, who worked out the saving formula directly with Yasser Arafat.

After four months of wrangling, an agreement was reached in the form of two documents, one on general principles, the other on border crossings. The two documents were initialled by Shimon Peres and Yasser Arafat in Cairo on 9 February 1994. Although the Cairo agreement was tactfully presented as a compromise solution, it was a compromise that tilted very heavily towards the Israeli position. The IDF had managed to impose its own conception of the interim period: specific steps to transfer limited powers to the Palestinians without giving up Israel's overall responsibility for security; the IDF undertook to redeploy rather than withdraw its forces in the Gaza Strip and Jericho; and the Cairo agreement gave the IDF 'full authority' over Gaza's three settlement blocs, the four lateral roads joining them to the Green Line, and 'the relevant territory overlooking them'. The outstanding feature of the agreement was thus to allow the IDF to maintain a military presence in and around the area earmarked for Palestinian self-government, and to retain full responsibility for external security and control of the land crossings to Egypt and Jordan. Despite these serious limitations, the Cairo agreement did form a first step in regulating the withdrawal of the Israeli civil administration and secret services from Gaza to Jericho.

This process of withdrawal was rudely shaken on 25 February 1994, when Dr Baruch Goldstein, an American-born settler and member of the racist party *Kach*, opened fire with an IDF-issued Galil assault rifle on Muslim worshippers in the Cave of the Patriarchs in Hebron, killing 29 before being bludgeoned to death by the survivors. A preliminary report by a commission of inquiry

appointed by the government revealed monumental incompetence and systematic failure to enforce the law against armed Jewish settlers on the part of the Israeli security forces. But the Hebron massacre also revealed that the Israeli concept of security in the occupied territories was basically flawed, because it catered only for Jews, while ignoring the needs of the Palestinian inhabitants. Israeli settlers had the army, the police and the border police to protect them, as well as being heavily armed themselves. The Palestinian inhabitants of the occupied territories, on the other hand, were left to the tender mercies of the settlers and the Israeli security services.

The PLO angrily suspended its participation in the peace talks in response to the massacre, demanding the removal of the four hundred or so militant settlers from Hebron, and the disarming of the rest. *Hamas*, the Islamic resistance movement which was bitterly opposed to the peace talks with the Jewish state from the start, vowed to exact revenge. Sympathy for the settlers declined sharply inside Israel after the massacre, both because of their attempts to derail the peace process and because they threatened to embroil their own countrymen in a vicious circle of violence and bloodshed.

The Israeli government did not go as far as it could have done in cracking down on the militant settlers. What it did do was outlaw *Kach* and detain without trial some of its leaders. It also agreed to the PLO demand for a temporary international presence in Hebron, to assist in promoting stability and restoring normal life in the city. Calls from the PLO and other quarters to put the whole question of settlements on the table were rejected by the government, on the grounds that it was not obliged to do so by the original accord until the beginning of the third year of the transitional period. The government did promise, however, in a joint communique it issued with the PLO in Cairo on 31 March, to accelerate its withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho, and to be guided by the target dates set in the Declaration of Principles.

These concessions were just enough to induce the PLO to resume its participation in the peace talks, and another round of negotiations resulted in an agreement which was signed by Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat in Cairo on 4 May. The Cairo agreement wrapped up the Gaza–Jericho negotiations, and set the terms for expanding Palestinian self-government to the rest of the West Bank. Expansion was to take place in three stages. First,

responsibility for tourism, education and culture, health, social welfare and direct taxation was to be transferred from Israel's civil administration to the Palestinian National Authority. Second, Israel was to redeploy its armed forces away from 'Palestinian population centres'. Third, elections were due to take place throughout the West Bank and the Gaza Strip for a new authority.

The Cairo document was billed by both sides as an agreement to divorce after twenty-seven years of unhappy co-existence, in which the stronger partner forced the weaker to live under its yoke. This was true in the sense that Israel secured a separate legal system, water, electricity and roads for the Jewish settlements. It was not true in the sense that the document gave the stronger party firm control over the new relationship.

The Cairo document stresses repeatedly the need for co-operation, coordination and harmonisation in the new relationship. A large number of liaison committees, most of which were to be divided equally between the two sides, gave a superficial appearance of parity. But a closer scrutiny of the agreement reveals that this parity is undermined in favour of the stronger partner by the fact that Israeli occupation laws and military orders were to remain in force, unless amended or abrogated by mutual agreement. What this meant in practice was that any issue that could not be resolved by negotiation would be subject to the provisions of Israeli law, rather than those of inter-national law. This was a retreat from the Palestinian demand that international law, particularly the Fourth Geneva Convention, should be the source of legislation and jurisdiction during the transitional period.

A week after the Cairo document was signed, a token force of thirty Palestinian policemen entered the Gaza Strip from Egypt to take over control of internal security from the withdrawing Israelis. This was the first tangible evidence that Israeli occupation was winding down. Until this point all the movement had been unilateral, as the Israeli army redeployed its forces so as to provide continuing protection to the tiny community of Jewish settlers in the strip. Now a new Palestinian police force was to take charge of the nearby Palestinian population centres in accordance with a pre-arranged division of labour. The Israeli withdrawal was greeted with a sigh of relief at home, and great joy and jubilation among the Gazans. As the last Israeli soldiers

pulled out of their military camps in Rafah and Nusairat, to a final barrage of stones, the Israeli flag was replaced by the flag of Palestine. A 27-year-old experiment in imposing Israeli rule over a million and a half recalcitrant Arabs, an experiment doomed to failure from the start, was visibly and symbolically nearing the end of its life.

The government's policy of controlled withdrawal from Gaza and Jericho enjoyed broad popular support. Hard as they tried, the leaders of the opposition failed to arouse the nation against the decisions of the government. As far as the government is concerned, the real paradox is that it needs a strong PLO to implement the Gaza–Jericho settlement, but a strong PLO only reinforces the determination of the Palestinians to fight for a state of their own. The Israeli Prime Minister has not mastered the art of gracious giving; the PLO chairman can be every bit as ungracious, and undignified, in fighting over every issue, however small, to extract the last possible concession.

Yasser Arafat's long-awaited arrival in Gaza on 1 July showed how much horror and revulsion he continues to evoke among Israelis, even after his historic handshake with their prime minister. Arafat's visit thus marked a moment of truth in Israel's domestic politics. Likud leaders saw the visit as an occasion for a mighty show of strength, joining hands with the leaders of the far-right *Tsomet* and *Moledet* parties. Their anti-Arafat rhetoric reached hysterical levels. But a rally organised by 'the national camp' in Jerusalem's Zion Square turned into a rampage by some 10,000 right-wing rowdies against Arab bystanders and property in the Old City. The ensuing orgy of violence did nothing to endear the hard-liners to the Israeli public. Far from arousing the nation against the policy of the government, the rally backfired against its own organisers, providing ministers with a welcome opportunity to denounce right-wing extremism.

The Labour government further enhanced its standing at home by concluding an agreement with Jordan. Israel and Jordan had always been the best of enemies, and many secret high-level meetings had taken place over the years across the battle lines. Palestinian nationalism posed a threat to both Israel and the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan, and they therefore perceived a common interest in containing it. After 1967 the Labour Party remained committed to the survival of the Hashemite monarchy in Amman, and emerged as the main proponent of the so-called

Jordanian option. The Israel–PLO accord took King Hussein by complete surprise, and seemed to signal the end of the special relationship between his country and Israel. But at a secret meeting with the King two weeks after the accord was signed, Mr Rabin assured him that Israel remained committed to the survival of his regime, and that Jordan's interests would be taken into account in all subsequent Israeli–Palestinian negotiations.

The most dramatic breakthrough occurred on 25 July 1994, when Yitzhak Rabin met King Hussein in the White House in Washington and, in the presence of a beaming President Clinton, signed a declaration which formally ended the 46-year state of war between Israel and Jordan. Rabin claimed for himself all the credit for the Washington Declaration, which he described as 'the closest thing to a peace treaty'. With characteristic lack of grace, he told Israeli journalists that his foreign minister had nothing to do with the sudden turn-about in the relations with Jordan. Yet in truth Shimon Peres had been the real architect of the Washington Declaration, just as he had been the real architect of the Oslo accord and of the Cairo agreement.

Peres is renowned for his pro-Hussein views, and in the Labour Party he is often nicknamed 'the last Hashemite'. Peres' most famous encounter with King Hussein took place in London in 1987. The London Agreement provided for bilateral negotiations under international auspices, but the then Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir scuppered it by insisting, as was his wont, on unconditional surrender by the enemy. After the Labour victory in 1992, when Rabin refused to talk to the PLO and pinned his hopes on Syria, it was Peres who argued that without a settlement with the Palestinians the King was unlikely to come out of the closet, and that the key to a settlement with both was economic cooperation. On 2 November 1993 Peres paid a secret visit to His Royal Highness, to whom he once referred as His Royal Shyness, in Amman, and the two of them worked out a joint strategy for peace in stages, which included persuading the Clinton administration to write off Jordan's debt to America. It was this strategy which paved the way to the trilateral summit in Washington.

The accord with Jordan was overwhelmingly popular right across the Israeli political spectrum. An opinion poll which coincided with the Washington summit found that 61 per cent of Israelis believe in 'the vision of the new Middle East'. So enthusiastic and unanimous was the popular response that even

the Likud was forced to change its tune. In the past Likud leaders, led by Ariel Sharon, touted the slogan 'Jordan is Palestine', which implied the destruction of the Hashemite regime on the East Bank and its replacement by a Palestinian state. This had been the Israeli right's favourite solution to the Palestinian problem. Whether he liked it or not, Benyamin Netanyahu was forced to recognise that this solution had been overtaken by events, and he even praised the accord with Jordan. Netanyahu also told Crown Prince Hassan that Sharon's view that Jordan is Palestine is not shared by him personally, nor by his party.

The accord with Jordan not only heightened public approval of Rabin's policy, but also enhanced his bargaining position *vis-à-vis* the PLO. It was immediately apparent that Rabin intended to play the Jordanian card against Arafat, to make him even more submissive and compliant. King Hussein was the joker in the pack, to be kept in reserve for trumping any aces that Arafat might produce.

The Washington Declaration provided a foretaste of the way in which the Jordanian card could be played against the Palestinians. This took the form of a reference to Jordan's 'special role' in caring for the Muslim holy sites in Jerusalem. East Jerusalem is claimed by the Palestinians as the capital of the independent state towards which they are striving. Under the terms of the 13 September accord, the future of Jerusalem is due to come up for negotiations between the two sides in the third year of the transitional period. The reference to Jordan's special role was therefore bound to be seen as a deliberate ploy by Israel to undercut the Palestinian claim to Jerusalem. It also introduced a third party to what was supposed to be a bilateral Israeli–Palestinian affair.

The accord with Jordan could also be seen as reflecting the measure of Rabin's success in moving away from the Madrid formula for the conduct of Arab–Israeli peace talks. During the bilateral talks that followed the Madrid conference, the Arab and Palestinian delegations tried to maintain a united, or at least a coordinated, front. This front was broken by the PLO, by its solo diplomacy and separate agreement with Israel. This in turn had the effect of reducing the inhibitions that other Arab states felt about doing business with the Jewish state. King Hussein was emboldened to take the plunge and sign another accord, which fell just short of a peace treaty with Israel. He adjusted himself

to the new reality, in which Israel is the predominant power between Morocco and India for some time to come.

Two years into his term of office, Yitzhak Rabin can claim that he has kept his promises to the Israeli electorate by reaching agreements with the Palestinians and Jordan, by improving beyond recognition Israel's relations with the United States, and by restoring Israel to a position of regional dominance. Rabin continues to claim that his own ultimate goal, like that of the Arabs, is comprehensive peace in the Middle East. But in his view the building blocks of comprehensive peace are bilateral agreements with the Arab states. Rabin harks back to the conception developed by David Ben-Gurion during the War of Independence, a conception which holds that Israel can defeat any coalition of Arab states, provided it picks them off one by one. It is in this sense that Rabin's diplomacy is the extension of war by other means. He has applied Israel's well-tried strategy for winning wars to the peace process with the Arab states, and he has already achieved a significant measure of success in dismantling the Arab coalition with which Israel had to negotiate at the Madrid conference and after. A peace agreement with Syria is on the cards, but for the time being Syria is isolated and poses no real threat to the security of Israel. The question is no longer whether Syria will settle its dispute with Israel, but when and on what terms.

The story of the Rabin government in its first two years in office is thus largely a success story, both in terms of foreign policy and in terms of consolidating its hold on power at home. Developments on the two fronts, as we have tried to show, are closely interlinked. The Labour Party was elected largely because of its commitment to the peace process, and its success in promoting this process has had the effect of weakening the opposition and of strengthening its own popular appeal. The moral of this story is not that Israel has no foreign policy, but only domestic politics, as Henry Kissinger would have us believe, but that the Israeli public can be relied upon to support a constructive policy aimed at resolving the century-old conflict with its Arab neighbours. A peace-oriented policy, in other words, has proved to be a winner, not only in Israel's external relations but also in the domestic political contest between the government and the opposition.

Chapter 2

Islamic Radicalism in the Arab World

*Ahmad Shboul**

'If I were a Western politician, I would do anything to prevent the Islamicists from acceding to power, because that would provoke regional instability and threaten Western interests. . . If I were an army officer or a high bureaucrat, implicated in the past mismanagement of the state, I would mount a *coup d'état* to prevent the Islamicists' accession, for, drunk with hatred for those whom they consider to be the enemies of God, would they not wish to throw some heads to the mob?'

Lahouari Addi, Professor of Political Science, University of Oran, Algeria[1]

It is perhaps a truism that political Islam, as reflected in the current discourse and actions of certain radical Islamicist movements, is perceived from outside such movements as a menacing phenomenon. Western preoccupation with political Islam, particularly since the Iranian Islamic Revolution (1979), has become increasingly tinged with anxiety and fear, often expressed in an alarmist language by experts, policy-makers and the media. Such apprehension is clearly not confined to Western

* I should like to thank my colleague Dr Nijmeh Hajjar for her valuable comments and suggestions.

1. 'Islamicist Utopia and Democracy', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Sciences*, November 1992, p. 129.

interests, since it is reflected in the policies of several regimes in the Arab and Islamic worlds, and in the attitudes of many Arab and Muslim intellectuals. This essay is not so much a survey of radical Islamicist movements in the Arab countries, as an attempt to provide some historical and sociological perspective on the current debate about such movements.[2] Emphasis will be on orientation and approach rather than description. In this context, it is necessary to keep in mind not only aspects of diversity and change but also current political and intellectual debates in the Arab world. It would be simply stating the obvious, and perhaps an understatement, to say that the Arab countries, and the wider Islamic world, reflect great diversity and have undergone significant transformations in recent decades. Indeed, since the late 1960s, and more dramatically since the Gulf War (1990–91), the Arab world has experienced such serious internal and external pressures, tensions and discord that it must be described as a world in turmoil.[3]

As a rule, I have used the adjective 'radical' and the noun 'radicalism' in this paper, in preference to 'fundamentalist' and 'fundamentalism'. I take the former to have the added dimension of signifying activist revolutionary ideology which, while it seeks both distinction from and engagement with opponents, strives to effect political and social change. Whereas fundamentalism may be said to signify an outlook or a world view, radicalism additionally indicates a program of action. Most activist Islamicist movements can be described, in varying degrees, as both fundamentalist and radical. The latter adjective, however, may not apply to most traditional religious scholars or functionaries. Certain regimes that identify closely with Islam as an ideology and a way of life, such as Saudi

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2. For some recent studies in English see, Nazih N. Ayubi, *Political Islam: Religion and Politics in the Arab World* (London, Routledge, 1991); John L. Esposito, *Islam and Politics*, revised edn (Syracuse NY: Syracuse University Press, 1987); also Edward Mortimer, *Faith and Power: The Politics of Islam* (New York: Vintage Books, 1982); Alan R. Taylor, *The Islamic Question in the Middle East* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988); and relevant chapters in Martin Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds), *The Fundamentalism Project*, 4 vols (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991-1994).
3. See Ahmad Shboul, 'Arab Society and Culture: Burdens of the Past, Challenges of the Future', *Voices*, Winter 1993, 5–14.

Arabia, may be described as promoting a conservative version of fundamentalist Islam. But such regimes can hardly be considered radical, in any sense. Individual preachers, scholars, writers or other communicators may advocate a fundamentalist understanding of Islamic teachings. But only if such individuals actively seek to influence change, or to achieve it through political organisation, can they be described as radical. Admittedly this is a fine, and perhaps controversial, line of conceptual distinction. It does not necessarily indicate any clear ideological demarcation. The adjective 'Islamicist' is used in this essay to signify those who use Islam as a term of *political* self-definition; while 'Muslim' or 'Islamic' can apply to all Muslims. (In French the term *islamisme* is often used to indicate the phenomenon of political Islam, in addition to *integrisme* which is equivalent to 'fundamentalism'.)

Rather than attempt a taxonomy of fundamentalist or radical Muslim groups or individuals, this paper attempts to contribute, in a preliminary way, to a critical approach to the understanding of the place of the Islamicist phenomenon in Arab society. This is viewed as a complex multifaceted phenomenon with political, social and cultural implications. It is true that Islamicist movements have recourse to essentially the same range of sources and the same broad terms of reference. However, in their interpretation and application, different activists do not necessarily come up with the same programs or follow the same methods or strategies. In particular, it is important to take account of the social and educational background of different Islamicist leaders, the nature and extent of their involvement in political activity, and their experience or knowledge of the rest of the Islamic world and of the wider world. It is also necessary to take account of the specific conditions of different Arab countries and societies and the ways in which Islamicist movements might respond to such conditions.

Above all, it is essential to avoid confusing different manifestations and activities associated with diverse Muslim individuals and groups in various contexts and circumstances. Thus, when speaking of societies that are entirely Muslim, or with a majority or even a substantial minority of Muslims, what meanings can one attach to different manifestations and activities and in what context? Individuals or communities may experience increased religiosity, assertion of cultural identity, involvement

in local networks for social welfare, preaching or missionary activity (through places of worship, educational institutions, publications or the media). They may participate in protest movements (for example against corruption, injustice, lack of democracy, foreign interference, high prices, unemployment), or may tend to phrase their social discontent in religious terms. On the other hand, they may field or elect candidates for student unions, professional syndicates, or in local or state elections, individually or as a political party. Those engaged in politics may win or lose elections, form an opposition, advise existing governments, enter into political deals, accept co-option in the ruling elite, assume majority or one-party rule. In certain cases, such people may behave 'rationally' or 'irrationally', or may even resort to violence. Are such activities or reactions so out of the ordinary?

Seen in an Islamic context, activities such as those indicated above may imply a certain pattern in a real or imagined 'resurgent Islam'. But it would be absurd to suggest that such familiar social or political manifestations constitute a 'threat' to civilisation or world order, simply because the human actors involved happen to be Muslims. When individuals or groups, including certain 'Islamicists', resort to acts of violence or intolerance, our condemnation of them should not lead to implicating all their co-religionists in this.

It would be both misleading and unfortunate to define our attitude to the Islamic phenomenon from the standpoint of Western *'realpolitik'* interests, or the security interests of existing authoritarian Arab regimes. (The two seem often to amount to the same thing.) Such a perspective would tend to imply a kind of 'holy alliance' (for example, of Western powers, Israel, and 'friendly' Arab and Muslim regimes) against the supposed threat of Islamic radicalism or fundamentalism. The semantic extension of this alleged 'common enemy' would then tend to become synonymous with 'terrorism'. For Arabs and Muslims, such a scenario could embroil their societies in conflicts not only with other societies, but also with themselves.

This needs also to be linked to the fact that political discourse about (and also in) the Arab world has become increasingly distorted. In a sense, this distortion has resulted from too much emphasis on the perceived strategies and priorities of the so-called 'New World Order', or the 'New Middle East'. There is an

increasing perception that the West, led by the USA, and with Israel as a strategic ally, has succeeded not only in setting the political and economic agenda, but also in imposing new terms of reference for the self-image of Arab regimes and Arab public opinion. In this 'new reality', little scope seems to be permitted for an independent indigenous Arab perspective.

Few 'experts' would perhaps realise that the violent actions, intolerance and confused discourse of certain Islamicist groups have generated much indigenous criticism, disapproval and opposition, sometimes expressed quite strongly, by many Arab intellectuals as well as ordinary committed Muslims.[4] But this does not need to be seen in the context of a global war against a supposed 'Islamicist terror', in which Arab and Islamic societies are expected to tear each other apart along lines of demarcation defined by others. Indeed there has been a vigorous and ongoing critical debate in the Arab world about political Islam and the role of Islamicist activists. As part of broader political and cultural debates, the one concerning Islam and politics is not only a debate *about* but also *with* the Islamic movements, and indeed *within* these movements.[5] Such indigenous debate, as well as the

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4. This is reflected in much Arabic writing and discussion. See for example the insightful essay by Habib Boulares, *L'Islam: la peur et l'esperance* (Paris: 1983); Eng. trans. by L. Ware, *Islam: The Fear and the Hope* (London: Zed Books, 1990); and works by Mohammed Arkoun and Fatima Mernissi, among others, cited below; see also next note.
5. A bibliography of Arabic works on this theme would be quite extensive. For example, see Isma'il Sabri 'Abdallah and others, *al-Harakat al-Islamiyya al-Mu'asira fi al-Watan al-'Arabi* (Contemporary Islamic Movements in the Arab World), 2nd edn (Beirut: 1989); Tariq al-Bishri and others, *al-Hiwar al-Qawmi—al-Dini* (The Nationalist–Religious Dialogue), papers and discussions of a symposium held in Cairo, September 1989, (Beirut: Centre for Arab Unity Studies, 1989); 'Abdel Baqi Elhermassi and others, *al-Din fi al-Mujtama' al-'Arabi* (Religion in Arab Society), proceedings of a symposium held in Cairo, April 1989, (Beirut: The Arab Sociological Association, 1990); Khalis Jalabi, *al-Naqd al-Dhati* (The Necessity for Self-Criticism within the Islamic Movement), 3rd. edn (Beirut: 1985); Rashid al-Ghannoushi, *al-Hurriyyat al-'Amma fi al-Dawla al-Islamiyya* (Public Liberties in the Islamic State) (Beirut: 1993); also the monthly periodical, *al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi* (Arab Future), Beirut, numerous articles between 1977 and 1994; *Mawaqif* (London), no. 67 (Spring

attitude of the 'silent majority', deserves more attention than it has received so far. For in the long run, it is perhaps more significant than pronouncements by outsiders.

Islam and Western Threat Perception

There is, of course, nothing new in the image of 'Islam', at different levels of signification, appearing as a 'problem' in the 'Western' mirror. Nor is it new for Muslim societies to view Islam as an authentic term of reference expressing cultural, and at times national, identity. What seems to be new is that, for many Western policy-makers, strategists, 'expert advisers' and journalists, political Islam, often generalised and exaggerated under the rubric of 'Islamic Fundamentalism', has come to represent a kind of ubiquitous menace, particularly for those looking for a 'new enemy' after the presumed demise of Communism.

In a real sense, Western anxiety about Islamic radicalism seems like a new version of earlier Western hostility towards the radical Arab nationalism and pan-Arabism of the Nasser era (1954–1970). Like its predecessor, Islamic radicalism is essentially perceived as anti-Western. This perception is often stated simply, with little reference to the historical and socio-cultural context. At another level, and with far more serious implications, the notion is being promoted of a new and supposedly inevitable conflict between the 'West' and 'Islam'. This is seen as replacing the old polarity between the West and the now defunct Soviet bloc. It is perhaps not going too far to discern in this kind of outlook some harking back to, or at least evocation of, old historical conflicts between the 'West' and 'Islam'. Thus, late twentieth century political discourse with its religious, strategic, economic and cultural concerns can still conjure up images of medieval and early modern Crusade, *Jihad* and Empire.[6]

1992) is devoted to Islamicist movements; see also *Mawaqif*, No. 65 (Autumn 1991), no. 66 (Winter 1992) and no. 70–71 (Winter-Spring 1993).

6. For example, see David Ignatius, 'The West's Next Crusade: Fighting Fundamentalist Islamic Rule', *Washington Post National Weekly*

This kind of supposition has recently been clearly implied at relatively high political levels, for example in pronouncements by NATO officials and US policy advisers about the 'Islamic threat'. It is to be remembered that strategists and policy-makers often find justification for their statements and policies in the advice of 'experts'. For many Arab intellectuals, including both moderate Islamicists and liberal secularists, such advice and pronouncements are indicative of thoughtless prejudice and manipulation, if not downright war-mongering.[7] To certain extremist Islamicists, however, this may appear, ironically, as a vindication of their own militancy and their significance on the world stage. After all, is not the only Great Power (or 'the Great Satan' in the parlance of extremist propaganda) admitting fear of them? The question that needs to be asked is whether this kind of mutual paranoid posturing might not run the risk of becoming a self-fulfilling syndrome. As some scholars have pointed out, however, it is quite simplistic and misleading to claim that 'Islamic fundamentalism', and by implication the Islamic world, has replaced the old Soviet bloc as a threat.[8]

It might be useful to point out certain ironies in the 'Islamic threat' presupposition. First, during the Cold War period, Islam was usually considered in some conservative circles (both in the West and in Islamic countries) as a bulwark against Communism.

Edition, 16–22 March 1992, pp. 23–4; Benjamin J. Barber, 'Jihad vs. McWorld', *The Atlantic*, 269, no. 3 (March 1992), pp. 53-55, 58-62, 64-65, both cited by Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (eds), *Fundamentalisms and the State: Remaking Polities, Economies and Militance*, Volume 3 of *The Fundamentalism Project* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), introduction, p. 8. For medieval and early modern perceptions, see Norman Daniel, *Islam and the West: The Making of an Image* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1960); also Norman Daniel, *Islam, Europe and Empire* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1962).

7. See for example, Ali Omlil, '*Hilf al-Atlasi wa-l-Islam* (The Atlantic Alliance and Islam)', editorial article in *al-Muntada*, vol. 10, no. 114, published by The Arab Thought Forum, Amman, March 1995.
8. For an insightful and sober analysis of Western negative perceptions, see John Esposito, *The Islamic Threat: Myth or Reality* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992); see also Avi Shlaim, *War and Peace in the Middle East: A Critique of American Policy* (London and New York: Viking, 1994), pp. 139–40.

Secondly, unlike the former Communist bloc in Eastern Europe (and elsewhere), there has never been any viable 'Islamic bloc' in a strategic, economic, political or ideological sense. It is to be remembered that, despite all rhetoric, the Organisation of the Islamic Conference (established in 1973) is no more than a loose association of countries whose economies are 'integrated' into, and hopelessly dependent on, the Western capitalist system.[9] Thirdly, the so-called US-led alliance, since the Gulf War of 1990–91, has included prominent Arab Islamic regimes which usually derive their political vocabulary and ostensible legitimacy from 'serving' Islam. Meanwhile the foreign policy, security needs and economic plans of such regimes are defined in the shadow of actual or imagined US influence. As such, and for obvious reasons, they can hardly be described as a threat to the West. Furthermore, despite its supposed emphasis on politics and solidarity among its followers, Islam, for the vast majority of Muslims, is not at all like a party-led ideology. Islamic solidarity is confined, more often than not, to the emotional domain. Ideological differences, rivalries, and even armed conflicts between Muslim countries are too well known to need any further comment.

On the other hand, it is possible to argue that Muslim communities in the contemporary world, far from posing a threat, often appear as victims. Some are victims of non-Muslim forces (in Bosnia, Chechnya, Azerbaijan). Other Muslims have been victims of conflict between Muslim states (for example, Iran and Iraq), or of persecution by their own governments for asserting ethnic, cultural or regional identity (the Kurds in Iraq, Iran and Turkey). Others are subjected to politically motivated violence by their own Muslim regimes and/or by extremist Islamicist groups (Syria in the 1980s, Algeria and Egypt in the 1990s), or as a result of factional fighting (Afghanistan). Furthermore, in certain Arab and Islamic countries, and under some other authoritarian regimes where Muslims live, the basic requirements of social justice, democracy and human rights are often inadequate or lacking. Yet some of these regimes are perceived by Western interests as acceptable friends, or even as strategic allies. The vast majority of the world's one billion or so Muslims do not see themselves, and should not be seen, as constituting a threat to the

9. On this body, see Hasan Moinuddin, *The Charter of the Islamic Conference*, (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987).

West or to the rest of the world. Despite the historical experience of Western colonialism, exploitation and interference, the vast majority of Muslims do not necessarily perceive themselves as being engaged in an inevitable conflict with the West. The long cultural interchange between Islamic and Western societies has been too complex, and at times too promising, to be obfuscated by the negative concept of 'conflict'.

Yet the habit of viewing *Islam* and the *West* as opposites, as actual or potential antagonists, has become entrenched in certain categories of the Western discourse. To a lesser extent, and mainly as a reaction perhaps, it has also become a feature of the militant variety of Islamicist discourse, particularly since the Iranian Revolution. It has been customary somehow, even in scholarly circles, to link 'Islam' and the 'West' by the conjunction *and*—not to signify *together*, but more often than not to convey the sense of *against*.[10] What is curious is that in such cases both nouns have often been used in an undifferentiated way. Usually neither 'Islam' nor the 'West' is clearly defined in such contexts. Thus the complexity of historical and social reality, of diversity and constant change, is often sacrificed for the simplicity of generalisations. In particular, the current Western discourse about 'Islam versus the West' seems to encourage the simplistic tendency to contrast 'Western' attributes with 'Islamic' ones, with implications of moral superiority. In a sense this could be seen as a new version of some early Orientalist attitudes to the Arab and Islamic worlds.[11] To a certain extent, and with far less

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10. An example of the seemingly irresistible attraction of this notion of hostility can be seen in the title of an otherwise meritorious study, William L. Cleveland, *Islam Against the West: Shakib Arslan and the Campaign for Islamic Nationalism* (Austin: University of Texas and London: Al Saqi, 1985).
11. Apart from Edward Said's classic *Orientalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978), see Anouar Abdel-Malek, 'Orientalism in Crisis', *Diogenes*, 1963, reprinted in Abdel-Malek, *Civilisations and Social Theory* (Albany: State University of New York (SUNY) Press, 1981), pp. 73–96; Abdallah Laroui, 'For a Methodology of Islamic Studies: Islam Seen by G. von Grunebaum, *Diogenes*, 1973, pp. 12–39; Arabic version, *'Al-'Arab wa-l-Fikr al-Tarikhi* (The Arabs and Historical Thought), 3rd edn (Beirut and Casablanca: 1980), ch. 4; also more recently, Bryan S. Turner, *Orientalism, Postmodernism and Globalism* (London: Routledge, 1994), ch. 5. For a prominent Orientalist's defence, see Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West* (New

originality but perhaps no less damage, this kind of outlook is sometimes encountered among Islamicists. The clouding of historical and sociological reality seems thus to continue across a real or imagined divide. At times, this seems like a hopelessly ongoing polemic.

The serious epistemological and cultural implications of such a view of the relations between the Islamic world and the West are not difficult to imagine. The need has been felt for an understanding of the human encounter between these two civilisations, their common heritage and cultural interchange, and their similar and different rhythms of historical experience.[12] However, while some leading Orientalists may sometimes question the validity of the over-worked contrast between 'Islam' and the 'West', the tendency to promote such contrast seems to continue, with the implication of inherent conflict.[13]

In this context, Samuel Huntington's recent formulation about a 'clash of civilisations' can be seen as a further step along this old line of thinking. The particular twist in the new interpretation is the strong implication that the next world war would be between such opponents as the Western and Islamic civilisations.[14] Of course others have presented the perceived clash less charitably, seeing it instead as one between civilisation and barbarism. At a more specific level, some, including certain 'specialists', have argued that Islam, now represented by anti-Western 'Islamic fundamentalism', is also (or perhaps therefore) hostile to, and permanently irreconcilable with democracy. In media reports or opinion columns, one further step can easily lead to quite emotive and sweeping generalisations. For example, 'Islamic fundamentalism' viewed as the same everywhere, without regional or ideological differentiation, has been described not only as

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York: OUP, 1993), ch. 6.

12. For example, Hichem Djait, *Europe and Islam: Cultures and Modernity*, trans. by Peter Heinegg, (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1985). This is also a running theme in the writings of Mohammed Arkoun, see below.
13. Bernard Lewis, *Islam and the West*, particularly ch. 1, 'Europe and Islam'.
14. Samuel P. Huntington, 'A Clash of Civilisations?', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 72, no. 3 (Summer 1993).

'wholly contemptuous of and hostile to the entire democratic political culture. . .', but also as being 'as militant and aggressive as the Bolshevik, Fascist, and Nazi movements'.[15] Similar strong reactions are sometimes expressed by indigenous Muslim voices. These are clearly worried about the obscurantist rhetoric and totalitarian implications of the extremist Islamicist discourse, for example in Algeria and Egypt.

Proponents of the 'us and them' syndrome have understandably found a useful concept in the 'clash of civilisations' hypothesis. For example, media reports about the recent Cairo Conference on Population and Development (1994) seemed to take for granted that Islamic and Western countries would stand on opposite sides concerning the main issues. As it turned out, the clash on this occasion was not so much between 'Islam' and the 'West', but apparently between the Vatican and the rest. However, in subsequent media comments on the Cairo Conference, assumptions about the clash of Islamic and Western cultures continued to be aired, with little reflection or explanation, even by supposed 'experts'. This is just one familiar instance that seems to illustrate the inadequacy of using assumptions about cultural conflict to reduce complex socio-economic and political issues.

Without wishing to belittle the scholarly worth of individual Western Orientalists, or to join the rush towards their wholesale condemnation, one has to admit that classical Orientalism has contributed, at least unwittingly, to such assumptions in the Western discourse. On their part, and mostly as a paranoid reaction to Western domination, Islamicist apologists have also perpetuated the same dichotomy in the Islamic discourse.[16] Ironically, such apologists often partake uncritically of the formulations of old and neo-Orientalism, and thus Orientalist perceptions of Islam are sometimes echoed by Muslims without reflection. For example, the notion that Islam is an immutable,

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15. Amos Perlmutter, *Washington Post*, 22 January 1992, cited by Marty and Appleby, in *Fundamentalisms and the State*, p. 6.
16. See Mohammed Arkoun's critical remarks regarding both sides in his *al-Islam: al-Akhlaq wa-l-Siyasa* (Islam: Ethics and Politics), trans. by H. Saleh, (Paris: UNESCO, 1986), p. 8ff. See also Mohammed Arkoun, *al-Fikr al-Islami: Naqd wa Ijtihad* (Islamic Thought: A Critique and Reinterpretation) (London: Al Saqi, 1990), and *Ayna Huwa al-Fikr al-Islami al-Mu'asir?* (Where is the Contemporary Islamic Thought?) (London: Al Saqi, 1993).

virtually static system, encompassing every aspect of life and not admitting separation of religion from politics, is common to both the Western Orientalist and the Islamic fundamentalist outlook. Some Orientalists would perhaps argue that the similarity is simply because both groups speak of the same 'Islam'. The point is precisely that they do. But when either group discusses Islam, it is usually a construct that is being postulated. Thus, despite the contrast in aims and scholarly methods, the old-style Orientalist and the modern militant Islamicist seem at times to evince similar assumptions, formulations and motifs. Is it possible then to ask whether, at a certain level, we are not in fact dealing with two examples of 'epistemological fundamentalism'? This is not to suggest that the fundamentalism of traditional or neo-Orientalists necessarily expresses itself with the same militancy or lack of subtlety often displayed by certain Islamicist or, for that matter, Western ideologues. Perhaps this needs to be put into some comparative perspective. It is thus reasonable to ask how intelligent readers would react, for example, to an ostensibly scholarly interpretation of Christianity that in part echoes, or is echoed by, the dogma, if not the rhetoric, of extremist Christian fundamentalists in the USA.

It would of course be absurd to suggest that the phenomenon of political Islam, or the perceived potential for instability usually associated with militant Islamicist groups, are mere figments of some Westerner's imagination. The seriousness of extreme political violence associated with some such groups is undeniable. Besides, the fear of Islamicist movements, or at least unease about their growth, is also displayed by several regimes in the Arab world, including those claiming to speak in the name of Islam. Many Arab intellectuals, mostly for different reasons, are understandably concerned about the rise of the Islamicists. They do not like the way in which certain Islamicist groups have contributed, at least unwittingly, to the distortion of cultural debate and, in some cases, the derailment of a promising democratic political process in the Arab world. There is understandably more concern in such Arab countries as Algeria and Egypt about the extent of political violence associated with extremist Islamicist groups. It is often pointed out by moderate Islamicist sympathisers, however, that acts of violence are being perpetrated not only by extremist Islamicist groups but also, and more systematically and on a much larger scale, by paranoid regimes in conflict with them. In some countries, such as Algeria,

a vicious cycle of violence, and a drift towards mutual exclusion between those in power and those aspiring to it, is becoming a grim reality.

Again, it is hardly necessary to remind ourselves that religious fundamentalism, radicalism, or extremism are not a monopoly of modern Islam; nor is political violence a monopoly of *Hamas*, *Hezbullah* or the *Jihad* groups. Such phenomena exist elsewhere. In the Middle East itself, certain Jewish parties in Israel (and in the Israeli settlements in the Occupied Territories) obviously come to mind. For example, militant politico-religious movements, such as *Kach* or *Gush Emunim*, whose vocal members include several hailing from the USA, justify their exclusiveness, intolerance and violence towards the Palestinians in religious terms.[17]

To acknowledge that the radical Islamic political phenomenon is real, and in some cases dangerous, does not mean that we can understand it in the context of cultural superiority or clash of civilisations. The discourse about the 'Islamic fundamentalist threat' is clearly becoming quite fashionable, even an obsession, in various academic, political and media circles in the West, and in a number of Arab and Muslim countries. In a real sense, it would be both inadequate and misleading to confine the discussion about Islamic radicalism to the context of 'Islam versus the West'. Apart from anything else, this would inevitably entangle our perspective with mutual historical prejudices of two complex cultures. What is needed is an approach that, while not denying such prejudices, consciously attempts to surmount them. Such an approach should be anchored in an alert and sustained double critique. This needs to be directed simultaneously at the mutual paranoia reflected both in the reductionist Western discourse about Islam and in the confused, occasionally incoherent and often escapist Islamicist discourse. Already a number of

17. For a comparative perspective on Islamic and Jewish movements, see Emanuel Sivan and Menachem Friedman (eds), *Religious Radicalism and Politics in the Middle East* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1990); see also Raphael Mergui and Philippe Simonnot, *Israel's Ayatollahs: Meir Kahane and the Far Right in Israel* (London: Al Saqi, 1987); for a broader perspective, see Richard Antoun and Mary E. Hegland (eds), *Religious Resurgence: Contemporary Cases in Islam, Christianity and Judaism* (Albany: SUNY, 197); and Marty and Appleby (eds), *The Fundamentalism Project*.

scholars and critics have contributed to this endeavour, including particularly those who consciously seek to address Arabic and Islamic, as well as Western and Third World, audiences.[18]

It is equally important to remember that Arab societies, particularly in countries like Lebanon, Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Jordan and the Palestinian homeland and diaspora, are not made up exclusively of Muslims. Christian Arabs are an integral part of these societies; and their role, aspirations and fears, like those of their Muslim fellow citizens, should be taken equally into consideration. Christian Arab thinkers and politicians have contributed to the current debate about political Islam and its place in Arab political and cultural identity. There is also a kind of political and cultural militancy that has defined itself in sectarian Christian (Maronite) terms, particularly among the Lebanese *Phalanges*, for example. Cultural militancy can also be seen in the discourses of a number of religious and ethnic minorities in several Arab and other Middle Eastern countries. These, like the militancy of Islamicist groups, need to be understood in the historical and sociological context of Arab societies, their political experiences and their patriarchal political culture. In particular, we need to take account of the lack, or at least the weakness, of established institutions and constitutional mechanisms for realising genuine political participation and social justice. We need to probe the tribal, sectarian and local terms of loyalty and political expression and to explore possibilities for socialisation and political activity beyond such primordial contexts. It is not enough to say that such problems must be somehow 'inherent' in Arab, Islamic or Middle Eastern culture. We need to ask 'why' and 'under what conditions', in concrete historical and sociological terms.

Furthermore, it needs to be realised that there exists in the contemporary Arab world a vigorous 'secularist' discourse. This seems to be generally ignored by Western observers and ridiculed by Islamicist ideologues. A tacit accord appears to exist between Islamicists and Western observers that only 'Islamicist' voices are authentically indigenous, and that other voices can safely be discarded as unrepresentative or 'westernised'. Many Arab intellectuals, both Christian and Muslim, have been engaged in

18. They include Samir Amin, Mohammed Arkoun, Fatima Mernissi, Edward Said and Hisham Sharabi among others.

the national political and cultural debates from a non-religious perspective. It is true that the secularist discourse has its own shortcomings, and that the concept of 'secularism' is far from being clearly defined or understood in the Middle East, even by some of those who argue for or against it. Nevertheless, there does exist an alternative Arab discourse that seeks to go beyond religious, sectarian and tribal loyalties and towards a concept of true citizenship in a modern democratic nation-state. In order to see the *Islamicist* discourse in its broad Arab context, it is necessary to recognise that it is not the only voice, not even the only *Islamic* voice in the Arab world. It is important to acknowledge the voices of 'the other Arab Muslims'.[19] Indeed one might add, 'let more of these other Arab Muslims speak up!'

Radicalism as Culturalist Reaction

In seeking to understand the position of Islamicist movements and the factors for their rise and apparent strength in the Arab world, it is necessary to maintain this kind of broad perspective. At a certain level it is possible to argue, as Samir Amin has done, that Islamic radicalism could be viewed within the global context of 'culturalist reactions' to Western domination, to 'Eurocentrism' or 'Eurocentric fundamentalism'.[20] Parallel culturalist reactions could be found in other African and Asian countries. Above all, however, Islamicist movements need to be understood as essentially responding to political, socio-economic and cultural factors in their own countries. In this context, the Western impact and the reaction to it can only be a factor, albeit a significant one, perhaps the most significant in certain cases.

The Arab world, in common with other developing countries, has experienced serious crises in the political, economic, social and cultural spheres. In the first place, there has been for some time an acute crisis of the state. The modernising state is perceived as having failed miserably in most Arab countries.

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19. Edward Said, 'The Other Arab Muslims', *New York Times Magazine*, 26 November 1993, reprinted in Said, *The Politics of Dispossession* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1994), pp. 384–411.
20. Samir Amin, *L'eurocentrisme: critique d'un ideologie* (Paris: 1988), English translation by R. Moore, *Eurocentrism* (London: Zed Books, 1988), p. 135.

There has been a more or less endemic crisis of political legitimacy.[21] This has to do, in part, with the failure of the political elites that emerged with independence, including those that fought for it, to promote genuine institutions and procedures for broad participation in the political process. This is confounded by, and is not unconnected with, their failure in the economic and cultural development areas. At the political level, a familiar pattern in several Arab countries has been for self-imposed rulers to promote themselves as unique beloved leaders, even as 'saviours'. In many cases, an army officer would end up assuming presidential authority through a military *coup*, and would then seek a mandate, often for life, perhaps standing as sole candidate in mock elections (where he usually gets about 99 per cent approval), creating his own party and, in some cases, an official 'opposition'. Thus patriarchal authoritarianism would be dressed up in 'progressive, popular, democratic' paraphernalia, with the help of paid, or cowed, trumpeters posing as educated spokespersons for the grateful multitude (*al-jamahir*). Examples of this pattern can be cited from several Arab regimes, past or present, from the Tigris to the Nile to the Atlantic. In other Arab countries, tribal dynasties have monopolised political and economic power, in certain cases using oil wealth as their own God-given property. More often than not, such rulers would in medieval fashion use their people as 'subjects', expecting them to obey their God-given authority and to be thankful for the bounty of *Tawil al-'Umr* (May Allah prolong his life!).

It is true there is a discernible trend towards real or supposed democratisation in the region. How much of this is just pretence remains to be seen. In any case, for the majority of the people living under such regimes, long painful experience has left deep marks of frustration, resentment, cynicism and desperation. With one or two possibly promising exceptions (one being that of Jordan

21. See Michael Hudson, *Arab Politics: The Search for Legitimacy* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Michael Hudson, 'State, Society, and Legitimacy: An Essay on Arab Political Prospects in the 1990s', in Hisham Sharabi (ed.), *The Next Arab Decade: Alternative Futures* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1988), pp. 22–37. For a more historical perspective, see Tamara Sonn, *Between Qur'an and Crown: The Challenge of Political Legitimacy in the Arab World* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1990).

since 1989), democracy, in the sense of genuine full participation in the political process, has not yet struck roots in the political culture of the Arab states. It would be misleading to suggest that the potential progress of democracy has been hindered by 'Islam' as such, or by the 'Arab mind', whatever that may mean. This predicament is better explained in the light of a combination of factors, including the short-sightedness of certain political leaders, the under-developed ideologies of political parties and the incapacity of intellectual elites in the Arab world. This situation, as well as the high profile of the Islamicists, should be seen within the context of 'the concrete circumstances of the region's contemporary history'.[22]

Crisis in Arab Society

The problems of the Arab world, including the circumstances that have produced the Islamicist radical impasse, are essentially symptoms of a society in crisis. It is a society attempting to come to terms with its historical legacy and with the modern world. This is a theme that runs through much of the contemporary literature, in Arabic and in Western languages, produced by Arab social scientists. For example, both Samir Amin and Hisham Sharabi view this crisis within the broader Third World de-colonisation and under-development context. Sharabi in particular highlights the effects of what he calls *neopatriarchy*, which he defines as 'a social formation . . . that is nothing else than corrupted patriarchy wedded to distorted modernity'. This he links to the historical relationship of *dependency* between the Arab world and the West.[23] This dependency needs to be understood in economic, strategic, political and also cultural terms.[24] Samir Amin, who identifies 'Eurocentrism' as a factor in the historical misunderstanding between European and other

22. Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*, p. 65.
23. Hisham Sharabi, 'Introduction: Patriarchy and Dependency and the Future of Arab Society', in H. Sharabi (ed.), *The Next Arab Decade: Alternative Futures* (Boulder: Westview, 1988), pp. 1–8; Hisham Sharabi, *Neopatriarchy: A Theory of Distorted Change in Arab Society* (New York: OUP, 1988).
24. For a study of this, mostly at the economic level but without ignoring other aspects, see Ibrahim al-Isawi, *Qiyas al-Taba'iyya fi-l-Watan al-'Arabi* (Measuring Dependency in the Arab World) (Beirut: 1989).

cultures, also sees it as an obstacle to democratisation and development in non-Western countries, including the Arab world.[25] For Amin, Sharabi and many other Arab sociologists and intellectuals, the most urgent problem of Arab societies is the absence of democracy and social justice.[26] In recent years, the Arab debate has begun to place due emphasis on the issue of human rights, or more specifically on the generally intolerable conditions of such rights under several regimes. This situation is being aggravated by the parochial rhetoric of both narrow Islamic fundamentalism and authoritarian Arab regimes, particularly as both use emotive 'Islamic' vocabulary to obfuscate the real issues. On the other hand, using the rhetoric of a 'clash of civilisations' or of the 'Islamic threat', while ignoring the basic issues of democracy, socio-economic justice and human rights, would neither explain nor improve matters.

Despite drastic socio-economic and demographic transformations, narrow, parochial political representation has persisted almost everywhere in Arab politics, at least for most of the past three or four decades. Thus the rule of one family, one party, one faction, one local or sectarian group, has continued to characterise the Arab political scene. With a few possible exceptions recently, the situation has hardly improved. Special cases of 'liberal democracy', such as Lebanon with the inherent contradictions of its political parochialism, have not withstood the double pressures of internal social transformations and external interference from within and outside the region.

Furthermore, a general absence, or at least severe limitation,

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25. Samir Amin, *Eurocentrism*; see also Edward W. Said, *Covering Islam: How the Media and Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York: Pantheon, 1981); Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993); on Islam and democracy, see Hisham Sharabi, 'Islam, Democracy and Socialism in the Arab World', in Michael Hudson (ed.), *The Arab Future: Crucial Issues* (Washington: Georgetown University, 1979); see in particular Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy: Fear of the Modern World*, trans. from the French by Mary Jo Lakeland (London: Virago, 1993).
26. See for example, Khaldun al-Naqib, *'Mihnat al-Dustur fi-l-Watan al-'Arabi* (The Crisis of the Constitution in the Arab World)', *al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi* (Beirut), 184 (June 1994), pp. 28–34; and in general, Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture and State* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1993).

of ordinary public liberties has characterised the practices of many Arab regimes. This situation has been perpetrated by, among others, such ruling elites as would use in the jargon of their one-party systems, and perhaps in the official name of their regimes, adjectives such as 'democratic', 'popular' (or even 'constitutional'). It is possible to say that the more such adjectives were used by a regime, the less descriptive they would be of its actual practices. In certain cases, it is more accurate to describe such practices as no less than repressive, regardless of whether such regimes are dubbed 'progressive' or 'conservative', 'pro-Western' or 'anti-Western'. Indeed, the acuteness of the situation warrants such descriptions as 'the state against the people'.[27] Arab rulers may express patriarchal concern towards their 'children' (and may still enjoy apparent Western support, connivance or indifference), but the Arab masses have generally experienced no less than the antithesis of democratic, popular or constitutional government for decades. In particular, such political practices have adversely affected, in some cases totally excluded, the development of civic institutions, thus aggravating the gap between the ruling elites and their virtually disenfranchised people.

It is important to remember that movements of popular protest, which have usually started spontaneously in certain Arab countries but were later dominated by the Islamicists, have been triggered by economic problems as well as by official corruption and restrictions on both political participation and civil liberties. The few recent experiments in revived parliamentary democracy (for example in Jordan) still need more time and determination to guarantee their permanent success. A very important factor here is the absence, or disarray, of other viable political parties which could counterbalance the obviously well-organised and often popular Islamicist movements. In this context, the aborted experiment in Algeria and the long history of repression of such movements in Egypt, for example, should be viewed not only as a consequence of Islamicist extremism, but more accurately as a major factor in the latter's intransigence, and as a symptom of the ruling elites' short-sightedness.

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27. See in particular Burhan Ghalyoun, *La malaise arabe, l'état contre la nation* (Paris: La Découverte, 1991); revised Arabic edition, *al-Mihna al-'Arabiyya: al-Dawla Didda al-Umma* (Beirut, 1993).

Islamicists and Violence

Since some observers seem to link political violence in the Arab world mainly, or even entirely, with Islamicist movements, it is necessary to put this in a broader perspective. During the past few decades, recurrent cases of detention without trial, official torture, extensive use of military force, and other violations of human rights have been committed by several Arab regimes against their critics or political opponents.[28] These have included regimes that are in US good books as friendly, even allied, states. Such violations have been directed at even mild critics of the ruling authorities, or those, including journalists and writers, whose criticism was only directed at blatant corruption and economic mismanagement. It is true that some Arab regimes have from time to time been 'blacklisted' for their alleged support of terrorism. What needs to be realised also is the extent of official terror perpetrated by these and other regimes against their own peoples.

In the economic sphere, the promised development and expected improvement in the quality of life have not generally materialised except for the privileged few. What is worse is the perceived regression towards more economic dependency on the capitalist West or, until recently, the communist East. Ironically, this has been true even, or perhaps particularly, in the case of the oil-rich Arab countries of the Gulf. Despite tangible, sometimes even great, improvements in infrastructure, education and health care, there is a real and acute sense of economic and strategic vulnerability in the Arab world. The increased spending on arms has not resulted in any tangible military victories, or in increased indigenous safeguards against external aggression. The Arab world is still essentially a consumer market, importing most of its food and manufactured items. There is only negligible industry, and no substantial exports except oil products. At the pan-Arab level, a sense of economic imbalance, some would say injustice, is strongly felt by many. It can be seen, for example, in the reliance on foreign, mostly non-Arab, labour of the Gulf countries, and the high levels of unemployment in many other Arab countries, such

28. See for example the documented study by Hasanayn Tawfiq Ibrahim, *Zahirat al'Unf al-Siyasi fi-l- Nuzum al-'Arabiyya* (The Phenomenon of Political Violence under Arab Regimes) (Beirut: 1992), (originally a University of Cairo PhD thesis).

as Egypt, Jordan, Algeria, Tunisia, and among the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank, including East Jerusalem.

At the level of daily life, individual Arab countries have had to grapple with severe problems of increased populations, demographic changes, including especially phenomenal migrations from the countryside to large cities. Acute examples of the expansion of urban slums are seen in particular in Cairo and Algiers. It is significant to note that in all the Arab countries that have witnessed increasing Islamicist strength, there have been similar socio-economic circumstances. To comply with pressure from international lenders, governments in such countries had to impose strict fiscal policies which have triggered 'bread, justice, and freedom' riots. During the late 1980s, such riots, and in some cases more serious disturbances, occurred in Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt, the Sudan and Jordan.

Public opinion in many Arab countries, and in Iran, has long perceived a pattern of actual or imagined foreign, essentially Western, exploitation and cultural imperialism. At the political and strategic levels, the Middle East has been rightly described as 'the most penetrated international relations subsystem in today's world'.[29] At another level, there is a deep sense of cultural violation that is perhaps difficult for many Westerners to understand. Islamic radicalism may appear anti-Western, but this is not because Arabs or Muslims are inherently against the West as such. It is rather that the modern Arab world, and the rest of the Islamic world as well, experience not only strategic and economic dependency on outside powers, but also cultural dependency and dispossession. To a certain extent, authoritarian regimes have been perceived by their own people as contributing to such humiliating dependency and cultural penetration. While other political forces are in disarray in most Arab societies, partly as a result of limited freedoms and the weakness of civic institutions, the Islamicist groups seem to have succeeded, sometimes apparently in a very short period, in organising themselves and in building up broad support. One aspect of their strength has been their outspoken criticism of Western ways and of forced modernisation, and their emphasis on cultural authenticity as they see it. Regardless of the efficacy of their

29. L. Carl Brown, *International Politics and the Middle East: Old Rules, Dangerous Games* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1984), p. 4.

political ideas or programs, there is no doubt that the Islamicists are able to touch a sensitive chord with the people, particularly as they use the cultural space of the mosque as well as informal social networks, and employ familiar emotive vocabulary.

Just as there is a sense of Western apprehension of political Islam, there is, conversely and equally if not more deeply-felt, Arab and Islamic distrust and fear of the West. This sense of being dominated by outsiders leads to retreat into native culture and deepens the crisis of identity and the search for indigenous values. There is no doubt that Arab Islamic culture and traditions are seen as a rich reservoir for an authentic collective identity. In general, and of course with varying degrees of emphasis, this attitude is shared by both Muslim and Christian Arabs.[30] At the root of the return to indigenous values is the question of cultural identity. As such, the phenomenon is not to be understood strictly in religious terms. Debates about questions of identity and national directions are of course not confined to the Arab world or, indeed, the developing world. Questions of this kind are being asked, in different ways, in such industrialised countries as the USA, Canada, Australia, Japan, and members of the European Union. But a most significant difference between these industrialised societies and developing societies, including the Arab world, is that in the former there are established mechanisms to debate such issues at the political and constitutional levels, through agreed procedures. By contrast, such mechanisms and procedures are generally absent, or in many cases inactive, in developing societies.

Indeed, profound debates about identity and future directions in the Arab world have often been conducted mainly by the intellectual elite on the pages of periodicals and books or in scholarly symposia. The ruling elites have often discouraged such forums at the national level, particularly if the debates were perceived to have practical political implications, such as democratisation, more freedoms, or rights of women. With very few exceptions, for example, the debates leading to the National Charter in Jordan (prior to the 1989 elections), such debates were

30. See for example Ghali Shukri, *Mir'at al-Manfa* (Mirror of Exile) (Cairo: 1980), p. 15: 'As a Christian Arab and a Copt from Egypt, I consider Islam as an integral part of my cultural and intellectual formation'.

mostly at the pan-Arab rather than state level. It may be true that a number of Arab countries have relatively long, though uneven, experiments in parliamentary democracy, and almost all of them profess to have modern constitutions. However, the real march towards full political participation, social justice and human rights still has a long way to go.

Democratisation and Human Rights

In recent years, there have been some attempts by US policy-makers in their dealings with Arab regimes ostensibly to promote democratisation as a necessary process for ensuring peace, stability and security for the New World Order. Ironically this kind of outside promotion, together with the waging of rhetorical warfare against 'Islamic' movements, is capable of backfiring. On the one hand, it could strengthen the suspicion that attempts at democratisation are imports from the foreigner and a further symptom of dependency, or even cultural imperialism. On the other hand, it could create more sympathy with Islamicist movements because they are seen as opposed to foreign interference. This is particularly so since it is perceived that Western powers, led by the USA, despite their talk about democracy and human rights, only care for their own strategic and economic interests in the region, and to that end would continue to support despotic authoritarian regimes, including those adopting traditional Islamic fundamentalism.

It is further perceived by many Arabs that such regimes ultimately have little interest in the democratic aspirations of their own peoples. For these are the same regimes that have engaged in oppressing voices of dissent, whether local or nationalist, socialist or Islamicist. Some of these pro-US regimes have long argued, in typical fundamentalist fashion, that they do not have to have parliamentary elections because they claim to apply *shura* (consultation) which they claim represents the Islamic version of democracy. Similarly, such regimes do not see the need for rights of women or human rights in general, because they claim to follow supposed Islamic principles, and they have the *fatwa*s of their religious functionaries to provide textual moral justification for their despotism. It is as if the teachings of Islam can be used at will to justify parochial, authoritarian policies or narrow-minded patriarchal whims. There indeed may

be some justification in the criticism of the potential totalitarian tendencies in some extreme Islamicist movements. However, such criticism would remain cynical and hypocritical if it is not combined with simultaneous criticism of the authoritarian practices of existing Arab regimes. Both Western observers (not to speak of Western politicians) and indigenous secularist critics would be using double standards if they did not direct their criticism equally at both types of anti-democratic forces. The current socio-political impasse in the Arab world is sometimes expressed in terms of fear of the modern world and of democracy.[31] This may be so. But the problem should be examined more clearly by focusing on the ruling elites. We need to expose the paradoxical position of those who claim to modernise their countries while demonstrating fear of the most essential conditions for modernisation: democracy, social justice, freedom and human rights. This attitude is at the heart of the crisis in Arab politics.

The Four Phases of Islamic Renewal

While Islamic radicalism may be seen, at some level, as a reactionist expression against the impact of the West, or perhaps even the 'failure of the West', it is important to remember that Islamic revival, or renewal, in the cultural and intellectual sense, is not a recent phenomenon.[32] The subject has been discussed by many scholars, and it is only necessary here to evoke its relevance to our present theme. Outstanding examples of early phases of Islamic revivalism would be the work of al-Ghazali (11th century AD) and of Ibn Taymiyya and his disciples (14th century) at the level of theology, jurisprudence and ethics, including political ethics. In the modern period, it is possible to identify four phases of Islamic movements in the Arab lands. The first is the one associated with puritanical religious and moral revival, as exemplified particularly in the reform movement of Shaykh Muhammad Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab in central Arabia, during the second half of the 18th century. This was a movement entirely

31. See in particular the insightful if somewhat idiosyncratic analysis by Fatima Mernissi, *Islam and Democracy*, cited above.
32. See John O. Voll, 'Islamic Renewal and the "Failure of the West"', in R. T. Antoun and M. E. Hegland (eds), *Religious Resurgence*.

unconnected with the Western impact. It was a significant *Salafiyya* (past-oriented) movement, greatly influenced by the legacy of Ibn Taymiyya, and it clearly looked to the model of the *salaf* (the early generations of Muslims) for inspiration. Its emphasis on *Tawhid* would be echoed, for different purposes and with different levels of articulation, by practically all later Islamic activists.

That the rise of the first Saudi state was closely associated with Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab's movement is of considerable significance for our purpose. It could throw light on the attitude of certain more recent Islamicist movements towards co-operation or interdependence with existing ruling elites. It is also worth remembering that this movement was temporarily suppressed, and the first Saudi state destroyed, by a decision of the Ottoman authorities, who used the forces of Muhammad 'Ali, the acclaimed moderniser of Egypt, with possible encouragement from, or at least the connivance of, European powers. Later, this movement was to receive new impetus when the Saudi polity was re-established by 'Abd al-'Aziz Ibn Sa'ud who successfully utilised the militant *Ikhwan* to strengthen and legitimise his authority. Ibn Sa'ud was eventually impelled to crush the same *Ikhwan* as a military and social force, thus leading to the assimilation of their legacy into his politico-religious apparatus, while shrewdly maintaining his legitimacy by directly appealing to Islamic values as interpreted by Ibn 'Abd al-Wahhab and his disciples.

Other movements of this first phase, such as the Sanusiyya in Libya, that of the Mahdi in the Sudan and other movements in the Maghrib were, in their different ways, strongly grounded in puritanical but militant Sufism. As indigenous movements, they were instrumental in opposing earlier European domination. The Mahdi of the Sudan and his movement, for example, generated in the British Empire of the time much political debate, press coverage and, eventually, military action. In this case there was some convergence, in an uneven way, between Imperial British and Khedival Egyptian interests to defeat the Mahdi's Islamic movement. These movements reflected the political culture of their own societies, and their legacies have continued to be felt, in different ways, up to our time.

The second phase, represented usually by Afghani and 'Abduh and their circle, including in particular Rashid Rida, Kawakibi

and al-Nadim (19th and early decades of the 20th century) also reflected strong reaction to European domination and an acute awareness of the need for reform. Afghani and his disciples recognised the endemic problem of despotism, tyrannical rule and authoritarianism, and sought different approaches to overcome it. Kawakibi in particular attacked it bravely, influenced in part by European liberal ideas. 'Abduh's pragmatism enabled him to effect conceptual and practical reform; and his legacy continued to influence later generations. Afghani, Kawakibi, and al-Nadim all seem to have met their deaths in suspicious circumstances, perhaps not unconnected with their critical views of despotic rulers. In their own different ways these reformers were in touch with both Islamic traditions and modern Western political ideas. They also dealt with real socio-cultural and political problems as they perceived them in their own time, and their discourse was grounded in the context of practical feasible reform. Some of their concerns, and in some cases their activities, were shared by their contemporary Christian Arab thinkers and reformers. On the other hand Islamic identity, as well as an acute awareness of both the positive contribution and potential danger of European powers, had already been at work in the ideas of 19th century cultural reformers such as Tahtawi in Egypt and official reformers such as Khayr al-Din in Tunisia.[33]

The third phase is that of Muslim movements in the first half of the 20th century, the most important and most influential of which has been that of the Muslim Brothers (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*), founded in Egypt by Hasan al-Banna in 1928. It has continued to play a significant, if often non-extremist, role in Egypt and other Arab countries. It has spawned, or at least greatly influenced, a number of Islamicist activist groups, including some extremist ones. Al-Banna's idealist vision should not obscure his realistic approach to social and political reform, nor his qualified acceptance of parliamentary and constitutional institutions in Egypt in the late 1940s.

The fourth phase, in our contemporary period, particularly

33. For historical background, including the role of both Muslim and Christian Arab thinkers, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798–1939* (London and New York: OUP, 1962); see also Hamid Enayat, *Modern Islamic Political Thought* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1976); John O. Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1982).

since the late 1960s, contains elements of both continuity and drastic change. Here the failure of Arab political elites, including socialist and pan-Arab nationalist political parties, clearly contributed to the re-emergence and strengthening of the Islamicist groups in the political arena. The blatant failure of the modernising state to achieve economic development and independence has also been a crucial factor in widening the gap between the people and their governments. The so-called 'revolutionary' or 'progressive' regimes, and the ideologies of nationalism, socialism and other '-isms' have not succeeded in delivering on their promises. The fact that such ideologies, including also communism and liberalism, have been perceived as imports and transplants should not be taken as the only cause of their lack of success. Part of the problem, particularly in the case of liberal democracy and moderate socialism, has been the failure of the political elites to understand the processes of genuine modernisation; and their attempt, instead, to impose imported foreign solutions to indigenous problems. Islamic ideas, on the other hand, no matter how misunderstood or how crudely articulated, are perceived as indigenous in the eyes of the majority of the people. Above all, the Islamicist discourse has access to audiences not available to other political or cultural movements in their societies, namely the mosque. Their rhetoric can be at once emotive, other-worldly and political. The question remains of course as to whether they can succeed in confronting practical political and economic problems, and with what results.

Islamicists and Politics

The political behaviour of radical Islamicists has understandably caused much concern to politicians and strategists, whether Arab or foreign. It has also attracted the scrutiny of scholars and the media. It needs to be remembered that an ideology that could first inspire, or appropriate, a movement of protest could later evolve differently at the practical level. Its leaders would presumably behave differently as a political party in election campaigns or with few or many seats in parliament, in opposition or as part of a national government. It could still undergo further transformation if its leaders accede to political power as a majority government. The question needs to be asked whether, in the context of Arab political culture, Islamicist

ideologies and politicians are perceived as exceptions to the rules of political behaviour. Like other actors on the political scene, the behaviour of the Islamicists in the political process could have serious consequences, particularly for their own societies. This is especially so in relation to such important issues as democracy, pluralism, civil rights including women's rights, education, economic and cultural development, and international relations.

Arab and other Muslim societies share many complex problems and dilemmas with other societies, particularly the rest of the so-called developing nations. In these societies, it is reasonable to expect that people would usually use familiar terms to articulate or address problems, or when they protest at the failure of the political elites in dealing with such problems. This means divergence of perception, different understandings and different interpretations, not only of the present, but also of the real or imagined past, and the anticipated or hoped-for future. In principle, Islamic values, ideas or slogans can provide real (or illusory) legitimacy for existing regimes, for political opposition movements and for popular protest. For this reason, and as a significant historical, social and cultural force, Islam cannot be ignored or underestimated as a potential political factor.

On the one hand, the Islamic factor in society and politics could contribute to more tolerance, flexibility, openness, pragmatism and social justice in the Arab world. At least it is optimistically perceived in this light by the vast majority of Muslims, and also by many non-Muslim students of Islam. On the other hand, it could also be unwittingly used, or indeed abused, by utopian reformers, narrow-minded ideologues, demagogues, authoritarian rulers, or political opportunists. The result could be perpetuation or even aggravation of existing problems and dilemmas.

Both political debate and political practice in the Arab world have for long been conducted in the terrible shadows of underdevelopment, parochialism, dependency and very limited freedoms. There have not been many examples of full-fledged, or even partial, openness or popular participation in Arab political practice. Many voices, both in the Arab world and abroad, are now warning against the danger of totalitarianism and the abortion of political pluralism, if the radical Islamicists were to accede to majority rule. Such fears might indeed be justified in

some, but not necessarily all, cases where an Islamicist party might conceivably assume political control. The question must be asked first, what pluralism? Where and how long has it been thriving? Secondly, such warnings were not usually so often heard when the same practices, and even worse, were imposed on the Arab people by most of their regimes, whether the so-called 'popular democratic', nationalist, Ba'thist or monarchic ones. It is obvious that the real problem does not necessarily stem from the supposed agenda of Islamicist radicals, let alone from genuine Islamic teachings. However, the historical experience of Arab societies makes such fears of totalitarianism real and daunting ones. For if earlier or current regimes could evoke God, religion, traditions, honour, progress and national interest to justify their neo-patriarchal oppression, might not an Islamicist regime appeal to God and religion with impunity to justify similar practices?

Indeed, the radical Islamicist movements have aroused more fears among secularist critics who perceive that, in their concern for alleged authenticity, the Islamicists seem to employ the rhetoric of a peculiarly utopian, obscure and ultimately closed logic. At times, the supposed familiarity of the Islamicist discourse does not seem to need any new interpretations. Nor does it appear to require precision or logical clarity, since it is enveloped in oratory, evocation and scriptural references that could mean different things in different contexts. It is worth remembering that other Arab political leaders and ideologues, including supposed secularists and conservatives, have not been known to be less emotive, ambiguous or referential in their rhetoric. Nevertheless, much doubt has been cast particularly on the ability of most of the Islamicists to provide genuine reinterpretation of the Islamic message for the modern world, or to find adequate answers to the real problems of their societies.[34] Such doubt may be justifiable, but it needs to be remembered that non-Islamicist politicians and ideologues are known also to have

34. Samir Amin, 'Is there a Political Economy of Islamic Fundamentalism', in his *Delinking: Towards a Polycentric World*, trans. Michael Wolfers (London: Zed Books, 1990), pp. 174–188 (original French title, *Déconnexion, pour sortir du système mondial* (Paris, 1985); also Samir Amin, *'al-Tubawiyya fi al-Mujtama' wa-l-Fikr* (Utopianism in Society and Thought)', *al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi* (Beirut) 184, (June 1994), pp. 42–53.

failed in similar efforts.

In viewing current trends and movements which use Islam as a political platform or slogan, it is necessary to avoid hasty generalisations. It would be unrealistic and undemocratic to dismiss all Islamicist movements, or refuse to engage in dialogue with them. The point has been raised in real political terms, specifically in Algeria and Egypt in the past few years. In both countries, the situation has been complicated by violence emanating from certain Islamicist groups, and also violence directed against them by forces of the current governments. To wage a large-scale war against Islamicists by pursuing security-driven policies through undemocratic violent measures is very likely to make matters worse.

The issue of violence is a particularly daunting one. A distinction needs to be made between movements that use only peaceful means to achieve their political goals and those that do not exclude violence from their options. As far as Islamicist violence is concerned, it is necessary to ask for what purpose is violence being contemplated. In certain cases, it is directly connected with the specific aims of liberation from foreign occupation. This is the case of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and *Hamas* movements, including the *Qassam* fighters, as well as the Lebanese *Hezbullah.* In their different ways, these groups are essentially concerned with opposing Israeli occupation and control in their respective homelands. However, in their rhetoric these groups often use universal, utopian Islamic motifs such as 'Islam is the solution' and 'the Islamic state'.[35] This is partly because such groups have links with more broadly-based Islamicist movements with universalist claims: *Hamas* emerged from the womb of the Palestinian Muslim Brothers; and *Hezbullah* has strong affiliations with the Iranian Islamic Revolution.

The second category includes movements that use violence against their own national governments, which they do not accept as legitimate. These include the *Jihad (al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya)* in Egypt and the military wing of the Algerian Front for Islamic Salvation (FIS). The violence of both types of movement may be understood in the context of frustration and

35. On the Palestinian movements, see Ziad Abu-Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza: Muslim Brotherhood and Islamic Jihad* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994).

demonstrated failure of negotiations and compromise. The Palestinian and Lebanese Islamicist militants see their methods as legitimate resistance to alien occupation and oppression; and in the case of *Hamas* as opposition to a perceived sell-out by the PLO. The Algerian and Egyptian militants see their violence as legitimate self-defence or struggle against political injustice. The circumstances of the rise of the *Jihad* and other extremist movements in Egypt needs to be understood in the context of the policies of Sadat's regime, particularly during the last three or four years of his reign, including the massive arrests of Islamicists and other perceived opponents. Similarly, the rise of the militant wing of FIS in Algeria should be understood in the circumstances of the abortive elections and subsequent policies of an increasingly paranoid regime. Neither group should be able to justify violence against innocent civilians, of course. The most disturbing aspect of violence perpetrated by certain Islamicists, as in Algeria and Egypt, is that of terror killing directed against individuals, including journalists, writers, artists and young women, because of their views or style of life.

Islamicists and Pluralism

A further necessary question is whether, and to what extent, a particular Islamicist movement may accept the principles of political pluralism and dialogue. A practical indication of this is when such movements participate in multi-party elections. This has happened with the Muslim Brothers in both Egypt and Jordan (it had also occurred in earlier elections in Syria, Iraq and Jordan in the 1950s). The same also happened in the case of FIS in Algeria until the government panicked and suspended the elections half way, thus leading to a long-term impasse. Other, less important, examples include three Islamic groups which participated in recent Kuwaiti parliamentary elections and a reformist Islamic coalition in the Yemeni elections. An example from outside the Arab world is that of the *Refah* (Welfare) Party in Turkey, which is actually an Islamicist party, but which is not allowed to use a religious adjective officially. It is to be remembered that certain Islamicist groups have enormous difficulty in functioning politically, due to persecution and legal injunctions against their activities, for example in Syria, Iraq and Libya, and recently in Algeria. To a certain extent, such

restrictions have also applied, on and off, in Egypt and Tunisia.

The Muslim Brothers in Egypt and Jordan seem to have opted for accepting political pluralism through peaceful democratic means. However, there are still internal debates and differences with others about the meaning of democracy. As a rule, radical Islamicist ideologues prefer to use the term *shura*, which is often interpreted vaguely as an Islamic substitute for democracy. The crucial question here is whether acceptance of pluralism and inclusion of others can be interpreted as a pragmatic short-term strategy, or as an established principle. The *al-Nahda* (Renaissance) Party in Tunisia as well as the Muslim Brothers in Egypt and Jordan, have openly expressed their support of the latter alternative, that is, the acceptance of pluralism, democracy and respect for difference.[36] This open attitude has, however, been received with scepticism. The success of certain Islamicist groups, such as the Muslim Brothers in Egypt, in extending their popular base through student unions, professional syndicates, welfare organisations and other areas of civic life, although done through legal channels, has led to increased alarm and consternation among their political opponents, particularly in official government circles. Such reactions seem to indicate a kind of 'Islamicists under the bed' paranoia.

It is possible to view the position of the Muslim Brothers and of the *al-Nahda* Party in the context of the political dynamics in the countries concerned. Certain Islamicist leaders, such as al-Ghannoushi, founder of the *al-Nahda* Party in Tunisia, are conscious of the dialectics of the logic of ideals and the logic of reality. The logic of the common good and the balance of powers in society would seem to make it acceptable, indeed imperative, for Muslim movements to collaborate with secularists and with their Christian compatriots. In this context the Islamic line becomes one, ostensibly the major one, among several currents, ideologies or parties. The most outstanding example of this attitude has been that of *al-Nahda* (originally known as the Movement of the Islamic Trend). Like the *Refah* Party in Turkey, it has adopted a name which does not specify its Islamic nature. *al-Nahda* has not only accepted, but in the writings and speeches of its founder, Rashid Ghannoushi, has also articulated, the

36. See R. Ghannoushi, *al-Hurriyyat al-'Amma* (Public or Civil Liberties) (Beirut: 1993), pp. 258–64.

principle of sharing and alternation of political power. Such a position has been questioned by some observers, including certain Arab Muslim social scientists. Is it mere political tactics or expediency, since *al-Nahda* is not in a position of authority? Would the Tunisian Islamicist movement abandon its support for pluralism if it were to attain the position of the party of the majority? It seems too early and somewhat unfair to pass a negative judgement on this. Ghannoushi himself seems sincerely convinced of the logic of pluralism and democracy, and sees no contradiction between these and Islamic principles.

It is important to acknowledge diversity, even within the same group. Thus some Muslim Brothers in Egypt seem to have a kind of 'two-faced view of pluralism'. At the same time some of their prominent members, such as Mustafa Mashhur, are openly and bravely addressing the question of political pluralism.[37] Similarly, the program of the Islamic Action Front in Jordan, which is the political arm of the Jordanian Muslim Brothers, has publicly called not only for the strengthening of national unity but also for the consolidation of *shura* and democracy (note the use of both terms together) as well as for defending liberties and the supremacy of the Law.[38]

The position of the Sudanese Muslim Brothers, led by Hasan al-Turabi, is very instructive. Here the situation presents an Islamicist movement that has experienced the political process with several strategies. In recent years the Islamicists have emerged as the major political party in the Sudan. They have co-operated with a military regime, first under Numayri, then under Bashir. During the period of transition they also worked within the framework of a coalition of political parties. The situation in the Sudan under Numayri was similar to that of Pakistan under Zia-ul-Haq. In both cases the Islamicists operated in a dubious symbiosis with an authoritarian regime. To a certain extent, their recent history illustrates the problem of Islamic movements and the implications of their co-operation with authoritarian regimes, simply because the latter agree to impose a superficial implementation of *Shari'a* laws. The Muslim Brothers in the

37. Mashhur wrote for *al-Sha'b Newspaper* which is close to the Muslim Brothers; see Ghannoushi, pp. 260–64.
38. See the Arabic newspaper and mouthpiece of the Muslim Brothers in Jordan, *al-Liwa'*, 24 February 1993; Ghannoushi, p. 264.

Sudan are now the most powerful political body. They have practically moved away from the notion of competitive pluralism and towards a kind of populist Islamic regime, with 'popular committees' somewhat akin to the Libyan model. Their experiment and policies are being anxiously watched, with optimistic interest by other Islamicist movements elsewhere, with fear by regional and foreign powers, and with disapproval by those other Arabs and Muslims who support open, democratic pluralism.

Finally, the Algerian FIS represents an Islamicist movement that has been denied participation in the political process because the government was afraid that FIS would win majority rule, and subsequently prevent others sharing or alternating with them. The obscurantist anti-democratic rhetoric and militancy of certain FIS leaders seem to have contributed to the Algerian government's fears. However, such reactions, and the subsequent deterioration of the situation in Algeria, indicate that part of the blame must rest with the government. The Algerian situation reflects a special case where the country's recent history—that is, one hundred and thirty years of French colonisation and cultural and linguistic alienation—has made the question of cultural identity an acute one. It also demonstrates the example of a country with serious post-colonial problems, in which the government has failed both in its economic policies and its political reform.

The matter seems less complex, on the face of it, in the case of a number of extremist, but more localised, Islamicist groups which seem to adopt a more or less rejectionist position towards the idea of political pluralism. Examples of these include *Hizb al-Tahrir al-Islami* (the Islamic Liberation Party), founded by Shaykh Taqi al-Din al-Nabhani in Jerusalem in the early 1950s, and for a while visible among Palestinians in Jordan and the West Bank. Despite its dogmatic position the *Tahrir* Party had at least once in the past participated in parliamentary elections: in the 1956 elections in Jordan. Its main slogan was the call for an 'Islamic State', and on that occasion the party won one seat which was held by a particularly outspoken member, Ahmad al-Da'ur. This is also the position of such extremist groups as *al-Jihad* (*al-Jama'at al-Islamiyya*) in Egypt, and *Hezbullah* in Lebanon. Even in *Hezbullah*'s case, it is possible that pragmatism and co-existence might not be entirely excluded. Despite its often

reported extremism, *Hezbullah* is able to present an interesting image in the personality and writings of Sayyid Muhammad Husayn Fadl Allah. He is not only a proponent of Islamic–Christian dialogue in general, but also an advocate of coexistence and patriotic sharing between the Christians and Muslims in Lebanon.[39]

One of the worrying features about many Islamicist groups is the apparent obscurantism of their theorists. There have been important attempts by members of the Muslim Brothers, the Tunisian *al-Nahda*, Hasan al-Turabi and other individual Muslim scholars, including trained sociologists and lawyers, to remedy the situation. In this context, it is important to see the dialectics of the relationship between such Islamic movements and the political environment in their particular countries. To some, the choices open towards the political process might seem limited to two: either patient preparation to achieve power through legal means, or resorting to violence. A third choice, however, may appeal to other Islamicists, namely, participation within a pluralistic democratic system. While there is now more general acceptance among Islamicist movements of the principles of democracy, there is agreement on the need to emphasise the independence of the Islamic political discourse. Like other intellectuals and political activists in the Arab World, and in other Islamic countries, the Islamicists reject any signs of subservience to foreign discourse, let alone foreign interference.

Where the discourse of some Islamicists poses serious problems from the standpoint of democracy and pluralism is when they deal with such questions as the sources of political authority. In other words, is there a conflict between the authority of the people and divine authority? The whole debate about God's *Hakimiyya* or supreme rule, the authority *(siyada)* of the *Shari'a* or of the people *(umma)*, is often confused and unclear. The Islamicists need to go beyond the old dogmatic formulations of Maududi and Sayyid Qutb, if they wish to break the political and ideological impasse. The debate about democracy and *shura* still sharply divides the Islamicist movements. Those of *Al-Jama'at Islamiyya* in Egypt completely and vehemently reject

39. See Muhammad Husayn Fadl Allah, *Fi Afaq al-Hiwar al-Islami al-Masihi* (On the Horizons of Islamic-Christian Dialogue) (Beirut: Dar al-Malak, 1994).

democracy as anti-Islamic, and claim that to speak of the authority of the people is to contradict God's authority. Similarly, their position on pluralism is uncompromising. Like the dogmatic rhetoric usually associated with some of the extremist ideologues of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, they only see two parties: God's and the Devil's. Furthermore, in their discourse they often take Qur'anic statements relating to the hereafter and attempt to apply them out of context to worldly politics! Similarly, like the *Hizb al-Tahrir*, some individual Muslim jurists object to the term democracy and its application as an un-Islamic import, without attempting to understand it.

On the other hand, it is promising that Ghannoushi in particular, and some members of the mainstream Muslim Brothers in Egypt, Jordan and elsewhere, accept democracy as a term and as a principle without any serious reservations. Some scholars, such as Yusuf al-Qaradawi, a qualified *mujtahid* and a prominent member of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers with following throughout the Arab world and beyond, have even published 'contemporary *fatwas*' in support of democracy and the right of Muslims to borrow the distinguishing features of democracy.[40] However, they insist on a position of Islamic independence from outside interference, politically, culturally and ideologically. In respect of the principle of independence, though not necessarily in the way it is expressed, they seem to reflect the attitude of many moderate Muslim and Christian Arab intellectuals and perhaps the majority of the people.

There is no doubt that those who represent the extreme Islamicist line of argument, although seemingly more visible and outspoken, are in fact a minority among Islamicists in the Arab world. Militant groups which advocate violence and refuse political processes are the exception, not the rule. Yet the views of such extremist groups are often presented, by them and by certain elements of the media, as the Islamic view *par excellence*. More attention should be given to the views and analytical

40. See Yusuf al-Qaradawi, Fatawa Mu'asira, (Contemporary Juristic Rulings), cited by Fahmi Huwaydi, 'al-Islam wa-l-Dimuqratiyya', al-Mustaqbal al-'Arabi, 166 (December 1992), especially p. 28; see also Yusuf al-Qaradawi, al-Sahwa al-Islamiyya Bayna al-Ikhtilaf al-Mashru' wa-l-Tafarruq al-Madhmum (The Islamic Awakening: Between Legitimate Difference and Objectionable Division) (Beirut: al-Risala, 1990).

position articulated by the other, mainstream, Islamicists.

It is also important to remember that most radical Muslim activists are not the product of traditional schools. On the contrary, many of them have been trained in various scientific, applied and social science disciplines, some with high degrees from Western universities. In fact many of those who may be described as radical Islamicists in certain Arab countries would be usually from outside the traditional religious establishment. They represent what has been described as the 'PhD + Beard' phenomenon. It is possible for young people to be radicals with modernist training but with the inspiring influence of charismatic fundamentalists at an early stage. Instead of merely asking such questions as 'What is it in Islam that makes some Muslims turn into extremists?', we should rather try asking the question: 'What factors lead people of whatever background to seek answers in their own religious and cultural traditions, and what factors lead others, in despair, to resort to paranoid attitudes and extremist views or activities?'

The Need for a Social Contract

Instead of thinking of remedies that only consider the interest of Western powers and westernising authoritarian regimes, it would be more appropriate to seek to understand the actual political, social, economic and cultural problems of Arab societies. Much of the indigenous Arab discourse, in its mainstream Islamicist and liberal secularist varieties, would seek to tackle such problems. At the political level, the way out of the impasse would seem to be in seeking to establish a broad social contract, perhaps in the form of a national charter to be debated and approved in each country. Of course human will and openness has to be present to achieve political and economic participation of all groups, sectors and individuals in society, including women and members of minorities. This has to be understood as genuine and full participation for all, based on the principles of equity, regardless of ethnic origin, creed, gender, wealth or social status. Such a social contract would need to include among its basic principles that of the acceptance of democracy in the fullest sense, and of political and cultural plurality within the context of the nation state. Obviously, conditions are not the same in all Arab countries. Particular social circumstances and experiences of each

country need to be taken into consideration. On the other hand, it would be futile self-delusion to keep arguing about ambiguous terms such as *shura*, or to repeat emotive slogans such as 'Islam is the solution' without explanation of what this actually means, and without concern for the practical political implications.

The question of political, cultural vocabulary and rhetoric is of course significant, and would continue to pose serious problems. Are Islamic categories or Western notions to be used? Is there a way to show that *a priori* opposition is not inevitable? Already the views of Ghannoushi and others seem to have gone a considerable way in this direction. More work needs to done, particularly by indigenous social scientists and legal scholars who need to be familiar with, and open to, both Islamic ideas and liberal democratic concepts and institutions. In order to avoid confusion and misunderstanding, the meaning of political democracy in the sense of equal, full and free participation in decision-making and in the political process, would need to be stated and elaborated. The principles of public liberties, sharing and alternating of political authority, and human rights need not only to be enshrined in constitutions, but also to be promoted and adhered to. They need to be presented in terms that are relevant to Arab societies, not as imported foreign concepts packaged by and for other societies. In this respect, universal democratic principles and the popular Islamic principles of justice, equity, and *shura* would be enabled to blend together in the context of a modern nation-state. Similarly, regional and international co-operation, based on equality, mutual respect and common interests would find reflection in principles common to the Islamic and Western traditions.

One of the daunting questions often raised in connection with radical Islamicist movements, such as FIS in Algeria, or *al-Nahda* in Tunisia, or indeed the Muslim Brothers in Egypt or Jordan, has to do with their future intentions should they succeed in attaining majority rule through democratically held elections. Specifically, the question is whether such a movement or an Islamicist political party would put an end to pluralism and thus stifle the democratic process. It is possible, but not really helpful, to argue that if they did they would not be the first to do so; and that earlier political elites, including supposed secular liberals, have in their time aborted the process. Such an assumption would want us to continue to subscribe to a kind of cyclical or repetitious

pattern in Arab and Islamic politics. It is clearly up to the societies concerned to prove that they can get out of the impasse. Above all it is the responsibility of current regimes to pursue the path of genuine political reform without fear of losing office, but with a willingness to accept its loss gracefully one day. It is time that Arab governments and political parties accepted the basic principle that any ruling party or regime must by definition be temporary, and that political power must alternate in a peaceful manner. It is time to restore the key Arabic political term, *dawla* (state, government, regime) to its original signification of 'temporary, alternating.'

The true guarantee for the future of democracy does not reside simply in the ideology of the majority party. It needs to be anchored in well-established institutions and acceptable mechanisms and procedures constitutionally enshrined and secured by law. Constitutions and national charters of themselves do not guarantee their application, of course. There has to be the human will and freedom from oppression. Above all, the education systems need to devote more attention to scientific thinking, including the way in which history is studied. Civic education, principles of free discussion, debating and respect for difference of opinion have to become integrated in the political culture. The Islamic juristic principles of accepting *ikhtilaf* (difference) and the supremacy of the common good (*maslaha*) are capable of being extended to the wider political sphere. Similarly, the Qur'anic injunctions about 'good dialogue and debate (*jadal . . . bi-l-lati hiya ahsan*)' and applying the gift of reasoning (*in kuntum ta'qilun*) should be extended to the intellectual and political discourse. This should be done in a way that is relevant to the real problems of the 15th Islamic century and approaching 21st Christian century, and that is inclusive of all members of society, including Christian as well as Muslim Arabs, and all members of other religious, ethnic and linguistic groups within each particular society. Educated Arabs, both Muslim and Christian—and in the case of the Maghrib, both Arabs and Berbers—like their peers in other developing countries need to use their high qualifications and training to help move their societies beyond old primordial loyalties and towards real political integration in the broader society. Both Islamicists and secularists in the Arab World need to come to terms with these basic issues. For better or worse, the current impasse, and the way or ways in which Arab societies confront it, will understandably

affect the Arab world itself much more than it would the West.

Despite the deep sense of disappointment and scepticism about the old pan-Arab ideologies of the 1950s and 1960s, most people in the Arab countries still aspire to some workable regional co-operation and possible integration among different Arab states. Many of them see the prior ities of the so-called New World Order as designed to weaken the Arab world, politically and economically. Such apprehensions are not alleviated by the kind of statements about redefining the Middle East and cutting Egypt and other Arab countries down to size which have been in circulation for the past few years. These statements have emanated from politicians and analysts, not only from the US, Europe or Israel, but also from the two non-Arab Muslim regional powers: Turkey and Iran. Before assuming that an Islamic nationalism might be taking over in the Arab world, it is important to take such phenomena into consideration. Even the most fundamentalist or radical Islamicists in the Arab World are aware of the Arab historical and cultural context of their societies.

Chapter 3

Civic Pluralism in the Muslim Middle East

James Piscatori

For an idea whose time has supposedly come, 'democracy' masks an astonishing number of unanswered questions. Is it a culturally specific term, reflecting Western European experiences over several centuries? Does its emergence require stages of economic development, with the formation of a bourgeoisie, or middle classes in general, the crucial step? Do non-Western societies possess their own standards of participation and accountability—and indeed their own rhythms of development—which command attention, if not also respect?

The relevance to the Muslim world is obvious. A well-established, conventional view holds that Islam and democracy are incompatible:

> How is it possible for anyone to reconcile democracy, which sprang from Protestant Europe after the Counter Reformation, with the government of the *Shari'a*, which is centralistic and intolerant of opposition? . . . There is no way the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria or any other modern Islamic fundamentalist movement will seek reconciliation with democracy. Once in power, fundamentalists in Algeria, Egypt, or Jordan will almost surely seek exactly what Ayatollah Khomeini accomplished—the destruction of political opposition, secularism, individual freedom, and the end of electoral politics.[1]

1. Amos Perlmutter, 'Islam and Democracy Simply Aren't Compatible', *International Herald Tribune*, 21 January 1992, p. 6.

This argument has been buttressed by scholars and influential journalists, who, if they do not outrightly equate Islam with anti-democratic forces, identify 'Islamic fundamentalism' as incompatible with social and political pluralism.[2] Many of these observers build their analysis around what Leonard Binder has called 'the cluster of absences'[3]—the absence of a concept of 'citizenship', of a political–legal culture of compromise and flexibility. Indeed, three major arguments are put forward:

- Muslim societies are inevitably authoritarian because a political culture of compromise was made impossible by legal and doctrinal rigidity and the absence of an idea of citizenship;
- Islam lacks intermediary institutions between the state and the individual, thereby rendering the emergence of a civil society impossible;
- Muslim societies have lacked a bourgeoisie and adequate capitalist development such as occurred in Europe where democracy emerged.

'Parliamentary' Islam

Despite this received wisdom, electoral politics—one important indicator of civic pluralism—has, to a certain extent, emerged in the Middle East: four *Majlis* elections have taken place in Iran since the Islamic revolution; and regularly contested elections have occurred at the municipal and national levels in Turkey where in 1993 Islamists belonging to the *Refah* (Islamic Welfare) party came to victory in Ankara and Istanbul, roughly doubling the percentage of their votes in the previous local elections five years earlier. In the Arab world, Islamists have also participated in a number of elections. In Egypt, for instance, the Muslim Brotherhood (*Ikhwan al-Muslimin*) fielded parliamentary

2. Gudrun Kramer, 'Islamist Notions of Democracy', *Middle East Report*, July–August 1993, pp. 2–8; Martin Kramer, 'Islam vs. Democracy', *Commentary*, January 1993, pp. 35–42.
3. Leonard Binder, *Islamic Liberalism: A Critique of Development Ideologies* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 225; compare with Gudrun Kramer, 'Islamist Notions of Democracy', p. 2.

candidates in 1945, but won no seats in an election that was seen as corrupt. In 1984, the *Ikhwan* concluded an alliance with the *New Wafd* Party and won 12 seats. In 1987, it formed an 'Islamic alliance' with the Socialist Labor Party and the Liberal Party, and increased the number of its parliamentary seats to 32. It boycotted the elections of November 1990, but its members have continued to win, even control, a number of professional groupings, such as those of lawyers, engineers and doctors.

In Jordan, King Hussein initiated a process of reform in 1989, and in November allowed parliamentary elections to be held for the first time in twenty-two years. Islamic candidates scored an upset in the election, taking 34 out of 80 seats, with the Brotherhood securing 22 of these seats. In 1990, in the local election in Zarqa, the Brotherhood won 9 out of 10 seats. In June 1990, the Brotherhood and its allies won 4 of the 9 seats in municipal elections in Rusaifah. In November 1990 a Muslim Brother was elected speaker, and the Brotherhood held five cabinet seats. In the November 1993 elections, following a further opening of the system and the adoption of a 'one person, one vote' electoral system, the number of Islamists in parliament declined. They now have only 16 seats in parliament, and many of their leaders, such as the speaker, were defeated.

In the West Bank, Islamist groups won approximately 40 per cent of the student vote between 1978 and 1987, and in the Gaza Strip, 65–75 per cent.[4] Between 1992 and 1994, *Hamas* (*Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*, the Islamic Resistance Movement) and Islamic Jihad participated in student elections at various universities throughout the West Bank and Gaza. Their success varied, depending in large part on community reactions to the stages of the peace process, and to electoral alliances that student activists forged on each campus. To cite but two examples, in the November 1993 Birzeit University elections—two months after the PLO–Israeli peace accord—*Hamas* participated for the first time in an electoral coalition with the anti-Arafat Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) and the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). The coalition secured 52

4. Jean-Francois Legrain, 'Les elections étudiantes en Cisjordanie (1978-1987)', *Egypte/Monde Arabe*, vol. 4, no. 4, 1990, pp. 87–116; Ziad Abu Amr, *Islamic Fundamentalism in the West Bank and Gaza* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), pp. 19–21.

per cent of the vote, winning all 9 of the council seats, of which *Hamas* took four. The victory was all the more significant because Birzeit is regarded as a *Fatah* stronghold. In the Islamic University of Gaza, Islamists have controlled the student council since the university was established in 1980. In 1992, *Hamas* obtained 89 per cent of the votes, when *Fatah* did not participate in the elections. In December 1993, with formal *Fatah* involvement, *Hamas* won 81 per cent of the vote and Islamic Jihad 2 per cent, while 11 per cent went to *Fatah* and 2 per cent to the PFLP.

In the June 1990 Algerian municipal elections, the first multiparty election since independence in 1962, the main Islamist party, *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS, Front for Islamic Salvation) secured a stunning victory, capturing 54 per cent of the vote, while the ruling *Front de Libération National* (FLN) garnered only 34 per cent. Martial law was imposed in June 1991, and the government cancelled the December 1991 elections which Islamists were poised to win. In Tunisia, in April 1989, Islamist candidates won 14.5 per cent of the nationwide vote, and a stunning 30 per cent in major cities. Owing to the peculiarities of the electoral law, however, they failed to secure any parliamentary seats. Islamist candidates refused to participate in the June 1990 local elections, and the government refused to legalise the *Hizb al-Nahda* (Renaissance Party), the reformed Islamist *Mouvement de Tendance Islamique* (Islamic Tendency Movement).

In the August–October 1992 parliamentary election in Lebanon, Muslim (and Shi'i) groups such as *Hezbullah* (Party of God) and *Amal* (*Afwaj al-Muqawama al-Lubnaniyya*, Lebanese Resistance Brigades) fared relatively well. Boycotted especially by Maronite groups, and tarnished by allegations of voting irregularities, the elections were nonetheless an indicator of Islamist strength in the southern Jabal 'Amil and eastern Biqa' valley areas. Out of a total of 128 seats in the *Majlis al-Nawab* (Deputies' Assembly), *Hezbullah* took 8 seats out of the 27 Shi'i deputies elected. Four other non-Shi'i deputies—two Christians and two Sunnis—appeared on *Hezbullah* lists, and vote with it in parliament. *Hezbullah* has specifically used its parliamentary platform to oppose any Lebanese–Israeli peace treaty. *Amal*, which has been more willing to accommodate itself to the Lebanese state, took 4 seats in the elections. Its leader, Nabih Birri, became Speaker of the Assembly, after the long-serving Shi'i Speaker Husayn al-Husayni resigned his post in protest at

what he saw as *Hezbullah* vote rigging in the Biqa. In addition to *Hezbullah* and *Amal* members, three deputies were elected from two Sunni Islamist groups.[5]

In April 1993, Yemen's first elections occurred. The *Islah* (Reform) party failed to win a single seat in the south, but took several seats in the north. In Kuwait, parliamentary elections have occurred, with interruptions, since 1963. The government has clearly sought to legitimise its position by seeking some form of electoral approval but, by the very same process, has opened itself to the charge that it is manipulating the electoral process to bolster narrow dynastic rule. Because the National Assembly (*Majlis al-Umma*) has at times felt able to criticise official policies, the government dissolved it in 1976 and 1986. The government was especially criticised for its handling of the Suq al-Manakh stock market crash in the early 1980s. In 1981, Islamists won 4 seats. The June 1990 elections were widely boycotted by Islamists and other oppositional groups, but in October 1992, in the first elections since the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait, self-identified Islamists captured 10 out of the 50 seats. They have used their position to push for social reforms, such as the end of coeducation at the University of Kuwait. The impact of their relatively small number may be magnified when the opposition votes in tandem, since the combined oppositional total is slightly more than half of the assembly seats.

While still not answering the question of what Islamists would do if they gained ultimate power, this review of Muslim political experiences at least suggests that Islamists are capable of engaging in the kind of political calculation, the give-and-take of politics, common to other groups. There is of course an inescapable irony, Islamists note, in the fact that their ulterior intentions and democratic *bona fides* are subject to such doubt, while the firm grip on power of narrowly-based or military-dominated regimes goes almost unquestioned. The unedifying spectacle of the Algerian military subverting the electoral process in order to save Algerian democracy has not gone unnoticed.

The view that Islam is anti-pluralist obscures the fact that important changes in ideology and social structure have occurred

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5. Farid al Khazin, and Paul Salim, *Al-intikhabat al-awali fi Lubnan ma ba al-harb* (Beirut: Markaz al-Lubnani li'l-Dirasat, 1993), pp. 48, 419–33.

over time throughout the Muslim world.

Ideological Evolution

Contrary to the argument often heard—ironically, in both the non-Muslim West and in Muslim societies themselves—considerable debate and intellectual exchange has occurred on such key issues as nationalism, popular participation, and social justice. Ideas are not stagnant, and Qur'anic meanings are scarcely unambiguous. Indeed, despite what is often assumed about the nature of Islamic law, considerable legal reform—including in conservative Saudi Arabia—has occurred. Alongside the *Shari'a* a parallel legal system based on *qanun* (laws) or *nizam* (decrees) exists. In such areas as social insurance, banking and mining, and even in areas of personal status in some societies such as Tunisia and pre-revolutionary Iran, Islamic legal codes have been codified and revised according to such well-established concepts as *maslaha* (public interest) and *takhayyur* (eclecticism among the legal schools).[6] Although the larger revealed edifice of Islamic law thus remains common to every Muslim society, legal codes have differed widely and reflect the underlying diversity of national histories, traditions and cultures within the Muslim world.

On the specific idea of Islam's compatibility with civic pluralism (*al-ta addudiyya*), a broad spectrum of ideas has emerged. At one end of the spectrum is the view expressed by Shaykh Fadlallah Nuri (1842-1890) during the Iranian constitutional movement of 1905–1911. He stressed that the equality of citizens was 'impossible'—particularly when one considered the obvious and innate disparities between parents and children, the learned and ignorant, and husband and wife. Moreover, a legislative body was superfluous for 'Islam does not have any shortcomings that require completion'.[7]

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6. See J. N. D. Anderson, *Law Reform in the Muslim World* (London: Athlone Press, 1976); James P. Piscatori, *Islam in a World of Nation-States* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 122–24.
7. Shaykh Fadlullah Nuri, 'Refutation of the Idea of Constitutionalism', in John J. Donohue and John L. Esposito (eds), *Islam in Transition: Muslim Perspectives* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1982), pp. 292-96.

Sayyid Qutb (1906–66) moreover, believing that the individual will should not be subordinated to that of others, strongly objected to any notion of popular sovereignty. His views were emphatic: 'To declare God's sovereignty means: the comprehensive revolution against human governance in all its perceptions, forms, systems and conditions and the total defiance against every condition on earth in which humans are sovereign'.[8] One of the leaders of FIS, Ali Belhadj, maintains that democracy is a flawed system. Indeed, the very concept of majority rule is unacceptable, since morality cannot be quantified; the greater number of votes does not translate into the greater moral position.

At the other end of the intellectual spectrum is the view that Islamic ideas are perfectly compatible with democratic ideas. Proponents of this view point to traditional ideas as permissive of a kind of participatory politics, and argue that these are in keeping with the broad requirements of a modern system. In this view, the supposed rigidity of Islamic law and unaccountability of rulers are countered by a flexibility in practice, which flows from the ability—albeit in certain prescribed circumstances—to interpret Islamic law (*ijtihad*) and the need to base the law and governance on consensus (*ijma*) and consultation (*shura*). Muhammad Asad, often identified as a modernist, carried these ideas directly into the realm of electoral politics: 'The legislative assembly—*majlis ash-shura*—must be truly representative of the entire community, both men and women. Such a representative character can be achieved only through free and general elections, therefore the members of the *majlis* must be elected by means of the widest possible suffrage, including both men and women'.[9] Tunisia's Rashid al-Ghannouchi unequivocally argues that 'the Islamic movement can only advocate democracy, not dictatorship'. Islam does not constitute a theocracy, and it both allows for the participation of the people and calls for the separation of powers in order to carry out *shura*. Democracy, in short, 'represents the hope of salvation'.[10]

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8. Sayyid Qutb, *Fi Zilal al-Qur'an*, cited in Yvonne Haddad, 'Sayyid Qutb: Ideologue of Islamic Revival', in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), p. 79.
9. Muhammad Asad, *The Principles of the State and Government in Islam* (Gibraltar: Dar al-Andalus, 1980), p. 45.
10. Rashid al Ghannouchi, 'Islam and Freedom Can be Friends', *Observer*, 19 January 1992, p. 18.

In between these two poles of the spectrum, certain Muslim intellectuals have argued that Islam constitutes its own kind of democracy. For instance, Abu'l-A la al-Mawdudi (1903-79), the great South Asian Muslim thinker, argued that Islam constituted a 'theo-democracy'. If democracy simply meant the sovereignty of the people, then it could not be compatible with Islam; in fact, Islam in this regard was 'the very antithesis of secular Western democracy'.[11] But if democracy was to be conceived of as a popular sovereignty limited by strict adherence to God's law, then the contradiction disappeared and it became clear that Islam was based at once on divine sovereignty and limited popular sovereignty. In Tunisia, Abdelfattah Mourou has reaffirmed the importance of the people to any conceptualisation of the Islamic state, and, in a form of argument that has gained some currency throughout the Muslim world, has spoken in effect of levels of sovereignty. God, of course, possesses ultimate sovereignty, whereas the people have a kind of proximate, operational authority: 'Laws come from God, but sovereignty is that of the people'.

Social Change

The second argument that Islam and democracy are incompatible rests on the idea that civil society has failed to emerge in the Muslim world. This is, however, a facile view which fails to note that, throughout the Islamic centuries, institutions intermediary between the individual and the state have in fact emerged. To name but two: the *ulama* (religious scholars), while largely politically acquiescent, have at important times served as moral critics of those in power; and Sufi orders have been able to marshal significant resources—economic, social and spiritual capital—that provide their followers with a valuable network of support and protection.

In societies along both sides of the Gulf, informal groupings have been a staple of social and political life. In Kuwait and elsewhere on the Arab littoral, men especially, but also women at times, come together in *diwaniyya* in which they discuss a range of concerns and often, as in Saudi Arabia, from the basis of

11. Abu-l-'Ala' Mawdudi, 'Political Theory of Islam', in Donohue and Esposite (eds), *Islam in Transition*, pp. 253-54.

incipient political organisations (*shilla*). Somewhat more formally in Kuwait, women also participate in neighbourhood cooperative associations (*jama at ta awuniyya*), and in the parliamentary elections of 1992, the Kuwait Democratic Forum invited two women to speak in a predominantly male *diwaniyya*.[12] James Bill has long pointed to the importance of *dawra* in Iran, informal groups of individuals which may be formed by overlapping professional, religious, political, or economic ties.[13] Because such groups have lacked formal leadership structures or central organisation, they have proved resistant to state cooption. Outside the Gulf, such Islamist groups as FIS in Algeria, *Hezbullah* in Lebanon, and *Hamas* in the West Bank and Gaza—groups that protest the corruption and laxity of both government and society, and see the antidote in a reinvigorated commitment to Islamic norms—constitute energetic autonomous associations in Muslim societies. In part because they help to mobilise popular discontent, and in part because they are committed to providing social welfare services, such as housing assistance, health care and education, these associations advance the public agenda of accountability. Although Islamist groups themselves may lack procedures for internal dissent, their effect is to create spaces in the public realm in which individuals and groups may express and, to a degree, act upon, oppositional sentiments.

In addition to the emergence and proliferation of voluntary associations, other profound social transformations have been set in train. The combined effect of mass education and economic liberalisation, such as the *infitah* ('open door') policy of the Egyptian government since President Sadat, has been the emergence of individuals and groups who, like the classical bourgeoisie, are intermediate between the economic and political elites and the masses. While each society has evolved according to its own dynamic, and the impact of the level of economic development can be overstated,[14] the emergence of potent middle

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12. Mary Ann Tetreault, 'Civil Society in Kuwait: Protected Spaces and Women's Rights', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 47, no. 2 (Spring 1993), pp. 275–91.
13. James Bill, 'The Plasticity of Informal Politics: The Case of Iran', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 27, no. 2 (Spring 1973), pp. 131–51.
14. Nazih N. Ayubi, 'Is Democracy Possible in the Middle East?', unpublished paper for the European Consortium for Political Research

classes dates roughly to the last half century. In Egypt, while marked economic and labour differentiation has existed since at least the beginning of this century, mass education is a relatively recent phenomenon—as is the resultant broadening of the professional middle classes. Mass primary education began in earnest only after the 1952 revolution, and it was another fifteen to twenty years before large numbers of students completed the advanced cycles of state-sponsored education. Major educational expansion began in the late 1950s in Morocco, in the 1960s in Lebanon on a national scale, and in the early 1970s in Arabian peninsula countries such as Oman and Yemen.[15]

The effect of such emerging middle classes is an increase in the number of politically influential actors. Often dissatisfied with the prevailing situation, they demand greater rights of participation. In Saudi Arabia, for example, despite the purported inability of rentier economies to generate participatory demands,[16] groups have arisen which are vocal in calling for the establishment of a *majlis al-shura* (consultative assembly), and then, after its establishment, for investing it with substantial deliberative power. These have come from the merchants and such professionals as doctors, engineers and academics. Similarly in Jordan, well-educated individuals 'resented the fact that they could not hope to break into the ruling elite' dominated by traditional families and clans, and businessmen resented that 'sweetheart deals and lucrative commissions were traditionally channelled by insiders in their friends' directions'.[17] Middle class politics thus adds to the trans-class politics of the 'street'—the normal fare of Middle Eastern, if not all developing society, politics—to create a kind of *de facto* pluralist system, even if that pluralism has not yet concretised in formal institutional ways.

Joint Sessions, Leiden, 2–8 April 1993, p. 4.

15. See Dale F. Eickelman, 'Mass Higher Education and the Religious Imagination in Contemporary Arab Societies', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 19, no. 4 (November 1992), pp. 1–13.
16. See Samuel P. Huntington, *The Third World: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), p. 65.
17. Abla Amawi, 'Democracy Dilemmas in Jordan', *Middle East Report*, January–February 1992, p. 27.

The Pluralist Process and Challenge

Contrary to the views expressed at the outset of this chapter, it is clear that an alternative approach to the question of pluralism in the Muslim Middle East is sustainable. This approach is built on two methodological and two substantive assumptions. Methodologically, the argument advanced here assumes that doctrine is not by itself either fixed or all defining; and that practice, the experiential realm, often induces ideological evolution. In substantive terms, these combine to suggest, first, that Muslim political cultures are shifting and thus do not inherently stand as obstacles to pluralist development; and, second, that the demands of recently empowered individuals and groups further push a political order to new points of crisis and equilibria, which may result in political diversification, if not also, in the long run, liberalisation.

The analysis thus points to the crucial importance of avoiding zero-sum game assumptions, and of placing historical processes into their multiple contexts. To ask if Islam is compatible or not with civic pluralism is to risk an essentialist answer: the nature of Islam is or is not pluralist. More telling is the question: under what circumstances is the process of pluralism encouraged? The answer which we have outlined notes the ambiguities of Islamic political thought, the relative wealth of non-state associational life, interest-based calculations of regimes and protest groups, the rising demands of middle classes, and discontents—as in Algeria, Egypt, and Jordan—unleashed by 'sharp economic crisis'.[18] If a contextualised approach to doctrine and ideology precludes facile presumptions that Islam prevents liberalisation, then an understanding of whether or not 'Islam' *encourages* it lies in the complex calculus of interests, values, and institutional life endemic to all Muslim societies.

Even if we argue that pluralism is an evolving process, rather than an end product, difficulties have to do with the internal Others of Muslim societies—political opposition, women and minorities. As much as Muslim theorists extol *shura* and *ijma* as inherently democratic, nagging questions persist. These have to

18. Michael Hudson, 'After the Gulf War: Prospects for Democratization in the Arab World', *Middle East Journal*, vol. 45, no. 3 (Summer 1991), p. 424.

do with who should be consulted and how should consultation and consensus be institutionalised, but more basic is the matter of displacement of power. Are governments willing to yield power peacefully to their opponents? This is what FIS and other Islamist groups have called for,[19] yet 'political alternation' of power is precisely what the regime seeks to avoid. Just as Islamists doubt that regimes will agree to such rotation of power, so too critics of Islamist movements doubt that, if these movements were to come to power, they would be any more politically generous. The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, for instance, has ambivalently staked its claim to lead the political order while suggesting that it would not tolerate a Coptic political party.[20]

The question of women in Islam is so suffused with ideological and political contention as to render all dispassionate discussion nearly impossible. Many Western observers—not all of whom may be classified as feminist—find in supposed Muslim strictures or traditional practices a convenient club with which to attack Islam's differences with Western liberal orders. Thus veiling, female circumcision and legal inequalities become symbolic of an elaborate Islamic structure of discrimination. Among some Muslim writers, representations of Western and Westernised women are often unflattering, suggesting that woman's emancipation 'is actually a disguised form of exploitation of her body, deprivation of her honour, and degradation of her soul'.[21]

Given such views, the need for contextualisation becomes all the more apparent. An evaluation of women's roles in various societies will reveal a multiplicity of activities that makes nonsense of conventional dichotomies such as 'public/male' versus 'private/female' that have long dominated the social study of Islam.[22] Yet even when this is taken into account, the objections

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19. See 'A Platform for a Political and Peaceful Solution of the Algerian Crisis' [Rome agreement signed by Algerian opposition groups], (January 1995), mimeographed.
20. Interview with Ma mun Hasan al-Hubaybi, *al Majalla*, 22–28 April 1987, p. 11.
21. Abdur Rahman Rahman I. Doi, *Women in Shari'ah*, 2nd edn, revised by Abdalhaqq Bewley (London: Ta-ha Publishers, 1989), p. 10.
22. See for example, Camillia Fawzi el-Solh, and Judy Mabro (eds), *Muslim Women's Choices: Religious Belief and Social Reality* (Providence and Oxford: Berg, 1994).

raised by some Muslims themselves are worth considering.[23] Basing their argument on a distinction between the Meccan, and purportedly more tolerant, period of revelation, and the Medinan, purportedly less bending, period of revelation, these self-declared reformers believe that women's legal and social status requires decisive upgrading in the direction of Meccan tolerance, and that traditional interpretations of Islamic law must accordingly be revised. Regardless of whether Islamic principles may be interpreted in a liberal fashion, and even if we concede that most interpretations of Islamic law have been obscured by male, patriarchal interests, the will of most Muslim societies to guarantee women's civic equality remains untested.

Finally, the status of non-Muslim minorities is troubling. Once again, distinctions between what ideologies may hold in theory and what occurs in practice are less important than that a civic order based on equality of individuals and groups has proven elusive. That this is so in Western societies is both obvious and, in a sense, irrelevant to our discussion. Copts in Egypt, Kurds in Iran, Turkey, Iraq, and Syria, Jews in Syria, and Berbers in Algeria all constitute minority groups whose protection from governmental or majority interference has, to put the matter mildly, not always been assured. The plight of the Algerian Berbers, disadvantaged by both government Arabising policies and Islamist condemnations that they are un-Islamic and have divided opposition to the regime, is particularly noteworthy. The deterioration of the economic climate, which may in the long run inspire political openings, may also, in the short or medium term, encourage the search for scapegoats, or give vent to intensified hostility towards 'out groups'.

Pakistan and Iran have set restrictions on the rights of minorities and women. This is seen in *Jamaat-i-Islami*'s hostility towards the *Ahmadiyya* and advocacy of *purdah*, and in the practice of President Zia-ul-Haq—as of the Saudi regime in general—of banning political parties as divisive. In Iran the government has proven intolerant of the Bahais, and vacillated on the question of women's proper public roles. In Sudan, moreover, the governments of Jafar al-Numayri and Umar al-

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23. See for example, Abdullahi An-Naim, *Toward an Islamic Reformation: Civil Liberties, Human Rights, and International Law* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

Bashir have, in association with the Muslim Brotherhood, exacerbated the civil war by being unresponsive to criticism from the predominantly non-Muslim southerners that imposition of the *Shari'a* discriminates against them.

The process is thus an uncertain one. But it is at least clear that either–or frameworks of analysis are misleading. Pluralism is a matter of degree, and while it is true that political liberalisation may often be a sham—'cosmetic democracy' (*shakliyya*)[24]—the increasing political differentiation of political order is apparent throughout the Middle East in the rich interaction of groups, individuals and ideologies. In such differentiation lie the possibilities, and the problems, of pluralism.

24. See Ayubi, 'Is Democracy Possible in the Middle East?', p. 6.

Chapter 4

The Middle East: Democracy or Veiled Authoritarianism?

Amin Saikal

As an ideal of government, democracy has become as much a catchcry in the Middle East as in most other parts of the world. Whatever their degrees of commitment to it, most Middle Eastern leaderships do not disown the vocabulary of democracy as a useful means of claiming political legitimation and branding their regimes as popular, representing the will of the majority of their respective publics. Many can point to the existence of some forms of 'popular representation' and 'electoral legitimacy' to substantiate their claim to popular sovereignty and ultimately a democratic system of governance. Yet, with the exception of Israel, where a Western style of democracy is in operation even though it operates to favour the state's Jewish majority, in most Middle Eastern countries what is practised is a form of absolutism, overt authoritarianism, or veiled authoritarianism. All serious post-War attempts at democratising politics and society in most Middle Eastern states, whether Egypt or Iran or Algeria, have ultimately ended up, at best, by Western standards, in the institution of concealed authoritarianism. There is a very important message in this: a Western-style democracy may be incongruent with the political and social–cultural conditions of these states. The goal of political reform should not therefore be to create a system and implement a mode of social and economic development which would meet Western standards, but rather to develop the constituents of a civil society.

This paper focuses on three main issues. The first is to explain,

briefly the dimensions of the concept of democracy and how incompatible a Western understanding of it has so far proved to be with the fundamental conditions of Iran and the Arab states. The second is to outline a number of major efforts which have been made in relation to democratisation in certain Middle Eastern states and to evaluate their outcomes. The third is to outline the fundamental reasons for the need to focus on building a civil rather than a democratic society, and to delineate what such a society should represent.

The Concept of Democracy

Needless to say, democracy is an overloaded concept. Historically, it has meant different things to different people. It has been applied to many different formations, and in interaction with different socio-cultural traditions and practices has produced diverse forms of government—some more representative, participatory and stable than others. Even in Western democracies, there is no consensus as to what precisely the concept means and how best to express it as an ideal. There is not even widespread agreement among theorists and practitioners as to whether democracy is a form of government, a method of choosing a government, or a term applied to a whole society, as intimated in Alexis de Tocqueville's study *Democracy in America*, which is essentially about American society.[1]

Whatever the diversity of views, there is a core or minimalist definition that lies beneath all the interpretations and uses of the term. As Anthony Arblaster writes, this core definition 'is necessarily general and vague enough to make such variations possible, but it is not so vague as to permit just any meaning whatsoever to be placed on the word. At the root of all definitions of democracy, however refined and complex, lies the idea of popular power, of a situation in which power, and perhaps authority too, rests with the people. That power or authority is usually thought of as being political, and often therefore takes the form of an idea of popular sovereignty—the people as the ultimate political power. But it need not be

1. For details, see Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, edited and abridged by Richard D. Heffner (New York: A Mentor Book, 1956).

exclusively political.[2] Obviously, the mechanisms for achieving this minimalist position can vary from country to country: they can be either electoral or non-electoral, although election through universal suffrage is often regarded as the best means.

Problems of Democratisation in the Middle East

The Arab and Iranian regimes have constantly been pressured from outside, especially by the West, and from within, to conform at least to this minimalist position as a foundation for the development of a liberal, pluralist, tolerant and stable society. If one adopts the principles of popular power and popular sovereignty as minimal for instituting democracy, one can argue that Iran and several Arab states, most noticeably Egypt and Jordan, have already made some progress in this direction. They have succeeded in establishing electoral and representative processes of popular legitimation, whereby citizens are given the opportunity to participate, either directly as in the case of Iran since the revolution of 1978–79, or directly and indirectly as in the case of Egypt, especially since 1981, in the making of legislative and executive powers, although these processes have been more robust in Iran than in others. The Jordanians have also managed to establish a more representative legislative body, with a strong role in making the government accountable, than may be the case with many other countries in the region, although the Jordanian monarch still remains in possession of very strong powers. Even Kuwait has managed to put in place a kind of Athenian democracy[3] with its election of 1992, whereby some 800,000 Kuwaiti males, who constituted about 13 per cent of the total population, were allowed to elect a pluralist national assembly. Meanwhile, such closed regimes as those of Hafez al-Assad and Mu'mar al-Qaddafi also have resorted to such processes to substantiate a claim to popular power and authority.

However, the fundamental problem with this minimalist form of democracy is that it can be utilised both to lay the foundation

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2. Anthony Arblaster, *Democracy* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1987), p. 8.
3. For a discussion of different models of democracy, see David Held, 'Democracy: From City-states to a Cosmopolitan Order', *Political Studies*, vol. 40 [Special Issue], 1992, pp. 10–39.

for building a comprehensive or liberal democracy, or to construct or reinforce a wide range of authoritarian systems. In the Middle East, it is the latter which have been most prevalent. When prompted to resort to some minimalist democratic reforms, a majority of leaderships have done so on a highly selective and exclusive basis and within procedural frameworks which have not substantially affected their personal or family or elite powers. They have conveniently designed and applied the reforms in such a way as to produce nothing more than systems that may be termed 'democratic in form but authoritarian in content', ensuring that the basic principles of separation of powers, political pluralism, individual rights and freedoms are not secured against the open-ended, arbitrary needs of rulers. Thus, whether operating within a traditional or traditional–modernist or revolutionary–modernist mould, they have shown a marked reluctance to venture beyond the minimalist position in the direction of creating liberal polities.

The few of them who have sought to venture beyond the minimalist position, out of either genuine reformist convictions or domestic and outside pressures, have not aimed at creating a widely inclusive and competitive system. They have sought to exclude from the process the groups which they have perceived as popularly threatening. As a consequence, their reforms have frequently resulted in political polarisation and violent conflicts—a development which has served as a strong deterrent to the others. One can draw on the experiences of a number of countries to illustrate this point, but none can be more illustrative than those of Iran, Egypt and Algeria.

Iran: From Autocracy to 'Theo-democracy'

In Iran, the whole revolutionary transition from the Shah's pro-Western autocracy to Khomeini's anti-Western, or more specifically anti-American, 'theo-democracy' provides a clear example of danger and violence that a process of even limited pro-Western democratisation can involve in the Middle East. There is no doubt that a variety of factors, ranging from the Shah's failure to institute a legitimate political system and an effective process of change and development, to his ill-conceived and badly implemented program of socio-economic modernisation and military build-up, to his alliance with the United States and his

regional ambitions, contributed to the creation of a revolutionary situation which eventually caused the Shah's fall. However, with the benefit of hindsight, it is clear that the fatal flaw which opened the way for his downfall was his mishandling of the process of limited liberalisation as a precondition for democratisation of polity that he sought to implement, especially from 1976.[4]

From his re-installment on the throne with the help of the CIA in 1953, the Shah, together with his main ally the United States, was always conscious of the legitimacy problems that he faced. As a result, with Washington's urging he had made a number of attempts in the 1960s to popularise his rule. In fact, his entire 'White Revolution' was designed to achieve this purpose. However, like many leaders in the region, he was prepared to implement only political reforms which would not undermine his autocratic powers but which would at the same time allow him to declare a commitment to creating a democratic system of government. He focused his reform efforts to benefit mainly those politically minded or active Iranians who were easily cooptable and lacked the necessary potential to pose a serious challenge to his powers. This meant that he not only excluded the radical religious and secularist groups from his reforms, but actually directed the reforms against them.

The Shah appeared to believe in the force of intertwined autocratic secularisation and modernisation as the best way to popularise his rule. In the process, he lost sight of the fact that after four centuries of power struggle between the Shi'ite establishment and political authority in Iran, if his reforms did not have the support of the religious establishment the latter was still potentially the only force capable of influencing the minds and capturing the emotions of the Iranian public against his reforms under the right circumstances. Despite being warned about the danger embedded in his approach, he persisted into the 1970s with a policy of doing everything possible to suppress and marginalise the religious establishment rather than to entice it to become a genuine participant in his reform endeavours.

None the less, under pressure from the emphasis that President Carter placed on human rights as an issue in the conduct of US

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4. Amin Saikal, *The Rise and Fall of the Shah* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), ch. 8.

foreign policy, the Shah finally found it necessary and expedient to introduce more substantial political reforms. Hence, from 1976 he inaugurated a phase of what could amount to limited but serious liberalisation. Although it is not clear what his ultimate goal was, it is evident that he had intended to institute a wider degree of public participation in the policy formulation and policy implementation processes, with a measure of freedom for the people to criticise the government, highlight human rights abuses and demand greater social justice and equity. While still opposed to dealing with his main, traditional religious and political opponents in any other than an autocratic manner, he wanted to open avenues of participation for those new social and economic groups which his process of speedy pro-capitalist modernisation had generated.

However, in a country where political suppression had been the central instrument of governance for a long time, and the public had not been educated in political pluralism, even this amount of reform was sufficient to enable a variety of groups, both old and new, to air their grievances with great ferocity. While quickly succeeding in instigating a nationwide anti-Shah protest movement by mid-1978, these groups could not develop a shared platform beyond a general desire to overthrow the Shah's regime and hope to replace it with something better. Consequently, following the fall of the Shah in January 1979, the revolutionaries headed in different ideological directions, opening the way for a long, violent power struggle between a cluster of Islamists, whose Shi'ite Islamic message and promises were easily discernible to an overwhelming majority of the Iranian people, and a variety of semi-secularist and secularist groups, whose ideological pronouncements in support of creating a pluralist and liberal system proved bewildering to a large proportion of the Iranian public.

In the process, Ayatollah Khomeini and his radical Islamic followers gained political ascendancy, with wide public support, but only at the cost of brutally suppressing other groups and demonising the West, especially the United States and its regional supporters, as dictated by the need to establish their brand of Shi'ite Islamic government and transform Iran into an Islamic republic.[5] The Iranian Islamic regime has evolved in

5. For details, see Said Amir Arjomand, *The Turban for the Crown: The*

many ways as a mirror image of that of the Shah. Although it has created an electoral process of political legitimation and citizen participation in politics, it has not established an inclusive political order, which could allow Iran to be defined as more than a theocratic state, and to be treated as such by all those outside forces which find its behaviour threatening to their interests. The regime has grown as exclusive and intolerant of opposition as that of the Shah, if not more so. This, together with the Islamic regime's inability to fulfil its promises of good government and a better life for a majority of Iranians, gives rise to the risk that any future structural political change may be as violent as the one which brought it to power. While the regime has, for the time being, suppressed virtually all forms of organised opposition, this does not necessarily make it immune from spontaneous popular uprisings of the kind which intially opened the way for the destruction of the Shah's rule. The present Iranian leadership is now confronted with a dilemma similar to that which faced the Shah in the last years of his rule: to keep the political system exclusive is as dangerous as to make it inclusive.[6]

The Iranian experience has had a lasting political and psychological impact on other leaderships in the region. It has taught them to be wary of any degree of democratisation which could move them on the same path as that of the Shah. It has reinforced the position of those autocratic leaders who have been looking for reasons to uphold their belief in authoritarianism as the most suitable form of governance for their respective countries. It is not surprising to see, for example, the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council, especially Saudi Arabia, showing marked reluctance to take their chances with political reform.

Islamic Revolution in Iran (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), esp. ch. 8; Amin Saikal, 'Khomeini's Iran', *Current Affairs Bulletin*, vol. 60, no. 5, October, 1983, pp. 18–30.

6. For a critical assessment of the Islamic regime, see Martin Wright, *Iran: The Khomeini Revolution* (Essex: Longman, 1989), esp. pp. 31–42; Hazhir Teimourian, 'Iran's 15 Years of Islam', *The World Today*, vol. 50, no. 4, pp. 67–70; Darius M. Rejali, *Torture and Modernity: Self, Society, and State in Modern Iran* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994), esp. chs. 7–8.

Egypt and Algeria 'Exclusive' Democratisation?

The Egyptian and Algerian experiences tell somewhat similar stories. In Egypt, during the last thirteen years of the leadership of President Husni Mubarak, a considerable amount of progress has been made in improving the conditions for wider public participation and popular legitimation, accompanied by a guarantee of some basic individual rights and freedoms. However, it has ultimately nurtured a presidential system which has concentrated too much power in the executive branch and, more specifically, in the hands of the indirectly-elected President, whose exercise of power has been conditioned more on the traditional support that he has received from the armed and security forces, and business and professional elites, than on direct public consent. The system lacks the necessary operational checks and balances to prevent the arbitrary use of governmental powers.[7]

Although a directly-elected multi-party legislature exists, the electoral system has been designed in such a way as to include in the process only those groups which are not popularly and ideologically threatening to the leadership's secularist, evolutionary course of change and development. For example, the electoral laws are designed in such a way as to ensure a huge majority for the ruling National Democratic Party (NDP) at the cost of independents and opposition parties. This has been the case with all the parliamentary elections held under President Mubarak. Not only did the elections of 1984 prove controversial, with the opposition challenging it on charges of violence and forgery, leading Mubarak to dissolve the National Assembly in February 1987 and hold elections in April for a new one, but the latter were also declared invalid in 1990 by the Supreme Constitutional Court. Although a new electoral law was promulgated, it too was challenged on the basis of the fact that it made judicial supervision of elections a practical impossibility. Nonetheless, elections for a new parliament were held on November 1990 at the cost of low voter turnout, enabling the NDP to win an over-

7. For a detailed discussion, see Hamied Ansari, *Egypt: The Stalled Society* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1986), esp. chs. 10–11; Robert Springborg, *Mubarak's Egypt: Fragmentation of the Political Order* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1989).

whelming majority of 348 out 444 of the National Assembly's seats.[8]

The government's official rationale for all this has been to avoid the rise of political extremism and too much fragmentation in the National Assembly, and thus to encourage development of a stable party system. However, it is also this provision that the Mubarak regime, which has predominantly stood for a secularist mode of change and development, has deployed to keep its most vocal and potentially powerful opponents, especially the radical Islamists, out of the process. It has feared the reversal of fortunes that possible electoral success of the Islamists could bring to its hold on power and to the direction that it has charted out for Egypt. This has produced a growing polarisation of the population along belligerent lines, between Islamists, semi-secularists and secularists.

As the Islamists have been able to thrive on mass poverty and the failure of the regime to procure much improvement in the social and economic existence of the Egyptian masses, the regime has grown increasingly nervous about the possibility of Egypt going down the same path as Iran. It has shown a great determination to suppress the Islamists by whatever means possible. It has pursued a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, it has sought to discredit Islamists by encouraging debate in the official media between different Islamic figures and groups and pitching them against one another in order to highlight how divided they are among themselves, and how inept the radical Islamists would be if allowed to be a major player in running the country. On the other, it has used maximum force whenever needed against those Islamic elements and their supporters who have expressed open opposition to the regime, and whom the regime has labelled as 'terrorists'.

This approach in many ways resembles that of the Shah, who branded his Islamic opponents, right up to half way through the revolution against his rule, as either 'Islamic Marxists' or 'Islamic terrorists', making little attempt to open appropriate avenues of participation for them. The result has been a bloody struggle, which promises to be protracted. With radical elements

8. For a concise discussion, see Tareq Y. Ismael and Jacquelline S. Ismael and others, *Politics and Government in the Middle East and North Africa* (Florida: Florida International University Press, 1991), ch. 13.

among the Islamists determined to achieve power through a campaign of violence designed to terrorise their opponents into submission, and with the holders of power determined to maintain the status quo as the best way to preserve what is good for them, the Egyptian system has now reached a point beyond peacefully remaining exclusive or becoming inclusive. As a pivotal force in the Arab world, Egypt faces a future full of uncertainties.

The Algerian crisis is at the point where Iran was in mid-1978, with one important exception. That is, whereas the Shah had not held a genuine democratic election to test the popular strength of the opposition, and could not resist the wave of popular protests once they incapacitated his government, in the Algerian case, despite allowing the Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) to test its popularity in the elections of 1991, which proved its capacity to win the final round of voting, the government of the National Liberation Front (FLN) or, since 1992, its military backbone, has refused to give in to the popular verdict. The FLN has ruled Algeria single-handedly since independence in 1961, instituting a one-party governmental system, and until the mid-1980s it persisted with a Soviet-type command approach to social and economic development. After seizing power, through a military coup, from popular Ben Bella who had led Algeria to independence, the FLN's military strong man, Houari Boumedienne, succeeded in transforming himself into an acceptable civilian leader, with a knack for political shrewdness and popular leadership. However, he tightened his grip on power through politics of centralisation and heavy reliance on the security and armed forces as the main beneficiary of his rule. He insisted on an authoritarian process of social and economic change, failing to manage the economy effectively or to give a clear sense of direction and identity to Algerians. However, he benefitted until his death in 1986 from close ties with the Soviet Union and its East European allies, enabling him to maintain a degree of economic stability.

The situation changed with his successor, Binjedid Chadli, who found himself not only with a mismanaged economy and growing associated political and social problems, but also with dwindling Soviet support under Mikhail Gorbachev. As dissension became apparent within the FLN and social unrest broke out, and an Islamic opposition, which soon coalesced within FIS,

scored well in local elections, the FLN's leadership under Chadli found it expedient by the late 1980s to resort to some democratic measures to improve the ruling party's popularity and thereby enhance its authority. The idea was to introduce democratic reforms, but only in support of continuation of the FLN's rule.[9]

It never felt, however, that its rule had become so unpopular that its process of democratisation would enable the very Islamic opponents that it wanted to marginalise to secure a major victory at the ballot box. Its decision to reverse the process and impose military rule, in order to prevent the FIS from gaining power through the very electoral system that the FLN had devised, not only plunged Algeria into a violent conflict, which has made the country's future totally uncertain, but also dealt a serious blow to the cause of democratisation in the Arab–Islamic world. The FLN's rationale for disallowing the second round of elections scheduled for January 1992, which the FIS was poised to win, was that if the Islamic party had been allowed to come to power it would have imposed a theocratic rule similar to that of Iran, destroying the very democratic process which had brought it to power.[10] However, the real reason was that the FLN's leadership had devised the democratic measures to strengthen its rule, not to give up power. It was prepared to make the system inclusive as long as it constituted no danger to FLN's political supremacy. Its reversal of the democratisation process may have brought a sigh of relief to many regimes in the region and the West, most importantly Egypt, France and the United States, which have viewed the rise of FIS to power as threatening to their interests, but at the same time it has driven the extreme elements within FIS to take up arms. The bloody struggle between these elements and the authorities has already cost thousands of lives, paralysing Algeria as a functioning state. Moreover, it has once again confirmed the crucial point that any system beyond veiled authoritarianism is not easily within reach in the Middle East.

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9. For background information, see John P. Entelis, *Algeria: The Revolution Institutionalised* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1986), esp. chs. 3–7.
10. For a discussion of the crisis, see Paul Schemm, 'Algeria's Return to its Past: Can the FIS Break the Vicious Cycle of History?', *Middle East Insight*, vol. 11, no. 2, January–February 1995, pp. 36–39.

The Roots of Authoritarianism

A variety of national and cross-national reasons can be cited to explain why anything more than veiled authoritarianism has proved so inapplicable in Iran and in most of the Arab world. Four interrelated factors are often depicted as being the most important.

The first is the degree of incompatibility that exists between Islam and competitive pluralist democracy. It is argued that Islam—with its central principle of *Tawhid*, from which flow other Islamic principles, including those concerning earthly governance, most importantly the principles of *Shura* (consultation) and *Ijma* (consensus)—essentially provides for little more than what Muwlana Mawdudi has called 'theo-democracy';[11] and is therefore a foundation for an authoritarian, not a liberal, political culture. Consequently, what has happened in the Muslim world ever since the Golden Age of Islam—the period of the Prophet Mohammed's and his Companion's rule—has been persistent acculturation of the masses by authoritarian values and practices, although with a variation in their intensity and effectiveness from time to time and place to place.[12]

The second is the fact, which in many ways flows from the first, that personalisation, as against institutionalisation, of politics has become very entrenched in the Arab world in particular, and in the Muslim world in general. Many date the origins of this factor back to the leadership of the Prophet Mohammed, when the force of personality, rather than the force of political institutions, provided for political stability and continuity. The patriarchal nature of Arab societies, pre-dating Islam, has simply contributed to and been strengthened by this factor. Although the Prophet was full of benevolence, his example of political leadership has not always been emulated in the Middle East since the Golden Age of Islam. With rulership frequently falling into the hands of self-seeking and self-centred

11. See Charles J. Adams, 'Mawdudi and the Islamic State', in John L. Esposito (ed.), *Voices of Resurgent Islam* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), ch. 5.
12. For diverse views, see Mir Zohari Husain, *Global Islamic Politics* (New York: Harper Collins College Publishers, 1995); John O. Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World*, 2nd edn, (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1994).

individuals, families and elites, the need for institutionalisation of politics has grown more acute than ever.

The third factor cited is a lack of sufficient awareness on the part of the public to enable it easily to grasp the significance of democratic values, with responsibility and cross-cultural understanding and commitment. The forces of authoritarian exclusivism and the culture that this has generated have substantially thwarted the growth of liberal education, and therefore the degree of intellectual diversity and free discourse which are so vital for the innovative, pluralist development of societies.

The fourth factor concerns the lack of consensus on the form and functions of government, a problem which has historically dogged most of the countries in the Middle East. Neither Iran nor any of the Arab states has so far succeeded in evolving, as against imposing, a viable national approach to, and agreement on, what constitutes good and widely acceptable government. Although the Islamic regime in Iran put this issue to the people in a referendum in 1980, the fact that it was done without the provision of an alternative greatly reduced its significance.

Democratisation or Civil Society?

The lack of progress beyond veiled authoritarianism in the Middle East underscores a vital point: the necessary conditions either for cutting through or for leap-frogging authoritarianism are still out of reach in most of the countries in the region. The way forward perhaps is not to press for democratisation of the political systems, which would require immediate and profound changes in the power structures, with deep effect on the fortunes of the very leaderships which are expected to bring about these changes. The objective should be to prepare the conditions for good government and a civil society. Such government and society do not need to be in conformity with the institutional models which underpin the operation of governments and societies in the West. Methods and values would have to be founded on those ideals and practices which are conducive to the development of a virtuous polity, the creation of which is after all a central focus of Islam. The starting point would not necessarily be to call for a change of leadership, but to convince the leadership of the need to move towards such practices as separation of state and

economy; establishment of the rule of law, with an emphasis on legal free space for the life of the individual, protection against arbitrary arrest or imprisonment; and the inviolability of basic human rights and freedoms, as was to some extent the case with the Italian city states and even the Ottoman despotism.

It is possible to achieve liberty—in terms of lessening the state's grip over society—without having Western-type democratic institutions first in place. However, the achievement of liberty could well open the way for democracy. Despite the prevalence of political authoritarianism, many practices pertinent to the development of civil society have already found their way into most of the countries in the Middle East. An encouraging debate, on such issues as the vitality of free market reform or liberalisation of capital, public representation in the governmental processes and wider space for individual innovations and personal freedoms, has gained strength. Certain leaderships, whether willingly or for reasons of expediency, have been shown to have benefited from such a debate, and have taken steps to enhance foundations for the growth of civil society.

Perhaps no leadership has made a more encouraging start in this respect than that of the Kingdom of Jordan. King Hussein's efforts over the years have enabled a degree of political pluralism, public representation, capital decentralisation and individual social freedoms to emerge while preserving relative stability. Whatever his motivations, this development has not resulted in serious dislocations or conflicts, for the changes have been introduced within a fairly inclusive framework. Even the Islamists have been legally permitted to contest elections and secure legislative representation, although it is not clear what the monarch would do if they ever achieved a majority in the parliament. What King Hussein has so far created may not necessarily amount to more than a kind of liberal authoritarianism. Even so, his model has produced a more stable process of change and development than, for example, that of Husni Mubarak in Egypt.[13]

The most important risk that his model carries is that its

13. For an overall assessment of the democratisation process in Jordan, see Riad Al Khouri, 'The Political Economy of Jordan: Democratization and the Gulf Crisis', in Dan Tschirgi (ed.), *The Arab World Today* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1994), ch. 8.

liberal functions would depend on who is in power. This means that it is practical and conducive to the evolution of a civil society for as long as someone like King Hussein is in charge and external factors do not hold a veto power over the process. In the case of Jordan, the external pressures generated from the country's peace deal with Israel, or from the troubled PLO–Israel peace process, could always force or enable the king to change course.

Such a risk might be worth taking in pursuit of developing an Arab or an Iranian democracy. A debate has already started about the ways and means by which political liberalisation can be achieved within the framework of promoting civil society in the Middle East.[14] Al-Farabi's *al-medina al-jama'iyya* (the democratic or the most admirable and happy city) may provide a central focus for this debate.

14. For an example of the debate, see the special issue of *Middle East Journal*, vol. 47, no. 2 (Spring 1993).

Chapter 5

Women in Politics in the Middle East

Samina Yasmeen

Judged by any criteria, women remain under-represented in politics in the Middle East. While a few women occupy top and token positions of power, the majority is denied access to political institutions and higher level administrative jobs. How do we explain this situation? Does Islam, as the dominant religion in the region, prevent women from becoming political actors? Or does (do) the explanation(s) lie elsewhere? This paper attempts to answer these questions.

To this end, the paper begins by describing the extent of women's participation in political institutions and higher echelons of governments in the Middle East. It argues that women's under-representation in politics in the Middle East constitutes part of the global trend of denying women access to political power. However, certain factors indigenous to the region also account for the limited participation of women in politics. While Islam can be identified as one of these factors, it is not alone responsible for denying women access to political participation. Instead, gender ideology and structural barriers coupled with the relative absence of democratisation in the region explain why women remain at the periphery of Middle Eastern political systems. The paper ends by arguing that an alternative definition of 'politics' and 'political' would suggest that while women remain under-represented in Middle Eastern parliaments, they nonetheless participate in politics through non-traditional means

and in non-traditional domains. The lack of political representation, therefore, may not necesssarily be synonymous with a lack of political participation.

Women, Legislatures and Decision-making

The record of female political representation in the Middle East has been far from impressive. As in a number of other states, the advent of independence and decolonisation has not necessarily coincided with women's right to participate in the political systems as independent actors. Instead, the move towards acquiring the right to vote has been slow and gradual in nature. Egyptian women asserted their right to equal political participation as early as 1935, under the banner of the Egyptian Feminist Union. But they acquired the right to vote only in 1956. Turkish women also raised the issue of female citizenship during and after the First World War. Their contribution to the war notwithstanding, these women remained hostages to social conservatism that denied them the right to vote until 1934. Syrian women, on the other hand, secured the right to vote in 1949, but were prevented initially from full participation by laws that extended the franchise only to females who had reached the level of six classes of primary schooling. Gradually, adult suffrage was extended to all literate women, and then to all women.[1] Iraqi women waited until 1980 before they could exercise their right to vote. Kuwaiti women have yet to win the right to political representation.

Having acquired the right to vote, however, most Middle Eastern women did not have to wait for the right to be elected to their respective parliaments, nor did the election of 'first female' to the legislature take long. As can be seen from Table 1, in the majority of the Middle Eastern states women were elected to the Parliament the same year as they acquired the right to hold public office. In fact, by 1993, Jordan and Morocco were the only two states with elected legislatures which stood out for the absence of women in the lower houses of their parliaments. The

1. Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), *Distribution of Seats between Men and Women in National Parliaments: Statistical Data from 1945 to 30 June 1991*, IPU Reports and Documents Series No. 18 (Geneva: IPU, 1991), p. 152.

Table 1: Female Political Participation in the Middle East

	Year of Vote	*Eligibility for Parliament*	*First Women Elected*	*Percentage Representation of Women in Lower Chambers (election dates in brackets)*			
							% in 1993
Algeria	1962	1962	1962	3.8 (1977)	1.4 (1982)	2.4 (1987)	..
Bahrain	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Egypt	1956	1956	1957	0.6 (1957)	8.9 (1979)	3.9 (1987)	2.2 (1990)
Iran	1963	1963	1963	1.5 (1980)	1.5 (1984)	1.5 (1988)	3.4 (1992)
Iraq	1980	1980	1980	6.4 (1980)	13.2 (1984)	10.8 (1989)	10.8 (1989)
Israel	1948	1948	1948	10.8 (1949)	6.6 (1969)	6.7 (1988)	9.2 (1992)
Jordan	1974	1974	1993	..	..	..	1 (1993)
Kuwait	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Lebanon	1926	1926	1992	..	..	..	2.3(1992)
Libya	1964	1964	1964	..	..	..	..
Morocco	1963	1963	1993	..	..	..	0.7 (1993
Oman	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Qatar	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Saudi Arabia	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Syria	1949	1953	1958	2.7 (1973)	6.6 (1981)	9.2 (1986)	8.4 (1990)
Tunisia	1959	1959	1959	1.1 (1959)	3.2 (1979)	5.6 (1986)	4.3 (1989)
Turkey	1934	1934	1935	4.5 (1935)	10.5 (1962)	1.3 (1987)	1.8 (1991)
UAE	..	..	..	..	..	..	..
Yemen	1967-70	1967-70	1970	3.3 (1990)	..	..	0.7 (1993)

Sources: *Distribution of Seats Between Men and Women in National Parliaments: Statistical Data from 1945 to 30 June 1991*, Reports and Documents Series No. 18 (Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1991); *Distribution of Seats Between Men and Women in the 171 National Parliaments Existing as at 30 June 1993*, Addendum to the Reports and Documents Series No. 18 (Geneva: Inter-Parliamentary Union, 1993)

situation changed in Morocco when two women representing *Istiqlal* and the *Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires* (USFP) were elected to the Chamber in the general elections held in June 1993. Less than five months later, on 8 November 1993, Toujon Faisal became the first Jordanian woman to be elected to the 80-member House of Representatives.[2]

The election of first female to parliament, however, has not guaranteed equitable representation for women in the Middle East. The data in Table 1 indicate that women have essentially remained under-represented in Middle Eastern legislatures. With the exception of Israel, Iraq and Syria, the percentage representation of women in lower chambers does not exceed the 4 per cent mark for 1992–93. This is not to deny that the level of female representation in Middle Eastern legislatures has gradually increased. In 1980, women comprised only 1.5 per cent of the representatives elected to the Iranian *Majlis Shoraye Islami* (Islamic Consultative Assembly); in 1993 the representation of women increased to 3.4 per cent. Similarly, the level of representation by Tunisian women increased from 1.1 per cent in 1959 to 4.3 per cent in 1989. But overall, fewer women are being elected to parliaments in the Middle East. Israel registered a decline in the level of female representation from a high of 10.8 per cent in 1949 to 6.7 per cent in 1988. Egypt presents a similar picture: while female representation increased to 13.2 per cent in 1979, by 1990 women comprised only 2.2 per cent of the *Majlis Al Shaab*. The proportion of women in Yemen's House of Representatives also declined from 3.3 per cent in 1990 to 0.7 per cent in 1993. Even Turkey, with its feminist movement dating back to the turn of the century, has experienced a gradual decline in the percentage of female legislative members, a picture which has only recently begun to change.

Women also constitute a minority in upper echelons of administrations in the Middle East. Apart from a few token positions, women are denied access to avenues where they can contribute effectively to decision-making at national levels. As can be seen from Table 2, only Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Turkey stand out for women occupying senior managerial and administrative positions during the 1980–89 period. Interestingly, with the exception of

2. *Keesing's Record of World Events*, June 1993, p. 39535–6; and ibid., November 1993, p. 39758.

Table 2

	Percentage of Females Employed as Administrators and Managers 1980-1989	*Females as Percent of Total Male Population in the Middle East*
Algeria	..	100
Bahrain	..	73
Egypt	14	97
Iran	..	97
Iraq	..	96
Jordan	14	95
Kuwait	0	76
Lebanon	..	106
Libya	..	91
Morocco	..	100
Oman	..	91
Qatar	..	60
Saudi Arabia	..	84
Syria	33	98
Tunisia	..	98
Turkey	3	95
UAE	0	48
Yemen	..	108

Source: United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report, 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp.144–45, 146–47

Syria, which recorded 33 per cent female employment as administrators and managers, the level of this representation did not exceed 14 per cent in any of these states.

The significance of this lack of representation becomes obvious when it is placed within the broader demographic context. Women constitute almost half, if not more, of the total population in the Middle Eastern region. In countries like Morocco, Lebanon and Yemen, women outnumber men. In others, including Egypt, Iran, Iraq and Turkey, women form 47.5–48.5 per cent of the total population (Table 2). Yet they are marginalised and kept at the periphery of the political and administrative structures. The seriousness of the situation becomes clearer when the Middle East is compared with other regions. On 30 June 1991, the world average for women's participation in single or popular parliaments stood at 11 per cent. The regional averages for Asia, Africa, Europe and the Americas were 12.6 per cent, 9.2 per cent, 12.5 per cent and 12 per cent respectively. In marked contrast, the percentage of women represented in Middle Eastern parliaments was estimated to be 3.7 per cent, even lower than that for the Pacific region (5.6 per cent).[3] What accounts for this low level of representation?

A Global Phenomenon?

It may be argued that the regional disparities notwithstanding, the situation with regard to female representation in Middle East politics is symptomatic of a global trend. Internationally, women have been denied access to political representation. They have also been marginalised in administrative structures, thus making it difficult for women to make effective contributions to, and changes in, the nature of political systems. This situation has existed not only in developing states but is also a feature of developed states. Women in the developed/Western states struggled for years before gaining the right to vote, and waited even longer for the right to hold public office. Canadian women, for example, won the right to vote in 1917, but were not allowed to stand for public office until 1920. New Zealand extended suffrage to women in 1893, but their right to be elected to the Parliament

3. IPU, *Distribution of Seats between Men and Women in National Parliaments*, p. 7.

was not acknowledged until 1919. Having won the right to hold office, women in developed countries took, on average, five years before being elected to the parliament. In Australia's case, women waited for forty years after acquiring the right to vote before the first woman entered the federal parliament.[4] Election of the first woman to public office coming earlier in developed states than in developing states has not guaranteed equitable representation by women in legislatures. In Australia, for example, out of thirteen elections during the 1949–1980 period, only three witnessed the election of a woman to the parliament. The situation improved in 1980, when 3 women entered the House of Representatives, but they still comprised only 2.4 per cent of members of the lower house. The proportion of women represented in the majority of other developed states at the turn of the 1980s was only marginally better. In Belgium female representation stood at 5.6 per cent, in France at 5.3 per cent and in the United States at 3.6 per cent. In the Diet of the Federal Republic of Germany women occupied only 44 of the 519 seats (8.4 per cent). In the early 1980s only a few developed states, including Finland, Sweden, Norway and the Netherlands, could claim higher female legislative representation, ranging between 14.6 per cent in the Netherlands and 26.4 per cent in Sweden.[5]

The obvious imbalance in gender-based legislative representation provided the impetus for demands for increased participation by women in political systems. These demands were voiced at the Nairobi Conference and the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (UNCEDAW). The Nairobi 'Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women' urged states to 'intensify their efforts to stimulate and ensure equality of participation by women in all national and legislative bodies'. UNCEDAW also specifically required states to 'ensure to women, on equal terms with men, the right to participate in the formulation of government policy and the implementation thereof, and to hold public office and perform all public functions at all levels of government'.[6] These demands

4. *Women in Politics and Decision-Making in the Late Twentieth Century: A United Nations Study* (London: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1992), pp. 4–6.
5. IPU, *Distribution of Seats between Men and Women in National Parliaments.*
6. *Women in Politics and Decision-Making in the Late Twentieth Century,*

were supported by a number of states, and by 1991 the Convention on Elimination of Discrimination had been ratified or acceded to by 108 states. Various governments also undertook steps to improve female political participation. However, the gender imbalance has not ended. Women still remain under-represented in legislative bodies and the upper echelons of decision-making. In fact, the world average for women holding parliamentary seats has declined from 11 per cent in 1991 to 10.1 per cent in 1993.[7]

The imbalance at regional levels also continues, with only 3.69 per cent women representatives in the Middle East, compared to the world average of 10.31 per cent in 1993.[8] This relative regional disparity, however, need not mask the reality of limited female political participation across the globe. The higher percentage of parliamentary women in developed states essentially reflects the positive situation in Scandinavian states, where the average female representation in legislative assemblies ranges between 33 per cent for Denmark to 39 per cent for Finland. In most other developed countries the proportion of women in Parliaments has not increased substantially. France, for example, has registered an increase of 0.4 per cent during the 1991–93 period, with women accounting for 6.1 per cent of the total representatives in 1993. Women in the British Parliament comprise only 9.2 per cent of the total number of representatives.[9] Australia presents a similar picture. Females comprise 51.1 per cent of the nation's population, but women hold only 8.2 per cent of the parliamentary seats at federal level. Although this figure indicates an improvement over the 1991 levels (when female representation amounted to 6.7 per cent), Australia still lags behind its northern neighbour Indonesia, where women occupy 12.2 per cent of the

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pp. 6–7.

7. Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, *Women, Elections and Parliament*, Report from the Joint Standing Committee on Electoral Matters (Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service, May 1994), p. 11.
8. Computed from *Distribution of Seats between Men and Women in the 171 National Parliaments Existing as at 30 June 1993, Addendum to Distribution of Seats between Men and Women in National Parliaments: Statistical Data from 1945 to 30 June 1991* (Geneva: IPU, 1993). The data do not include information on Iran.
9. ibid.

seats in the Parliament.[10]

Women also remain relatively 'minor players' in the corporate world, with female membership of boards of directors comprising only 3 per cent of the total.

Interestingly, the United States has also lagged behind in encouraging women's participation in politics and decision-making. In 1989, for instance, only 28, or 6 per cent, of House of Representatives seats and 2 per cent of Senate seats were won by women. The 1992 elections dramatically increased the number of women in the Congress; their numbers in the House rose from 29 to 48 (11 per cent), and in the Senate from 2 to 6. A seventh woman joined the Senate in June 1993, bringing the total percentage of female representation in the upper house to 6 per cent. Cumulatively, for the first time in history, women constitute 11 per cent of the total membership of the US Congress. However, these women are also denied access to the real decision-making centres. Only two women occupy positions of leadership in the House and the Senate. Importantly, while a few women hold chairmanship of sub-committees, none of the 40 Standing Committees in the House and the Senate is chaired by a woman. Effectively, therefore, women are unable to influence their colleagues and play a significant role in the legislative process.[11]

Against the background of this widespread gender imbalance, existing both in developed and developing states, it can be argued that under-representation of women in politics in the Middle East constitutes part of the global trend of denying women access to political and decision-making power. To put it differently, regional disparities notwithstanding, women in the Middle East are merely following the global patterns of remaining at the periphery of the political systems.

Middle Eastern Women and Barriers to Political Representation

To place the issue within the context of global patterns of gender-based discrimination is not to deny that certain factors specific to

10. *Women, Elections and Parliament*, pp. 27–28.
11. Janet Hook, 'Women Remain on Periphery Despite Electoral Gains', *Congressional Quarterly*, 9 October 1993, pp. 2707–13.

the Middle East also account for the limited participation of women in politics. These factors could be identified as a series of barriers that prevent Middle Eastern women from participating in politics and decision-making at senior levels.[12]

The most significant and central of these barriers remains the gender ideology prevalent in the region, which defines feminine and masculine in diametrically different terms. 'Feminine' is gentle, sweet, weak, compassionate yet distracted. Unable to focus on issues and make informed judgements, a woman is credited with the ability to use her sexuality to manipulate men. 'Masculine', on the other hand, is identified with determination, clarity of thought and action, and physical strength. The physical strength, however, does not remove the inherent weakness in a man, that is, his propensity to be duped by a woman's manipulative capabilities. Interestingly, such a distinction between feminine and masculine is not limited to the Arab Middle East. Both Turkish and Persian cultures also view femininity and masculinity in similar terms. In his novel *To Crush The Serpent*, for example, a famous Turkish writer, Yashar Kemal, eloquently depicts these gender images; Hilal, a respected villager is captivated by Esme's beauty, and later killed by her former suitor. Hilal's mother convinces his son, Hassan, over a number of years, of the need to kill Esme to avenge his father's death. Hassan resists this manipulation, but finally gives in, to be freed of the serpent.[13]

These gender images coexist with distinct definition of male and female roles in life. These roles are essentially biologically determined; women's ability to bear children places them in the role of nurturers. They are expected to bring up children, be compassionate to them, and provide them with a favourable home environment. Men, on the other hand, are expected to be the breadwinners, and provide for the sustenance of the family. Such role definitions are based on a view of life divided between natural and cultural domains. While women operate in the passive, natural domain, men are accorded the right and expected to operate in the active cultural domain, the area where art,

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12. For a detailed discussion of barriers preventing women from political representation, see *Women in Politics and Decision-Making in the Late Twentieth Century*, pp. 27–56.
13. Yashar Kemal, *To Crush The Serpent* (London: Harvill, 1991).

culture and politics exist. These distinctions automatically lead to the private–female and public–male dichotomy.[14] Women essentially operate within the home environment and sustain the family emotionally. Men operate in the public domain, and work for the physical sustenance of the family. On the surface, a definition of male and female roles and areas of operation creates an image of complementarity. Men and women perform their respective roles and help protect the basic unit of existence, the family. The reality, however, is different. The distinction between private and public areas of operation does not guarantee female control over the home environment. Instead, the private/public dichotomy coexists with a power imbalance within the home environment. Male superiority in the public domain is transferred to the family unit as well. To put it differently, a typical Middle Eastern family essentially remains patriarchal in nature. Men are not only treated as the head of the household, but, as can be seen in Table 3, are also overwhelmingly identified as such.

Table 3: Percentage Distribution of Household Heads By Sex in the Middle East

	Year	*Male*	*Female*
Iran	1976	92.7	7.3
Israel	1983	81.6	18.4
Kuwait	1985	95.2	4.8
Morocco	1971	83.1	16.9
Syria	1970	87.5	12.5
Tunisia	n.a.	89.6	10.4
Turkey	1980	90.0	10.0

Source: *UN Compendium of Social Statistics and Indicators, 1988,* (New York: United Nations, 1991), pp. 232–41

14. See, for example, Michael Gilsenan, *Recognizing Islam: Religion and Society in the Modern Arab World* (New York: Random House, 1982).

The private/public dichotomy does not permit women to determine their own future either. Women are bound by traditions that link the sexuality of unmarried adolescent females with the honour (*'ird*) of the family. So strong is the fear of young women bringing shame to the family by losing their virginity before marriage that most of them are confined to the private sphere upon reaching puberty. They are also married off at a very early age. Hence, most Middle Eastern women are married by the time they are 21 years old. Some intra-regional differences do exist; the average age at first marriage ranges between 17.8 years in Yemen and 23 years in Kuwait. Tunisia stands out as the only Arab state where the average age of women at first marriage is as high as 24 years.[15]

Soon after getting married, women are expected to perform their role as nurturers by bearing children and bringing them up. These expectations, and the very high premium placed on a woman becoming a mother within the first year of marriage, result in high apparent fertility rates among Middle Eastern women. Defined as the number of live births per woman, the fertility rates in the region range between 3 in Israel and 7 in Libya, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Oman.[16] These rates are in marked contrast to other developing countries like Mauritius and Sri Lanka, where the average fertility rate is estimated to be 2.0 and 2.5 respectively.[17] The higher fertility rates in the Middle East create a situation where women spend most of their 20s and 30s bringing up children. By the time they reach their late 30s or early 40s, most of these women, especially those with daughters, have become grandmothers. Ideally such a situation should enable Middle Eastern women to be more active in politics compared to their Western counterparts, who marry at a later age and are engaged in bringing up children until their mid-forties. But in reality, women in the Middle East remain at the periphery of the political systems.

A number of structural barriers prevent women from being represented in legislatures. So strong are these barriers that the majority of women fail to qualify for the first stage of political

15. *UN Compendium of Social Statistics and Indicators, 1988* (New York: United Nations, 1991), pp. 193–219.
16. ibid.
17. United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), *Human Development Report, 1994* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 174–75.

Table 4: Levels of Illiteracy in the Middle East By Sex in 1990 (percent)

	Female	1990	*Male* 1990
Algeria	87.4 (1971)	54.5	30.2
Bahrain	71.5 (1971)	30.7	17.9
Egypt	77.6 (1976)	66.2	37.1
Iran*	74.5 (1971)	59.4	37.0
Iraq	..	50.7	30.2
Jordan	45.6 (1976)	29.7	10.7
Kuwait	52.0 (1975)	33.3	22.9
Libya	..	49.6	24.6
Morocco	..	62.0	38.7
Qatar*	49.1 (1981)	27.5	23.2
Saudi Arabia	69.2 (1982)	51.9	26.9
Syria	80.0 (1970)	49.2	21.7
Tunisia	..	43.7	25.8
Turkey	56.9 (1975)	28.9	10.3
Yemen	..	73.9	47.2

Table 5: Percentage Distribution of Economically Active Population in the Middle East by Sex

	Year	*Total EAP (Million)*	*% Female*
Algeria	1987	5.3	9.2
Bahrain	1991	0.22	13.6
Egypt	1989	16.03	28.6
Iran	1986	12.85	10.1
Iraq	1987	3.9	11.6
Israel	1992	1.85	41.6
Kuwait	1988	0.72	23.3
Morocco	1982	5.9	19.6
Qatar	1986	0.2	9.4
Syria	1989	3.06	15.4
Tunisia	1989	2.3	21.0
Turkey	1991	20.7	31.4
UAE	1980	0.5	5.0

* The information on Qatar and Iran for 1990 is based on data collected in 1986.

Sources: *UNESCO Statistical Yearbook 1993* (Paris: UNESCO, 1993), pp. 1/5-1/23; ILO, *Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1993*, Tables 1, 2A (Geneva: ILO, 1993); Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1993), p. 46

representation, recruitment. Consequently, the next two stages of political representation, selection and election, elude these women. Illiteracy among Middle Eastem women is the strongest of these structural barriers. As can be seen from Table 4, almost one-third of the female population in Jordan, Turkey, Kuwait and Bahrain is illiterate. In Egypt, Morocco, Iran and Saudi Arabia more than half of women are illiterate. In Yemen, the level of illiteracy among women is estimated to be 74 per cent.

The lack of literacy among almost half of the female population coexists with limited participation by women in the labour force. On average women account for 17.4 per cent of the Economically Active Population (EAP) in the Middle East. Some intra-regional variations exist, with female EAP in Israel and Turkey estimated to be 41.6 per cent and 31.4 per cent respectively, while only 10.1 per cent of women are economically active in Iran, and 5 per cent in the United Arab Emirates (Table 5). These differences notwithstanding, the overall picture remains the same: women's economic potential remains underutilised in the Middle East.

Interestingly, even when economically active, most of these women are employed as unpaid workers. A large majority of women in selected Middle Eastern states are either engaged in unpaid family labour, not classified as salaried employees, or are self-employed. Egypt and Turkey stand out for the relatively higher proportion of women who are not paid for their economic activity, and are excluded from the money economy. To make matters worse, the majority of the female EAP congregate around two sectors of the economy, agriculture and social services. A very small proportion of economically active females are employed as managers, professionals and administrators in these states. In Turkey, for example, only 1.6 per cent of the economically active women occupy these positions. The situation is slightly better in Egypt where 3.3 per cent of the female EAP are employed as managers, professionals or administrators. Only in Israel do one-eighth of the economically active women occupy administrative or managerial positions.[18]

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18. International Labour Organisation, *ILO Yearbook of Labour Statistics, 1993* (Geneva: International Labour Organisation, 1993), Tables 1, 2A, 2B; Valentine Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East* (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1993), pp. 1–27.

Their low levels of literacy and equally low levels of participation in the paid labour force prevent women from participating in the public–male domain. This, in turn, reduces the number of women available to be recruited into the political mainstream with the eventual possibility of being elected as representatives. Effectively, therefore, women remain at the periphery of the political system in the Middle East.

To say this is not to deny that women's status in the Middle East has undergone a change in the last few decades. In a number of cases, state interventionist policies have helped reduce the levels of female illiteracy. In others, as in Saudi Arabia, certain influential females have encouraged other women to obtain education. Cumulatively, this has resulted in a relative decline in the levels of illiteracy among women in the Middle East. In comparative terms, for example, literacy among Saudi Arabian females as a percentage of literate males has increased from 13 per cent in 1970 to 66 per cent in 1992. The figures have changed also for Egypt and Iran, from 40 per cent and 43 per cent in 1970 to 54 per cent and 66 per cent respectively in 1992. Similar trends can be observed in the cases of Jordan, Turkey, Bahrain and other Persian Gulf states (Table 4).

The decline in levels of illiteracy is parallelled by an increase in female participation in the labour force. The percentage of employed women in Egypt, for instance, increased from 16.87 per cent in 1983 to 27 per cent in 1989. In Turkey, the proportion of employed females changed from 9 per cent in 1983 to 10 per cent in 1991. Bahrain also registered an increase in the number of employed women (from 565,000 in 1987 to 898,000 in 1992). Significantly, the areas and levels at which women are being employed have also improved. The number of women employed in non-agricultural activities has increased, albeit only slightly, during the last decade. In 1983, for example, women constituted only 16 per cent of those employed in non-agricultural activities in Egypt. By 1989, the proportion had increased to 17.6 per cent. In Jordan, female participation as a percentage of those engaged in non-agricultural activities increased from 20 per cent in 1983 to 23 per cent 1991. At the same time, a slight increase has been registered in the number of female managers, administrators and professionals in the Middle East–Persian Gulf region. In Bahrain, for example, the percentage of women employed across major groups increased from 5.7 per cent in 1987 to 9.0 per cent in 1992. Of

these, while only 1.7 per cent occupied administrative positions in 1987, by 1992 almost 2.7 per cent were in such positions.[19]

The weakening of the structural barriers is occurring alongside a slight change in the gender ideology prevalent in the region. Although the private–female/public–male dichotomy continues to underpin gender relations in the Middle East, economic pressures have opened up avenues for changes in the dominant images of feminine and masculine. The need for men to migrate to other countries or regions to earn a living has ushered some women into the public domain. While still bound by the code of honour and traditional definitions of masculine and feminine, these women are forced to assume the position of real heads of the household. Although this new position is not openly acknowledged by a number of women, it does provide these women with an alternative view of their role in life. In other cases, as in Kuwait, political upheavals during and after the Gulf War have prompted women to reassess the basis of their position within the family unit, and their relationship with the men in the family. The traditional concepts of male 'strength' and female 'weakness' are being questioned by some women, at least privately if not publicly,[20] as are the rules confining women to the private domain.

Meanwhile, the average age at which Middle Eastern women get married has been rising. While these women still marry earlier than those in a number of other developing states, they are marrying later than they used to. Hence, the proportion of married women in selected age groups has altered. In Kuwait, for example, the data for 1970 revealed that 78 per cent of women in the 20–24 years age group were married. Fifteen years later, only 53 per cent of those in the same age group were married. The proportion of married females in the 15–19 years age group had also declined during the same period, from 37 per cent in 1970 to 14 per cent in 1985. A very similar situation exists in Syria, Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Bahrain.[21] Apart from marrying later, women in the Middle Eastern states are bearing fewer children than in the past. Table 6 indicates the relative decline in fertility rates;

19. ibid.
20. See, for example, Jan Goodwin, *Price of Honour: Muslim Women Lift the Veil of Silence on the Islamic World* (London: Little, Brown & Co., 1994), pp. 154–80.
21. *UN Compendium of Social Statistics and Indicators, 1988*, pp. 193–219.

Table 6. Fertility Rates Among Middle Eastern Women

	1975	*1985*	*1992*	*1992 as percentage of 1960*
Algeria	7.5	6.7	5	69
Bahrain	7.0	4.6	3.8	54
Egypt	6.6	5.3	4.2	60
Iran	7.0	5.6	6.1	85
Iraq	7.2	6.7	5.8	81
Israel	3.8	3.1		
Jordan	8.0	7.3	5.8	76
Kuwait	7.5	5.2	3.8	52
Lebanon	6.1	3.8	3.2	51
Libya	n.a	n.a		
Morocco	7.1	5.4	4.5	63
Oman	7.2	7.2	6.8	96
Qatar	7.0	5.9	4.5	65
Saudi Arabia	7.3	7.3	6.5	90
Syria	7.8	7.2	6.3	87
Tunisia	6.8	4.9		
Turkey	5.6	3.9	3.6	56
UAE	6.8	5.2	4.6	66
Yemen	7.0	7.1		

Sources: *Human Development Report, 1994*, pp. 174–75; *UN Statistical Yearbook 1990/91* (New York: United Nations, 1993), pp. 146–61; *Third World Guide 1993/94* (Uruguay: Instituto del Tercer Mundo, 1992), p. 35; *UN Compendium of Social Statistics and Indicators, 1988*, pp. 232–41

with the exception of Yemen, the number of children born to an average woman has declined in all regional states.

Notwithstanding these changes, women still remain hostages to the gender ideology and the structural barriers. The pool from where women could be recruited into political parties, and then elected to legislatures, remains severely limited. This, in turn, limits the chances of women being represented in political institutions and senior administrative positions. The situation is further complicated by the lack of democratisation in the Middle East. While in some states, consultation replaces the need for elected parliaments, in others elected parliaments operate as vehicles of authoritarianism. Democratic traditions remain weak in the weak states of the Middle East. Under circumstances where even men are denied the right to participate fully in the political systems, the barriers of 'veiled authoritarianism' become even stronger for women. In fact, undemocratic Middle Eastern states often attempt to counter opposition to their repressive and/or undemocratic policies by adopting a persona of neo-patriarchy. By targeting the weakest link in the system, the women, these neo-patriarchal states hope to retain the good will of the majority of men in the system. Women, therefore, remain at the periphery of the political systems, and are often under-represented.

The Role of Islam

It is often argued that Islam plays a major role in marginalising women in politics in the Middle East. Such an argument is based on the assumption that Islam confines women to the home environment, identifies their role primarily in terms of nurturers, and therefore legitimises their lack of political representation. Interestingly, these assumptions are not restricted to analyses presented by Western academics and analysts. Some Muslim analysts have also blamed Islam for delimiting women's area of operation and their ability to operate in the public domain. In some cases, such criticism has been voiced directly. The Turkish ideologue Ziya Gokalp (1876-1924), for example, blamed Islam for relegating Turkish women to a secondary status, and for replacing the traditional 'parental democratic' family with the

'patriarchal autocratic' family.[22] In other cases, Islam has been indirectly linked to women's confinement to the private sphere. In his book *The Arab World: Society, Culture and State*, for example, Halim Barakat does not directly blame Islam for women's status in the Middle East. Nonetheless he portrays Islam as legitimising the extant Arab system and class structure. He also maintains that Islam, along with the concept of charity, perpetuates the rationalisations put forward for the prevailing order.[23]

To some extent such criticisms are valid. Islam's penetration into the Middle Eastern culture and its place as the dominant religion in the region has made it possible for men to use Islam to relegate women to a secondary status. The religion is used by them to legitimise the division between the private–female spheres and the public–male areas of operation. By referring to various *hadith*, they stress that women must remain the nurturers in the family, and that the public domain must be left to men only. The *Shari'a* is further used to argue that women cannot occupy positions of political leadership and/or act as judges. While in some cases, as in Saudi Arabia, such use of Islam is politically sanctioned, in other countries Islamic injunctions are invoked by men merely as a matter of routine in social and family situations.

The higher rates of illiteracy among Middle Eastern women play a significant role in perpetuating this use of Islam by men as a vehicle of social control. Basically ignorant of the real contents of the *Shari'a*, women tend to rely on men for translating and interpreting religious injunctions. Men's interest in perpetuating the prevailing social order prompts them to ignore the revolutionary aspects of Islam that might permit women to realise their full potential. Instead, the restrictive nature of Islam is emphasised, and women are encouraged to continue operating within the home environment only. A number of women also join in this attempt to demarcate areas of operation between men and women. Convinced of the male interpretation of the *Shari'a*,

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22. Deniz Kandiyoti, 'End of Empire: Islam, Nationalism and Women in Turkey', in Deniz Kandiyoti (ed.), *Women, Islam and the State* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 34–35.
23. Halim Barakat, *The Arab World: Society, Culture and State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993).

they support and reinforce the arguments for women's role as nurturers, and discourage those interested in stepping outside the boundaries of home. In any case, the net result is the same; women remain confined to the home environment, and are dissuaded from joining mainstream politics.

However, it is important to realise that Islam is not solely responsible for the under-representation of women in politics in the Middle East. In fact no attempt to link Islam directly with levels of political representation can be academically sustained.[24] Consensus does exist in Islam on the basic precepts and pillars of the religion. However, beyond this conceptual clarity, diversity becomes the norm. This diversity is not restricted to the obvious Shiite and Sunni divide. Nor is it limited to the theological domain only. Rather, differences also exist in Islam on interpretation of the *Shari'a* in the domain of society and politics. The interplay of this diversity with different cultures creates further complication; Islam acquires the colour of the society in which it is practised. Hence, there are as many interpretations of the *Shari'a* as there are cultures in which Muslims live. Given this diversity, the argument that Islam alone accounts for the status of women in the Middle East cannot be sustained. Nor can Islam alone be held accountable for women's marginalisation in the political system. Instead, the supremacy of tradition, which cuts across religious divides, explains why women remain confined to the private sphere. So strong are these traditions and the gender images that in cases of conflict between Islamic principles and tradition, the latter often wins. The manner in which the issue of inheritance is dealt with in the region is a case in point. Although Islam gives daughters the right to inherit property from their parents, a number of Middle Eastern women renounce upon marriage their claims to family property.[25] The practice ensures the ownership of property on patrilineal lines, even though this contradicts the basic principles of Islam! The issue of female circumcision is another example of tradition being superimposed upon religious principles. The practice continues in some Middle Eastern states,

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24. For an excellent discussion on this point, see Valentine M. Moghadam, *Modernizing Women: Gender and Social Change in the Middle East*, pp. 1–27.
25. See, for example, Ebba Augustin (ed.), *Palestinian Women: Identity and Experience* (London: Zed Books, 1993), chapter 1.

even though it is not enjoined in Islam.

The gender ideology and traditions, and not Islam, also reinforce the structural barriers that eventually prevent women from becoming actors in politics. Evidence to this effect can be found in a series of studies conducted during the 1980s and early 1990s on female participation in the Middle Eastern labour force. Neither the women nor the men targeted in these studies identified Islam as a reason for their attitudes to female employment. A project on Kuwaiti women's participation in the work force failed to link lack of employment to Islamic religious beliefs.[26] Similarly, a World Bank study of attitudes to employment of females in Jordan, Morocco, Egypt and Turkey found men referring to women's physical characteristics, like weakness, and their tendency to be away from work for long periods, as reasons for not choosing them for various jobs. Islamic injunctions were not given as reasons to deny women job opportunities.[27]

Finally, the overriding significance of tradition and gender ideology in circumscribing women's political role in the Middle East can be seen in the attitudes of those states and/or actors which apparently opted for alternative approaches to life. Despite its emphasis on ending class-related oppression, for instance, the Iranian Left decried the idea of an assertive woman operating in the public sphere, avoided emphasising women's rights, and constantly referred to the sanctity of the home.[28] Even President Saddam Hussein, for all his avowed adherence to Ba'athist ideology, was quick to invoke the traditional image of the nurturing woman during the Iran–Iraq war, when he asked Iraqi women to bear more children. Tradition, and not religion, it was obvious, presented increasing and recurring obstacles to female participation in the public arena.

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26. J. A. Sanad and M. A. Tessler, 'The Economic Orientation of Kuwaiti Women: Their Nature, Determinants and Consequences', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 20, 1988, pp. 443–468.
27. Ivy Papps, 'Attitudes to Female Employment in Four Middle Eastern Countries', in Haleh Afshar (ed.), *Women in the Middle East: Perceptions, Realities and Struggles for Liberation* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1993), pp. 96–116.
28. Hammed Shahidian, 'The Iranian Left and the "Woman Question" in the Revolution of 1978-79', *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, vol. 26, 1994, pp. 223–247.

Breaking The Barriers

Despite traditional, structural and political barriers, the ratio of female representation has increased in some Middle Eastern states. While few in number, these women indicate that it is possible to break the barriers to their political representation. The question arises as to what enables these few women to transcend the limits imposed on their political representation. The historical record suggests that the role of the state as an agent of change has been significant in increasing women's representation in the Middle Eastern states. Whenever the state has tackled the issue of illiteracy, pushed for increased female participation in the labour force, and issued decrees for additional political participation by women in legislatures, the number of women represented in parliaments has increased. The process has often been encouraged and supported by women who acquire influence by virtue of marriage to political leaders of these countries. The gradual increases in the proportion of women representatives in Egypt, Syria, Turkey and Iraq stand out as examples of such state-sponsored representation. Egypt is an especially good example of the state acting as an agent of change.[29] The Egyptian state guaranteed women's rights against discrimination in the workplace as early as 1959. Law 91 of 1959 entitled working women to paid maternity leave, leave of absence to nurse an infant, and early retirement. Later, the Personal Status Law of 1979 granted women the right to divorce their husbands, have custody of children, alimony in case of divorce, and the option to stay at the matrimonial home until the children reached a specified age. The fact that the Personal Law was declared unconstitutional by the Higher Court, only to be introduced as a new law in 1985, heightened the realisation among Egyptian feminists that they needed greater representation in legislative bodies, if for no other reason than to protect their gains. But meanwhile Egyptian President Anwar Sadat issued a decree in 1979 enlarging the composition of the *Majlis-i-*

29. For a detailed discussion of women in Egyptian politics, see Earl L. Sullivan, *Women in Egyptian Public Life* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1986). See also Margot Badran, 'Independent Women: More Than a Century of Feminism in Egypt', in Judith E. Tucker (ed.), *Arab Women: Old Boundaries New Frontiers* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), pp. 129–48.

Shaab to include thirty seats reserved for women. The decree, according to several accounts, came about as a result of his wife Jihan Sadat's commitment to women's issues, and her crusade to improve their status in Egypt. The decision, against the background of other laws attempting to remove the structural barriers, resulted in increased female representation in politics. The number of women in the *Majlis-i-Shaab* soared from 2 in 1957 to 42 in 1982. Women were able to break the barriers.

Interestingly, however, the ability to break the barriers has largely remained the prerogative of women from the upper and upper-middle classes Once again, as evidenced by the Egyptian case, a typical woman elected to the legislature belongs to a 'family with a name', is highly educated, speaks at least two languages, is married, and has fewer than the average number of children. While in some cases she may be in her early 30s, mostly a typical female politician is in her 40s. Most importantly, irrespective of any other differences, each one of these women needs to have excelled in her respective field of specialisation before being elected to parliament. To put it differently, the need to have a proven record in political organisation seems less of a requirement than proof that she can perform exceptionally well in her own profession! The Turkish Prime Minister, Tansu Ciller, a US-educated professor of economics with an estimated family wealth of $45 million, also fits this mould.

Ciller's election as Prime Minister of Turkey in June 1993 also points towards another element prompting increased female political representation in the Middle East—the need for tokenism and symbolic gestures. Ciller was a relatively new entrant to politics, who came into the limelight just before the 1991 elections, as a member of Suleyman Demirel's team. Her bold economic proposals, especially those relating to restructuring of the state-owned economic enterprises, won her attention, but failed to curb inflation. However, she was elected Prime Minister by an overwhelming majority in 1993, in order to emphasise Turkey's European identity and give an image of 'new blood' to the True Path Party. In the words of a delegate from Ankara, she was elected because the party wanted 'the most electable leader', someone who could win '48 per cent of the vote, not 28 per cent'.[30]

30. 'Modern woman to lead Turkey into new era', *Age* (Melbourne), 15 June 1993.

Political Participation: An Alternative Perspective

The preceding discussion of women in politics in the Middle East relies heavily on the traditional understanding of political participation, that is, representation in political institutions and/or the upper echelons of governments. However, an alternative perspective could lead us to different conclusions about women in Middle Eastern politics. If the term 'politics' is defined as encompassing various non-political and non-traditional channels, through which various groups articulate their demands and undertake activities that ultimately change the perceptions and policies of various governments, it could be argued that women in the Middle East have not remained at the periphery of the political systems. Rather, they have played a significant role in the politics of the region. In some cases, this participation has occurred as solitary attempts by individuals to respond to political changes around them. Hanan Al-Shaykh's 'The Story of Zahra' portrays such a character. Surrounded by the devastation of the Lebanese civil war, Zahra chooses to establish a sexual relationship with the sniper at the end of the street. The relationship is her contribution to keeping the destruction to a minimum, at least for the time when she is with the unknown sniper. Even though this character could be ignored as fictional, the fact remains that women all over the region take various individual decisions that affect the political system in which they operate. The choice made by a selected few Saudi Arabian women to set up their own businesses is a case in point, as is the decision by some women to learn and educate other women about their rights in Islam, as a means of breaking the barriers to education and employment.

Beyond these individual attempts, women have also participated in community activities and protests that could be categorised as 'political'. The attempts by feminists in Egypt and Turkey to change state policies affecting women in various spheres of life are two such examples. Specifically, in Turkey the feminist movement kept women's issues in the limelight during the 1980s. In 1986, women started a petition campaign in Istanbul and Ankara against the state's failure to implement the UN Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. A year later, they campaigned against domestic violence and questioned the legality of a judicial decision which prevented a battered wife from getting a divorce. These attempts

were instrumental in prompting various Turkish political parties to include women's issues in their party programs and manifestos during the 1991 elections.[31] Other examples of such participation include the growing number of art exhibitions by Palestinian women, which depict the life and experiences of Palestinians living in the Occupied territories.[32] The decision of a few Saudi Arabian professional women to drive cars during the Gulf crisis is another significant example of a non-traditional method of participating in the political system. Although the decision cost these women their jobs and mobility, it did raise the issue of women's position in a traditional society like Saudi Arabia.

Similarly, the protest by several Kuwaiti women against the state's decision to deny them the franchise in the post-Gulf elections stands as an act of political participation.[33] These acts, while initially rebuffed, and not always successful beyond the traditional realm of 'social reforms', have played a role in gradually changing the status of women in the Middle East. They have also set in motion processes that could ultimately pave the way for greater female political representation. Until then, however, it could be argued that lack of female political representation has not necessarily meant a lack of political participation by women in the Middle East.

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31. Yesim Arat, 'Toward a Democratic Society: The Women's Movement in Turkey in the 1980s', *Women's Studies International Forum*, vol. 17, nos 2–3, 1994, pp. 244–47.
32. Vera Taman, 'Palestinian Women's Art in the Occupied Territories', in Augustin, *Palestinian Women*, pp. 63–67.
33. For additional examples of political participation by Middle Eastern women, see Mervat Hatem, 'Toward the Development of Post-Islamist and Post-Nationalist Feminist Discourses in the Middle East', in Tucker, *Arab Women*, pp. 29–48; see also, Orayb Aref Najjar, 'Between Nationalism and Feminism: The Palestinian Answer', in Jill M. Bystydzienski (ed.), *Women Transforming Politics* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), pp. 143–61.

Chapter 6

Palestinian Women Under Occupation: Social Problems and Social Change

Ron Macintyre

The Oslo accords of September 1993 and the Cairo agreement of May 1994 have left Palestinian women's work committees in the Occupied Territories with mixed feelings. In theory the Cairo agreement sets in motion the withdrawal of Israel from the Gaza Strip and Jericho and transfers to the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) an expanding range of powers and responsibilities over a five-year interim self-rule phase. But considerable doubts remain as to the type of Palestinian society that one day might evolve in the wake of the successful outcome of negotiations between Israel and the PNA/PLO. This has been heightened in 1994 by interfactional differences between the PLO with a largely secular political ideology and *Hamas,* an Islamic fundamentalist offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood that has a sacred nationalist agenda for Palestine. On top of this is a lurking suspicion that the Arafat–PLO leadership might tend towards a conservative view of women, and reimpose on them personal status laws that in essence reflect traditional and religiously-based patriarchal values.

The women's committees believe that personal status laws deriving from Ottoman times have perpetuated serious

'inequalities' within Palestinian society.[1] These are seen to be at variance with the concept of 'democracy' which was a fundamental principle during the *Intifada*, the Palestinian uprising of 1987–93.[2] Further concern has been voiced over the promulgation (in December 1993) of the Basic Law or interim constitution of the PNA, which made no reference to 'equality' in law between men and women. A second draft (April 1994) referred to 'equality between men and women' in the context of international agreements governing basic human rights and outlawing all forms of racial and religious discrimination.[3] But one notable omission in this draft was direct reference to the 1979 UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women. Article 16 of this Convention calls upon the parties to take 'all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women in matters relating to marriage and family relations . . . on a basis of equality of men and women'.[4]

A majority of Arab and Islamic states have had problems with this convention, and few have ratified it unconditionally.[5] This

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1. Personal status laws in the Occupied Territories today derive from the Ottoman Islamic code of 1917; they were inherited by the British in Palestine and maintained in substance by Jordan (West Bank), Egypt (Gaza Strip) and the Israeli occupation after 1967. For example, polygamy was limited but not banned; *Shari'a* and ecclesiastical courts were responsible for personal status laws. Women's work committees believe that other inequalities exist in issues such as custody of children, inheritance and 'control' of women.
2. See for example, F. Mernissi, 'Democracy as Moral Disintegration: The Contradiction Between Religious Belief and Citizenship as a Manifestation of the Ahistoricity of Arab Identity', and N. Saadawi, 'The Political Challenges Facing Arab Women at the End of the Twentieth Century', in N. Toubia (ed.), *Women of the Arab World: The Coming Challenge*, trans. Nahed El Gamal (London and Atlantic Highlands NJ: Zed Books, 1988).
3. G. Usher, 'Women, Islam and the Law in Palestinian Society', *Middle East International* (London), 23 September 1994, p. 17.
4. Human Rights Commission, *United Nations International Instruments on Human Rights* (Wellington, 1989), pp. 58–65.
5. One hundred and twenty states, or 65 per cent of the membership of the UN, had either ratified or acceded to this convention by 28 May 1993. But only five out of twenty Arab states had acceded to this convention. New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, *United Nations Handbook 1993* (Wellington: Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade,

has raised fears among women that the PNA might adopt personal status laws based on the Islamic *Shari'a* that would perpetuate an 'unequal' relationship between men and women at the level of the family. There are wider implications for the socio-economic and political status of women during the current phase of self-rule, as well as when statehood is achieved at a later stage.

Following on from the agitation over the absence of gender balance in the Basic Law, a group of women from the PLO's General Union of Palestinian Women (GUPW), which was established in 1965, and some intellectuals published in August 1994 a draft bill of rights for women.[6] It argued in favour of a secular and egalitarian vision of women's legal rights in the fields of employment, education, health and crime, but it was circumspect on the issue of family and personal status laws. This may have reflected a measure of indecision or hesitancy over the ideological relationship with *Hamas*, the main Islamic opposition movement, that is firmly committed to the imposition of Islamic-based personal status laws.

Left wing women's committees have argued in favour of a secularist defence of women's rights, and an agenda that attempts to maximise women's forthcoming electoral capabilities within the PNA, in association with other sectors of Palestinian civil society. One leading feminist said:

> If women don't utilise the cultural space that autonomy affords to pursue their own agenda, if we focus exclusively on the narrow political question as to whether we're for or against the PNA, then in effect we are giving up the social and legal terrain to *Hamas*. And if we do that we are finished.[7]

Women's committees currently reflect ideological divisions within the PLO, and between the PLO and *Hamas*. Across the major sacred–secular rift there is also disagreement between women's groups on the question of personal status laws and the type of society which they seek to create. So what does this hold for women in the new phase of self-rule?

1993) p. 56.

6. Usher, 'Women, Islam and the Law in Palestinian Society', p. 17.
7. ibid.

The aim of this paper is two-fold. First, for perspective, it examines social changes in the role of 'organised' Palestinian women in the context of Zionist settlement in Palestine, Israel's military occupation since 1967, and especially during the *Intifada*. Second, it examines the interaction of gender issues and national rights for women in the context of Palestinian self-rule, with possible implications for future Palestinian statehood.

Phases of the Women's Movement

It is difficult to 'construct' the pieces in the Palestinian women's movement during the early part of this century. There are times when 'Palestinian' women have been noticed in the area of social and charitable work, and in opposition to Zionist settlement in Palestine in 1884. But local conventions and traditions have prevented access to women to ascertain their points of view on social and political questions. Not surprisingly, historians have tended to ignore the role of women within Palestinian society until fairly recently. Even then, the initiative to open up the women's question for discussion has been taken primarily by women.

Palestinian women, like their sisters in neighbouring Arab states, have traditionally been regarded as private persons. Their lives have centred on the home, as wife, mother, provider, nourisher and sustainer of family needs. Within the home, women were often extremely active in areas that were extensions of their domestic roles. For example, this might include networking with other women in cottage-type industries, involvement in marriage arrangements and initiating property transactions, including disbursement of Islamic *waqf* (charitable trusts). Women were also the purveyors of community information through interacting with other women in the family gathering (*majlis*) or at the communal well and/or oven for baking bread (*ta'boun*).

Tradition also upheld Arab women as the 'producers of generations' and upholders of cultural, traditional and moral standards. A 'fallen woman' was not only a disgrace to herself, but could adversely affect the social standing of her husband and children. For the unmarried woman, virginity and honour were different sides of the same coin, and society, both male and female, required unquestioning compliance with these principles

of good conduct.

Socio-economic class circumstances affected the needs of women in different ways. The wearing of the veil (*hijab*) was related to socio-economic circumstances, and much more in evidence among the upper classes in the towns. In contrast the veil was impractical and relatively uncommon among peasant women. Thus when we refer to Palestinian women, it is important to bear in mind a range of socio-economic classes, with different needs and aspirations, separated by urban and rural lifestyles, and, durinq the twentieth century, exposed to varying degrees of modernisation, Western values and, latterly, colonial exploitation.

The Palestinian women's movement can be divided into three phases. First, the early, or nascent, nationalist phase (1920–47). Second, the charitable or non-governmental organisation (NGO) phase (1948–78). Third, the popular or women's work committee phase (1978–present). In all these phases there has been some thematic overlap (see Table 1).

Table 1. Major Characteristics of the Palestinian Women's Movement

1. Nascent nationalist phase 1920–47
Ad hoc or token political participation
Philanthropic social relief and self-help projects
No feminist agenda
Leadership: upper class, educated, urban-based
No mass constituency

2. Charitable organisations phase, 1948–78
Non-partisan cultural activity
Philanthropic social welfare, relief and self-help projects
Leadership: predominantly middle class, educated, urban-based
No feminist agenda
No mass base constituency

3. Women's work committee phase, 1978–present
Active national and political participation
Self-reliance projects, emphasising economic development
Leadership: predominantly middle class, tertiary educated, professional, urban-based
Feminist agenda identifying national liberation and women's rights
Towards a mass base constituency

1. Nascent nationalist phase, 1920–47

Nascent women's movements during the first two decades of the twentieth century were politicised by Arab nationalist opposition to both Turkish nationalism and European colonialism in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria and 'Palestine'. Membership of these movements often comprised educated women from upper or middle class urban backgrounds. Feminist demands such as the removal of the veil and equal rights for women in personal status laws were to be found in varying degrees in respective women's movements. This was most prominent in the case of the Egyptian Feminist Union (founded 1923). For Palestinian women, the veil was an issue which one day would have to be addressed. But of much greater concern in the early 1920s was the need to mobilise women's energies to oppose British plans for setting up a mandate in Palestine, with provision for a Jewish national home. Social distress of needy Arab families, some the victims of communal rioting in 1920–21, also seems to have acted as a catalyst for their involvement outside the home.

In 1921 Palestinian women met for the first time in Jerusalem to set up the Arab Women's Union (AWU). Central to its policy was the need to link national action with social and humanitarian relief measures. It attracted educated women from largely upper-class urban backgrounds, both Christian and Muslim. These prominent women or *shakhsiyat* committed themselves to a policy of 'passive resistance' against the British mandate and called for the boycott of foreign goods.[8] Their stand on national questions, as might be expected, was identical to that of the male leadership of the Arab Congress (founded 1919).

It was unusual for women to cross the threshold into public life. The charitable focus of the AWU no doubt made it more socially acceptable to male society, which wanted all sectors of Palestinian society to force the British to desist from their plans for the setting up of the mandate.

A similar linking of ad hoc or token national and social issues was evident in the first Arab Women's Congress, held in Jerusalem in October 1929 (see Table 1). Between 200 and 300 upper and

8. M. Rishmawi, 'The Legal Status of Palestinian Women', in Toubia (ed.), *Women of the Arab World*, p. 82; P. Strum, *The Women Are Marching: The Second Sex and the Palestinian Revolution* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1992), p. 29.

middle-class women from throughout Palestine attended, to protest about the Jewish national home, and about brutal suppression of Arab demonstrators by the British during the Wailing Wall incident in Jerusalem in August 1929. The conference appears to have been timed to reinforce Arab demands on the British for the suspension of Jewish immigration and land sales.[9] Women chanted anti-British slogans in the streets, and followed this with a protest to the British High Commissioner, Sir John Chancellor.

To contemporary observers, it was a rare event for Palestinian women to take such a visible and public role in defence of national interests, and in some cases to be seen and photographed unveiled in public.[10] Activist members were either wives or relatives of the current political leadership of the Arab Congress. Its secretary-general was Zlikha ash-Shihabi; committee members included Mrs Jamal Husseini, Mrs Mousa Alami and Mrs Ouni Abd' al-Hadi. Its social base was also very narrow.[11] It called for an end to the Jewish national home, and for aid for needy families. The stated purpose of its charter was to help and support the men in the nationalist movement.[12]

Between 1920 and 1947 Palestinian women's groups in the main urban centres (such as Jerusalem, Haifa and Nablus) provided intermittent support for male nationalist activities, in the context of wider charitable or socially acceptable work. Protest telegrams were sent to British mandate authorities; political leaflets were distributed and money raised for health care; fines were paid for those convicted of 'crimes' in support of the nationalist cause. Rural women participated in the uprising of Izz ad-Din al Qasim (killed in 1935) and in the main Arab revolt of 1936–39; some were killed, others provided food, medical care, refuge, first aid and ammunition to the resistance or *fedayeen*, while assisting in replanting land stripped by the British.[13]

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9. The Shaw Commission of Inquiry into the Wailing Wall incident (August 1929), set up by Britain, noted in March 1930 that Zionist immigration demands were at the root of the problem, as they aroused Arab fears of Jewish political domination.
10. P. Strum, *The Women Are Marching*. See photographs, pp. 178–79.
11. Rishmawi, 'The Legal Status of Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories', p. 82.
12. Strum, *The Women Are Marching*, p. 29.
13. K. Abu Ali, General Union of Palestinian Women, correspondence with

These were seen as socially acceptable patriotic acts, which brought honour not only to the women, but also to their husbands and families.

Women crossed the political threshold once more following the adoption of the UN partition resolution on Palestine (November 1947) which led to the creation of the state of Israel (May 1948). One source observed that thousands of women belonging to the AWU 'still veiled—marched in protest, to the utter amazement of the British colonial officials'.[14]

The defeat of the Arab armies by Israel in 1948–49 led to the physical destruction of Palestinian society and an ensuing exodus of over 900,000 refugees, or about 70 per cent of a total population of 1.3 million. It was a 'catastrophe' (*nakba*) which affected equally men, women and children. Palestinians were uprooted and dispossessed of land and homes, and thrown into a new and miserable lifestyle in the mushrooming refugee camps which sprang up on the West Bank (annexed by Jordan), Gaza Strip (administered by Egypt), Lebanon, Syria and Jordan. Peasant families without land were the most economically deprived. The urban middle classes, many of whom fled to neighbouring Arab states, the West Bank, Gaza Strip or further afield, had greater powers of economic survival.

In the hiatus following the end of the mandate (1948–50), women's charitable organisations substituted for state services, providing training centres for nurses, first aid stations, feeding centres and soup kitchens. Previously secluded upper and middle class women were encouraged to cook, mend and distribute clothes, and collect donations for the needy. Giacaman suggests that this period marks the formal birth of the Palestinian women's movement, as it gave them more 'visibility' as social actors, with a political agenda such as the preservation of Palestinian national and cultural identity.[15] Of course it might be argued

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author, 'Basic Observations Pertaining to the Palestinian Women's Movement', Amman, October 1994 (in Arabic).

14. R. Tawil, *My Home, My Prison* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, c. 1979), p. 72. This book is an Arab feminist classic in its own right.
15. R. Giacaman and M. Odeh, 'Palestinian Women's Movement in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip', in N. Toubia (ed.), *Women*

that this 'greater visibility' lasted for a relatively short time (1948–50) and was severely restricted during the Jordanian period in the West Bank (1950–67).

2. Charitable organisations phase, 1948–78

Palestinian political institutions were virtually destroyed through military conflict and social upheaval in Palestine in 1948–49. The nationalist movement after 1948 was decimated; many of its leaders had been killed, exiled and/or thoroughly discredited. Charitable work, which sometime extended to ad hoc political protest, became the guiding principle of the women's movement. Some of the older leading *shakhsiyat* and their husbands disappeared from the political scene, while others renewed their activities in increased social and charitable work.[16] For example, Andalib al-Amad, the founder of the AWU, set up an orphanage and hospital in Nablus, and Zlikha Shihabi started projects for refugees near Jerusalem, while the Halabi sisters rescued and preserved peasants' cultural patterns and designs in their Jerusalem workshop.[17]

Giacaman writes: 'The ideology of charity was so pervasive. . . Activities were conducted "from above". Middle-class women defined the needs of, delivered services to and, indeed, were charitable towards village, refugee camp, and poor women'.[18] Many registered charitable societies were set up in cities and towns in the central area of the West Bank, such as East Jerusalem, Nablus, Ramallah and Bethlehem. One source accounts for 150 charitable organisations in the West Bank in the 1980s in which women either dominated or played a crucial role.[19]

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of the Arab World, p. 58.

16. Tawil, *My Home My Prison*, p. 72.
17. R. Sayigh, 'Palestinian Women Under Occupation', in E. W. Fernea (ed.), *Women and the Family in the Middle East: New Voices of Change* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1988), p. 195.
18. Giacaman and Odeh, 'Palestinian Women's Movement in the Israeli-occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip', p. 59.
19. Sayigh, 'Palestinian Women Under Occupation', p. 196. See also Strum, *The Women Are Marching*, p. 32. Examples of such charitable organisations include: *Ri'yat al-Tifl* (Society for the Care of Children),

It is interesting to hypothesise that before the revival of Palestinian political institutions in the early 1960s with the rise of the PLO, the survival of the Palestinian community and the preservation of its culture and traditions resulted largely from the work of women within the home, and in the numerous voluntary organisations that provided charity to a people demoralised by the loss of Palestine.

Between 1948 and 1967 Palestinian women set up a number of charitable organisations in the West Bank and East Jerusalem, including orphanages, literacy and health programs. These were supplemented by Jordan's Ministry of Social Affairs, while UNRWA (United Nations Reconstruction and Works Administration) contributed to refugee relief in the camps through shelter accommodation, food rations, works programs, education, health and vocational training centres for men and women.

Jordan, however, imposed strict limitations on political activities by the charitable organisations in 1956. This was designed to counter the revival of Palestinian national consciousness after Jordan's annexation of the West Bank in April 1950. Tension between the AWU and authorities was particularly high in Nablus in 1966. This followed insistence by the administrative governor that a meeting on the status of women would only be permitted if 'politics' were ruled out.[20]

Women activists in this period were often caught in the crossfire of a highly conservative society, which disapproved of their visibility in public life, and an overly cautious Jordanian government that limited, sometimes brutally, all forms of Palestinian political activity in the West Bank.[21] Charitable organisations often performed extensions of the traditional female functions in the home. They were intentionally non-threatening to male society; some were apprehensive about 'mixed' gatherings, and cautious about dealings with 'American' cultural groups in view of the latter's close association with

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Ramallah, 1945; the Jordanian Red Crescent Society, Tulkarem, 1947; *Rawdat az-Zuhur* Society (Kindergarten of Flowers), Jerusalem, 1952; the Arab Women's Union, Tulkarem, 1953; the Society for the Care of Children and the Guidance of Mothers, Nablus, 1954.

20. R. Tawil, *My Home My Prison*, p. 72.
21. ibid., pp. 86–88.

Israel.[22] Their functions were acceptable as providers of charitable 'relief' to their less fortunate sisters and more generally, at times of crisis, to the wider male population. However, their actions did lead to much more activity for a few women beyond the home. Occasionally women crossed the political threshold, only to retire quickly from the political scene. Female empowerment was not an issue which they could openly address because of existing social attitudes, despite the willingness of a few determined activists, like Raymonda Tawil and Sahar Khalifa, to question and defy 'male' social conventions.[23]

Charitable social work gave women more opportunities to mix and swop notes beyond the confines of the home, in what seemed to be an extension of their normal home duties. Women were perceived as nurturers of the needy and care-givers for the sick. These functions blended naturally with conservative middle class social attitudes and acceptance of women operating outside the home. Jordan's concentration of economic development on the East Bank during the period 1950 to 1967 limited employment opportunities for women in the West Bank. This tended to reinforce the importance of charitable and relief work as a collective outlet for women during the Jordanian period.

Israeli Occupation

In 1967 Palestinian society was racked by Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. The traditional Arab village, based on a subsistence agricultural economy, was in many instances transformed into a village dependent for its livelihood on wage-labour in Israel. One of the most significant effects of Israel's colonisation was the proletarianisation of the traditional village economy, which was exposed to Israel's superior market economy. Palestinians were compelled out of economic necessity either to work in Israel as a source of cheap labour, or to emigrate to greener pastures which, until the mid-1980s, were to be found in the Gulf.

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22. ibid., p. 73.
23. ibid., pp. 86–88; S. Khalifa, 'I don't want my body to be a bridge for the state', Extracts from an interview with Palestinian novelist, in *ICCP Newsletter* (newsletter of the International Coordinating Committee for NGOs on the Question of Palestine), no. 40, Special Issue on Women, Geneva, February 1992.

The occupation transformed the Palestinian village into a community of mainly women and children, to which men returned in the evening after menial work in Israel (such as in construction, industry, seasonal agriculture) with no job certainty, and forever subject to local and regional crises. The 'pauperisation' of Palestinian society had a telling effect upon the older charitable organisations.

Evolution of the Charitable Organisations

Older charitable organisations began to broaden the focus of their operations in the wake of the Israeli occupation (see Table 1). The line between permissible social and political activities, which the Jordanians had enforced, was now blurred. The organisation which set the new trend to 'self-help' with an emphasis on 'steadfastness' (*sumud*) or resistance to the occupation, was the *Inash al-Usra* (Family Rejuvenation Society) of al-Bireh (founded 1965). Its founder, Samiha Khalil, from al-Bireh, explains the basis of her philosophy:

> I saw the United Nations offering charity to our people—the same UN that had been so quick to recognise the state of Israel. . . I thought, 'It barely wants to keep us alive. There must be some way I could help the victims of war provide for themselves'. And in one small room I started teaching women to sew so they could work to support their families.[24]

Inash put special emphasis on female 'self-help' by setting up a number of vocational training programs and productive marketing ventures; it fostered and encouraged Palestinian culture and national identity in the face of Israel's occupation. Since 1967 it has grown into a major educational and cultural institution in the West Bank, comprising an orphanage, vocational training college for women, kindergarten training for teachers, food production, catering service, a centre supplying knitting, a museum and folklore institute.[25]

The theme of 'self-help' was central to the philosophy of many charitable organisations in the Occupied Territories. The Bethlehem Society provided a similar philosophy with a

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24. K. Warnock, *Land before Honour, Palestinian Women in the Occupied Territories* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1990), p. 162.
25. Rishmawi, 'The Legal Status of Palestinian Women', p. 89; Warnock, *Land before Honour*, p. 162.

different agenda. One of the organisers said:

> We offer interest free loans to anyone who wants to set up a small shop or buy a new cow or set up a workshop to make beads, rosaries—and these small industries can succeed because we have many tourists in Bethlehem. . . For women there is embroidery. Women come and collect it from us and take it away to do it at home, when they can fit it in with their housework.[26]

Charitable organisations contributed significantly to the welfare of the people in the Occupied Territories, but their work was often highly specific and fragmentary, and lacked an overall plan for social and economic development. They were highly visible in terms of structure and leadership, and as such their licenses were frequently revoked by the occupation forces, for failure to comply with conditions of operation. In July 1979 the first Palestinian Social Conference brought together all the charitable organisations. But for Israeli Security this gave them a dangerous national character, and led to the imprisonment and interrogation of a number of organisation leaders. In the politically charged environment of the late 1970s many charitable organisations were ill-equipped and philosophically unsuited to meet the needs of a new generation that was politically active, much better educated, and suffering under the weight of the oppressive colonial policies of the occupation.

3. Women's Work Committee Phase, 1978–present

Women's work committees appeared in the late 1970s and early 1980s, due to a number of interrelated factors. First, the older charitable societies were generally unable to cope with the pressures of the Israeli occupation in meeting the needs of women. Second, the need to advance the role of women during the UN Decade of Women was highlighted by (a) their enfeebled socio-economic position in a society fast becoming reliant for its livelihood on cheap wage labour in Israel, and (b) because of limited employment opportunities in the occupied territories. Third, with the establishment of West Bank universities, such as Birzeit, young women were becoming much more actively involved in political issues. Fourth, Israel's offer of the vote to women in the municipal elections of 1976 (whatever the ulterior motives) broke the traditional convention that had shut women out of

26. Warnock, *Land before Honour*, p. 163.

political life as participant individuals. Fifth, the election of the right wing Likud government in 1977 and its annexationist policies enlivened fears and heightened political activism in the Occupied Territories. Sixth, the failure of the US-sponsored Camp David accords (signed in 1978) to make progress on the question of Palestinian self-determination heightened the urgent need for organised mass rejection of the occupation.

In the West Bank a new generation of locally educated women from middle-class families was geared much more to economic development than to charity, to female empowerment than dependency, to mass mobilisation and participatory democracy than authoritarian military government.[27] In their thinking they drew a distinction between 'self-help', or ad hoc projects providing social relief, and 'self-reliance', the latter implying the need for a national strategy for economic and social development (see Table 1).

The first of the new Working Women's Committees (WWC) was established in Ramallah on International Women's Day, 8 March 1978. Its founders were socially mobile educated, urban, middle-class women, who wanted to create a movement with a specific women's agenda that would operate in tandem with the larger national liberation movement under the PLO. But the immediate and basic problem that confronted the founders of the new committee was communication with women across socio-economic class and religious lines (Christian, Muslim). Conservative social attitudes existed towards women in the workplace and in trade unions, where they might come in 'contact' with men. To find out the needs of women the leadership persuaded members to go out into the 'countryside' to listen and learn. Giacaman describes the philosophy of the committee:

> The popular movement is extremely important not only because it raised the consciousness of villages, but equally because it helped raise people like me—nice middle class academics on the fringe of their society—to get acquainted and link up with real people, the rural majority, 70 per cent of the people.[28]

The *modus operandi* of the WWC was basically very simple. A small group of dedicated women from the parent committee would form a local committee in a village, camp or town to set up a

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27. ibid., p. 164.
28. Strum, *The Women Are Marching*, p. 63.

project based on the principle of 'self-reliance'; this would be autonomous and based through consultation on the needs of the local people; in turn the local committee would become part of a larger national network. Ideas and initiatives might flow in both directions between grassroots and the national executive.[29] Conventional operating procedures such as leadership elections were kept to a minimum to avoid the 'prying eyes' of the occupation. The ultimate aim was the improvement of women's political, economic and social conditions as part of the process of liberation from all forms of colonial exploitation.

The new women's committees sometimes worked in cooperation with charitable organisations in setting up projects, overcoming limitations placed on their operations by the occupation. Most likely there was also considerable overlap of members at grassroots level. By 1983, thirty-three committees had been set up in towns, villages and refugee camps, representing a wide cross-section of Palestinian female society.

In their first decade, women's committees grew rapidly, with an estimated membership of over 10,000.[30] But their decision to work within the PLO structure led to subsequent ideological fragmentation of the committees across the major divisions in the PLO, as had earlier occurred in the Palestinian women's movement in Lebanon. In March 1980 some of the original WWC broke away to form the Union of Palestinian Working Women's Committees (UPWWC), which follows the program of the Communist party. Soon after, the pro-PFLP (Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine) Union of Palestinian Women's Committees (UPWC) was set up in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. In 1983 the pro-*Fatah* Union of Women's Committees for Social Work (UWCSW) was founded. Finally, the original WWC became the Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees (PFWAC) which followed the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP). In addition, there were a number of professional middle-class women, some with links to *al-Haq*, the Ramallah-based human rights organisation, who remained independent, but had a close association with the committees across partisan lines.[31]

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29. Warnock, *Land before Honour*, p. 166.
30. ibid., p. 167.
31. This group includes, for example, Rita Giacaman, Islah Jad and Hanan

It is debatable whether ideological fragmentation of the women's committees was all that negative. Opportunities were provided for women to enter the political arena and to become involved in issues, from the left-wing socialist perspective of three of the committees (UPWWC, UPWC, PFWAC) to the social welfarist approach of the pro-*Fatah* UWCSW. Committees were nominally linked through the Higher Women's Council (established 1989) which, however, rarely met. The committees believed that the contribution of women to the national struggle for independence could only be achieved by improving their socio-economic status in society. A summary of their major objectives includes:

- Mobilisation of women to improve their socio-economic status.
- Training and coordinating women for employment outside the home.
- Raising women's educational standards and political awareness.
- Providing child-care facilities and social relief to needy families.
- Fostering cultural and national exhibitions.

Women's work committees were generally decentralised, with links to universities and trade unions. They also had a strong commitment to grassroots democracy, which enabled them to continue work when the leadership was immobilised by the Israeli Defence Force (IDF).[32] Funding for the committees came from locally raised sources (craft bazaars, especially Palestinian embroidery) and membership subscriptions. There was some overseas funding of group projects, but in 1982 this was restricted by an Israeli military order, which required a permit before funds could be imported.

Women's committees received much the same brutal treatment from the IDF as was meted out to other Palestinian institutions under the occupation. This included arrest, imprisonment, interrogation, refusal to issue operating permits, restrictions on conduct

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Mikhail Ashrawi of Birzeit University; Mona Rishmawi, International Commission of Jurists; and Randa Siniora of *al-Haq*, a human rights organisation. Strum, *The Women Are Marching*, p. 64.

32. ibid., p. 66.

of meetings, denial of permits for building construction and of permission to leave the country. There were also frequent raids on committee headquarters and seizure of files. Israeli authorities tried to weaken the committees by attacking their welfare and educational activities. Kindergartens and child-minding facilities were frequent targets of the IDF.

It is difficult to know the exact number of women that were members before the *Intifada* uprising began on 9 December 1987. Repeated Israeli raids on files of some committees led to few incriminating records being kept, especially during the *Intifada*. One estimate is that about 2–3 per cent of West Bank women were activist committee members at the end of 1987; about 10 per cent used some of their services, and a total of 15–20 per cent were indirectly involved with them.[33]

Impact of the Intifada

Mounting unrest towards the Israelis reached crisis point during the *Intifada* (1987–93). Within a relatively short time the *Intifada* had affected all walks of life. Women, like men, became involved in an intensified nationalist struggle. Daily conflict with the 'iron fist' policy of Israel's government forced women to take on a more militant rejectionist stance, which spilled over onto the streets, to both support and incite men to greater effort. Arab women of all ages clashed with Israeli soldiers; many were arrested, imprisoned, interrogated, sometimes sexually molested, raped and killed. Such feminine behaviour before the *Intifada* would have been frowned on. Now women were being applauded for their actions. Released women prisoners were honoured and welcomed back into the fold as patriots. Here was an important attitudinal shift that, in the short term at least, could accept women who might have been sexually violated by their captors.

Within the countryside the non-partisan United Palestinian Medical Relief Committees (UPMRC) extended the range of services to women and families who had become the victims of Israel's repressive policies. Women's research institutions established by women's committees in Nablus, Birzeit, Bisan, Jerusalem and Gaza in the period between 1988 and 1993 produced a number of studies relating to family planning, reproduction, legal and economic status of women, and gender issues involving men and

33. ibid., p. 68.

women within the family.[34] The *Intifada* also highlighted as never before the need for women to establish priorities in terms of feminist interests in the wider nationalist movement.

Victims of the *Intifada*, killed, maimed or wounded, were to be found in many households. Women became 'breadwinners' in 37 per cent of the families in the West Bank.[35] Eight per cent of all fatalities were female. Women could not easily hide from the realities of the *Intifada*, or pass responsibility over to the men. Men of all socio-economic backgrounds were under considerable pressure and much more 'reliant' on women in the home, in a support role in the street, and in the workplace. Urban women took the lead in providing education for students following the closure of schools and universities for lengthy periods during the *Intifada*.[36] *Intifada* or 'underground' education, even to the point of conferring of university degrees, operated under the noses of the IDF. Village and camp women participated in the distribution of food and monitoring of IDF movements. Household gardens were cultivated for food production, which was shared among needy families, enabling villages and camps to withstand curfews imposed by the IDF.

The image of an embattled people became a reality for men and women during the *Intifada*. Women's committees managed to attract a number of men in villages and camps to participate in women's projects, while in the cities young men and women participated openly in practical work related to the *Intifada*. Men confined to the home by the *Intifada* began to help with housework, with more emphasis on shared decision-making within the family. Families suspended marriage dowries (*mahr*) and social celebrations as patriotic acts.[37]

Women's committees used the *Intifada* to broaden the base of their membership. However, more recruits were probably attracted by national struggle than by purely feminist issues. Home economics became an important cornerstone of the national

34. Nadia Hijab, 'Palestinian Women: The Key to a Secular Democratic State', in Centre for Policy Analysis on Palestine, *Palestinian Self-Government: An Early Assessment* (Washington DC: Centre for Policy Analysis on Palestine, April 1994), p. 13.
35. K. Abu Ali, 'Basic Observations'.
36. ibid.
37. ibid.

economy. Women's cooperatives and production centres appeared, with a dual emphasis on 'self-reliance' and 'rejection' of Israeli products. Sometimes these operations were hastily conceived, and were often under-funded, under-skilled and lacked adequate marketing outlets. In some cases long-term planning for development was less in evidence than a political statement that 'the women were on the march'.[38]

Despite the social upheaval created by the *Intifada*, women's committees were not immune from ideological divisiveness within the wider nationalist movement. For example, in 1989 the pro-DFLP Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees supported the PLO line on negotiations for peace with the United States; but another faction of the PFWAC took a rejectionist stand. This disrupted a number of PFWAC projects, and led to a scramble for property and assets, both factions claiming to be the true PFWAC.[39] Similar ideological divisions were to occur over the self-rule provisions of the Oslo accords of September 1993.

Hamas and the Women's Committees

The Islamic Resistance Movement (*Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*) or *Hamas* is a militant offshoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, which came to prominence in Gaza following the outbreak of the *Intifada*. It identifies with the uprising of Izz ad-Din al-Qasim (1935) in Palestine against the Zionists and the British, and the policies of the Muslim Brotherhood after 1968.[40] It is probable that Israel 'encouraged' the Brotherhood in Gaza in the late 1970s, as a 'charitable' counter to the more militant PLO. Gaza University became a centre of Islamic fundamentalist activity and the scene of considerable confrontation between *Hamas* and *Fatah* supporters over admission to faculty and student committees. In the 1970s and 1980s fundamentalists set up a network of educational, health, cultural, and sporting bodies, with the emphasis on fostering Islamic values, including the wearing of the veil, which served as a symbol of religious

38. Z. Kamal, The Palestinian Federation of Women's Action Committees, UN Asian Seminar and NGO Symposium, Nicosia, 20–24 January 1992, *ICCP Newsletter*, no. 40, February 1992; N. Hijab, 'Palestinian Women', p. 12.
39. Strum, *The Women Are Marching*, p. 263.
40. *Hamas*, Covenant, August 1988.

decorum and national identity. This was accompanied by a rapid increase in mosque construction in the Occupied Territories.

Sara Roy shows that *Hamas* gained ground over PLO-based organisations in Gaza during the *Intifada* through vastly superior social welfare provisions in a society where interfactionalism had undermined the earlier cooperative efforts of the *Intifada*.[41] *Hamas'* popularity has also been rising in the West Bank. For many it provides a secure religious identity, associated with a vigorous national struggle to liberate the 'whole' of Palestine. For example, in 1992 it significantly increased its vote in elections to the Chambers of Commerce in Ramallah and Nablus, and on student university committees in Nablus and Hebron. However in 1993 more business and professional institutions continued to be dominated by PLO supporters.[42]

Hamas is opposed in principle to a secular society in which men and women participate 'equally' within public life. According to its covenant, the proper place for a woman is in the home, where 'she plays the most important role in looking after the family, rearing the children, and imbuing them with moral values and thoughts derived from Islam'. The preservation of family values is central to the philosophy of *Hamas*, as is the belief that the family represents the cornerstone of Palestinian Islamic society. Thus *Shari'a* or Islamic law must be the basis of personal status laws governing the family. The head of *Hamas'* Young Women's Muslim Association in Gaza said that women should serve the *Intifada* by providing the necessities at home for their men to fight the 'jihad' to liberate Palestine.[43]

Hamas is opposed to the PLO's secular policies, observing that 'we are unable to exchange the present or future of Palestine with the secular idea'. It is committed to the 'liberation' of all of Palestine as a religious duty or 'jihad'. Its extremist wing has carried this concept to great length through 'jihad', with considerable loss of Jewish and Arab lives. *Hamas* is a growing organisation which draws economic support from Islamic states (such as Iran, Egypt, Jordan, Saudi Arabia) and Muslim organ-

41. S. Roy, 'New Dynamics of Civic Disintegration', *Journal of Palestine Studies* (Berkeley), vol. 22, no. 4 (Summer 1993), p. 29.
42. Z. Abu-Amr, *'Hamas*: Historical and Political Background', *Journal of Palestine Studies*, vol. 22, no. 4 (Summer 1993), p. 15.
43. Strum, *The Women Are Marching*, p. 222.

isations throughout the world, especially in the USA.

The *Intifada* highlighted the growing chasm between the women's committees and *Hamas*. Educated committee women did not take kindly to threats and intimidation by Islamic fundamentalists over the wearing of the veil, which appeared to symbolise adherence to the religio-political principles of *Hamas*. The four women's committees looked to the United National Leadership of the Uprising (UNLU) to support their case. It was rumoured that there were some women in the UNLU. But they were disappointed by the response of the UNLU. *Fatah*, the dominant element in the UNLU, which had been cultivating a Muslim 'national' appeal, was disinclined to push too hard on a feminist agenda. In a communique in August 1989 the committees advised women to struggle with men who attacked their behaviour and dress, even if this became physical.[44]

There were reports in the early 1990s of a considerable number of women in the West Bank and Gaza Strip wearing the veil (*hijab*) and Islamic dress (*jilbaab*). Peer pressure, religious proselytisation, mosque-related largesse, and national and patriotic solidarity with Saddam Hussein during the Gulf War might account to a large extent for this behaviour. However, the extent to which religious dress alone represented a profound attitudinal change among women was much less certain. A Norwegian survey carried out in 1993 found that 29 per cent of women and 20 per cent of men preferred 'secular' values.[45] It concluded that women, more than men, were a potential force for secularism. It is, however, difficult to agree with Nadia Hijab, on the strength of this limited survey, that women 'are definitely a strong potential force for secularism'.

The *Intifada* highlighted the fact that the contribution of the women's work committees to the national struggle was valued most highly by the male leadership of the PLO. But when it came to specifically feminist issues, traditional values and political alliances often obscured or relegated women's interests from immediate consideration. In the 1990s women's committees have been more insistent on a feminist agenda within the framework of the larger nationalist movement. At a UN conference in January 1992 a pro-*Fatah* UWCSW speaker emph-

44. ibid., p. 217.
45. Quoted in Hijab, 'Palestinian Women', p. 14.

asised the need for collective organisation to enhance the rights of women:

> Women should endeavour to organise themselves within the context of women's associations, institutions and trade unions.
>
> Women should endeavour to assert their presence in all spheres of life, and resist suggestions that they should once again be confined to their homes.
>
> Women should clearly realise that the struggle for enjoyment of their rights will succeed only through the joint struggle in which men and women must engage.[46]

The significant point is the argument that women should exert their presence through 'joint struggle' for 'equality' with men, and not in terms of gender conflict with men, as has happened in many industrialised countries. Palestinian women prioritise their future on the successful outcome of the current peace process exemplified in the Oslo accords, but they are disinclined to push the debate to the point of confrontation with the men. In this respect they differ from Western feminists, some of whom, on questionable theoretical grounds, offer instant diagnoses of the problems of Palestinian women in terms of gender oppression or sexual discrimination.[47]

Women's committee leaders resent personal status laws which enshrine patriarchy, but not all are convinced that this is the immediate root of their problem. For them it is the oppressive policies of the occupation which have adversely affected their lives and those of their families. It is believed that only with the removal of the occupation will women be better placed to determine their own future, including, according to one newsletter, 'reproductive freedom'.[48] But will they? There is a body of historical evidence which shows that women in a number of anti-colonial struggles have been relegated to marginal roles after the achievement of independence. The determination of Palestinian women to organise for collective effort in the context of the national struggle shows a will to meet this contingency.

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46. S. Mahmoud, 'Palestinian Women: Present Situation and Aspirations', United Nations Asian Seminar and NGO Symposium on the Question of Palestine, Nicosia, 20–24 January 1992.
47. For a critique see C. Mahanty, 'Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses', *Feminist Review*, no. 30, 1988.
48. Strum, *The Women Are Marching*, p. 223.

Looking to the Future

Palestinian women have had a limited presence in the PLO since 1964. The GUPW, founded in 1965 and an affiliate of the PLO, has been active outside the Occupied Territories in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan, and has provided women with an international focus through UN-sponsored conferences. But its concern has been primarily with women's issues (for example, literacy, health, child-minding facilities, cooperative, cultural and productive enterprises). In the 1980s female representation in the Palestine National Council (PNC), the PLO's parliament, amounted to about 10 per cent of all delegates. No woman has yet been appointed to the senior Executive Committee of the PLO. There is currently only one woman heading a PLO delegation abroad.[49] Women, however, have been more visible in the PLO's cultural, social, medical and research institutions, and in informational and ancillary roles.[50] Six women participated in the Palestinian delegation to the Madrid peace process, while Hanan Ashrawi, a professor from Birzeit University and human rights activist, was briefly raised to prominence as the spokesperson for that delegation. Um Jihad (Intisar al-Wazir), wife of the late PLO leader Abu Jihad, was appointed Minister of Social Affairs in the PNA, the only woman out of sixteen appointments. She is also the only woman member of *Fatah*'s central committee. In April 1994 there were no women members on the 14-member board of the Palestinian Economic Council for Development and Reconstruction (PECDAR).

It is clear that Palestinian women have played a highly significant role in the area of women's affairs. However this has been far less evident in the main political and economic committees within the PLO, and in those that have been set up since October 1993 to make the transition from occupation to self-rule. The PLO, like neighbouring Arab governments, has up to the present excluded women from major political and economic roles. Despite its internationalist appeal, the PLO is basically quite conservative in terms of gender issues, and reflects a society within the Occupied Territories that might be resistant to hasty political change based on a revised gender balance.

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49. Hijab, 'Palestinian Women', p. 11; S. Khalifa, I don't want my body to be a bridge for the state'.
50. K. Abu Ali, 'Basic Observations'.

Arafat and the PLO leadership, including the left-wing PFLP and DFLP, are not known to have a specific women's agenda, other than in an ideological context of pursuing national liberation based on a program of social justice and 'equality' between men and women. This was seen in the PLO's Declaration of Independence of November 1988, and was repeated in its Interim Basic Law in April 1994. Such a formulation is also found in the constitutions of a number of Arab states, which provide for 'equal rights' for men and women. The women's committees, however, believe that these constitutions are in contradiction with existing personal status laws, as they do not provide for real 'equality' within the family.

For Palestinian women's committees, the process of interim self-rule has highlighted the need to pursue their policies with great vigour. The emphasis on 'equality' within the home and 'equal opportunities' written into law are currently basic demands. However, the extent to which the leadership of the four committees represents the interests of all Palestinian women is, of course, the crucial question. Do they, for example, have the same priorities as literate and illiterate, old and young, women in the refugee camps, villages and across the religio-political divide in *Hamas*? Do they represent the opinion of all women? Have they got their priorities right? Are they in tune with the needs of *Hamas* women, for example, on the question of personal status laws and the rights of women beyond the home?

When the PNA finally comes to rule on the question of personal status laws it may have to consider three options (we use polygamy as an example, being the most controversial issue in personal status laws):

1. A secular civil code, administered by civil courts under state jurisdiction (polygamy banned; Western/Turkish models).
2. A 'liberal' interpretation of the Islamic *Shari'a*, administered by civil courts under state jurisdiction (polygamy banned; Tunisian model).
3. Maintaining the status quo or personal status laws administered by *Shari'a* courts (polygamy permitted but restricted; as in Egypt, Jordan and most Arab states).

In the case of Option 1 above, no Arab state has yet broken with the Islamic *Shari'a* on personal status laws, although some have incorporated secular, civil, commercial and penal codes into

their legal systems. The reason for this may be that Islam has been intricately associated with Arab history, culture and nationalism in the twentieth century. It is difficult to believe that the PNA would go down the secular track on personal status laws, as it would be out of step with the majority of Arab states, and as it might indicate an unpatriotic capitulation to Western-style values; which would certainly be exploited by *Hamas* and Islamic conservatives. Women activists who advocate Option 1 might also be accused of advocating a form of Western cultural imperialism.

Option 2 above might permit the women's committees more opportunities to build on 'liberal' legislation that would be more generally acceptable to a wider cross-section of Palestinian society.[51] But *Hamas* fundamentalist and conservative religious elements might be expected to oppose any moves to bring *Shari'a* courts under 'state' (Palestinian National Authority) jurisdiction.

Option 3 above, if retained, would be opposed by the women's committees as in the past. They would see it as a negative conservative reaction to women's rights, and the issue would remain the subject of considerable agitation, ameliorated only in the short term by the need to achieve full independence.

As we have seen, Palestinian women have come a long way in the twentieth century from the era of the 'secluded' upper class *shakhsiya*, committed to token involvement in the nationalist movement, and to the professional leadership of the various women's working committees; from a phase where women feared to cross the political threshold into public life, to the present, where demands for independence are linked ideologically to demands for women's rights (see Table 1). But the interpretation which the PNA gives to women's demands for 'equal' rights may in the end depend more on the alignment of inter-Arab politics and the current political relationship between the PLO, *Hamas* and Israel in the context of self-rule, than on the success of the articulate ideological demands of the women's committees.

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51. Um Jihad, who is said to 'have the ear' of Yasser Arafat, might be anticipating such a move towards a more 'liberal' Islamic policy. For example, in August 1994 she helped draft a declaration of principles which would revise laws permitting polygamy and discrimination against women in matters of inheritance. See Yasser Arafat, 'Women in Gaza', *Jerusalem Post International Edition*, 27 August 1994, p. 10.

However we look at this question, its outcome, though far from certain, might well be crucial in determining the future evolution of Palestinian society into the next century.

Chapter 7

Afterthoughts

Geoffrey Jukes

The preceding chapters deal comprehensively with the principal factors affecting future political development of the Middle East in general and of the peace process in particular. They do not, however, deal with the prospects for renewed military confrontation, and although the likelihood of this is probably lower than at any time since the Second World War, some aspects of the military situation may be worth mentioning. While the outcome of the Gulf War has probably indicated to all concerned the dangers inherent in provoking the US-led coalition of outside and regional powers into concerted action in defence of the status quo, in the longer term the presumed aspirations of Iran, Iraq and Pakistan (perhaps also of Libya) to possession of nuclear weapons raise a question mark. These aspirations, when not denied, are usually defended in terms of the nuclear capacity Israel has long been assumed to have, and which India demonstrated it had by a single 'peaceful' test of a nuclear 'device' in 1974. Western (including Israeli) concern about these aspirations, when linked to the fears of Islamic radicalism (particularly the 'clash of civilisations' hypothesis) mentioned by Ahmad Shboul in Chapter 2 and to current fear of the undesirable proliferation of knowledge through the hiring of impecunious scientists from the former Soviet Union, could lead to action along the lines of that taken by Israel against an Iraqi nuclear reactor in 1981, with incalculable but probably highly detrimental effects upon prospects for a long peace in the Middle East.

To put these fears in perspective, it is worth recalling that an authoritative and hence widely accepted prognostication made in

1966[1] postulated that by 1995 the number of countries capable of producing nuclear weapons could increase from five to thirty-two. That the actual increase has been only to six acknowledged (India being the sixth) and two assumed (Israel and, more recently and less certainly, Pakistan) is due in part to intensive anti-proliferation activity by the nuclear powers. But it probably owes more to the sheer expense of creating a credibly viable and deliverable nuclear weapons system compared to that of conducting a few tests, and to decades of experience that, beyond deterrence of the worst but least frequent case, i.e., of all-out attack by another nuclear power, the foreign policy advantages deriving from possession of nuclear weapons are hard to identify and harder still to quantify.

The possibility of proliferation accelerating through the hiring by 'maverick' states in the Muslim world or elsewhere of former Soviet nuclear-program scientists cannot be dismissed out of hand. Their numbers are large, many have lost their jobs, and they now have, at any rate in principle, a freedom to leave the country which was denied or severely restricted in Soviet times. But there are several reasons not to overstate their potential for augmenting the risk of proliferation. First is the difficulty and very high costs already mentioned of acquiring a numerically and qualitatively credible nuclear weapons system, as opposed to carrying out a few weapons tests (itself only cheap by comparison). Second is that for almost fifty years a large pool of potentially recruitable nuclear-weapons program scientists and technologists has theoretically existed in the shape of the many thousands employed in the American, British and French weapons programs and in associated activities in a number of other countries where nuclear power is used to generate electricity. They are much better paid than their Soviet counterparts, but have never been so well rewarded that a sufficiently determined 'maverick' could not offer them much more in hope of tempting them away. Unlike their Soviet counterparts, they could go abroad relatively easily, but if there has been any such exodus, it has been small, has never included any leading figures, and has not, or not yet, brought into the 'nuclear club' any nations which could not otherwise have joined it.

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1. Leonard Beaton, *Must the Bomb Spread?* (London: Pelican and the Institute for Strategic Studies, 1966), p. 9.

Fifty years after the first test of a nuclear weapon, the six acknowledged and two assumed members of that 'club' are all countries with large high-technology sectors, those of China, India and Pakistan quite large in absolute terms, though small relative to their total populations. The other assumed member, Israel, is a very special case, enjoying a disproportionately large share of the world's scientific and technological talent, almost unconditional support from the United States and from Jewish communities world-wide, and general though less unreserved support from most other industrialised countries. This suggests that if the non-proliferation regime were to break down, the early new entrants to the nuclear 'club' would be countries with similar profiles, i.e., with a high-technology sector large in absolute terms, and/or a substantial international support network among high-technology countries. No Muslim country in the Middle East has those prerequisites for rapid entry to the ranks of nuclear powers.

Three other factors likely to inhibit a contribution by former Soviet scientists to an 'Islamic bomb' should also be mentioned. First, scientists who joined programs regarded as controversial by many of their academic colleagues mostly had a substantial measure of patriotism among their motives. In the Soviet Union those who had moral reservations from the outset, such as Peter Kapitsa, declined to take part, and those who subsequently acquired them, such as Andrey Sakharov, resigned to campaign against nuclear weapons, not to offer to make them for other countries. That being so, ex-Soviet scientists approached for possible recruitment, or hearing of an approach to a colleague, would be highly likely to report the fact to the Russian security services, leading to expulsion of the would-be recruiter. Second, as in all the intellectual professions in Russia, many scientists are Jews, with even less incentive than their Slav colleagues to contribute to an 'Islamic bomb', for which Israel would be the prime target, or to contemplate others doing so. Third, steps have been taken by several Western governments to offer alternatives to the potentially vulnerable, in the shape of contracts for research with joint-venture institutes in Russia, or posts in Western countries. The situation bears, and undoubtedly receives, close monitoring by Russian and Western (especially Israeli) intelligence services, but its potential for destabilising the Middle Eastern peace process or contributing to a putative 'clash of civilisations' should not be overestimated.

As for conventional military operations, Israel has on all occasions shown itself capable of handling any individual or collective attack from its neighbours, and those neighbours' capacity to mount such attacks has been greatly reduced. Avi Shlaim indicated in Chapter 1 that Prime Minister Rabin is determined to reassert the strategic dominance of the Middle East which Israel enjoyed before the Gulf War, and for that reason prefers to deal with his neighbours one at a time. Circumstances would seem to suggest that Israel's strategic dominance has in fact been strengthened by the Gulf War to the point where it does not need reassertion. Like most of Israel's previous wars, and like the Falklands War of 1982 but on a much larger scale, the Gulf War demonstrated how easily high-technology forces, such as those of Israel and of its main international supporters, can demolish large conscript 'cannon fodder' opponents while incurring very few casualties themselves. The armed forces of Israel's most intransigent neighbour, Syria, have shown themselves less well-suited to operate high-technology equipment, and their ability to acquire it has been much reduced by the collapse of the Soviet Union, which supplied most of their armaments on very easy credit or grant terms no longer available from its Russian or Ukrainian successors. The situation tends to support both Shlaim's argument that the question is not whether but when Syria will come to terms with Israel, and his clear preference for Peres' objectives and negotiating style over those of Rabin.

Iran's ability to disrupt the military balance in the Gulf or the peace process in general is also limited by its being neither Arab nor predominantly Sunni, and by its distraction towards influence-building among the newly-independent Transcaucasian and Central Asian states of the former Soviet Union. There it is in competition for influence not only with Muslim Turkey and, to a lesser extent, with Saudi Arabia, but also with Russia and China. Its main assets are a cultural influence dating back to well before Russian overlordship of the area, and its potential ability to offer alternatives to the currrent routes through Russia for export of the area's natural resources, especially oil and natural gas. Its main disadvantages are that its ethno-linguistic links are only with the Tajiks, and Shiism is common only among the Azerbaijanis. Its recent purchases from Russia of a nuclear electric-power reactor and some diesel-powered submarines have aroused Western (especially US) disquiet. But Russia, a near neighbour, has even less motivation than the West to foster the

creation of a nuclear-armed radical Islamic state on its southern borders, adjacent to former Soviet Republics in Transcaucasia and Central Asia whose rulers, almost all former high-ranking Communists, see Islamic radicalism as the biggest potential threat to their own rule and the stability of their new countries. It therefore makes sense to assume, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that the Russians have no wish to cut their own throats, that the reactor supply agreement contains at least the normal International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards against diversion and enrichment of reactor fuel into weapons-grade material, and that the lack of expressions of concern by the former Soviet republics in the region indicates that they do not see the sale as a threat.

As for the submarines, previous Iranian interference with tanker traffic in the Gulf, mostly by free-floating mines, took place during the Iran–Iraq war in which Iraq was the favoured contender of the West and of most Arab governments. These measures by Iran were meant to hit directly at the oil revenues of Iraq and its Gulf supporters by deterring tanker traffic to and from their ports, and indirectly to induce them to put pressure on Iraq to end the war. If hostilities were to break out again, the submarines would probably be used for the same purpose, relying on the limited capacity in anti-submarine warfare of the small navies of Iraq and the Gulf states. However, such actions would almost certainly bring on a return of the US and several other NATO navies, with submarine-hunting capabilities of a totally different order, against which the submarines' survival in the relatively shallow waters of the Gulf would probably be brief. Nor, in the event of Iranian attacks on international shipping, would the US and allied navies necessarily confine themselves to submarine hunting. They would almost certainly use aircraft and missiles to give Iranian shore installations and airfields the same treatment they gave Iraq's during the Gulf War. Iran's disruptive potential lies more in its presumed support of radical movements elsewhere in the Islamic world, including some which go in for terrorism, than in its acquisition of military capabilities from Russia, China or elsewhere.

It is in this respect, sub-conventional warfare, that the future of the peace process looks least assured. Guerrilla warfare is always difficult to stamp out unless the grievances which give rise to it are dealt with, because the guerrilla's initial

objectives—to create disorder, and thereby cast doubt on a government's control over the society—are more modest, and hence more easily attained, than those of a government, which needs to be seen as totally in control. In addition, the guerrilla can choose his targets, while the government has to try to guard all that the guerrilla might choose, and public support prompted by grievances renders the guerrilla an elusive target. He can move easily from harmless civilian to militant fighter and vice versa, often within a few minutes, whereas his opponents are usually uniformed and visible.

The problems presented to the Israeli Defence Forces by *Hamas'* and Islamic Jihad's operations, especially those of suicide bombers, are obvious (and also present a theological difficulty—the belief that martyrdom for the faith ensures automatic entry to Paradise irrespective of previous conduct, a belief not shared by Christianity or Judaism, need be held by only a small proportion of Muslims to ensure a constant flow of recruits for suicide missions); but the dilemma they create for Arafat is agonising. If he cannot demonstrate ability to prevent such operations being mounted from PLO-governed territory, he loses credibility both with the Israelis and with would-be providers of the foreign aid he so desperately needs; but to the extent he succeeds in doing so, he risks being discredited among Palestinians as a mere tool of the Israelis.

The authors of Chapters 2, 3 and 4 all criticise various aspects of 'exclusionism' in Muslim societies, pointing to the exclusion from the political process of national minorities and Islamic groups. They advocate movement towards including such minorities and movements in the political process, as a way to accommodate the grievances of the excluded and to moderate the actions of those movements which react by embracing violence. Ahmad Shboul argues in Chapter 2 the need for a 'social contract', the attachment of specific meaning to the somewhat imprecise Qur'anic concept of *'shura'* (consultation) and restoration of its original meaning 'temporary, alternating', to the Arabic word *'dawla'* (state, government). Amin Saikal in Chapter 4 advocates concentration on building 'civil society' rather than pushing Western-style 'democratisation', while James Piscatori demonstrates in Chapter 3 that many of the elements of 'civil society' already exist to varying extents in Muslim Middle Eastern countries. So, in more limited contexts, do Samina Yasmeen and

Ron Macintyre in Chapters 5 and 6.

Unfortunately none can yet prescribe how these unquestionably desirable goals are to be attained. At the general level is the problem of how those now in power in Middle Eastern countries can be induced to accept the idea of voluntarily yielding it to opponents if the electorate votes that they should. At the particular level of the peace process it is hard to see how mainstream PLO feeling, that the present deal with Israel is the best that can be achieved, can be reconciled with the substantial minority rejectionist view, that Arafat's acceptance of it is a sell-out and betrayal.

However, all point to the diversity of Muslim societies as a caution against stereotyping them as uniform and static by virtue of having a common religion, and all Muslims as potential, if not actual, fundamentalists. As Shboul rightly points out, this makes no more sense than to stereotype all Western societies in terms of the values propagated by extreme Christian fundamentalist sects in the United States, and ignores the existence of a vigorous secularist debate in some Muslim societies which has attracted almost no Western attention.

Another point relevant to dealings with the Muslim Middle East is the perception of themselves as 'victims' that is held by many Muslims. This has not disappeared with decolonisation, because of perceived continuation of Western economic and cultural dominance. Contrasts are drawn, it may be added, between the swift and decisive action taken against Iraq on the one hand and the apparent paralysis of will over defending the Bosnian Muslims or at least providing them with weapons with which to defend themselves on the other. On the northern periphery of the Middle East, Russia is perceived to have supported Christian Armenia over Muslim Azerbaijan in the long-running conflict over Nagorno–Karabakh and, while accepting the total secession of the Baltic States from the CIS, to have chosen to use extreme force against predominantly Muslim Chechnya's attempt to follow their example. Nor has it gone unnoticed that this met with no more than token protests from the West, on the legalistic ground that Chechnya (forcibly incorporated in the nineteenth century) is 'part of Russia', whereas the Baltic States (forcibly reincorporated in the twentieth century) were not, by virtue of being constituent Republics of the Soviet Union. More recently still, until the perpetrators of the

Oklahoma City bombing were arrested, speculation by 'experts' that it was the work of Muslim fundamentalists was widespread, even though its date, the second anniversary of a botched FBI attack on an esoteric religious sect in Texas, pointed to a domestic origin. That a sense of victimisation should exist among Muslims is hardly surprising, and the suggestions contained in some of the papers of a greater need for understanding are highly apposite.

That having been said, the need for understanding works both ways. Shboul defines a state of crisis in the Arab world, caused largely by disappointed expectations of modernisation and the persistence of autocratic rulers, and Saikal notes the general failure of the Middle East political process to advance beyond overt or veiled authoritarianism. It is undoubtedly true, as Shboul points out, that many of the regimes derive support from the West, but that, with all due respect, is neither here nor there. It may well suit Western countries for such regimes to exist, but the last time the West restored to power a Middle Eastern autocrat under challenge from his own people was many years ago (Iran, in 1953); while (by definition anti-Western) leaders of decolonisation almost everywhere (for example in Egypt, Algeria, Syria, Iraq and Sudan), once in power, espoused authoritarianism as enthusiastically as any *ancien regime*, often behind a screen of democratic slogans.

Islamic radicals are indeed not responsible for all the terrorism in the world, but they do commit much of it, and if the first reaction of 'experts' was to blame the Oklahoma City bombing on them, it was because several similar previous outrages directed at Americans—such as the bombing of airliners and of the World Trade Centre in New York—have been convincingly linked to Islamic radical movements. If, as is stated or implied in several of the chapters, the radicals' excesses can be attributed to frustration at exclusion from their own countries' political processes, the outside world is being required to pay in disruption for those countries' inability to develop 'inclusive' political systems, and is unlikely to go on doing so indefinitely. That forbearance has its limits is already being shown by the rise of racist anti-immigrant movements in France, Germany, UK and elsewhere, primarily directed against Muslims (Algerians, Turks, Pakistanis, Bangladeshis) and by the actions taken by governments of the advanced industrial countries to open their borders to each others' nationals but simultaneously to tighten

controls on entry from 'outside'. The US effort to quarantine Iran for allegedly supporting international terrorism has so far attracted no other adherents, but the hardships caused to the Iraqi population through prolonged UN restrictions indicate the potential consequences of gaining an international reputation as a source of trouble. It is certainly true that the outside world needs to understand the situation in the Muslim societies, but equally true that the Muslim societies need to understand the likely consequences of exporting their problems rather than solving them.

The last two chapters deal with the question of women's status, Chapter 5 in the Muslim societies as a whole, and Chapter 6 with the role of Palestinian women. In Chapter 5 Dr Yasmeen quite rightly points out that women are under-represented in politics not only in the Middle East but in most countries of the world. She suggests that Islamic injunctions and restrictive interpretations of the *Shari'a* only partly account for their low position, other factors such as gender politics, the attributed role of women as nurturers, and seclusion to prevent loss of virginity before marriage, factors which have parallels in non-Islamic countries, for example in Southern Europe, being at least as responsible. Dr Yasmeen notes also that the women who have broken through the barriers (such as Tansu Ciller, Prime Minister of Turkey) tend to be from rich or at least middle class families; and that the generality of women exercise influence in 'non-traditional' ways, for example, through the family circle or women's groups. The label 'non-traditional' is surely a misnomer for the most traditional way to exert feminine influence, through the home environment. In his comedy 'Lysistrata', Aristophanes had the women of Athens and Sparta succeed in ending a long war by agreeing to deny their husbands sexual intercourse while the war continued. And 'Lysistrata' was written in about 415 BC! More recently, women's home influence was often cited in Western societies as a reason why they 'did not need' the right to vote. In any event, it is not unique to the Islamic societies, so does not specially compensate for political under-representation.

Dr Yasmeen's point about the class origins of women who succeed in breaking down the barriers is, however, very important. All the advanced industrial societies exhibit high levels of female participation in the workforce, and declining demand for the heavy manual labour for which males have an

advantage. The restrictions placed on women in the Middle Eastern societies limit their contribution to increasing national wealth, but the ability of some educated women to compete successfully in male-dominated fields provides role models which previous generations lacked.

Dr Macintyre's analysis of the role of Palestinian women under occupation (first British, then Israeli) indicates that the women's movement went through three phases from 1920, and that in the first two there was no specific feminist agenda. However, in the third phase, which began in 1978, national liberation began to be equated with women's rights to equality with men, though to be sought by cooperation rather than by gender confrontation. There is tension between the women's movement's objective of equality and *Hamas'* traditionalist resistance to the idea of any significant public role for women. The PLO, while in principle secularist, has declined to confront *Hamas* on this issue, mainly for fear of losing mass support, and without clear indications of the extent to which the women's movement is representative of mass female opinion, it is difficult to forecast what type of personal status laws will be introduced to replace the present laws derived from the Ottoman Islamic Code of 1917, in which polygamy is limited but not banned, and responsibility for personal status laws vested in *Shari'a* or religious courts, not the secular judiciary. About all that can be said is that a law banning polygamy and wholly secular (the Turkish model), or banning polygamy and operated by *Shari'a* courts but under secular jurisdiction (the Tunisian model) will be unacceptable to *Hamas*, and one which permits though restricts polygamy (as in most Arab states) and is administered by *Shari'a* courts will be accepted by *Hamas* but opposed by the women's movement.

The issue of women's rights will clearly provide yet another problem for Arafat's administration, given the impossibility of reconciling the views of the women's movement with those of *Hamas*. However, this is a minor problem compared to the major differences with *Hamas* over acceptance or rejection of the peace settlement with Israel, and the experience of previous decolonisation movements in the Middle East and elsewhere suggests that women's rights are unlikely to be given the social priority necessary to advance much.

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