BATILI DEMOKRATLAR VE DOĞULU DESPOTLAR?

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Dr. Bobby S. Sayyid

Leeds Üniversitesi, Sosyoloji Bölümü

Özet

Hamas'ın seçimlerdeki galibiyeti ve Batılı güçlerin bu galibiyete gösterdikleri tepki, Batılıların hem demokratik olup hem de (Batılı olmayandan çok) Batı karşıtı olarak kabul edilen siyasi hareketleri tanımlamadaki güçlüklerini gözler önüne sermektedir. Bu tebliğ, demokrasi ile Batılı kimlik arasındaki yakın ilişkiyi göz önüne alarak, İslam'ın kendini anlatması ile çağdaş İslami dünya bağlamındaki demokrasinin güçlüklerini incelemektedir. Bu tebliğ ayrıca, siyasi yapılar ile kültürel kimlik arasındaki ilişkiyi inceleyip, demokrasi ve despotluk kavramlarının belirli kültürel oluşumlarını incelemektedir. Siyasi rejimin kimliği, siyasi uygulamaları ve prosedürlerinden daha fazla önemli değildir ve ancak Batılı ya da Doğulu olarak kabul edilecekler kadar fazla bir öneme sahiptir.

MIRROR, MIRROR

WESTERN DEMOCRATS, ORIENTAL DESPOTS?

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Dr. Bobby S. Sayyid

University of Leeds, Department of Sociology, Leeds, UK

Abtract

The electoral victory of HAMAS and the reaction of Western powers to that electoral victory, suggests difficulty that Westerners have in imagining political movements that are both 'democractic' and simultaneously considered to be 'anti-Western' (rather than merely non-Western. Given this intimate relationship between democracy and Western identity, the paper examines some of the conceptual difficulties with the articulation of Islam and democracy in the context of the contemporary Islamicate world. The paper examines the relationship between political forms and cultural identity, it sets out to explore the way in which notions of "Democracy" and despotism are associated with distinct cultural formations. The identity of a political regime is less a matter of its political practices and procedures and more a function of the extent to which it can be considered 'Western' or 'Oriental'.

MIRROR, MIRROR

WESTERN DEMOCRATS, ORIENTAL DESPOTS?

Introduction

There may have been an episode of *Star Trek* in which some members of the fearless crew of the USS Enterprise end up in an identical but mirror universe. An identical universe, populated by characters which look exactly like characters from our universe poses the problem of identity: how do we differentiate the characters from 'our' universe from those who belong to the mirror universe? The way the question is resolved in *Star Trek* is by using political practices as signifiers of identity. In the mirror universe, the existence of a secret police, torture chambers, assassinations, and so on, points to the fact that even though it was inhabited by characters and objects which are superficially identical to our universe – we are, nonetheless, in another universe. This mirroring was marked out by the way in which "our" Federation of Planets, a voluntary association of different worlds, never existed in the alternative universe; instead we find ourselves confronting a vicious militaristic Terran empire. The use of political practices to mark out differences between humans makes sense once we are confronted with the similarity of our common humanity. In other words, the differences in systems of political practices become one way of delimiting different human groups.

I would like to suggest that this movement from Federation to Empire is perhaps another way of replaying the distinction between Western democracies and oriental despotism.[1] This episode of *Star Trek* (which could have been called "Mirror Mirror") can be seen as one of the periodic explorations of oriental despotism. For, to the extent that our universe is based around a valorisation of democracy, the mirror universe is beholden to racist caricatures framing the depiction of oriental despotism. Ultimately, a political system points to types of political agents; the empire is the empire because its political agents lack compassion, reason, truthfulness, etc. Thus a narrative of fundamentally different political systems becomes a narrative of fundamentally different societies. This link between the social and the political is what I want to explore in this paper. In particular, I want to look at the way that democracy is conceptualised in the post-cold war world by examining the fate of one area that it has largely failed to democratise: the world of Muslim polities. In Islamicate societies there is a strange paradox that those who claim to believe in democracy do not wish to practice it, and those who claim not to believe in democracy promise to implement it.[2] This paradox occurs in the context of the debate about the relationship between democracy and Islam, questioning, in particular, the extent to which the 'failings' of the Islamicate world are due to the absence of democracy and to what extent democracy is compatible with Islam.[3]

Delimiting Democracy

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[1] Interestingly, we discover that the mirror universe counterparts of the Enterprise who had been transported to "our" Enterprise had been immediately recognized and detained. This is explained by the capacity for rational beings to appear as savage, a capacity that savages lack, i.e. they cannot get away with pretending to be civilized. Readers will immediately recognize another Orientalist trope: the capacity of the Westerners to imitate natives, and the incapacity of the natives to do the same.

[2] I tend to follow Hodgson's use of the term Islamicate to denote a "social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and Muslims…" but not straightforwardly derived from Islam understood as a 'religion' (1977: 59). It could be argued that with the 'rise of the West' from the 19th century onwards, the Muslim Ummah has become increasingly patterned on Islamicate rather than Islamic lines. Islamism can be seen as project to make more Islamic what is Islamicate. See Sayyid (1997 and forthcoming).

[3] See for example, the collection of essays by Gassan Salame tellingly entitled: *Democracy without Democrats*.

One of the difficulties of this debate about Islam and democracy is that the main terms of the debate remain rather nebulous. Islam denotes a scriptural heritage, a set of societies in which it predominates, a cultural horizon, etc. (Hodgson, 1978: 57-60). Democracy also operates in a variety of registers: academic, governmental and popular. Alongside the narrow methodological definition often found in political science textbooks, there is a more diffused generalised understanding of democracy, in which "Democracy" is a metaphor for a political regime. There is considerable slippage between the methodological and the metaphorical use of the term. It is, however, the metaphorical use of the term that draws the boundaries around the technical elements considered to be central to the understanding of democracy and those considered to be marginal.[4] There are a variety of features that are considered to be constitutive of democracy, such as elections and peaceful transitions of power, and most definitions of "Democracy" refer to some or all of these features. The presence or absence of these features can be used to determine whether a particular polity is democratic or not. This is the approach that many NGOs and think tanks follow. Freedom House, for example, has been producing a listing of democratic countries since 1970, thus suggesting that a "Democracy" that lacked these key features would no longer be considered to be a "'Democracy'". There are, however, a number of difficulties with this conclusion. The literature is replete with various examples in which there is considerable muddying of the democratic waters. For example, was Hitler democratic because he was elected to power? The Enabling Act, which underwrote much of the Nazi take-over of power, was a piece of legislation legitimately passed. Was the United States democratic before the passing of the Civil Rights Acts that guaranteed adult African Americans the right to vote? Was Switzerland democratic before 1970, when women were given the right to vote? What are we to make of the 'freedom of the press', in an age of oligopolistic media moguls, and to what extent is voting an exercise of autonomous individuals or the product of manipulation through clever advertising? What is interesting about these anomalies is that they do not seem to undermine the democratic status of some countries, whereas other anomalies are considered to be sufficient to discredit the democratic credentials of others. It could be argued that the difference is in the nature of the anomalies or it could be argued that the difference is in the nature of the different countries. The understanding of democracy, which sees it as typified by a list of key features, is inadequate; since the identity of "Democracy" is not based on substantive qualities, but, rather, like all identities it is relational and contrastive. In the case of "Democracy" its identity is derived from its negation of despotism. The elements that constitute "Democracy" gain their significance from being contrasted with elements that are considered to be constitutive of despotism. This frontier between "Democracy" and despotism has a long history.

The Usual Beginnings: Ancient Greeks and Democracy

Democracy begins in ancient Greece.[5] This is the dominant view of the genealogy of "Democracy"; but one, which immediately calls for a series of caveats. Firstly, it is not certain that democratic form is not a property of other city-state formationsb – e.g. Sumerians or Phoenicians.[6] Secondly, not all of ancient Greece was democratic; it is principally Athens during the 3rd-5th centuries BCE that is typified as democratic, and even in democratic Athens, women, slaves and foreigners were excluded

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[4] The question of the best definition of democracy is irrelevant for the purposes of the paper, since the argument that I am making is that it is the deployment of the signifier "Democracy" that defines it, not its definition that determines its deployment.

[5] For example, Held acknowledges that Athenian democracy is a fundamental source of inspiration for Western political thought. Similar views can be found from any cursory glance of the corpus of Western political thought.

[6] Both Held and Hornblower concede that democratic elements may have Phoenician and Mesopotamian antecedents (Hornblower in Dunn 1993: 2 and Held, 1994:5).

from political participation.[7] The identification of "Democracy" with the Greeks proceeds, not from an enumeration of forms of governance by various Greek communities, but rather, from the Greeks' perception of themselves as free in contrast to the enslaved subjects of the Persian Great King. Greek freedom versus Persian slavery is one of the first instances of a trope within Western political thought, which is played as a variation on the theme of the opposition between Western "Democracy" and Oriental despotism.[8] The distinction between Greek democracy and Persian despotism arises most clearly in the wake of the Greek-Persian wars, and is one of the means by which the various anti-Persian, Greek city states forge a common identity facilitating the formation of a united front against the Persian invasions. The claim that Greeks were free, ruled by their peers, while Persians were slaves ruled by the first Oriental despot is like many of the claims that the Greeks made, taken to be historical rather than historiographical.[9] Many subsequent writers took this division between Greek democracy and Persian despotism seriously – so that this dichotomy between "Democracy" and despotism has come to be seen as one of the great divides between the West and the Rest (Bobbio, 1989). Since the "roots" of the West are most often traced to the formation of Greek civilisation, democracy thus became a component of Western identity.[10] Democracy is articulated by its opposition to the supposed despotism of the Persian monarch (and behind the figure of King of Kings, a metonymic chain of monarchies and absolute rulers: from the Pharaohs of Egypt to the Great Kings of Assyria and by extension, the "Sons of Heaven" of China and India, the Caliphs and Sultans of Islam and the General Secretaries of CPSU). The other of "Democracy" was despotism, and despotism is found not in Sparta but in the sprawling Persian Empire. The freedom of the West is guaranteed by its contrast with the slavery of the Orient. As long as the West and the Orient are distinct, the West can always be freer than the Orient, and thus always more democratic than the Rest.[11] It is difficult to find any historical period in which the West is considered less free than the Orient (regardless of the

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[7] Simon Hornblower suggests that democracy begins with Sparta and the institution of a constitution that called regular meetings of a popular assembly (Dunn, 1993).

[8] As elegantly explored by Patricia Springborg (1992).

[9] The recognition of Orientalism within Classical studies has led to a number of recent works which have began to de-valorize ancient Greek experience and in particular its relationship with the Persian orient. By making use of cuneiform texts, Amole Kuhrt, Sherwin-White, and the Achemenind History Workshop have began a project of reappraising and reconceptualizing Greek historical record as part of Greek cultural conventions rather than as a transparent reading of the world of the Ancient Greeks. The hazards associated with such revision of one of the West's foundational narratives can be seen in the debate generated by the publication of Martin Bernal's *Black Athena*. Alas, social science continues to really on versions of classical history which someone like Weber would be familiar with and refuse to acknowledge the transformations that have occurred in ancient history which put into question many of the easy assumptions about the west and rest which still continue to circulate.

[10] Throughout this paper I will refer to the West in the singular. This is not to deny the variety of "Wests" that constitute the West – but rather to refer to the way in which West denotes what has been called the first conglomerate state. This is a post-Westphalian configuration, which has its immediate precedents in the Atlantic Alliance during the Second World War. In this polity, the many attributes of the Westphalian model of statehood are preserved in formal spheres, but increasingly undermined, for example, in the realms of security and war-making. See Martin Shaw (2000) *Theory of Global State* and Frank Furedi's *Silent War* (1999) for further details. Furedi point to the role of racism in the construction of international affairs, a perspective that Shaw's study strangely lacks.

[11] The discourse of the "noble savage" and assumed absence of property and state in the Americas and Africa would seem to suggest that certain non-European societies were freer than the West. It is important, however, to note that even in these regions when states were encountered, e.g. Ethiopia or Aztecs, the language of the oriental despot was not far behind. The freedom of the Americas and Africa could only be conceptualized in pre-political and pre-social (read, pre-civilized) terms, hence it was not true freedom but anarchy – the absence of governance rather than limited government – w hich remained the patrimony of the west.

evidentiary basis).[12] This of course allows the West to present its imperium as a form of liberation so that we could continue to call the leading members of the West (e.g. Britain, France) democratic even when they held direct sway over millions of people denied rights of self-determination (e.g. French North Africa, British India).

There is, however, another possible reading in which we do not associate the quality of freedom with the designation of a society as being 'Western' or 'Oriental', but, rather, with a consideration of the ways in which agrarian societies were disciplined and regulated. A comparison of ancient Athens, with a population of perhaps a quarter of a million and a 'police force' of perhaps 600 (Ober, 1989), with the Persian Empire with a population at least ten times larger and a permanent military establishment numbering in the tens of thousands, in terms of their respective capacity to regulate their societies, suggests a variance with the popular conception of Greek freedom and Persian despotism. Ancient Athens was a far more tightly disciplined society than that controlled by the Persian King of Kings.[13] The King of Kings may have had a permanent administration, a permanent military and have been able to draw on regular tributes; however, in all instances, the imperatives of imperial control entailed cooperation with and reliance upon local elites. Prior to colonial European empires, all agrarian empires lacked the skilled personnel to penetrate deeply into the communities they governed.[14] The Persian ruling elite made a virtue of this weakness by developing a discourse that allowed them to preside over complex and diverse groups and societies by following what we could call a multicultural strategy, in which the King of Kings, ruled as Pharaoh in Egypt, the vicar of Marduk in Babylon, and so on. In other words, Persian rule was based on a high level of the self-management of its constituent communities. The King of Kings ruled over peoples who believed in one God, many gods or no god; his concern, however, was limited to the extraction of general deference for his authority and the payment of tribute.

In contrast, it can be argued that the claustrophobia, which often features in small-scale societies (in which everybody knows everybody), can produce small town totalitarianism in the context of a politically mobilised citizenry. That is, a disciplinary society in which the pressure to conform to the conventions of that society is insistent and intrusive. The citizens of Athens lived among such a highly politicised and highly mobilised citizenry.[15] Neighbours could be a combination of informers, prosecutors, juries and judges. A consequence of a population that is mobilised and intensely politicised is to erode any distinction between the public and the private. At the same time, the relatively circumscribed area of the Athenian state meant that there was little respite from snoopy gossipy neighbours with political axes to grind (Ober, 1989:148-151; 1996). One could thus be mischievous and suggest that it is just as useful to see in Athens the dawning of "totalitarianism" as it to see the dawn of ""Democracy" (Agamben, 1993). This is perhaps one way to understand the assertions made on behalf of the Athenian polis as the place marking the emergence of politics itself (Finely, 1991; Zizek, 1998). The intensified capacity for surveillance, the intense mobilisations are all considered to be the hallmarks of modern totalitarianism. (The major difference between Athenian 'totalitarianism' and its modern counterparts has to do with the absence of a permanent bureaucracy

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[12] The notable exception being narratives of 'noble savages', i.e. nomadic or stateless peoples, who enjoyed a certain rude freedom beyond that of civilized people. The contrast between state societies, however, was consistent – western states are always freer than non-western states.

[13] Michael Mann (1986) makes a similar point.

[14] It was not only lack of skilled personnel, but also the difficulty in preventing the personnel from "going native". The European colonial empires found a solution to this problem through the development of a racialised governmentality, in which the gap between imperial rulers and the colonial ruled could not be closed, thus imperial administrators could not be 'consumed' by native societies. See Mann (1986) for problems of exerting imperial control. See Hesse and Sayyid (forthcoming) for racialised governmentality.

[15] It was not unusual to have juries of 6000 from the total citizenry (i.e. those who held full political rights) of around 30,000 during 5th century BCE. See Ober (1989) for details of the level of mobilisation.

and a permanent military). The "democratic" Athenian polity could not tolerate individuals whose beliefs did not accord with that of the polity itself, as many Athenians (including, most famously, Socrates), found to their cost. Even though the historical record does not support the idea of a clear-cut distinction on grounds of individual liberty between Greek democracy and Persian despotism, such a sharp distinction has emerged in the form of Western democracies and oriental despotisms. In other words, the distinction between despotism and democracy is too complex and too blurred in real life to be made with dogmatic certainty. It is difficult to conclude that Athenian citizens were freer than Persians subjects, simply by focusing on the constitutional form of these two political entities. To make the distinction credible, it requires that despotism and "Democracy" become over-determined as categories associated with grand cultural formations. Thus, "Democracy" is Western and despotism is oriental. This demarcation between the West and the Orient may not have been sedimented until the early modern period, but it has its roots in the retrospective construction of Western cultural identity through its contrast with an Oriental cultural formation (Springborg, 1992:1). In other words, the frontier between "Democracy" and despotism also corresponds with a frontier between the West and the Orient, and while this frontier did not stabilise until the end of what is called the early modern period, its precursors could be found in the beginning of ancient history. Not only does "Democracy" begin with the ancient Greeks, the West also begins with the ancient Greeks. Democracy becomes a signifier of the West, within the narration of Western identity. Thus, from the very beginning, it is possible to see how the discourses of Western identity were intertwined with the discourses of "Democracy" or its cognates. As such, there is hardly a period in human history in which the regions that are considered to be the core of Western patrimony are generally considered to be less free than the realms that are associated with the Orient.[16] Western historiography has tended to ensure that the link between the West and "Democracy" remains unbroken. The narration of "Democracy" is also the means by which Western identity is narrated. Thus the instance of the non-democratic government of the Third Reich problematises the membership of the Third Reich as a member of the West. Similarly, the racialised denial of democracy in the nation-empires of Britain or France, has been made palatable by making the distinction between home and abroad almost hermetic. Thus one could always claim a democratic status for these countries because of the rights that metropolitan populations enjoyed, while excluding accounts of the denial of many of those rights to their imperial subjects. Nor is it mere coincidence that the emergence of absolutist monarchies in Europe enhances the significance of maintaining the distinction between Orient and West, hence the introduction of 'despotism' as a term marking out the rule of the Ottoman empire as being fundamentally distinct from the strong monarchies of Europe (Valensi, 1993: 98).

What is at stake in the distinction between "Democracy" and despotism is not merely a set of governmental procedures or styles; rather it is a way of life. The content of the difference between "Democracy' and despotism is based on the way in which the political forms refer to distinct cultural formations. (What is important is not that the boundaries of these cultural formations are fuzzy and ultimately have no essence, but rather that they operate as being 'superhard' (Staten, 1984: 150)). Attempts to "deconstruct" the West and Orient division by, for example, showing how the roots of the West can be found in Mesopotamia or (even) Islam fail to understand that the distinction between the West and Orient is not purely an empirical one, which can be corrected by bringing in new data. The West is a discursive object, the identity of which is formed by making it distinct from other discursive objects. The logic of identification imposes the distinction between the west and non-west. Attempts to show the Near Eastern roots of Western civilisation only aim to shift the boundaries between the west and rest, rather than to abolish the distinction itself. Attempts to demonstrate that the West-Orient divide is reductive, by pointing out elements which supposedly blur these distinctions, are based on essentialist reading of West and Orient, e.g. arguing that Islam in Spain was Western (Turner, 1989) or that Yusuf Islam (Cat Stevens) is a Westerner who is Muslim (Sadiki, 2004: 138). Such positions can only derive from a sense of the West that is unchanging; thus, Spain or Sicily or

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[16] This revolving cast of regions has tended to include northern Italy, France, Britain, the United States, and Germany during most periods of its history.

Cat Stevens have a western essence, which can always be located beneath the Islamicate surface. Neither what constitutes the West nor the Orient is immutable in itself, what is immutable is the presence of the frontier itself. In other words, as long as the discourse that specifies western exceptionality vis-à-vis the rest of the world continues to be articulated, it will always require a frontier to determine what is included and what is excluded from that exceptionality. This is why objections as to the specific histories or societies falling on one side of the frontier or the other may vary over time, but it is the frontier that remains and constitutes the identity of both West and Orient. These identifications do not exist outside the frontier. The boundary between Western democracy and oriental despotism can shift (and has shifted) but it cannot by definition be removed without dissolving the West-Orient dyad. The contrast, however, between oriental despotism and Western "Democracy" is constant, even if the meaning of democracy as such is not fixed. In fact, it could be easily demonstrated that while various signifiers have denoted the political system of the western cultural formation, the contrast between West and Orient has been key to determining the identity of those signifiers. The description of political regimes in Western political thought is conducted against the backdrop of the constitutive difference between the West and the 'Orient', the discourse of "Democracy" is not an exception to this.

The discourse of the West is not merely (or even mainly) produced by academics and scribblers; it is a discourse that is constituted by the contemporary world order. The West is not reducible to machinations of what has been called the Western conglomerate state (Shaw, 2001), though this political entity is often decisive in articulating the frontier between the west and its others. Commentators, who are swift to dismiss the idea of a West as some essentialist fantasy, and keen to point to its fragmented nature, ignore the way in which the West is manifested throughout the world in a mundane and almost banal sense. There is often confusion between the nominal unity of the West and its substantive properties. The West, like other collective identities such as Islam or America, is a name that erases differences; to point to the (internal) differences that constitute the West (or any other collectivity) does not diminish the way in which heterogeneous elements which constitute these collective formations are marshalled under one signifier. The identity of signifiers (including, for example, "Democracy") arises from inclusion in a system of differences; thus to assert that the identity of democracy is a function of its contrast with other signifiers is not to engage in essentialism, since we are dealing with logical and nominal entities not substantive prosperities.[17] Within Western political thought the articulation of the West (what it is, what it means, who is part of it) is a decisive move prior to the articulation of forms of political regimes. The link between "Democracy" and the West is not purely opportunistic or merely accidental, it part of set of sedimented (and naturalized) practices which form the identity of both "Democracy" and the West.

Defining the Demos

The conflation between "Democracy" and the West has important implications for the way the demos is conceived and constructed. "Democracy" as a political system is often justified (in popular terms) as the expression of the will of the people; this translates, within the conceptual language of liberalism, into the will of individuals. In other words, the rule of the demos becomes the means by which individuals express their own political preferences.[18] "Democracy", by providing the means by

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[17] See for fuller examination of the nature of essentialism, Diana Fuss (1989) *Essentially Speaking: Feminism, Nature and Difference.*

[18] I do not have the space in the paper to investigate the links between liberalism and "Democracy" within Western political traditions. It should be clear that what I refer to as "Democracy" is a retrospective reading of the themes that have historically been designated by a variety of labels, reflecting local contexts – e.g. republicanism, liberalism, etc. The category of "Democracy" that I refer to is an over-arching label which has, at least at the level of the non-specialist political theorist, colonized aspects of these earlier labels. Thus, many of the features of liberalism are now considered to be intrinsic features of "Democracy". One of the difficulties of

which individuals can find political expression, becomes the political system that is most in accord with what it is be human, since it allows individuals to choose their political arrangements, and as individuals form the basis of all human social arrangements. The authentic experience of being human can only be discovered within the context of a "Democratic" regime. In other words, "Democracy" provides the arena in which the essence of being human can be acted out. The significance of this is that the idea of an essential human presupposes that there are humans who are inessential. The universal nature of a human essence is belied by the way in which any set of humans who are chosen to display that essence must do so in particular way. Humanity, as a general category, only becomes concrete in its culturally embedded form. Within Western supremacist discourse the essence of what is to be human is clearly identified by the practices of *homo occidentalis*, the idea being that it is only in the West that humans are truly human and everything else is either cultural accretion or a deviation from that norm. Racist ideologies have made this relationship explicit and such racist discourses continue to influence the way in which humans are conceptualised. The idea of what constitutes the authentic essence of humankind has now become related to being the same as what is authentic within Western cultural practices. Thus, "Democracy" allows true human identity to realise itself – other forms of governance, however, act as restrictions and constraints on human identity. "Democracy", by removing restrictions and lifting constraints, allows humans to be truly human. Universal values are, as such, considered to be incarnate in the West. Western supremacist discourse claims that universal values are not something that you can find everywhere; they are strictly speaking the property of the West. Thus the universal cannot be generated from every history or from every region. It has a home, it has a particular history, and for any cultural formation that wishes to partake of universal values, it has to make its way to the home of these values, by following a specific historical sequence. "Democracy" then becomes the way towards excavating these values that are hardwired into the essence of humanity by establishing a procedure through which the (essential) qualities of being human can find authoritative public expression. It cannot be understood merely as a set of institutional and procedural arrangements. The nature of "Democracy" is linked to a wider horizon of what the world is like, the question of human nature and ultimately what is seen to be the destiny of the world itself. Over-determining the explicit appeals to "Democracy" are implicit assumptions that democratisation is only possible via Westernisation. It functions within the contemporary world as a marker of a specific cultural formation. The actual difference between "Democracy" and despotism is discussed as the difference between tyranny and freedom or any of its analogues; however, it is actually more about the difference between Western culture and its others. "Democracy", therefore, operates more as a cultural marker than as a designator of a settled set of procedures and practices, and it is this convergence between "Democracy" and Western identity which makes it so difficult to imagine a regime that can be generally considered to be both simultaneously democratic and anti-Western. Accordingly an anti-Western regime cannot be a "Democracy" regardless of how many elections it may hold, how transparent its governmental procedures maybe, or how just its legal framework maybe.

The difficulty of articulating Western despotism and oriental democracies is not purely empirical; it is dependent on the way in which "Democracy" operates as a marker of cultural identity. "Democracy" is the name by which Western political practices are staged; similarly despotism is the name given to the politics practised by the Orient. Both the Orient and the West refer, not to geographical entities, but to complex cultural formations with mobile boundaries, which can shift as a result of changes in political practices. For example, Russia can be Oriental during the Cold war, and yet it becomes Western as soon as it introduces electoral politics, engages in the language of "Democracy", but more importantly, becomes a de facto supporter of US foreign policy in relation to the periphery, e.g. Iraq.[19]

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discussing a concept like "Democracy" is that in terms of the variety of circuits it operates in, none of these circuits is hermetically sealed from another. This, of course, makes the task of a critic much easier, since they can always cite another circuit, another rendition of "Democracy", which apparently does not display the same qualities in the notion of "Democracy" that are being argued for.

[19] Populism can be seen as a category that emerges to explain a divergence between "Democracy" and Western identity that cannot be resolved by an expansion of the boundaries of the West (see Sayyid, 1997).

"Democracy" is a name for a way of life beyond its specific mechanisms and procedures. The concept of "Democracy" gains its unity and its coherence by constant implicit or explicit contrast with despotism. Democracy is what despotism is not. Despotism is not, however, a category that is more secure than "Democracy", it is also given its identity by contrast to "Democracy". This game of mirrors between "Democracy" and despotism, as being formed relationally and through the negation of the other category, is over-determined by cultural signatures. It is the relative stability (the *longue duree*) of these cultural signifiers that helps sustain their signifieds, including political systems. Democracy and despotism are marked elements, where the marking takes the form of cultural prefix: Western and Oriental. The stability of these prefixes allows "Democracy" and despotism to be fixed, as part of the frontier, which divides the West from the Non-West.

During the period 1945-1991, the meaning of Western democracies was given by their contrast to the oriental despotism of the Communist bloc. Thus, "Democracy" began to expand so that it was no longer simply concerned with the political equality of those defined as citizens, but was also concerned (to greater or lesser degree) with issues of social and economic equality. The identity of "Democracy" was based on the constitutive contrast with communist totalitarianism, but is in the process of being transformed as a result of the collapse of the communist system of governance, and it is perhaps not coincidental that questions of social and economic equality are considered to be less and less central to "Democracy".

The constitutive relationship between "Democracy" and the West presents a problem for cultural formations of the world that find it difficult to be re-described as Western. For in these instances "Democracy" can be used as means of violent repression. In the name of "Democracy" (either actually existing or that is to come), many regimes have excluded and repressed Islamists, asserting that the anti-Western nature of Islamism is a threat to "Democracy".[20] A clear example here is the so-called "postmodern" coup that removed the Refah (Welfare) Party from power in Turkey, as is the military intervention which prevented the victory of the FIS in the Algerian elections. I take it for granted that all of these instances can be seen in a variety of lights, and one should not be surprised that the various champions of "Democracy" act in their own interests and thus have a rather self-serving definition of "Democracy". The politics of the deployment of the concept of "Democracy" are, however, not only reducible to opportunism and short-term tactical calculations; rather it is this opposition between the Western and the Oriental which sets the context for the Islamicate world's engagement with "Democracy". It is this engagement that I wish to examine in the next section of the paper.

Islamicate Paradigms of Good Government

Historically, it is possible to identify five models of good government within Muslim political thought. The first model was that of the first Islamic state established in Medina under the leadership of the Prophet. This remains the paradigmatic model of good government for all Muslims. This model could only survive as a horizon, following the death of the Lord of Medina, since it relied upon divinely guided Prophetic interventions. In the absence of such guidance, Muslim political thought focused on the Caliphate as the crystallisation of Islamicate good government, a feature recognised in classical Islamicate historiography as the rule of the four Rightly Guided Caliphs who became the models of good government. The rightly guided caliphs had to rule without Prophetic abilities (however, their role as close companions of the Prophet provided them with ontological privilege by proxy, or in case of Ali, ontological privilege by blood – at least according to the Shia) and could thus be more appropriate models of good government. This second model eventually came to dominate

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[20] The relationship between Islamism and the West is rather complex. For a set of arguments that see Islamism as anti-Western – in a cultural sense, not necessarily in a geo-political sense, see Sayyid (1997).

what become the majority strand within Muslim political thought. Running alongside this strand was a perspective in which Islamically-sanctioned good government was only possible under the rulership of Imams, who could trace their descent directly from the family of the Lord of Medina, via issue of his daughter and nephew. In other words, the descendants of the Prophet are ontologically privileged so that they can implement divine injunctions. This position became dominant within Shia political thought, but also influenced other political positions that remained critical of actually existing Caliphate(s). With the abolition of the Caliphate in 1924, the idea of good government within Islamist circles came to be constituted around the provision of an Islamic political order, expressed as an application of "Shariah" law or through the installation of rulers who were conversant with a knowledge of Islam. Khomeini's theory of the *Vilyat-e-Faqih* unified Sunni and Shia political thought, by arguing for an interim leader, who did not possess sacral authority, but who could work towards establishing an Islamic government that would hasten the return of the Mahdi. Thus Khomeini's theoretical intervention transformed Shia political eschatology, making it, for all intents and purposes, compatible with Sunni political thought. Khomeini's de-facto Caliphate opened up the possibility of reconstructing a Muslim political centre.

In the wake of Khomeini's political thought, and the crisis of Kemalism, it could be argued that we are witnessing the development of a fifth paradigm of Islamicate good government, one that is based on the attempt to articulate the relationship between Islam and democracy as not only a possibility but necessity. Implicit in this fifth paradigm is development of a notion of a moderate Islam (Aktay, 2004), which is compatible with "Democracy." This paradigm of Islamicate good government includes former ideologues of Islamism (for example, Rached Gannouchi, or even Abdolkarim Sourosh) as well as secular-liberals (such as Nawal El-Sadawi) and various technocrats. It is possible to identity four main strategies by which democracy is being aligned with Islam.

First, there is a set of arguments which, by identifying "Democracy" with a method that gives a voice to the will of the people, seems to give Islamists a way to achieve political power, since they see themselves as being representative of the people, in a way that the ruling elites who oppose them are not. Thus democracy offers a way for the Islamists to achieve power, without having to go through a violent armed struggle which, in many instances, has alienated and frightened many potential supporters. Second, there is a set of arguments which seem to accept that the end of the Cold war signals the superiority of the democratic form of governance, and as the prevailing world order is committed to "Democracy" and insists (selectively) on its imposition, it makes sense to bow to the inevitable. It is worth noting that many ideologues of the Islamist movements were heavily influenced by the vanguardist model of political power exemplified by fascist and communist parties in the 1930s. Thus, the historic victory of liberal-democracies over fascism and communism suggests that such models of power are flawed. Third, there is a set of arguments which sees the failings of the various Islamist movements to achieve power, or, when they have achieved power, the failure to do anything to implement an Islamic order, as a general failure of Islamism as a political project. Fourth, given the degree of torture and repression that many Islamist activists have faced, and given that in the current crusade against Islamism/"war on terror', the capacity for Islamists to articulate a distinct vision is increasingly circumscribed. Consequently, the appeal to "Democracy" offers an alternative way of trying to readdress the gross inequalities and cruelties that disfigure Islamicate societies.

Currently, in most Islamicate countries, there is a wide gap between the rulers and ruled. It is the presence of such a gap that points to the absence of good government. Islamism attempts to conceptualise a closure of the gap by formulating a good government in the shape of a rather nebulous vision of an Islamic order. It is this project which an increasing body of commentary seems to think is bankrupt (Sayyid, 2003). Thus many voices have begun to urge Muslims to accept a good government that works, instead of striving for a good government that does not deliver – that is, accept that only a democratic arrangement can provide good government in the contemporary world. Advocates of "Democracy" for the Islamicate world use the experiences of the Western countries to illustrate the benefits of "Democracy" and this often tends to follow the narratives of "Democracy", which are based on Westernese. Soroush's (2002) tendency to universalise contingent historical development in

Western history as necessary is indicative of this trend. This is the discourse that is still dominant within the word order (if not hegemonic). As a consequence, "Democracy" is considered to be equivalent to a set of descriptions, such as freedom of the press, the protection of human rights, peaceful transfers of power, etc. Thus, they respond to a definition of "Democracy" that is produced by particular (Western supremacist) narratives, a definition that tends to be (understandably) hazy about some anomalies of the democratic discourse (e.g. persistence of racist governmentalities).[21]

There are four major difficulties that confront any project of trying to install democracy in the Islamicate world. First, any project of transformation will be met by resistance from those who seek to maintain the status quo. In the case of the Islamicate world, there is little indication to believe the majority of regimes will be more amenable to being replaced by a democratic regime than an Islamist regime.[22] Thus, the question of democracy in the Islamicate world cannot be separated from a political question regarding the means and possibility of carrying out regime transformations in polities in which regimes have both external and internal support that limits the possibility of their transformation. In other words, to close the gap between rulers and ruled in many Muslim polities requires not simply a proclamation of the virtues of '"Democracy"' but also concrete strategies as to how such a 'democratic' transformation is to take place.

Second, to the extent that the difference between "Democracy" and despotism is also a difference between the Orient and the West, it is difficult to see how any '"Democracy"' can be established in the Islamicate world without a prior Westernisation, even at a superficial level, which means a 'pro-Western alignment'. To the extent that Western and Islamicate identities are articulated in mutually exclusive frame, Westernisation presents an ontological challenge to societies based around Islam. It could be argued that one way around this problem is to de-link the technical side of democracy from its metaphorical aspect. By using the discourse of Muslim apologia it is possible to re-describe the technical features of democracy as being compatible with and found within the practices of the Prophet. Such arguments are, however, unsatisfactory, since they take little or no account of the way in which control over democratic discourse is exercised through grossly unequal power relations. The capacity of the Islamicate world to disarticulate and rearticulate democracy is circumscribed by the way in which democratic discourse is still an important component of western identity. Thus, the rearticulation of "Democracy" means a re-narration of western identity – a re-narration that many forces in the Western world will (and do) resist. Until it becomes possible to go beyond the dyad: 'the West and the Non-West', until a vocabulary develops that does not see the 'non-Western' as a residual category, until it is possible not to refer to the 'non-Western' as 'non-Western', the ability of Islamicate or other societies to dis-articulate western democracy is going to be limited. The consequence of this is that any attempt to articulate "Democracy" in Islamicate register will have to take place in a context where commanding significations of "Democracy" comes from the West. As the inequalities in the world order are to some extent sustained by a political system which many actors within the West support, the Western capacity to reduce "Democracy" to a form that makes its compatible with its imperium means that democracy in the 'Non-West' can take a form that allows a corrupt and unjust social order to prevail. "Democracy" can become an obstacle to radical social transformation rather than assisting such a goal.

Third, and following from the above point, one of the ways that "Democracy" works in the post-Cold War world is by blurring the distinction between friend and enemy, and thus bringing about a depoliticization of society (Zizek, 2000: 10). Thus, "Democracy" as promise of the end of history has the effect of preventing the recognition of the political nature of the Islamicate societies and their place in the world. This generalised de-politicisation allows technological thinking to dominate. The

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[21] See Goldberg (2002) and Hesse and Sayyid (forthcoming) on racist "anomalies" of Western liberal democratic discourse.

[22] See Savas S. Barkcin, "Exporting Democracy To The Muslim World", for an insightful analysis of the relationship between post-Cold war western realpolitik and the export of "Democracy".

reduction of the political to the administrative means that Muslim governance remains trapped in a mimetic methodology, unable to make meaning, and unable to construct and perpetuate the Islamicate elements of their societies except as a form of sentimental attachment. The implications of the Dengist diktat that it does not matter whether the cat is black or white as long it catches mice, means that a state which is only justified in terms of a narrowly conceived instrumental logic is unable to uphold and reflect the being of its people. If government is only about efficient administration than there is no reason why the Islamicate world should not contract out administration of its territory. The current articulation of "Democracy" means a shift from political to economic governance, which is not only seen in relation to the way in which state authority is eroded in favour of the market. The hegemonic articulation of "Democracy" at the level of the global means accepting the current socioeconomic order, and refusing the possibility of any radical transformation that challenges the neo-liberal 'consensus'.

Fourth, and more importantly, the quest for "Democracy" forecloses the possibility for articulating good government within an Islamicate register. The implications of this not only turn on the possibility of maintaining a pluralistic world, but also a world in which the postcolonial moment is not replaced by a revamped colonial order with its attendant injustices and cruelties. Unless we believe in the possibility of articulating theories of legitimate rule from different histories and traditions, the promise of justice, prosperity and peace will remain nothing more than window dressing on a violent and iniquitous world order. Accepting "Democracy" and its Western logo works towards homogenizing the world in a way which counters the appeal of "Democracy" as an expression of the demos. If the proper demos has only one history and one tradition, it cannot be a global demos. The idea that a planetary humanitarianism could underwrite a global demos would carry greater weight if it could be demonstrated that such a demos would be truly global. It is decolonisation not "Democracy" that promises a global demos, and without a global demos "Democracy" will retain all its restrictive and ultimately xenophobic features.

Some of the ambiguities of the way in which the signifier of "Democracy" can be deployed can be clearly seen in the attempt by the American occupiers to try and impose a democracy on Iraq in the wake of their conquest of the country.[23] This is not only the function of the way in which the imposition of an American proconsul and an undemocratic puppet Iraqi government, along with the apparent necessity of recolonizing Iraq as the foundation of its democratisation, seems at odds with what is commonly represented by "Democracy". It is also the function of the way in which a number of writers, including the neo-conservative gurus of the current US administration, see in the democratic transformation of societies, not the possibility of the often-repressed people of those societies discovering their voices, their capacity for thinking through their history, but rather a transformation into pro-Western (if not pro-American) subjects. Democratic transformation becomes the continuation of Westernisation through other means. For the neo-conservatives and their European allies, the reorganization of Islamicate societies around the signifier of "Democracy" will prevent them from being antagonistic towards the West; it will allow these societies to seek their 'national' interests as being compatible with Western interests. It is very likely that an Iraq which is "Democratic" will be an Iraq which will accept American bases, provide extra-territorial rights for American officials and allow American capital more or less free rein, regardless of whether the Iraqi demos is in favour or not of these policies.[24]

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[23] Given the affinity between the neo-Conservatives of the Bush administration and Reaganism it is worth reflecting on the Reaganite project of promoting democracy in Latin America during the 1980s. Carothers points out that there is a very strong tendency within the United States to see its political institutional arrangements as the essence of Democracy itself, rather than merely one possible institutional configuration among many others (1994: 249).

[24] Of course, it is possible that such a scenario may not come to pass because the Iraqi people may force major concessions on the Americans. The question is, of course, at what point would the popular will of the Iraqi people be disarticulated from the signifier "Democracy" and sutured with signifiers of "Islamic fundamentalism", or "remnants of Saddam's regime?"

The expansion of the democratic revolution is limited to the extent that the frontier between the West and the Orient conditions the identity of "Democracy" itself. Thus, whereas in the context of the regions of the world which can be rearticulated with relative ease as Western, "Democracy" with its promise of liberating and empowering the demos can provide the basis for closing the gap between rulers and ruled. Here one could point to the relative success of democratisation in southern Europe in the 1970s. In parts of the world where the conceptual frontier has been sedimented for a variety of historical reasons, and gives the impression of having a *longue duree,* the importation of the signifier, "Democracy", requires the rearticulation of the importing society as part of the West. In these conditions, where the demos has to be first de-Orientalised, the reliance on the signifier of "Democracy" can expand the gap between the rulers and ruled, with all its attendant repressions. The eighty-year experience of Turkey, and the largely unsuccessful attempt of its ruling elite to reclassify it as Western, at least illustrates some of the difficulties of requiring 'de-Orientalization' as a necessary prior move to "Democratization". Reformers in the Muslim world may be better employed in trying to articulate the presumed dividend of "Democracy" (e.g. freedom from repression, a de-militarization of public life, possibilities of non-violent and routinized transformations of government) under another signifier of good government that does not require the detours of using the logo of "Democracy". For what such reformers may gain in support from the Western plutocracies by organizing their opposition to repression under the brand name of "Democracy", they are likely to lose in relation to their genuine aims of empowering their demos. While Western political thought may be content with its ideas of good government being organized under the signifier of "Democracy", it does not follow that all political thought should reach this conclusion.

Conclusion

The Age of Europe bequeathed to the world a name for good governance. This name, like other names for good government, always escaped full realization; good government can never be perfect if it can always be called to better itself in the name of itself. The initial baptism of "Democracy" as the political form of the West at its most western, means that the good governance that "Democracy" nominates is too often blind to the way in which western cultural regimes have been supplemented, if not formed, by disparate assemblages of power, e.g. liberalism and colonialism, human rights and racialized governmentality (Hesse, 2004).

Those who seek in "Democracy" hope for a more just world, need to let go of "Democracy" as signifier of the West, and dare to imagine a world in which various societies and histories can produce notions of good governance which are commensurate with the fundamental pluralism of this planet. This means abandoning the colonial discourse of Westernese which sees the future and past of human endeavour in terms of the distinction between the West and Non-West (and their cognates). The idea that tools for a better life can be found from any particular set of social practices ultimately means rejecting the idea that the salvation of humanity only lies in Westernisation under whatever logo, and allowing the emergence of discourses that might even exclude the Western *ratio* (Diawara, 1990: 87).

I began this paper with intimations of an episode from *Star Trek*. From 1492 to the world of *Star Trek* is almost a thousand years. The appropriation of the 'New World' that inaugurated the Age of Europe, is replayed in the way in which *Star Trek* colonizes the future, by projecting forward the 'Age of Europe' Perhaps there will be another series of *Star Trek* which portrays not the continuation of the epoch inaugurated in 1492, but sees the next 500 years in terms of multicultural reformation, where the stars are not a backdrop to a thousand year Reich based on Westernese. It would rather be a metaphor for the fundamental pluralism of human history. Of course to deny such a possibility or denigrate it as descent into relativist chaos is not only a failure to imagine that others may also dream of better worlds; it also demonstrates 'we' are resolutely unwilling to live in the dreamscapes of others, while continuing to expect that 'others' will only find wellbeing in playing extras in 'our' dreams.

Acknowledgments

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