

# Concept and Historical

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## 1. Citizenship as a Historical Concept:

If we assume ‘citizenship’ to be a ‘concept’, that conjures up questions about structures, the evolution of linguistics, the coinage of technical terms and historically how those terms have been used. In the end it appears to describe a new socio-cultural and political phenomenon that comes under the general term ‘modernity’. It rests upon a political institution linked to the notion of ‘constitution’, of a nation state that claims national sovereignty, and of a sovereign people who dwell in a defined region. Attached to it are rights and obligations under which the individual is disciplined by his/her social contract and, as a citizen, becomes part of a state.

That is what happened in modern western history. The most important moments were the

declaration of American independence (1776), the ideas springing out of the French Revolution, preceding those were the ideas of the Enlightenment, and most notably the declaration of human rights and of the citizen of 1789.

These struggles for rights were gradual and uneven during the 19th century in Europe and the United States, but scholars identify them as defining moments for the concept ... **the concept of** citizenship. The ordeals of Europe during two 20th century wars that saw totalitarian, Fascist and Nazi states emerge made democracy pegged to the rights of the citizen the pivotal issue. In their wake, intellectual and constitutional efforts intensified to protect the notion of citizenship as a historical treasure that must augment citizen — that is, human — freedoms and rights across the board. The rights movement expanded to include the rights of women and children, the right to employment, the rights of the disabled and the marginalized, the rights of civic institutions, the rights of cultures in all

their variety, and the rights of minorities. Alain Touraine, in his book, *What is Democracy?* inspired by the reviving political vitality of democracy and its evolution in the second half of the 20th century and beyond, writes: “Democracy must be defined not as a victory of the majority or of the mass over individuality. It must describe institutional guarantees that give space to the majority in the face of practical intellections and all the varieties of historical memory. It must draw together compromise and freedom. As Charles Taylor said, democracy is the means for recognizing the other.” Framed in another question: ‘Is it really “the rule of the majority or the guarantee of minority rights?”’

In a nutshell, the concept of citizenship pivots on two conditions:

\*There must be a nation state and all it implies by way of establishing a citizens’ society that opts for coexistence for all its members.

\*The system must be democratic along with its many demands for balancing rights against obligations, the private sector against the public, and those things that are private and personal against those things that fall within the public domain.

In brief those are the reference points for what defines citizenship on the basis of worldwide experience however those in the West may define it. On the one hand (Huntington), you have the tensions of disparity between and the idiosyncrasies between nationalisms and religions as expressed by some Islamists and nationalists and the everlasting contest between cultures; on the other hand (Fukayama) there are the disparities in progress and development between the 'historical world' plagued by racial, bloody and civil strife (within it the Muslim world) and the post-historical world, the western world.

We do not have the luxury of space to discuss these two theses. What we glean from them is an indication of how we may conceive

the notion of citizenship through referring it to its historical roots in the western historical experience. In spite of all the ideological opposition to the notion of citizenship both around the peripheries and at the center of western culture, and in spite of the ethnological or narrowly biased pseudo-historical comparisons made by some western scholars, that experience has gone on to become a global model. So we can speak of ‘citizenship’ as a philosophical concept. That is, it is an idea in the general and abstract sense. At the very least it is an abstract and non-specific idea that can be generalized.

However this abstraction or generalization of the notion of ‘citizenship’ does not let us off the hook. We must bring into the mix for comparison a variety of sources and also a diversity of historical experiences. We need to do this because historical awareness resides in many forms. It is an awareness of decisions concerning the path taken (or not taken), or of changes that might be swift or slow in how our minds work, how we use our intellects, and

how we shape our ideas. Words shift their meanings and terminologies change (or are coined). Institutions, structures, governments, states and means of production and economic exchange evolve. Stories passed on orally, written texts, or shifts in life-styles preserve or pass on individual or group memories. Articulate or subconscious images in language pass on how we evaluate differences or how we assess to our historians or to our various ethnic perceptions in how we evaluate any given idea that has become general or even global. In this case the idea is 'citizenship'. At this point it might be useful for us to compare the way Arabic sources treat the term 'citizen' and how it is used in the West.

## **2. 'Member of the City', Citizen or Citizenship in Western Sources:**

Western lexicons give to the idea of 'citizen' and 'citizenship' (member of the city) the meaning of belonging to 'the city'. In classical Greek and Roman times a 'city' was a political entity in a specific location. Before being conceived of as a parcel of land with its

agrarian dependencies, the City was a collective, an organism, that brought its members together in a historical union organized around a common cult of worship. The person who belonged to this structure became a ‘member of the city’, a citizen.

There was, therefore, an intimate bond between the institution and its member. The valid city gave birth to its valid member. This is what Plato expressed in his *The Republic* when he laid stress upon the strong link between ethics and politics. For his part, Aristotle also argued that what distinguishes the human person from animals is the former’s belonging to a city. This Greek understanding of the city (city equals state) yielded also the principle of the sovereignty of law identified in Greek by the term *nomos*.

Whatever the case may be concerning the way the Greek city was structured, Herodotus groups them under three categories: democracies, oligarchies and monarchies. The democratic city of Athens became the focal point for studying normative Greek democracy

in the ancient world. It was the authority for describing ‘the member’ or the citizen both in belonging and in the right to participate in political life. The freedom of the individual was exercised in protecting the city. The European Renaissance (beginning in the 15th and 16th centuries) laid stress upon returning to Greek authority in its literature, law-making and political ideas. This provided the pretext for challenging the medieval church’s sanction of the principle of the divine right to rule, for combating the use of religion to acquire of political power, and for rejecting the confusion of roles in governing institutions.

These ills for centuries typified the Europe of the all-inclusive empires and absolute monarchies. In that context the Athenian ideal of ‘the citizen’ — pegged as it was to the twin principles of freedom and equality before the law — vanished. What came to dominate in the societies of medieval Europe was the principle of belonging to the Church and total obedience to the monarch. This was ordered



on strict class lines dictated by the prevailing feudal system.

What is meant by ‘pretext’ or ‘means’ here is that returning to Greek and also Roman history was a way of responding to new historical circumstances precipitated by the rise of mercantile cities, the movement of experimentation, expansionism, humanism, and the impact of the devastating wars of religion that conscripted the mass of European humanity on the principle of fanatical loyalty to this or that religious party. Then along came Machiavelli’s ideas about separating politics and religion. John Locke called for tolerance through separating the two authorities, the religious and the civil. And Thomas Hobbes advocated a sovereign state (stronger than society) that matured into the principle of separating the powers as Montesquieu later elaborated it.

All these changes in the way of thinking were the vanguard of a new history being evolved in Europe and the New World (the United States). Their novelty gave rise to

‘modernism’ or the cutting of ties to the past. True, the new used Greek and Roman sources for laws, legislation and civic order. It was a link to ancient history as a sort of ‘enabling history’. But, in fact, ‘modern’ history was being built from the ground up. Even now it is, as it were, under construction. We can see this in what is being written these days about the state, democracy, citizenship, civil society and human rights.

In definition the nation state somewhat resembled the city state and gradually replaced the empire state, and the definition of the individual citizen gradually replaced the assembled people, the allied groupings, the masses and the subjects seen as a flock. With the democratic revolutions of the 18th and 19th centuries and the writing of the democratic states’ constitutions based upon the law of human rights and the rights of the citizen, the notion of universal suffrage (one man; one vote) gave value to the citizen as an effective factor in the political process and in the mechanisms of decision-making.

That was not achieved all in one leap, nor was it the end of the European awakening, nor was it, as some have argued, the appearance of a superficial form that had no substance. It has been a process giving foundation for how we understand the modern 'citizen' in his open-ended global human dimension who has the capacity constantly to evolve in response to social, economic and cultural developments and shifts and to keep pace with these changes.

At the beginning of the present century a book was published in Paris under the title, *The Sanctification of the Citizen: the History of Universal Suffrage in France*(1). The author disproves the contention of some publicists that representative democracy has been subverted into a mere formal exercise. For his part, he sees that "... the principle of universal suffrage is not simply a superficial freedom; it gives foundation a type of equality between human beings, and is in fact a constituent force in society itself."

It is true that the principle of universal suffrage was not a matter of consensus until

the middle of the 19th century, and it was not fully socially implemented until mid-way through the 20th century. Nonetheless, its philosophical starting point based upon the natural rights of the individual citizen remains open to development and expansion, as has actually happened. For instance, first it got beyond the French electoral law that stipulated discrimination based on class and profession (excluding the servant class and monks), it then got past the condition of having a certain level of material wealth, then the condition of age (it went from 25 to 18), and then the gender qualification was overcome with the law of 1944 that gave women the right to vote. The pressure has been constant to expand it based upon the philosophical notion of the natural right of the human person, the citizen.

The dialectic today so far as the individual citizen who lives in an established democracy is concerned is to find the difficult but very promising balance between the increasing demand for protecting freedom (that comes up against certain aspects of justice) and the

demand for justice (that comes up against certain aspects of freedom). This is a pungent dialectic because the citizen may be able to develop his or her currently ambiguous relationship with society and the state, and, through the institutions of representative democracy, might be able to strike a new balance in participatory decision-making, in the proliferation of political parties, in intellectual freedoms and the press, and in the initiatives of civil society.

This has been a thumb-nail sketch of the situation of the citizen in the West's experience. It has expressed, somewhat in the abstract, something of the intellectual history of Greece in the Athenian democratic experiment. Its political philosophy has been an enabling resource. But it has carried with it something more, something greater, something more valuable in the experiences of modern times. They have seen changes, choices of direction, and intellectual and philosophical expressions that have — since the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and following the

agonies inflicted by the totalitarian states that reduced the citizen to but an integer in the mass — laid foundations for reviving democratic awareness in the second half of the 20th century.

## **What of the Image of the Citizen, the City and the State in Arab History?**

### **3. The Citizen in Arabic Sources:**

The Arabic dictionaries say, “The compatriot (*al-mawâtin*) is one who was nurtured with you in the same country or who lives there with you.” It is a word derived from the trilateral root *w-t-n*. *Lisân-ul-‘Arab* (*The Arabic Tongue*),<sup>(2)</sup> defining *w-t-n*, says: “The *watan* is where you live. People live there; that is their place. *Watan* is a place and also a dwelling. *Awtana-hu* means someone took it as a *watan*. The passive participle, *mawtin*, indicates a manifestation of war. Its plural is *mawâtin*. In the Glorious Revelation [i.e. the Holy *Qur’ân*] it says, “God gave you victory over many *mawâtin*.” (*Qur’ân, Sûrah 9:25*) Further, you settled the land (*awtantu*) and you

*decisively* settled (*watantu-hu tawtînan*), and you took it as a *watan* (*istawtantu-hâ*). Or one takes an initiative (*tawtîn*) as a first step ...” (vol. 13, p. 451)

The literature of the Arab heritage is packed with expressions of love for the homeland and one’s dwelling place. It expresses longing for it and love for its folk, the place where a human person grew from childhood to young adulthood. An example is what Ibn-ur-Rûmî wrote in a poem addressed to Sulaymân bin-‘Abd-Allâh to gain his support against a merchant who had forced him to sell his home:

I had a dwelling place [*watan*] I tried hard not to sell.

I see now one more fortune-blest in full possession.

If folk recall their homes, those homes call out as well,

Recalling days of youth, becoming their obsession.

Existential and romantic feelings, therefore, tied a person to a place, but it had no specific legal meaning. The question is: When does the term ‘*muwâtin*’ (in Arabic) acquire a legal meaning, a meaning that brings it closer to the concepts of ‘citizen’ and ‘citizenship’?

It seems that the first modern Arabic usages of the terms ‘citizen’ and ‘citizenship’ in a technical sense occurred in the writings of Rifâ‘ah Râfi‘ at-Tahtâwî (1801-1873) and Butrus al-Bustânî (1819-1883). They spoke in terms of the ‘native son’ (*ibn-ul-watan*), the indigenous person (*watanî*), and patriotism (*wataniyyah*).

Tahtâwî says in his fourth chapter, ‘Concerning the Homeland, Civilization and Education’, of his book the *Trustworthy Guide to Young People*: “The citizen is one who belongs [i.e. to the homeland ... *al-watan*] or has sought shelter in it, taking it as his or her homeland, sometimes attaching it to his name. It is said: ‘He is an indigenous person (*watanî*). That means that he enjoys the rights of his country, the most important of which is



rights within a human society. The indigenous person [now read, ‘citizen’] may not be described as ‘free’ unless he binds himself to the laws of the homeland and involves himself in their execution. By definition his commitment to the foundational laws of his country requires that his country guarantee him the rights of the city. He enjoys the privileges of his municipality. In this sense he is an indigenous person and a countryman. That means he is on the roster of the members of the city. He is a member of the body politic. And that is the highest distinction one can achieve in the community of nations.”

At-Tahtâwî goes on to say, “Being a member of a homeland does not just require that a person may claim the rights that homeland has to bestow, but he must also live up to the rights the homeland has to claim from him. If he does not do that his civic rights are forfeit.”

Butrus al-Bustânî, at-Tahtâwî’s contemporary, wrote in an article in 1860 published in *Nafîr Sûriyyah* [*The Syrian Grouping*]. Under the heading, ‘Nationalisms’

— although at the time he was still torn between his identity as an Ottoman and his identity as a Syrian — under the fourth category he defines, he said, “Syria (*bilâd-us-shâm*) and Arabia are well known as our homeland in all the variety of its plains, wildernesses, mountains and seacoasts. Syrians, in all their confessional, sub-cultural, racial and various branchings are all natives of the homeland.” He continues, giving the individual and the homeland a legal meaning: “O children of the land, you have a claim upon it. Furthermore, the homeland has claims upon its people. ... The homeland must assure for its people security for their most important rights: their lives, honor and property. Freedom it must also guarantee as regards their religious, cultural and civic rights. Not least of these is their right to freedom of conscience especially in matters religious.”

What, then, have we tried to achieve in referring to these two texts?

In referring to history we have tried to identify the transition point in the use of an

Arabic term, the point when it acquired meaning and signification from defining technical usages evolved in the course of the democratic experience of western nationalism. These indicate, in the course of articulating innate human rights, a thought-frame that can be abstracted and applied globally. Among these, as we have previously indicated, is the technical Arabic term that conveys the notion of ‘citizen’.

At-Tahtâwî and al-Bustânî, in the way they used the terms ‘homeland’ (*watan*), ‘indigenous person’ (*watani*) and nationalism (*wataniyyah*) were loading old and traditional Arabic terms with new and modern significance that historical awareness, noting divergent historical strands and cultures, can well appreciate. They served the then current process of acculturation. They moved the discussion in the direction of a legal understanding that defined the situation of the individual who dwells in a specific place where a certain society and system of government prevails toward a framework of

rights and responsibilities a ‘native son’ (*ibn-ul-watan*) enjoys in ‘homeland’ (*watan*). Shortly thereafter this technical usage of the terms ‘citizen’ (*muwâtin*) and ‘citizenship’ (*wataniyyah*) were employed in the Ottoman constitution of 1908. More importantly, in the constitutions of the 1920s, these terms were incorporated in the Arab East in Egypt, Iraq, Syria and Lebanon where, by the Treaty of Lausanne (1912) and under the principle of nationality, regional ‘citizenship’ was recognized for those living in what were essentially Ottoman lands. The peoples of these lands previously had been known as ‘Ottoman subjects’, but even earlier, in the language of the constitution of 1908, they were tacitly recognized as ‘Ottoman citizens’. Article 17 stipulated, “All Ottomans are equal before the law and they are also equal with respect to the kingdom’s rights and obligations.”

The articles that specify these rights and obligations clearly point to citizen rights with respect to free expression, the right to publish

and to assemble and form companies. There was the right to oppose and to express criticism. Most of these were derived from the constitutional law of France, Belgium and Britain.

The Arab constitutions of the 1920s in several countries redrafted these seminal ideas in light of their current historical situation. This may be described as a state of transition, on the one hand, from an understanding of ‘populace’ (*ar-ra‘iyyah*) expressed in terms of a relationship between an authoritarian state (*dawlah sultâniyyah*) and the various groupings of that state’s societies, and on the other hand, toward an understanding of ‘nationality’ (*al-jinsiyyah*) or national identity (*al-huwwiyyah*) under the aegis of the modern ‘citizen state’ (*ad-dawlah al-wataniyyah*). This latter was a newly-minted political entity that the literature of Arab nationalism spoke of as the ‘provincial state’ (*ad-dawlah al-qutriyyah*) expressing the pan-Arab ideology that preferred talking about an ‘Arab nation’,

demanding an Arab state understood as the over-arching nation state.

Whatever the nature of this ideological ambiguity between the ideal of the Arab nationalist state and the ‘provincial state’ bred by the demands of international, regional and local social realities, the novel ambiguities this shift in Arab political society — the shift from the notion of passive populace to the notion of the individual’s acquiring a nationality that, in its turn, included the right of citizenship in a state — sparked complex questions in the thinking of the Arab elite and in the way ordinary people began to think. It affected their actions and the way they responded to their fundamental novel reality as newly coined citizens.

#### **4. New Questions and Ambiguities:**

Briefly we may indicate several questions that precipitated the new ambiguities:

In this study we do not have the space to explore the new nation state. It endowed its citizens with a defined sense of belonging to a

region (or homeland ... *watan*) that became a state or had had a state imposed upon it by complex international, regional, internal or geo-political factors. So far as a country's people and their elite could 'take it in' culturally, politically, socially and existentially, this sense of belonging described citizenship. It also described the 'citizen' as a legal entity.

But belonging thus, symbolically present and influential though it have might been, there were other circles of belonging, some weaker but others stronger, to bear in mind. These circles of belonging might have been all-embracing, transcending belonging to a limited nationality tied to the state through which he or she gained the right to citizenship. For example there has been the Arab nationalist sense of belonging to an 'Arab Nation' with an imaginary nationalist state. There has also been the Islamic political sense of belonging to a fictional Muslim commonwealth with a Caliphate or political program that sidesteps the provincial state. There are any number of

‘belongingnesses’ — sectarian, religious or tribal loyalties — that may either branch away from or intrude upon and therefore compromise the sense a citizen’s membership within a state. What come to mind are the sectarian divides in Lebanon and the tribal groupings in The Yemen.

Whether this sense of belonging is broader than nationality (the identity given by the state to its citizens) or whether it is more narrowly defined, these other ‘belongingnesses’ raise this questions: Is cultural diversity the right way to go? How can these competing historical loyalties described as ethnic be reconciled with the citizen’s priority to affirm his or her nationality?

These questions imply another: Is it possible to gather these sub-identities together — be they great or small — so as to enrich the broader sense of citizenship? In whatever country, can the Arab citizen’s identity (leave aside tertiary greater or lesser identities) be enriched by his or her specific nationality? It is understood that this requires the practice of



democracy finely balanced between rights and responsibilities, between freedom and justice. There is a thin line, transgression of which could well lead to disruptions. Either local loyalties form up into a variety of indigenous and conflicting power groups (and that has all the makings for civil war), or else the state intervenes, tightens its grip and becomes a military or dictatorial regime.

In light of this, are we at a historical crossroads? Once again, are we going back to our historical parochialism?

## **5. ‘Lessons and Recollections’ — History’s Vision of the Future:**

The Ottoman state shifted from an absolute monarchy to a state controlled by foreign-imposed regulations (or capitulations ... *tanzîmât*) and subsequently to a constitutional monarchy. This latter stage is represented by the promulgation of constitutions twice, once in 1876 (but that was suspended within a year), and again in 1908 (and that was aborted by war and the militarization of the regime).

Nonetheless, it inspired great hopes among the modernizing Arab elite, but among ordinary people in society it also ushered in difficulties and raised obstacles.

The writer, Sulaymân al-Bustânî, a parliamentary representative from the governorate of Beirut, has recorded his recollections on how the parliamentary experiment began in the Muslim world. He observed that there was a dysfunction in how the citizen electors appreciated the notion of ‘representative’. They saw the representative as a mediating authority devoted to serving the interests of individuals and groups. This was not an authority for oversight and legislation.

In his book, *Lessons and Recollections* (*‘ibrah wa dhikrâ*) under the heading, ‘The Ottoman Constitution’, al-Bustânî wrote, “During the first parliamentary session of 1876 we quickly learned that people of every province thought their delegates represented their electors and nothing else. As they saw it, their delegates were under orders to promote all their desires and to exert themselves on

behalf of the groupings of individual voters whatever that entailed. From some provinces letters poured down like rain on their delegates demanding things that, had the delegates put them forward for debate, would have earned them the derision of all their colleagues. There was a demand by one to have an adversary disenfranchised and have all his assets transferred to him. Others demanded titles and honors. One petitioner asked that a governor be directed to look upon him or a colleague, requiring him to raise that person to high military office. One of these came from a mule driver whose animal had been stolen, demanding that his representative order its immediate return.”

Given this beginning we are not enlightened as to why the notion of parliamentary representation has persisted. In light of its beginning we cannot expect the past to enlighten the future, nor does the present explain the past. But when the two interact they do help evolve ideas that have some

scholarly legitimacy and point toward useful ideas.

We do not necessarily get closer to the notion of ‘representation’ (the representation of the citizen in the nation state) through the lens of history. The texts evolve, but that is not all. There is the inertia of existing and traditional institutions that affect public perception, but that is not all either. The texts *have* evolved. In many Arab lands they speak clearly about representing the people. There is also no question but that public perceptions have also changed.

This is evident in the political culture where democracy is expressed in broad bands of the elite, the educated classes, and even among the general citizenry. But, of whatever type, we note the persistence of an effective indigenous dynamic. It affects how people vote and how representatives are chosen. It is obvious that the relationship between voter and the voted upon remains one of service [in the sense al-Bustânî described]. It has yet to become a social or national contract in the context of a

nation state and its representative bodies. It remains a contract between a paternalistic authority and its client populace. It is within that context that loyalty is conceived. Loyalty is toward the regime. The Lebanese experience as regards the relationship between the citizen and his/her representative amply illustrates that this 'pastoral' or paternalistic bond still persists.

The significance of al-Bustânî's writing lies in the fact that he recorded the moment of a sharp historical break between two ideas: representative government and authoritarianism. The one idea was modern ushered in by the new constitution that specified equality among citizens, their freedoms and their rights. The other idea was of authority long established upon a mental set, way of reasoning and a pattern of daily behavior that came down from the past and lived in the present as something established or at least semi-permanent. It is an idea that can be summarized in a grouping of terms whose elements and connotations we may

draw from tradition and not least of all from the writing of Ibn-Khaldûn, especially his *al-wâzi‘ al-‘asabânî wa as-sultânî* [*Constraints Communal and Authoritarian*]. Indicative terms are: the flock of the populace (*ar-ra‘iyyah*), obedience (*tâ‘ah*), victory (*ghalabah*), loyalty (*wilâ’*), shelter (*lujû’*), following (*taba‘iyyah*), subservience (*istitbâ‘*), and rebellion (*mumâna‘ah*). All these terms are indicative of the sort of governing authority that rested on protection and service, breaking the back of complainers, and voluntary or coerced loyalty. If you didn’t knuckle under you got out. It was a sort of social contract between various levels of government that mediated affairs for a society composed of subjects belonging to and organized in various bodies bonded by group loyalties (*‘asabiyyah*) on the one hand, and, on the other hand, the dominant or over-arching homogeneous group known as ‘the people of the state’. This social contract was limited to extending service or benefit in exchange for so-called ‘loyalty’.

What al-Bustânî described of 1908 was the actual break moment when two ideational systems split apart. It was also a break between two constructions of history. Al-Bustânî was laying his money on a change for the better a quarter of a century down the road as education, nurture, progress, and economic fortunes improved across the board. Now three-quarters of a century since that wager was made, al-Bustânî still leaves the door wide open to the question: How will the Arab and Muslim worlds through their citizens achieve the democratic transformation? The breadth of this question remained and still remains a matter of heated debate. Why is it that we still encounter obstacles — obstacles in the path of the transition from a clan-based authoritarian society to a citizen-based democratic society — and why can we not come up with what it takes to overcome those obstacles?

In our opinion, no culture or religion is more or less amenable to the idea of democracy. There is a mistaken assumption currently in circulation that Christianity in the countries

where it is dominant is more friendly to the idea of democracy, and that Islam is congenitally resistant or even antagonistic to it. Doubtless these assertions convey the biases of those who express them. They exploit the focal western perception that claims modernism as its own, interpreting it in its own consumerist terms. The West has also marshaled extremist fundamentalist forces that seek to transpose the past into the present in a manner that intends to defend a western position that no longer has credibility. It confuses the historical record; past and present get flipped end-for-end. Fictitious dams are erected between cultures that short-circuit their interaction by promoting a fanciful picture of what has gone before. What this logic intends is to effectively restore the old totalitarian state in a new guise. The modernization of totalitarianism is achieved through installing a bureaucratic military government, or a one-party system, or the deification of the Supreme Leader through making it a cardinal sin to criticize him.



The fact is that all cultures (and all religions, for that matter) have, at given moments in history, interpreted and read their texts in a variety of ways. These readings quickly inspired ideologies for governments, regimes, political relations, groups and factions — that is, social forces. It is quite natural for these forces to resist new changes in the way government and its institutions work. These ideologies customarily turn into wearisome or contentious hectoring under the cloak of a particular political idea, but that cannot transgress upon the essence of culture. Almost by definition the cultural essence does not develop or change.

If, during the Middle Ages, the reading of Christian culture yielded a social and political ideology antagonistic to the intellect and opposed to the individual's being transformed into a free citizen in an impartial state, another reading emerged and allied itself with the Reformation, with the Renaissance, with humanism and the industrial revolution, and with the Enlightenment. It exerted itself to

creating a ‘secular theology’ in the 20th century. As some have observed, Christianity had to learn democracy and to adopt the notion of ‘citizenship’ or the right of the individual within the general body and that body’s rights over the individual. It learned this over the course of history and the social and economic changes it brought; it learned this by facing the demands and pressures of reality; it learned this in the face of effective political activity and the diversification of social forces; it did *not* learn this by virtue of its predisposition or lack thereof.

Similarly, this logic of change, adaptation and ‘going with the flow’ is not alien to Muslim culture. Efforts in this direction were already evident in the 19th century when pioneers prefigured the awakening. We note with at-Tahtâwî and the earlier generation of reformers that the break with the past that has taken place does not indicate a cultural failure, transmutation or rebellion. What it indicates is that there are factors that may be studied and absorbed, and that have led to this break.

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## References:

\*) Wajîh Kawtharânî is a Lebanese researcher and academician.

[1]- Pierre Rosanvallon, *Le sacred du citoyen, Histoire du suffrage universel en France*, folio Paris 2001.

2- *Lisân-ul-‘Arab* is an intimidating fifteen volume somewhat back-to-front compilation by al-Imâm Abî-Fadl Jamâl-ud-Dîn Muhammad bin-Makram. For many long years it has been the best lexicon of last resort for the Arabic language. The quotation here is mercifully focused and selective. [TR]