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THE LANGUAGES OF THE ARAB REVOLUTIONS

Abdou Filali-Ansary

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I fully appreciate the honor bestowed upon me by my inclusion in the group of scholars and political leaders who have previously delivered the Seymour Martin Lipset Lecture on Democracy in the World. I am pleased to have this opportunity to engage with Professor Lipset's thought—an opportunity that I had strongly wished for after meeting him briefly during one of my visits to the National Endowment for Democracy, but one that sadly did not materialize during his lifetime.

In preparation for this lecture, I read again several of Lipset's writings that had left a lasting impression on me years ago. These included two of his seminal essays: "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," published in March 1959, and "The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited," which was based upon an address that he gave as president of the American Sociological Association in 1993.¹ At a time when change seems to be accelerating, and momentous events are happening in quick succession, rereading these essays invites us to step back from the avalanche of everyday events and place them in a larger frame with a deeper perspective. My hope is that this may help us to gain a better understanding of the changes that are taking place around us, as well as give us some useful insights for thinking about the future.

One of the lessons that we learn from Lipset concerns our need to

THE SEYMOUR MARTIN LIPSET LECTURE ON DEMOCRACY IN THE WORLD

Abdou Filali-Ansary delivered the eighth annual Seymour Martin Lipset Lecture on Democracy in the World on 26 October 2011 at the Canadian Embassy in Washington, D.C., and on October 24 at the Centre for International Studies at the Munk School of Global Affairs at the University of Toronto. The title of his lecture was “The Arab Revolutions: Democracy and Historical Consciousness.” The Lipset Lecture is cosponsored by the National Endowment for Democracy and the Munk School, with financial support this year from the Albert Shanker Institute, the American Federation of Teachers, the Canadian Embassy in Washington, and the Canadian Donner Foundation.

Seymour Martin Lipset, who passed away at the end of 2006, was one of the most influential social scientists and scholars of democracy of the past half-century. A frequent contributor to the *Journal of Democracy* and a founding member of its Editorial Board, Lipset taught at Columbia, the University of California–Berkeley, Harvard, Stanford, and George Mason University. He was the author of numerous important books, including *Political Man*, *The First New Nation*, *The Politics of Unreason*, and *American Exceptionalism: A Double-Edged Sword*. He was the only person ever to have served as president of both the American Political Science Association (1979–80) and the American Sociological Association (1992–93).

Lipset’s work covered a wide range of topics: the social conditions of democracy, including economic development and political culture; the origins of socialism, fascism, revolution, protest, prejudice, and extremism; class conflict, structure, and mobility; social cleavages, party systems, and voter alignments; and public opinion and public confidence in institutions. Lipset was a pioneer in the study of comparative politics, and no comparison featured as prominently in his work as that between the two great democracies of North America. Thanks to his insightful analysis of Canada in comparison with the United States, most fully elaborated in *Continental Divide*, he has been dubbed the “Tocqueville of Canada.”

Previous Lipset Lectures were delivered by Ivan Krastev (“Paradoxes of the New Authoritarianism,” 2010), Nathan Glazer (“Democracy and Diversity: Dealing with Deep Divides,” 2009), Jean Bethke Elshtain (“Religion and Democracy: Allies or Antagonists?” 2008), Pierre Hassner (“Russia’s Transition to Autocracy: The Implications for World Politics,” 2007), Saad Eddin Ibrahim (“Toward Islamic Democracies,” 2006), Francis Fukuyama (“Identity, Immigration, and Liberal Democracy,” 2005), and Fernando Henrique Cardoso (“Scholarship and Statesmanship,” 2004).

identify categories that will let us study political change—and particularly processes of democratization—from the vantage of the social sciences rather than from a theoretical viewpoint that assumes hidden forces to be at work, be they cultural or material in nature. The polarity of (ideological or cultural) “superstructure” and (material or economic) “base” prevailed in academic circles for decades after Marxists had introduced it. One and only one unambiguous answer was sought to a very large question: What is the ultimate factor that determines the course of history—economics or culture?

Although such formulations may seem to us now to be crude and old-fashioned, in fact they have not really and entirely gone away. The opposition between the material and the cultural is kept alive by, among other things, a kind of inertia reflected in the divisions separating academic disciplines. Most academics studying social and political matters tend to see themselves either as economists (or economic historians) focusing on the material bases of society, or as specialists in cultural expressions in one or another of their multiple forms. As a consequence, these academics wind up lending primacy to this or that “factor”—the one that they have chosen as their main object of study.

Earlier in his life, Lipset had begun at one end of the spectrum,² but when his thought matured, he brought the two poles together, as is shown by the subtitle of his 1959 essay. It is significant that he labeled them differently from the common usage of the time, calling one “economic development” and the other “political legitimacy.” In doing so, he introduced two categories that could be used to establish clearly bounded objects of inquiry, thus allowing them to be approached through the standard and reproducible methods of the social sciences, including comparisons, tests, and sometimes measurements. At the same time, he spelled out the scope and limits of the type of inquiry upon which he was embarking, stressing the importance of formulating *testable* propositions, of avoiding ideas of mechanical causality in favor of multivariable convergences, and of keeping open the possibility of later adjustment or revision (or “revisitation,” as he called it).

In adopting such a perspective, we are no longer in the grip of deep convictions about great turns in history or enduring cultural or civilizational identities, but in the realm of facts and characterizations that can be observed, tested, and interpreted within explicit parameters. When the concept of “material base” or “infrastructure” is replaced by “economic development,” it immediately becomes a set of measurable variables. When “superstructure” is defined as “political legitimacy,” then questions of history, values, and worldviews can be brought back to the discussion in a “controlled” way, as “variables” that can be studied like other historical matters. The links between the two classes of variables are thus highlighted. The classes cease to be a pair of nonoverlapping sets, each of which comprises objects so completely different from those found in the

other that they cannot even be discussed together. Instead, they come to be viewed as collections of variables that can *all* be studied in ways widely accepted and well understood by historians and social scientists alike.

The View from Political Legitimacy

I believe that a Lipsetian (or neo-Lipsetian) approach can help us to understand what is happening in the Arab world today, and may also help us as we strive to peer forward toward what may happen (which is, of course, not the same thing as predicting what *will* happen).

In recent decades, attention directed to developments in the Arab region has focused mostly on its cultural heritage, often assuming a kind of continuity between past and present, a persistence of essential features that can be found in any country or society that belongs to the region. Attempts at Marxist explanations of the region's past, as well as attention to issues of economic development, have been more or less pushed aside or left to fade into the background. Since the upsurge of Islamism, one might say that all eyes have been directed to the region's religious heritage and to the overwhelming effects that this is supposed to have on the present.

Here the approach suggested by Lipset helps us to set aside implicit and unverifiable assumptions that can be neither proven nor falsified, and to focus instead on things that we can observe and interpret. He begins with a telling definition:

Legitimacy involves the capacity of a political system to engender and maintain the belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or proper ones for the society. The extent to which contemporary democratic political systems are legitimate depends in large measure upon the ways in which the key issues which have historically divided the society have been resolved.³

Political legitimacy thus understood applies to *all* societies across cultural and historical divides, and it brings their particular histories and value systems into the picture in ways that enable us to study their effects on the present. What should count for us now, in other words, is *not* the past as academics can reconstruct it, but the *memory* of the past as it survives in the consciousness of people and shapes their attitudes regarding present-day challenges.

One must immediately add, however, that memories are not stable, that they vary substantially across different times and places, and that most societies are not bound to a single narrative about their pasts. A clear illustration of this may be found in the recent history of the Arab world, where two different discourses seem to have unfolded at the same time, often interacting and sometimes even becoming intertwined, yet remaining clearly identifiable as two separate strands. One highlights the role of

Islam and its religious traditions, and emphasizes the overwhelming influence of the remote past on present-day Arab societies. The other, commonly called the Arab Renaissance or Nahda, emerged in the nineteenth century, bringing together Christians, Muslims, and Jews who spoke the Arabic language and felt that they belonged to one culture and shared common aspirations for the future. The Nahda was secular by definition and converged with the ideals of the European Enlightenment. It included brilliant figures, such as Rifa'a al-Tahtawi, Butros al-Bustani, and Khalil Gibran, who contributed great works in literature, history, and political thought, and whose influence remains substantial.

Today, academics who study the modern history of Muslim societies usually choose to devote their attention either to the Islamic revival or to the Nahda (in fact, more often to the former), although the two of them were unfolding at the same time and engaging in intense mutual debate, highlighting different moments or aspects of the past and providing different reference points on the basis of which societies could choose to shape their respective futures. Quite often, thinkers and activists belonging to one of the two movements adopted and used notions, concepts, and categories from the other. Although the prevailing impression today is that Arab public opinion has settled in favor of the current that has evolved into Islamic fundamentalism or Islamism, there is clear evidence that the ideals of the Nahda also continue to have a powerful influence. In other words, we tend to think nowadays that there are two separate camps, one of fundamentalists and one of secularists. Yet at ground level, things are more nuanced and more complex.

The evidence for this is overwhelming and is clear in the way that people talk, think, and act with regard to politics. Roger Scruton, the author of a popular dictionary of political thought, asks us to consider what we would learn if we were to “extract, both from active debate, and from the theories and intuitions which surround it, the principal ideas through which modern political beliefs find expression.”⁴ One thing that would immediately draw our attention is the variety and novelty of notions that are being used by Arab populations today to articulate their frustrations and aspirations. Slogans still abound which convey the impression that invoking glorious moments of the past or a return to religion (or traditions linked to religion) is the only real alternative to the ills of the present. Probably the most renowned of these slogans are “a return to *shari'a*” and “Islam is the solution.” Alongside them, however, are a number of new terms or phrases— notions that have no apparently traceable origins in the Islamic heritage yet have become common currency, including “human rights” and “democracy.” So even though calls for a return to approaches derived from the past or built on religion continue to flourish, their impact may be overestimated, especially by observers who take words at face value and seek their meaning in dictionaries rather than in a grasp of contexts and practices.

As the German historian of the Muslim world Reinhard Schulze has noted, “discourse containing Islamic terms and symbols” may be less about religion than about a certain approach toward the task of coming to terms with the modern world. Religious notions, in other words, are called upon to face the overwhelming challenge of modern concepts. Schulze offers the following description of the situation in the early part of the twentieth century:

Both kinds of discourse [that is, the Islamic and the European] communicate within Islamic societies and provide a permanent process of cultural translation. This means that Islamic terms and symbols can constantly be translated into “European” ones and vice versa. This in turn allows for *code switching*, that is, the use of one or the other cultural languages of modernism, depending on the context. Islamist parties thus interpreted the leading themes of the “European” political public with a vocabulary of their own, which gave the outside observer the impression that these parties were religious groups. But in fact, the Islamic and the European discourse became widely assimilated to one another, and it was only with the emphasis of new reference points that they were torn apart. This again gave a dynamic impetus to politics in Islamic countries. The common recourse to an Islamic language also enhanced the awareness of belonging to one and the same “cultural community.”⁵

The seemingly irreducible opposition between Islamic and modern discourses today, therefore, reflects a recent turn—the outcome of a polarization that, one may add, has never been complete or final. Those who were attentive to Arab discourse in an earlier period saw in it a manner of accommodating modern ideals by grounding them or encapsulating them within a framework of familiar Islamic landmarks.

What the “Arab Spring” shows is that, while this form of appropriation had proven unsuccessful and had receded in the face of intense polarization, an unsuspected wave was gathering strength and producing a *new political language*. This can be seen in the coinage and dissemination of new concepts that capture the aspirations and hopes of the new generations in the Arab world in ways that are aligned with modern political ideals and, at the same time, adjusted to the particular conditions of local populations.

In some cases, there is total equivalence between terms that originated elsewhere, such as “democracy,” “human rights,” or “civil society,” and the corresponding Arabic terms (*dimukratiya*, *huquq al-insan*, and *mujtama’ madani*, respectively) that have now become part of the common language. In other cases, there are “adjustments” or outright creations, as with “rule of law,” which becomes *dawlat al-haq wa al-qanun* (a state bound by law and respectful of rights) or *dawlat al-mu’assassat* (literally, a “state made of institutions,” as contradistinguished from a state made by and for individual rulers).

Here one should stress the crucial impact of the written press, which has been amplified by satellite TV stations such as al-Jazeera. Atten-

tion has rightly been paid to the role of the Internet and social media in stimulating and supporting the protest movements of 2011, but with respect to the long process that led to the emergence of a new political language, it was the written press that played the decisive role.

It remains true, however, that many languages are spoken at the same time. Concepts such as *shari'a*, *jihad*, and *ijtihad* have even made their way into European languages, where they tend to carry with them specific connotations. Within Muslim contexts, these terms do refer to perspectives well entrenched in the collective memory; in some circles, they are meant to express concrete expectations, as when *shari'a* is used to refer to particular sets of prescriptions in family law and penal matters. The alarm that such terms arouse in the minds of Westerners may, in some cases, be justified. This calls for a renewed attention to the ways in which collective memories (or historical consciousness, as we are proposing to call it) are sustained and shaped by modern education and the media.

But the most significant development may be precisely what is neglected in most studies of the region: the emergence of a new set of notions, phrases, and expressions that are modern, local, and expressive of popular aspirations. These new phrases and expressions will influence the ways in which the older ones are understood, and will expand the discourse concerning the norms and ideals that should guide public policies.

There is now across the Arab world a new language of politics. It includes not only translations of notions familiar to English speakers, but also other formulations of views about popular rights and aspirations that are clearly modern. The remarkable fact is that this new language is now the common speech of *all* parties, Islamists included. Its terms have thus acquired the status of universal yardsticks by which all matters are assessed or measured, including notions rooted in tradition or religion. One might even say that today religious views are being vindicated and justified through the medium of modern norms.

I would assert that, due in large part to the influence of this new political language, democratic legitimacy is becoming the only form of political legitimacy acceptable in Arab societies. But if this analysis is correct, how can we understand the persistence of calls for a return to *shari'a*, and the endorsement that such calls seem to receive when Arabs are allowed to exercise their democratic right to vote in free elections?

***Shari'a* in the Context of the Arab Revolutions**

Wael Hallaq, one of the most prominent contemporary scholars working on Islamic law, states:

There is no doubt that Islamic law is today a significant cornerstone in the reaffirmation of Islamic identity, not only as a matter of positive law but also, and more importantly, as the foundation of a cultural uniqueness.

Indeed, for many of today's Muslims, to live by Islamic law is not merely a legal issue, but one that is distinctly psychological.⁶

The scope of this assertion needs to be tempered in light of our earlier observations about the advent of newer modes of expression of public opinion. It is also reductionist in treating personal piety, which is clearly at work among those seeking obedience to *shari'a* in their own daily lives and is a powerful inclination for many individuals in all societies, as a purely psychological phenomenon. Yet while Hallaq's statement is exaggerated, it does capture the impressions that prevail nowadays among many of those who study the Arab world.

To understand how memories of the past shape present-day attitudes regarding *shari'a*, we must look back at the way in which the history of Muslims unfolded. After the early divisions following Muhammad's death in 632 C.E., the political order that stabilized and persisted for centuries in most Muslim contexts was far from unbounded despotism. At the same time, however, it was equally remote from the notions of collective, shared, or distributed power that early generations of Muslims had aspired to and that had been sanctified by widely accepted religious authority. Once it became clear that the latter, the fully legitimate Islamic system of power, could not be maintained or restored, most Muslims settled on a less ambitious goal—namely, the acceptance of de facto rulers provided that they committed themselves to obeying and enforcing the law, understood as the corpus of prescriptions elaborated from the sacred scriptures by scholars independent of the state. In the words of Noah Feldman:

In its essence, the *shari'a* aspires to be Law that applies equally to every human, great or small, ruler or ruled. No one is above it, and everyone at all times is bound by it. Though the constitutional structure that historically developed to implement the *shari'a* afforded the flexibility necessary for practical innovation and effective government, that structure also maintained the ideal of legality. Judges who are devoted to the *shari'a* in this sense are therefore devoted to the rule of law, and not the rule of the state. The legitimacy of a state in which officials adhere to this structure of beliefs would depend upon the state's faithfulness to implementing the law.⁷

Such an arrangement did provide people with some protection from the arbitrariness of rulers and enabled them to live their lives within the framework of regulations understood to be in conformity with the will of God. This has left lasting consequences, notably a deeply entrenched ethical consciousness among Muslims that extends well beyond the ranks of those who are driven by feelings of personal piety or by a commitment to what has come to be seen as an "Islamic" order.

That being said, one must also stress that calls for a return to *shari'a*

do not mean the same thing in every situation. In some cases, they clearly convey an aspiration for the *moralization* of public life. In popular circles, where illiteracy often still prevails, as well as among those

Modern conceptions of legitimacy are likely to prevail in future debates. Yet it is too soon to discount the risk posed by more rigid views that see shari'a as a "catalogue of prescriptions," many of which are incompatible with the moral sense acquired by humans across different cultures.

whose education conveyed scientific and technical skills with little opening to the humanities, traditional religious formulations remain the way of expressing a wish for what in the West would be described as "basic decency" (the absence of gross abuses of power, widespread corruption, or general cynicism).

It is this that lends slogans such as "Islam is the solution" their meaning and their strength, and that explains the success of Islamists in so many places. Having been in the opposition for so long, repressed and rejected by the ruling elites, they have found words to articulate widespread disgust at the gross misbehavior of those

in power, words that resonate with popular longings for a return to basic rules of decency. The Islamists are now reaping the fruits of speaking to and for the people in a language that they understand.

At the same time, however, this can foster a number of misunderstandings, as may be observed from some recent trends and turns of events. *Shari'a* is venerated among the popular strata because it refers to the idea of a moral order, and because it still has the prestige of a system that long helped to protect communities from the arbitrariness and abuse of despots. *Shari'a* provided ways to restrain the despot, because it invoked a divine, absolute rule of law (a law given by God, which lies beyond the reach of men, including the rich and powerful).

Yet the absoluteness of *shari'a* is sometimes transferred from its principles to its prescriptions, from the general framework that supports a rule of law to particular rulings that were formulated and implemented through particular interpretations in specific contexts. These rulings are then extracted from their social and historical contexts and used as elements of a modern legal system. This kind of "codification" of *shari'a* began to take place in the nineteenth century, and it often included specific provisions of family law that discriminate against women or harsh punishments that are totally unacceptable in the light of modern ethical principles. Such punishments generally had been implemented rarely, except when despots wanted to deliver strong messages to restive populations. But today they have come to be seen by narrow-minded secularists as an essential feature of *shari'a*.

As indicated earlier, I believe that modern conceptions of political legitimacy, formulated in what I have called the new political language of Muslims, are likely to prevail in future political debates. It is too soon, however, to discount the risk posed by more rigid views that see *shari'a* as a “catalogue of prescriptions,” many of which are incompatible with the moral sense acquired by human beings across different cultures. These views derive their continuing resilience from an uncritical and closed-minded brand of traditional religious scholarship.

Will “*Weltanschauung* Politics” Return?

We should not forget that processes of democratization are facilitated by combinations of factors (or prerequisites), and that they remain under threat from adverse conditions even when these prerequisites are present. Extremism comes in various forms, and some of them have more easily gained acceptance than others. As Lipset says:

Weltanschauung politics have also weakened the possibilities for a stable democracy, since parties characterized by such total ideologies have often attempted to create what Sigmund Neumann has called an “integrated” environment, one in which as much as possible of the lives of their members is encapsulated within ideologically linked activities. These actions are based on the assumption that it is important to isolate their followers from contact with “falsehood” expressed by the non-believers.⁸

What prevented most European countries in the early twentieth century from joining the ranks of democracies? One may point with little risk of error to what Lipset called “*Weltanschauung* politics” (hereafter WP), which in Europe took the forms of fascism, communism, and various nationalisms. Movements belonging to this category kept a firm grip on power in some countries for decades, and would not be totally overcome until 1989, the year when the Berlin Wall was torn down, opening the way for the real and perhaps final end of WP in Europe.

In the Arab world, WP emerged shortly after the creation of modern states. It took the form of nationalist regimes (of which the Baathist variants were the most virulent), which prevailed in many Arab countries, often in combination with a proclaimed commitment to socialism.⁹ The region’s remaining monarchies were spared this particular fate, but in many cases they suffered from another form of extremism, arising from the unleashing of tribal or ultratraditionalist forces. Now, however, WP is receding in the region, and people are starting to have their say in politics, using different “languages” simultaneously: One of them is that of *shari'a* understood as an ethical framework, a language of moral references comprehensible to a majority of the population; another is a new modern language that, as we have already described, has made its mark on the political scene.

Should we push for a sharp contrast and a clear distinction between these two ways of debating about political ideals and policies, in order to avoid ambiguity and the risks that it brings? Theoretically, and from a purely intellectual point of view, nothing short of full clarity should be accepted. On a practical level, however, when the majority of the population chooses, through a democratic process, to keep in its constitution a reference to *shari'a* or Islam, should we not accept the popular will? We know that, for the traditionally educated, the concept of the rule of law is equated with the supremacy of *shari'a*, understood not as a catalogue of specific prescriptions but as a framework for implementing moral norms in the social and political order.

As long as *shari'a* is a kind of flag—a symbol of identity and a way of expressing moral values and the need to uphold them in political practice—more or less in the way that the British monarchy is kept as a symbol of a specific identity and of attachment to cherished traditions, there is no reason to oppose the will of the majority. No democracy can thrive by turning its back on “the ways in which the key issues which have historically divided the society have been resolved.” A purely secularist approach, following the French model of *laïcité*, itself may become a form of WP, if it is imposed on people as an external ideology. This is in fact what happened in Syria under the Baathist regime, which today is revealing its true face in all its ugliness.

At the same time, we must remain vigilant against a return of WP from the other end of the ideological spectrum, taking the form of an insistence on restoring an Islamic system as it is imagined to have been in the past, and on implementing *shari'a* viewed as a “catalogue of prescriptions.” We know that these kinds of conceptions derive from ignorance disguised in the garb of traditional Islamic religious scholarship, and that today they are sustained principally by backward monarchies. The danger here comes from a genre of “pseudo-learning,” a range of approaches that employ apologetics as a way of glorifying one’s own heritage instead of exploring it in an honest, scholarly way.

Here we must stress that, in the short term, the best way to face the rise of such attitudes may include the acceptance of political leaders who are able to reach the moral sensibilities of their citizens by addressing their concerns in a language that they understand. In the medium and long term, however, the emphasis must be put on fostering an education that helps people to learn about their religious heritage in ways that respect their intelligence rather than take advantage of their lack of sound knowledge.

In conclusion, we now seem to be at a moment when large strata in Arab societies (and in developing countries more broadly) have reached a state of real disenchantment with utopias, and seem to be ready for other forms of political participation. This is the great good news of the Arab Spring, and perhaps its most important lesson. The conviction

that there *are* alternatives to the kinds of regimes that have for so long imposed themselves on Arab societies—that life under this or that brand of dictatorship and unaccountable rule emphatically does *not* have to be the Arabs' fate—seems to have taken hold of the collective imagination.

Muslim societies have become well aware of the weakness of despotism and of the possibility of finding and implementing workable alternatives that provide dignity and hope to the masses.

An opening-up of the historical awareness of Arab peoples to the democratic ideas, models, and experiences that have emerged in modern times has now become a distinct possibility. This is clear to anyone who *listens* carefully to what people are saying and what they are calling for.

But the news of this favorable turn of events should not lead us to lower our guard. The debate is continuing, and supporters of democracy must still overcome serious challenges. Utopian

slogans calling for the restoration of *shari'a* as a list of harsh prescriptions in use many centuries ago still attract followers—especially among large numbers of people who do not clearly see the distinction between *shari'a* as a general injunction to cherish the rule of law and *shari'a* as the enactment of specific legal provisions.

Here we find ourselves confronted by gross misinterpretations of the Islamic heritage that find no support in a careful historical assessment of the development of Muslim societies. These misinterpretations are lent some authority by the support that they receive from a traditional scholarship that refuses to accept any kind of self-criticism. The other aspect of their appeal comes from the feeling, still entrenched in some social strata, that only a full return to the religious heritage can help to moralize the public order. Clarification will be needed in order to disseminate a good understanding of the past and find appropriate ways to learn lessons from it. This process can benefit from the indisputable fact that society has become well aware of the weakness of despotism and of the possibility of finding and implementing workable alternatives that provide dignity and hope to the masses.

In these pages in 1996, commenting on an article by Robin Wright that discussed two visions of Islamic reformation, those of Rachid Ghannouchi (now leader of the Ennahda [or al-Nahda] party in Tunisia) and of exiled Iranian thinker Abdul Karim Soroush, I came to the following conclusion:

There are voices, like Ghannouchi's, calling for a return to the "implicit constitution" that Islam is supposed to have provided (and which may not be opposed to democracy, or may even find in it a good expression of some of Islam's requirements). These are typically calls to resist "West-

ernization” and to return to the original (and never fully implemented) Islamic constitution via a course of general reform that usually involves the moralization of public affairs and of political and social relationships. Appeals like these are reminiscent of the “natural and cyclical reflex” to seek a purified and more forceful version of Islam that the fourteenth century Arab historian Ibn Khaldun observed in Muslim societies whenever rulers exceeded the limits of the tolerable. For all their sincerity and effectiveness in terms of influence on the masses, such appeals grow out of attitudes that are trapped in the past. They can in no way lead to a real democratization of society.¹⁰

Today I would alter that judgment. Having chosen Seymour Martin Lipset as a guide, I recognize the need for “revisiting” old conclusions. I would still insist that thinkers such as Soroush, Fazlur Rahman, Abdelmajid Charfi, and a host of others are needed to offer the education required for Muslims to recover a healthy historical consciousness and, with it, a religiosity fully centered on the individual and his or her ethical outlook. But now I would also accept that figures like Ghannouchi are needed to facilitate the transition from despotism to constitutional rule. Given that the government of Tunisia, well before the Arab Spring, had already put in place reforms that bar any recourse to narrow interpretations of *shari‘a*, Ghannouchi will have to find ways to accommodate his “Islamism” to the laws, regulations, and procedures of a modern state—all under the vigilant eyes of well-educated elites and citizens who have shown that they know how to rid themselves of despots.

As Lipset reminds us, “Democracy is not achieved by acts of will alone; but men’s wills, through action, can shape institutions and events in directions that reduce or increase the chance for the development and survival of democracy.”¹¹ The challenges confronting Arab societies that aspire to achieve democratic self-government and the rule of law (including respect for human rights) should be addressed in a positive fashion at the level of institution-building and policy-making—not by pursuing quixotic fights against slogans and utopias.

Even the upcoming struggles over the role of *shari‘a* can and should be waged in the arenas of mass education and democratic politics. Yet as these day-to-day struggles continue, it is also essential that serious thinkers and scholars strive to clarify the various meanings that *shari‘a* has had in the past and to explore how it can be interpreted in ways that meet the needs and aspirations of modern citizens.

NOTES

1. Seymour Martin Lipset, “Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy,” *American Political Science Review* 53 (March 1959): 69–105; and “The Social Requisites of Democracy Revisited,” *American Sociological Review* 59 (February 1994): 1–22.

2. In "Steady Work: An Academic Memoir," Lipset says: "Intellectually, I moved a considerable distance, from believing in Marxism-Leninism-Trotskyism to a moderate form of democratic socialism and finally to a middle-of-the-road position, as a centrist, or as some would say, a conservative Democrat." *Annual Review of Sociology* 22 (August 1996): 1.

3. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy," 86.

4. Roger Scruton, "Preface to the Third Edition," *Palgrave Macmillan Dictionary of Political Thought*, 3rd ed. (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), xii.

5. Reinhard Schulze, *A Modern History of the Islamic World* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2002), 10.

6. Wael B. Hallaq, *The Origins and Evolution of Islamic Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 1.

7. Noah Feldman, *The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 149.

8. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy," 94.

9. Lebanon is probably the only exception here, since it has been designed to be and to remain a mosaic of closed communities.

10. Abdou Filali-Ansary, "Islam and Liberal Democracy: The Challenge of Secularization," *Journal of Democracy* 7 (April 1996): 79–80.

11. Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy," 103.