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# POPULAR UPRISINGS AND ARAB DEMOCRATIZATION

This paper proposes that domestic political conflict presents opportunities for positive change with long-term effects despite the "inherent plausibility" of its harmfulness. This position is tested using examples of Arab bread riots in the context of the wave of Arab democratizations over the past twenty years. Although generally guided and controlled, Arab political liberalizations (especially those of Sudan, Algeria, and Jordan) have their roots in pressure from below. Elsewhere (as in Tunisia and Egypt), similar pressure has helped consolidate—or, at least, place—political reform on the agenda of de-legitimized ruling elites. Democracy and democratization in the Arab Middle East have almost invariably meant a trend toward "parliamentarization" and "electoralization," without yet presaging polyarchal rule. Between 1985 and 1996, the Arab world has experienced more than twenty pluralist or multiparty parliamentary elections, twice the number that took place in the entire preceding period since the early 1960s, when many Arab countries won independence from colonial rule. A focus on the *khubz*-iste (the quietist bread seeker who abandons quietism as soon as his livelihood is threatened by the state) and the *ḥiṭiste* (the quietist unemployed who becomes active in bread protests) provides a new perspective on democratization processes in Arab societies.

## ARAB DEMOCRATIZATION

Faced with outside pressures—the global diffusion of democracy and human rights as new standards and legitimators in domestic politics—and crises of economic performance and of de-legitimacy from the inside, many Arab ruling elites have embarked on previously unthinkable political reforms,[1] catching students of Arab politics unprepared. Most research into Arab politics has only recently[2] turned its attention to the question of democracy, focusing instead on the behavior of political elites and on the Arab–Israeli conflict, to the detriment of other research areas.[3] Indeed, opportunities in the Arab world are slowly unfolding for greater participation and contestation—the two dimensions of Robert Dahl's polyarchy.[4] However, even though Arab political liberalizations have not hitherto led to popularly constituted and accountable government, rule of law, or revitalized intermediary institutions, or put an

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end to abuse of office and serious violations of human rights,[5] democratization is the paradigm through which they are interpreted. By and large, the experiences of Southern and Eastern Europe, Latin and South America—regions that find themselves in stages of transition far more congenial with transcending the democratic threshold—form the comparative framework for the study of democratic stirrings and initiatives in the Arab Middle East. The state of flux observable in most Arab political liberalizations suggests that Anglo-American paradigms—namely, democratization—are not easily (or, at least, not yet) applicable to Arab democratic experiments unless they are supplemented with indigenous forms of explanation and interpretation in which political realities and phenomena are conceived.[6] Hence, a process of dialectic, as against synthesis, is needed between indigenous forms of explanation and European-based frameworks in which knowledge practices from "East" and "West" engage in cross-cultural "fertilization" or what Louis Cantori calls "cross-cultural dialogue."[7]

Since the 1960s, the study of Middle Eastern politics has seen many Eurocentric paradigmatic approaches and explanatory universals—developmentalism and modernization, dependence theory, culturalism, corporatism to bureaucratic authoritarianism—come into vogue and go back out of it. Understandably, wide consensus exists among specialists that as a focus of area study, Middle Eastern politics poses many a challenge, if not many a lag, theoretically and conceptually.[8] No matter how potent and functional in the milieu in which they are conceived, Eurocentric interpretive frameworks cannot be expected to fit comfortably in the milieus into which they are often transplanted, or always to be congenial to the different forms of interpretation on which they are imposed. There are as many forms of interpreting and explaining a given political phenomenon and of reading a given political reality as there are cultures and categories of thought. Naturally, this does not preclude the possibilities for congruence, overlap, or exchange. That relatively abstract Eurocentric paradigms may not serve well to explain the dynamics of Middle Eastern politics, especially with regard to the so-called third wave[9] of Arab democratizations and transitions[10] to polyarchal rule, has been suggested by many leading commentators on the prospects of "Arab democracy."[11]

Recent analyses of the complex dynamics of Arab movements toward liberalizing the authoritarian structures of the various *mukhābarāt* (police) states are fragmentary. In general, democracy is considered irrelevant to the Arab context. Michael Hudson deprecates this exceptionalism—which produces a literature that excludes the Arab world when the subject under study is democracy.[12] An extension of this exceptionalist and Orientalist view is the often assumed incompatibility of Islam and democratic practices, a bias that John Esposito and James Piscatori reject.[13] This bias has roots in an "adversarial" history between Islam and Christendom, as Cantori correctly points out.[14] Knowledge-making and practices in the field of Middle Eastern politics are not neutral. They are "embedded in the historical attitude of American and European culture toward Islam and Arabism."[15] The corollary is that "the West feels that its stereotypes constitute 'knowledge' of the Middle East."[16] In the same vein, Korany states quite boldly that generalizations about Islam and Islamists and their assumed inhospitability to democracy aside, "Islamic and Western democratic values tend to

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overlap" and include basic concepts of equality, justice, and so on.[17] As the third millennium draws closer, sustaining or inhibiting democracy and demanding and defending it will be a challenge for the peoples of the Arab world, and Cantori's call for political science to be critical and more self-consciously interpretive[18] is apposite.

The post–1945 democratic model, filtered through American pluralism, should not be replicated in the Arab world because at the economic level it is capitalist, and at the social level it is individualist and secular. This is not to say that democracy should be viewed as exclusively Western; it may well be relevant for the Arab world. Nor is it to say that the Arab democratic model will be *sui generis*. The common denominator already exists, at least in theory, in Islam's concept of consultation and in democracy's most basic principle of participation. As noted earlier, Islam's principles of equality and justice have analogues in Western democracy. The merits of relativism, however, must be weighed against the trap of exceptionalism. In the Arab world, privileging indigenous models of democracy has historically worked to sidetrack genuine political reform. Given the contestability of "democracy," it is minimally defined here as a form of legally conditional and limited rule standing in contradistinction to that most widely practiced in the Arab world: autocracy.

## ISLAMISTS, BREAD RIOTS, AND THE ARAB SOCIAL COMPACT

In a world where the neo-liberal agenda's shaping of economic activity is being globalized, bread riots are bound to increase. Governments almost everywhere have in varying degrees succumbed to the new economic correctness, or the so-called Washington consensus. This new correctness mistrusts state interventionism and subsidies and vouches for the market to deliver growth and high living standards. Market fever has traveled to Moscow and Cairo and to Damascus and Algiers. The populous and the poorer Arab states whose economies are fairly integrated into the international economy are highly dependent on the Bretton Woods system and can ill afford to turn their backs on the major money-lenders. At least in the foreseeable future, there seem to be no answers among the policy-makers in these states to the question of how to resist International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank prescriptions for minimum state economic management and structural-adjustment programs that insist on the waiving of subsidies. Resistance can be costly: it can place a country on the periphery of the international system. But so can conformism to IMF and World Bank prescriptions, which can bring about a permanent risk of social unrest. No doubt, the Southeast Asian economic contraction and the downfall in 1998 of the Suharto regime in Indonesia are constant reminders of such risk.

In most formerly socialist Arab states, the plan is being phased out; and the market is virtually in. Just as the new economic policy has been behind many privatization programs and the rudimentary stock markets established in Alexandria, Beirut, Casablanca, and Tunis, the new social policy is behind the increasing dismantling of subsidies just about everywhere in the Arab world. Education remains the last service for which subsidies are still fairly high, ranging between 7 percent (Algeria, Tunisia) and 5 percent (Morocco, Egypt, Jordan, Yemen) of the gross domestic product in 1995. Food subsidies as a percentage of GDP for the same year are markedly lower

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than they were in the 1960s to the mid-1980s. Yemen is the only Arab country in which the 1995 social expenditure on food subsidies as a percentage of GDP is still relatively high (10.4%). It is lower than 1 percent in Algeria; lower than 2 percent in Tunisia, Morocco, and Egypt; and lower than 3 percent in Jordan.[19] Subsidies are being phased out differently. But all focus on the poorest of the poor. According to Qaiser Khan of the World Bank's Middle East and North Africa Region, subsidies no longer cover fine bread, and limited quantities of subsidized inferior bread is distributed in the poorer areas—where queuing is essential. Like Egypt, Morocco subsidizes inferior flour, sugar, and cooking oil. Algeria and Jordan in 1993 and in 1996, respectively, switched to a system of means-tested cash transfers aiming to reach the neediest of all. Tunisia's formerly universal subsidy system ceded to a self-targeting type through lower-quality packaging but not inferior commodities. Yemen retains universal subsidies on wheat and wheat flour.[20] Despite the increasing dismantling of subsidies, Arab states are still sensitive to the potential of weak social policy and price hikes of food products to destabilize social peace and their rule. Some countries, notably Egypt, have established government social funds aimed at providing resources to non-government–organization and community-sponsored projects for the creation of jobs and provision of additional training and health services. Nevertheless, with the ever-increasing demands for employment, social services, and training, combined with the pressure to eliminate subsidies, food protest in this age of uncertainty is sure to remain a certainty in the Arab world.

Food protest is not specific to Arab history. Edward Thompson makes a number of interesting suggestions that have relevance not only for the pre-modern but also for the contemporary Arab world.[21] He opposes the claim that the food protests in 18th-century England were mob or riot activities; that they were just "rebellions of the belly," or responses to economic hardship.[22] For Thompson, claims such as these are historically bound;[23] the common people were not seen as historical agents before the French Revolution.[24] He argues that food protests can be explained as expressions of outrage, a violation of community consensus.[25] According to his "moral economy of the poor," the lower strata had the right to livelihood and economic justice, partly legitimated by paternalistic support of the authorities.[26] They were not to be undermined or compromised by dealing, milling, or marketing activities that could cause high rises in the price of bread. These food protests, then, were not compulsive but self-activating. In fact, they were "highly complex form[s] of direct popular action, disciplined and with clear objectives."[27]

Edmund Burke applies Thompson's thesis of a "moral economy" to the Arab world between 1750 and 1925, identifying three phases of Arab protest: 1750–1839, 1840–80, and 1880–1925.[28] The pattern, organization, style, and ideology of protest differed from one phase to another. In the third phase, for instance, the symbolic language of Islam was replaced with that of secular nationalism.[29] Here Burke cites the example of the Druze and Syrian rebels of 1925.[30] Similarly, the strategy of resistance shifted to more sophisticated tactics to counter more formidable adversaries. In the 1880s, Egyptian *fallāḥīn* (peasants) resorted to rent strikes and land invasion to counter high taxes.[31] Burke sees the changes in the ideology and strategy of Arab social movements as indicative of the changes engulfing the Arab world (as in social structures),

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partly owing to the influx of European colonizers.[32] Burke's analysis conceives of Arab protest movements as an arena of social assertion and dynamism. Thus, his analysis lends significance to anti-Orientalist and historical approaches to the questions of state–society relations and governance in the pre-modern era.

Fieldwork data collected by the author from Sudanese Islamists who, under the leadership of Ḥasan al-Turabi, were organized under the banner of the National Islamic Front (NIF) between 1985 and 1989 and Jordanian Islamists from the Islamic Action Front (IAF) suggest two important linkages. One regards the notion of moral economy as having a strong basis in Islam. The other concerns the fact that food protest was a leading factor in influencing government policy toward democratic reform in Sudan and Jordan in 1986 and 1989, respectively.

Conceptions of economic activity by Islamists from the NIF and the IAF are closely bound up with Islam. Its ethical precepts are therefore grounded in revelation that defines the regulatory code of the believers' covenant with God—the permitted and the forbidden, duties and entitlements. The code is also clear about the ends of that covenant: a balance between the here and now and the hereafter. In fact, Qurʾanic language gives many references to the here and now and the hereafter, often stressing that the former is transitory, and that the latter is "better and more lasting" (Q 87:17). But what is certain is that actions in this life have consequences for the next. Accordingly, although the morality of economic activity in Islam is clearly vertical, it does have a strong horizontal dimension. It is one where theology and pragmatism intertwine. Theology or divine authority, as al-Turabi puts it, makes economic activity morally superior to that found in the West—for example, liberal or state capitalism.[33] Jordanian Islamists concur.[34]

NIF and IAF interviewees refer to many verses that ground the ethics of economic activity in divine authority. There are clear Qurʾanic injunctions against *tabdhīr* (excessive consumerism), usury, and theft. A few verses urge Muslims to honor contracts and agreements. Others speak directly to the kind of unfair dealing, milling, or marketing activities that could lead to exploitation of the have-nots, as in Thompson's moral economy of the poor. One injunction commands Muslims to "keep up the balance with equity" and not to "fall short in measure" (Q 55:9). In fact, there is a whole chapter in the Qurʾan on the *muṭaffif*—he who cheats by giving short measure or short weight. More specifically, the Qurʾan exhorts the devout to practice *infāq fī sabīl Allāh*—that is, to spend in God's way (e.g., Q 57:7; 10). Underlying the notion of spending in God's way is the idea that all bounty belongs to God. Hence the verse, "Allah is the best of Providers" (Q 62:11). This Godly bounty, or *niʿam* (favors), must be managed in accordance with God's sanctions by balancing the earthly with the heavenly as well as the individual with the communal. Like all precious possessions, wealth is a *fitna* (trial) in this life (Q 64:15). ʿAbd-Allatif ʿArabiyyat, the current IAF leader, makes the point that a Muslim's wealth is governed by communal obligations that stress the *ḥaqq* (right) of *al-miskīn* (the needy or the poor), *al-yatīm* (the orphan), and *ibn al-sabīl* (the wayfarer).[35] Thus, the Qurʾan not only obligates Muslims to pay zakat (the poor rate); it also resonates with exhortations to the believers to engage in other voluntary gift-giving known as *ṣadaqāt*. It promises those who answer the commandments of "offering Allah a goodly gift" (Q 73:20)

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and "striving in Allah's way with [their] wealth" (Q 61:11) eternal bliss in paradise. Conversely, for those who fail the trial of wealth—"love wealth with exceeding love" (Q 89:20)—the *ḥisāb* (accounting) on judgment day will be severe.

Like al-Turabi, Ishaq Ahmad al-Farhan, leader of the IAF between 1992 and 1997, believed that moral conduct in economic activity or any other sphere of mundane life is essential to *ʿibādāt*, worship, and religious practice.[36] This is the pragmatic and practical side of a morally based economic activity in Islam. The end of economic activity is to ensure that Muslims are provided with an environment that facilitates, not complicates, the practice of Islam, maximizing submission to God and not to pecuniary distractions (in the case of the rich) or to concerns with survival (in the case of the poor). One interviewee mentions the hadith by the Prophet, *kāda 'l-faqru an yakūna kufran* (poverty verges on unbelief ), in support of the idea that material need compromises ethical behavior.[37] Ethical behavior in economy—and, for that matter, in polity—is necessary for being Muslim. There is a normative dimension to this. The Qurʾan guides the believers to the rules and ways that ought to make Muslims happy in this life and the next.

The upshot of this strong basis for a moral economic system in Islam, as most interviewees confirm, is the primacy of *al-ʿadālatt al-ijtimāʿiyya* (social justice) within the Islamic framework.[38] Social justice in Islam consists of the running of mundane affairs according to godly sanctioned ethics for advancing public utility—that is, the good of the *umma* (Islamic community). Formulations of social justice in Islam may vary in practice and scope according to context, but what makes its conception paradigmatically distinct and common to all Muslim societies is its community-based redistributive system. Through this system, the offsetting of material inequalities and injustices is equally binding on all members and groups constituting the Islamic community. Inequalities are attended to through voluntary donations and obligatory taxes for the poor. Injustices are managed by way of observing godly laws governing fair trading as well as through more formal legal and administrative means. The gist of social justice in Islam places an obligation on the not-so-poor and the well-off to undertake a measure of self-sacrifice, not self-denial, in order to improve the conditions of the needy. For inequalities to become just and Islamically acceptable, a portion of the benefits of material bounty bestowed upon the rich Muslims by God must be passed on to the needy. The general welfare of the *umma* is contingent upon *tarāḥum* (mutual compassion). This is one reason that social welfare has always been a top priority for Islamic movements such as the NIF and the IAF.[39]

All interviewees from the NIF and the IAF ascribe moral bankruptcy to the blueprints of economic management that deepen and widen inequality in their countries. These blueprints hurt low- and middle-income earners as austerity programs did in Sudan and Jordan in the 1980s. Islamists question the wisdom of implementing strategies instigated by IMF officials with no real experience of the abject poverty and daily struggle for survival by millions in the Arab world. Put in the words of a leading Jordanian Islamist: "IMF officials hardly leave their comfortable offices. When they visit countries in our region, they stay in five-star hotels. Maybe they should venture into our slums and refugee camps to learn how their strategies for basic services cutbacks cause hunger and despair."[40] Another interviewee from the NIF places the blame squarely on insensitive and dependent secular–nationalist development

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strategies: "to a point, the IMF is to blame for the widespread misery caused by its [austerity] programs. But I question the local official who is supposed to be close to the people and mindful of their welfare why he implements them."[41] The IAF spokesperson Hamzah Mansur describes the implementation of austerity measures in Jordan as *siyāsatu tajwīᶜ* (policy of starvation). For him, the government was ill advised to embark on major cutbacks without putting in place compensation schemes for those most at risk.[42]

Criticism of these austerity measures is not leveled on purely moral grounds. A veteran Islamist unionist with Jordan's Engineers Syndicate, Tariq al-Tall, point outs that the IMF's increasing tendency to dictate policy devised in New York is not always well suited to social conditions in the Arab world. He considers its blueprints for monetarist-stabilization programs for Arab debtor countries as verging on blackmail. For without their implementation, these poor countries face being penalized with disapproval of debt-service relief and loss of badly needed foreign aid. There has been a long-term price, he argues, for pursuing these short-term benefits: erosion of economic and political sovereignty. Also, from his perspective as a unionist, he charges that IMF instructions in the area of macroeconomic policy are inimical to the interests of workers and the freedom of trade unions. Often, austerity programs counsel keeping a lid on wages and labor discipline, a euphemism for getting tough with unions' freedoms and workers' rights. The IMF's recipes for greater roles for the local private sector can be disastrous if self-interest becomes the overriding dynamic of economic activity. Al-Tall notes that Islam does not oppose the rise of a dynamic domestic private sector; rather, it opposes the concentration of advantages in very few hands. Ideally, the Islamic way stands for the distribution of benefits for the sake of the less fortunate in the community of believers. A major contradiction he finds with some of the IMF proposals for growth and economic management in the Arab world regards the encouragement of export-oriented agriculture at the expense of agrarian production geared to realizing food self-sufficiency. As he correctly points out, a portion of Arab foreign debt goes toward paying off the rising food-imports bill.[43]

Islamists from al-Turabi to al-Farhan consider the state's providential role toward its poor citizens both a civil and religious duty.[44] Failure in this duty renders state–society relations vexatious, actually and potentially. For them, the incidents of food protest exemplify how such vexatious relations lead to clashes between central governments and the people. Jordan's longest-serving parliamentarian and a leading IAF member, Yusuf al-ᶜAzm, argues that just as central government policy impinges on people's capacity to sustain themselves, so do the actions of the populace when they rise up against exorbitant prices for essential alimentary items. Bread riots, as he puts it, are meant to "prick the rulers' conscience" and "send them messages" that something is amiss in their rule.[45] The caliphs, especially ᶜUmar, al-Sanusi of the NIF points out, made it their job to inquire about the welfare of their people, ensuring that all were reasonably fed and clad. Their example, he adds, is worth following because they had the wisdom to realize that living below poverty disturbs religiosity, civility, and stability.[46] Accordingly, Abu Faris, a theologian from the IAF, argues that anything that impinges on the believers' *karāma* (dignity) and upsets the moral and social fabric of society, as price increases on food items do, must be opposed.[47]

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So it is this opposition to deteriorating living conditions and the widespread backlash against them that led to political reforms in Sudan and in Jordan. Interviewees from the IAF and the NIF directly link the democratic breakthroughs in their respective countries to the domestic unrest resulting from the social costs of the austerity measures. ᶜAbd-Allatif ᶜArabiyyat, who also served as speaker of Parliament for two consecutive terms in the early 1990s, clearly sees that link:

> The sense of unease and uncertainty caused by reductions in government expenditures in social services and food subsidies is behind the bread riots of 1989. Reductions directly affect the poor. But they do affect society as a whole because they widen the gap between the rich and the poor, deepen inequities and create divisions. These divisions upset social peace for everyone. The riots themselves were bound to happen; they erupted when the suffering became unbearable and anger with government policy unstoppable. . . . The people took a stand like that by our people in Palestine and, as a result, they won democratic reforms.[48]

Not only does ᶜArabiyyat make a link between bread riots and democratic openings in his statement; he also makes a link between the riots in Jordan and the Palestinian uprising. NIF Islamists take the bread riots of 1985 in Sudan to be *ḥāsima* (decisive) with regard to the democratic politics they instigated between 1986 and 1989. Al-Turabi himself notes that the Sudanese have a long history of challenging central authorities and winning concessions and political or economic reforms from them. He considers that tradition to be typical of the true believers' duty to translate into action the divine commandment of *al-nahy ᶜani 'l-munkar* (forbidding the reprehensible). Al-Turabi affirms that the democratic phase ensued directly from the people's determination to impose their will through peaceful protest.[49] Suᶜad al-Fatih observes that the bread riots in Sudan demonstrated to the rest of the Arab people that popular protest can deliver victory against dictatorial forces, no matter how well equipped they are.[50] This is perhaps one reason al-Turabi observes that the riots in Sudan tested and disproved the "myth that autocrats like al-Numayri were invincible."[51] Hafiz al-Shaykh al-Zaki, a prominent legal expert and figure in the NIF, refers to the riots as *nidāᵓ al-ᶜadāla* (the call of justice), noting that "at the end, justice always triumphs and the overthrow of al-Numayri [was] an example of how the people decided to defeat injustice and succeeded."[52]

Burke's analysis lists a number of points that can be seen to favor democratic norms, corroborating Islamist linkage between food protests and political reforms in Jordan and Sudan. His analysis supports the presence of Islamic principles akin to the notion of moral economy. The historical praxis of resistance indicates that the pre-modern Islamic state was neither the chief agent of change nor irresponsive to the demands of the variety of social movements (millennarian, revivalist, or economic).[53] Burke calls attention to the fact that these delegations and other forms of mediation between rulers and ruled suggest that "Middle Eastern societies were governed in accordance with tacit moral understanding . . . about how much was too much."[54] Intrinsic to this moral understanding was the Islamic notion of social justice. Burke views Muslims, both individuals and communities, as being endowed with a mission to struggle for justice, stipulated in the Qurᵓanic instruction to enjoin the good and forbid evil.[55] The enactment of justice is invested in the authority of a just prince. The office of *al-muḥtasib* (superintendent) is delegated this task in

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practice. Being charged with ensuring fair dealing in the marketplace in such matters as prices, weights, and measures, and with the prevention of hoarding, the *muḥtasib* and the duties he performed were a public trust, which for Burke has special significance in the context of the pre-modern Islamic state's commitment to social justice:

> [T]here was indeed an Islamic analogue to the West European Christian notion of moral economy, and . . . it centered upon the application of the sharīᶜah [Islamic law] by a vigilant Muslim ruler. In particular, according to the sharīᶜah, the government was obligated to enforce a series of measures of direct economic relevance to the inhabitants. These included the prohibition of usury and the insistence that only Quranically sanctioned taxes be imposed, that only Quranically approved coinage be permitted to circulate officially. . . . In addition, there was the further general understanding that it was the duty of governments to ensure the supply of grain to the market at reasonable prices. Taken together these obligations amounted to an Islamic social compact which provided the moral basis of society.[56]

The Islamic social compact Burke describes represents the doctrinal and customary frame from which the historical praxis of resistance derived its legitimacy. Protest movements in Muslim societies amounted to cries by society to enact the Islamic *telos* of justice and defend age-old liberties, particularly the right to subsistence.[57] Such protests provided rulers with the opportunity to bolster their own legitimacy by looking into society's demands and by reasserting the Islamic principles of good government on the basis of justice. The praxis of resistance, especially in the form of *khubz* protests, continues to be embedded in Arab societies. These protests obviously represent the discontinuous practice of democracy by society and serve as forms of pressure from below which often succeed in bringing about change from above.

## THE COLLAPSE OF *DĪMUQRĀṬIYYAT AL-KHUBZ*

The notion of a tacit pact between ruler and ruled is best encapsulated by the Arab term *dīmuqrāṭiyyat al-khubz* (democracy of bread). This is how Professor Ahmad Shalabi of Cairo University describes Nasser's politics.[58] Akin to *dīmuqrāṭiyyat al-khubz* is the notion of the "democratic bargain."[59] Essentially, its chief premise is that post-independence Arab rulers have been paid political deference by their peoples in return for the provision of publicly subsidized services—education, health care, and a state commitment to secure employment. Political deference has been traded for *khubz*, or "bread," used here in a generic sense to refer to free education, health care, and other services. In a sense, the arrangements represented by the concept *dīmuqrāṭiyyat al-khubz* are similar to Burke's idea of a social compact, as they represent the moral basis of polity and society. As an explanatory tool, the concept *dīmuqrāṭiyyat al-khubz* is significant in that it stresses the socio-economic basis of Arab political power: Arab authoritarianism has reproduced itself not by relying solely on brute force, but also by relying on "elements of negotiation and accommodation."[60]

The catalytic role of the *inḥilāl* (collapse) of *dīmuqrāṭiyyat al-khubz* can be seen in the most recent Arab democratic stirrings. The politics cultivated by *dīmuqrāṭiyyat al-khubz* are largely deferential and non-participatory, conditional on the state's

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providential capacity. One consequence of these politics is what the Algerian intellectual Malik Bin Nabi calls *bulitīq* (a bastardization of the French term *politique*).[61] This popular and pejorative Maghribi term refers to politics as an undesirable game of power, subterfuge, and countersubterfuge; as talk but no action. It conveys a general feeling of distrust, which leads to the avoidance of politics.[62] If Arab peoples tend to disown their regimes, *bulitīq* aptly explains why. The support networks provided by the tribe or the family have generally helped Arabs maintain distance from authority. Before the emergence of the nation-state system, the Arab individual's main desire was livelihood without interference from nature or from authority (tax collection). The undisturbed and apolitical world of the Arab individual is captured in the popular Maghribi saying, *naʾkul al-qūt wa nistanna al-mūt* (food we eat, until death we meet). The ultimate provider was not the state; it was Allah and His providence.

In the post-state period, the residue of that folk culture can be seen in another popular Maghribi term: *khubz*-iste. The term *khubz*-iste describes the populace's attitude of distrust toward the political system, coupled with deferential political behavior. The difference now is that the state is in the picture. A departure has occurred: from the world of non-conceptual icons to one of conceptual symbols; from one where providence is imparted directly by Allah to one where providence is associated with the state; and from one where politics had little relevance to one where politics has more relevance. In both, however, politics has relevance only where the balance of physical existence was impinged upon by authority. If Arab individuals are *khubz*-istes, so are Arab states. The latter creates an expectation in the former to seek what it can provide. The *khubz*-iste individual is quietist; the *khubz*-iste state is providential.

Since the *khubz*-iste individual is quietist only insofar as the state is providential, economic downturns have eroded the providential platform of Arab polities. Subsequently, under societal pressure, the tacit contract between ruler and ruled has become tenuous, leading to involuntary relaxation of control from the top in the form of ambiguous politics of renewal—limited participation and contestation—the clear purpose of which has thus far been the survival of the regime. Economic malaise is at the root of both societal pressure and political changes. Nowhere has that societal pressure been more evident than in the phenomenon of *intifāḍāt al-khubz* (bread uprisings). Recent Arab history is littered with numerous examples of bread uprisings: Egypt, January 1977; Morocco, January 1984; Tunisia, January 1984; Sudan, March 1985; Algeria, October 1988; Jordan, April 1989; Lebanon, in the post-war period.

Bread riots can be explained in terms of cause and effect. In all these countries, riots were triggered by soaring food prices, housing shortages, high unemployment, and, in Algeria, even rationing of water supplies. In Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia, the trends since the mid-1970s up to the mid-1980s had been of rising prices and declining living standards for a significant percentage of the population.[63] For instance, Morocco's cost-of-food index more than tripled between 1973 and 1983,[64] and in the mid-1980s it was estimated that more than 40 percent of the country's population was living below the poverty level.[65] Around the same period, some 35 percent of Tunisia's total labor force was either unemployed or underemployed, and a high percentage of "households in the southern interior live[d] at or below the level of basic subsistence."[66] Like Morocco and Tunisia, Sudan experienced increasing trends of pauperization, either owing to government economic mismanagement or poor har-

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vests.[67] In Jordan, soaring food prices followed IMF-approved economic-austerity measures, a situation that was aggravated by mounting foreign debt and a plummeting dinar.[68]

The examples of Algeria and Egypt are equally instructive. In neither country was the professed brand of Arab socialism godless or about class struggle.[69] Both, however, were authoritarian and economically inefficient. Egypt's military setbacks against Israel further de-legitimized Nasser's Arab socialism. The abandonment of socialism in Egypt in the late 1970s, and more so in Algeria in the 1980s, was conceived in a milieu of economic malaise: soaring foreign debt,[70] high unemployment, housing crises, and heightened social polarization between rich and poor. The state welfarist inducements, which in the 1960s and early 1970s served to de-politicize the masses, were stretched too thin or were made totally unaffordable by larger populations in the 1980s. Egypt's high military expenditures and Algeria's dwindling revenues from oil rents, which decreased from $45 billion to $28 billion between 1984 and 1986—by more than one-third—were intolerable economic burdens.[71] For the educated jobless in both countries, where unemployment still ranges between 20 and 30 percent of the active workforce, disillusionment with the regimes was vented in the "briots" of 1977 in Egypt and of 1988 in Algeria.

In the impoverished Arab states, unemployment will always be a potential detonator of social discontent and political instability. Like *khubz*-istes, *hit*-istes are ubiquitous. The pressure of population-growth further compounds economic hardship. The annual population-growth rate, fluctuating between 2 percent and 4 percent, is very high given the modest resources of impoverished Arab states. This not only means further pressure on housing, water, food, employment, education, and health care; it also presents the more daunting prospect of a doubling of the total population by the year 2025.

The contraction of job markets is further squeezing these countries' economies. In almost all of them, only 23 to 31 percent of the total population is fully employed. This has heightened despair among the youth, considering that in 1989 60 percent of all Arabs were under nineteen years of age.[72] The prospects of improvement are poor for the alienated and disillusioned Arab youth. The doors of immigration have been closed. To put the brakes on future immigration, the former European Community (EC) devised a package of aid to twelve non-member Mediterranean states, seven of which are Arab—Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Morocco, Syria, and Tunisia. The aid package, known as the Revised Mediterranean Policy, consisted of a combination of $500 million in grants and more than $4 billion in loans. The package was prompted by fear that economic malaise and surging Islamism could spark an exodus from these countries to Europe. "Today the phrase 'boat people' refers to refugees from Vietnam," said one EC official. "In the future, it may refer to illegal immigration across the Mediterranean."[73]

Unequal and selective development that benefits a certain social group or favors a certain region has created a great deal of polarization between the poor and the nouveaux riches. Algiers, for example, illustrates the chasm between the haves and the have-nots of the middle-class suburbs and the abject poverty of the Qasbah area.[74] Al-Sadat's economic policy of *infitāḥ* (open-door policy) has not been beneficial to the poor. Concomitant with the prosperity of the free-trade zones was the

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misery and marginalization of millions of Egyptians—some actually living in cemeteries—outside the formal economy. Mostly geared to liberalizing the economy, encouraging foreign investment, and privatizing public assets, the modest windfall of the *infitāḥ* policy was confined to the Egyptian bourgeoisie, the clientele of al-Sadat's regime, a kind of economic apartheid.[75] Although this policy freed Egypt from dependence on the Soviets, it failed to free the country from dependence on the United States and international capitalism:

> This meant the incorporation of the Egyptian bourgeoisie into new relations with imperialism, and its transformation into a comprador class dependent on foreign capital. . . . Egypt became a part of the world economy, fulfilling its role as emergent neo-colony of transnational capital dominated by the United States.[76]

The *khubz*-istes' disaffection with inexorably deteriorating economic and living conditions can be singled out as the main factor that creates a socially and politically explosive atmosphere. It is against the backdrop of economic malaise that *khubz*-istes and dissident forces take to the streets en masse. In these protests, the people's taste for participatory politics is nurtured, and their dissidence is unleashed by directly challenging political authority. The rebellious street binds together political dissidents, marginals, the unemployed, and disillusioned youth. They acquire a spontaneous solidarity and, in their common consciousness of being actual or potential victims of the regime, they direct their anger at high status and regime symbols. The Algerian riots of 1988 are instructive:

> From the cities of the coast to oases of the Sahara, Algerians went on [the] rampage and destroyed whatever, in their eyes, represented the regime: city halls, police stations, courts. . . . They also vented their rage on the political headquarters of the country's only legal party, the FLN. . . . Inevitably, stores were ransacked and cars burned, turning the main commercial streets of Algiers into scenes of devastation.[77]

These riots provided a catalyst for the reforms that followed in 1989.

The point must be made that bread riots are an economic and political phenomenon.[78] The protests following the waiving of state subsidies[79] for strategic commodities (sugar, tea, kerosene, flour, bread) and price hikes can mislead if they are interpreted strictly as "rebellions of the belly." In all cases, these *intifāḍāt* amounted to protests against social inequality, corruption, nepotism, authoritarianism, and the regime's incompetence. Egyptian protesters also targeted the government.[80] Mark Cooper stresses the significance of the fact that the January 1977 riots in Egypt followed the November 1976 parliamentary elections and primarily targeted the People's Assembly:[81]

> [T]he rioters [did] not look on [the People's Assembly] as an object of attack; rather, it seem[ed] that they want[ed] to use it as a forum in which to be heard. . . . These elections in particular aroused and politicized large numbers of people and, with the capricious raising of prices, the demonstrators felt that the elections and the Assembly had failed them.[82]

If by targeting the People's Assembly Egyptian rioters disowned the abused process and institutions that, in waiving food subsidies, failed to prevent a decision that was impervious and inimical to their interests, the Algerian rioters also disavowed their regime.[83] According to Hugh Roberts, that disavowal was translated into open contempt for President al-Chadhli: "as the rioters themselves put it, *ʾmā bghīnā lā*

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*zibda wa lā filfal, lākin bghīnā zaʿīm fḥalʾ* (we don't want butter or pepper; we want a leader we can respect)."[84]

The reference to the bread riots, especially those of Algeria and Jordan, as *intifāḍāt* "uprisings," recalling the Palestinian Intifada, is deliberate. The magnitude of public participation, especially among the youth; the intensity of the outbursts; the demonstrations' semi-peaceful nature (with stone-throwing being the main means of engagement); and their spontaneity lend credibility to the theory of the infectiousness of the Palestinian Intifada. The Intifada is an outburst against a "foreign" occupier. The Jordanian and Algerian riots were outbursts against local authorities who represented some degree of "foreignness" in the eyes of the rioters: their dependence on foreign aid and expertise; their imported, ineffective "-isms" and ideologies employed for nation-building; their economies, which have been plugged into the international economy; and their limited autonomy, with many regimes being seen as puppets. Like the Intifada, the Jordanian and Algerian riots amounted to a cry for justice, equality of opportunity, and emancipation from poverty and despair:

> [T]hose who sympathise with the rioters often call the October Revolt the *intifāḍa* (uprising). . . . There can be no doubt that the school children battling in the streets of Algeria took their cue from the Palestinian teenagers of the West Bank and Gaza. Witnessing almost daily television scenes of that uprising, Algerian youngsters set out to enact their own *intifāḍa.* One young demonstrator was quoted as saying, "They aren't afraid, so why should I be?"[85]

This serves as a confirmation of the view expressed by the West Bank activist Jonathan Kuttab in 1988 that Arab regimes harbored fears of an Intifada spillover into their own streets.[86] The Intifada assumed a spiritual importance in the eyes of millions of Arabs, epitomizing hope that people-power resistance might one day enable disaffected Arabs to achieve their objectives of justice, equality, and emancipation. Like the youth of the Intifada, the new generation of Arabs stage their own *intifāḍa* in defiance of the status quo. Unlike their parents and grandparents, they have known only the post-independence order, an order where the gap between their rising expectations and the ability of their regimes to meet them increasingly widens. They have little reason to feel grateful or beholden to their regimes. No amount of rhetoric about a glorious past or a brighter future, couched in the language of nationalism, Pan-Arabism, or development, is good enough. It means little to the *hit*-istes in many an Arab café or street, to the hungry Sudanese, or to the cemetery-dwelling Egyptian.

Accordingly, if *intifāḍāt al-khubz* seem to have aroused the Arab people's appetite for open defiance of the status quo, what then are their consequences?

- Economic malaise and the limitation or unaffordability of state welfarism produced twin, opposing effects: politicization of both *khubz*-istes and *hit*-istes, and erosion of the legitimacy of the regime in many impoverished Arab states.
- *Intifāḍāt al-khubz* can be interpreted as kinds of indirect elections in countries where no pluralist politics exist. *Intifāḍāt al-shāriʿ* (street uprisings) amounted to votes of no confidence against the incumbent regimes. The rioters rebelled to express widespread feelings among the masses of ingratitude toward regimes that still based their legitimacy on past achievements of little relevance to the people's present struggle for *khubz*. Despite their economic roots, these *intifāḍāt* have

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definite political content and motivation. According to Cooper, Egypt's 1977 riots had "signs of organization [with] identical anti-regime literature appear[ing] simultaneously across the . . . country . . . , [of] systematic attempts to cut internal communications . . . , [of] coordinated attacks on neighbouring police stations . . . , [of] selectivity of targets, concentrating on state property."[87] David Seddon draws similar conclusions about evidence of political organization in the *intifāḍāt* of Morocco, Sudan, and Tunisia in 1984 and 1985.[88]

- *Dīmuqrāṭiyyat al-khubz* gave way to *al-dīmuqrāṭiyya al-siyāsiyya* (political democracy). *Khubz*, the powerful idiom of the past, ceded to the idiom of the present: the vote. In the immediate post-independence period, the vote was denied to the Arab masses in return for *khubz*. In the 1980s the regimes failed to deliver *khubz*, and when the masses took to the streets demanding *khubz*, they were given the vote.

The democratic openings that resulted from popular uprisings in the 1980s in Algeria and Jordan are instructive. Pressure from below—the *intifāḍāt* of the Jordanian and Algerian streets—was a prime factor in forcing both countries' regimes to democratize. The price was paid in human lives: twelve Jordanians in the April 1989 riots, and up to 500 Algerians in the October 1988 riots.[89] From this perspective, democratization has not come easily to Jordan or Algeria. It was fought for. The protest for *khubz* turned into a protest for rights. In Jordan, the 1989 replacement of Rifai and the promise of early elections calmed the situation,[90] and in Algeria, only the promise of democracy provided a temporary reprieve for the FLN.[91] The rulers in Algiers and Amman came to the realization that repression has its limitations, and the still vivid memory of the overthrow of al-Numayri in the 1985 Sudanese bread riots was a reminder of such limitations. As Gene Sharp observes, "the brutalities of repression against non-violent resisters trigger a process of 'political jiujitsu', which increases the resistance, sows problems in the opponents' own camp, and mobilizes third parties in favour of the non-violent resisters."[92]

The catalytic role of the collapse of the *dīmuqrāṭiyyat al-khubz* and *intifāḍāt al-khubz* in a few Arab democratic openings can be seen in the overthrow of al-Numayri's authoritarian regime in 1985. This event was like a historical re-enactment of the October 1964 downfall of another Sudanese autocrat, General ᶜAbbud. Not a single authoritarian regime in the contemporary Arab world has fallen victim to people's power except in Sudan, where this has occurred twice. Nowhere else, with the exception of Algeria and Jordan in the late 1980s, have clear-cut democratic experiments ensued from "people's power": the first from 1964 to 1969; the second from 1986 to 1989. These outcomes refute Henry Bienen and Mark Gersovitz's thesis that subsidy-cuts–based anomie has only short-term implications for political stability.[93] More important, long-term political repercussions of Arab *intifāḍāt al-khubz* challenge both the near-silence of the literature on democratic transition regarding the role of anomie and the functionalist faith in modernization and social change embedded in some Western epistemological circles. Evidence from the Arab world supports the idea that that democratic transition can be the result of social disorder triggered by bread riots. Raising food prices, like raising or imposing taxes, can trigger rebellion against authoritarian regimes.[94] If civil disobedience led to the cancellation of food-price increases (Tunisia, Morocco,[95] and Egypt[96]), followed by incremental but

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continuous, though token, pluralization in Sudan, Algeria, and Jordan, it produced some clear examples of political liberalization.

The uprising of the Sudanese people in March–April 1985 represents an example par excellence of an economically based but politically motivated protest. It was a politically purposeful anti-centralist protest by civil and non-civil collectivities, some of which were both aware of and dissatisfied with their peripheral positions. Many forces from the country's civil society (associations representing women, doctors, lawyers, engineers, trade unions, and students) as well as non-civil forces (the Association of Police Officers, Free Army Officers Organization [FAOO]) joined in a political movement espousing radical change—that is, nothing short of bringing down al-Numayri's regime. For some of these forces, participation in the protest was not just part of a larger mobilizational effort against a de-legitimized authority but also part of a strategy of aspiring power claimants with their own political agendas.

Throughout the *intifāḍa* the confluence between the economic and the political was clear-cut. Leaflets such as those distributed by hospital doctors referred to al-Numayri's government as "a regime of hunger."[97] The same leaflets nevertheless articulated radical political messages and defined clear political stances with the people and against the regime, for good government and against authoritarian rule. Hence, the Association of Police Officers not only expressed that its members would "disobey any orders to use force against the people of Sudan," but also adopted the slogan, "No to [al-] Numa[y]ri, and no to dictatorship."[98] Similarly, the FAOO's message was that "the Sudan Armed Forces side with the popular revolt against hunger, ignorance, and misrule, and for social justice and equality."[99]

## THE PECULIARITIES OF ARAB "DEMOCRATIC" TRANSITIONS

Obviously, the progression to democracy in the Arab world does not necessarily reflect the Western experience.[100] The Western model of linear change through feudalism and then the bourgeoisie has had no precedent in the Arab world. The Arab search for democracy seems to traverse the "authoritarian road": the survival of personalist regimes and the experience of reversals in 1958 and 1975 strongly illustrate the persistent challenge of Arab democratization. Although the scholarly discourse on political transformation presupposes the presence of prerequisites or preconditions for transition to democracy, these remain indeterminate. Rustow[101] cautions against confusing correlation with causation, especially with reference to socio-economic variables, noting that the transition processes and dynamics are not uniform. In the following, the socio-economic correlate of democracy will be examined with special emphasis on the collapse of the bread pact between rulers and the ruled in the Arab world.

The focus here is on Seymour Lipset's widely accepted[102] association of high economic performance with corresponding high levels of democracy. In his words:

> [T]he more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy. From Aristotle down to the present, [people] have argued that only in a wealthy society in which relatively few citizens lived in real poverty could a situation exist in which the mass of the population could intelligently participate in politics.[103]

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TABLE 1 *Discrepancies between GNP and competitiveness*

| Country | GNP Per Capita (US$) | Number of Elections Since 1979 |
|---|---|---|
| UAE | 19,600 | 0 |
| Qatar | 15,670 | 0 |
| Kuwait | 15,500 | 3 |
| Saudi Arabia | 7,700 | 0 |
| Bahrain | 6,630 | 0 |
| Libya | 6,200 | 0 |
| Oman | 5,650 | 0 |
| Iraq | 5,500 | 1 |
| Algeria | 2,300 | 3 |
| Tunisia | 2,000 | 3 |
| Jordan | 1,600 | 3 |
| Lebanon | 1,600 | 2 |
| Syria | 1,200 | 3 |
| Morocco | 1,100 | 4 |
| Egypt | 800 | 6 |
| Mauritania | 600 | 2 |
| Sudan | 550 | 2 |
| Djibouti | 300 | 1 |
| Somalia | 200 | 0 |
| Yemen | 700 | 2 |

Lipset establishes a linkage between wealth and democracy but does not link economic fairness (equal distribution of wealth) and political fairness—that is, democracy ("one person, one vote"). Thus, for Lipset, an increment in general wealth would mean political participation without necessarily eliminating socio-economic inequalities. Dahl, however, while of the view that a fairly high GNP-per-capita "threshold" can be conducive to higher levels of contestation and participation, cautions that higher GNP levels per capita beyond a minimum threshold do not necessarily "affect [polyarchy] in any significant way."[104] Further, Dahl gives the example of American democracy in the 19th-century, which had neither an industrial base nor a high GNP per capita.[105] Samuel Huntington's findings point to an "economic transition zone" that can correspond with a "political transition zone" where movement from nondemocracy to democracy occurs.[106] This transition however, is not irreversible. Lipset's correlation applies to the Arab setting only in one sense:[107] it explains the unsustainability of competitive (Lebanon) and semi-competitive[108] (Morocco, Tunisia, Jordan) politics in the not so "well-to-do" Arab countries.

The view in many parts of the Arab world, right or wrong, is that democracy is amenable to high economic development, but not vice versa. Present Arab democratizers are the "relatively populous, poor, and politicized."[109] The "well-to-do" Arab rentiers states are, with the qualified exception of Kuwait, the furthest from democratization (see Table 1). Higher income per capita does not automatically translate into greater competitiveness or contestation (electoral activities).

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How can these last two deviations be explained? Part of the explanation lies in the fact that the huge returns from external oil rent have contributed primarily to aggrandizement of the state and its political oligarchical patrons—the "rentier class."[110] This aggrandizement applies to both oil producers and non-producers. The former directly accrued billions of petrodollars from external oil rent. The latter, only peripheral oil producers, profited from the Arab oil boom, which facilitated greater Arab economic integration and interdependence. This latter group has become partly rentier economies. They rent labor, skills, and expertise to the scarcely populated Arab oil-producing states and thereby earn billions of dollars in remittances. Transfers of millions of Arab petrodollars either in the form of aid or investment are another factor in the equation. Petrodollars have endowed the Arab state with an independent resource to cement and reproduce itself. A prime function of this resource has been the ability to buy political patronage, legitimacy, and time. Hence the oil paradox: the strength and relative domestic autonomy of the Arab state stems from dependence on external oil revenue.[111] Petrodollars have also enabled power-holders to assert their authority by expanding state involvement in all socio-economic spheres. Most socio-economic functions are state-led. This interventionism has largely inhibited the rise of autonomous societal power centers. The large size of the state bureaucracy has turned much of the working population into de facto state clients whose livelihoods depend on the public purse. According to one estimate of the late 1970s, state bureaucrats formed 30 percent of Egypt's labor force and 60 percent of Jordan's.[112] In fact, according to Robert Springborg, the *infitāḥ* (open-door policy) has not stemmed the growth of Egypt's state bureaucracy. It quadrupled between 1970 and 1986, reaching 4.8 million—10 percent of all Egyptians were state employees.[113]

Dividends from the oil rich to the oil poor have helped consolidate the states of the latter, creating political interdependence. External extraction of oil surpluses has bestowed upon the oil rich both internal and regional distributive powers. These powers have in turn given them regulative functions calibrated according to interest—exclusion of foes and inclusion (pork-barreling) of allies. The recipient Arab states distribute and regulate using the same formula. What Samih Farsoun calls a "wide economic base" operates both internally and externally:

> Regime stability derived domestically in part from this wide economic base, which has been a direct consequence of the expansion of state functions. This would have been impossible without the capital surpluses for the oil-producers and capital transfers for the oil-poor states.[114]

Extraction and distribution of petrodollars have given regimes regulative leverage resulting from the acquisition of a "wide economic base" through all-encompassing patronage. As Farsoun correctly notes, this has enabled the state to "pre-empt and deflect opposition."[115] Political monopoly and the reproduction of the authoritarian state are not only functions of passive exclusion (pre-emption and deflection); they are also active undertakings. The *mukhābarāt* state, with its military and police apparatuses, has been made possible by the oil boom. It continues to be able to reproduce itself and perfect its coercive capacity.[116] For Farsoun, the Arab state is the "syncretic state-in-three."[117] It is the "historic state" thriving on political patronage through limited distribution of power (status, prestige) and economic opportunities. Also, it is the "modern state" with its corporatist character combining interdependent

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and yet autonomous and semi-autonomous interests and power clusters—bureaucracies (civil, military, and police), bourgeoisie (including ruling elites), and technocrats (including information holders and dependent theocrats). It is self-serving, nurturing legitimacy through welfarism and symbolic functions[118] (to enhance a sense of community, of safety, of patriotism) and nurturing clientelism by creating the opportunities and environment for "capital accumulation by the elite."[119] Finally, it is the *mukhābarāt* state that ensures the survival of the regime and its allied interests.

Huntington relates the failure of oil-rich states to democratize to state enrichment from petrodollars, which discards its need for tax revenue. It seems that these states are comfortable with the status quo—that is, non-competitive polities in which there is neither representation nor taxation.[120] Tax-paying citizens in consolidated democracies subject their governors to the rigor of accountability and checks and balances. The point is that oil wealth has contributed to the viability of authoritarianism, not of democracy. If one accepts the association between high economic development and democracy, arguments can be made for more equitable distribution of oil wealth in such a way that it brings Arabs near those "thresholds" or "zones of transition" that would make Arab democracy a viability. For such transfers to happen, democracy is needed first.[121] The anomaly with regard to democratizing Arab states resides in the fact that medium to low economic development, which is generally taken to be a constraint to democratization, has in fact been a catalyst. Although this might be an exaggeration, the fact remains that openings initiated by a few authoritarian Arab states have been the result of economic downturns, not high performance.[122]

## CONCLUSION

The assumption that the better a country's economic performance, the better its chances for democracy presents problems in the Arab world. The bias of this theory against poorer states is obvious. Arab democratization seems to benefit from austerity, not bounty. Contrary to the arguments of Western theorists (especially Lipset), it is the poorer, not the richer, Arab states that have taken steps toward democracy. Democracy can be said to be a technique for bridging political and economic impasses; it is not simply a product of socio-economic development or of unique cultural attributes. The logical flaw evident in much Western writing on the topic is that deductions made from the experience of mature democracies are of doubtful relevance for states that are only beginning the process of democratization. The problem is not that the ideal of democracy as celebrated in the West is not relevant to the Middle East, but that analyses of non-Western political transitions must take account of the special circumstances and severe challenges facing late-developing states.

The relationship between anti-government *khubz* riots and political liberalizations is one of strong correlation, even if their democratizing effects in Sudan (1985), Algeria (1988), and Jordan (1989) suggest a causal association. Here, Rustow's warning not to confuse correlation with causation is heeded. Empirical evidence suggests a link between mass agitation and political reforms in many polities. Evidence from the American Civil Rights Movement, as ably shown by F. F. Piven and R. A. Cloward, is instructive.[123] From the Arab context, interviews with Sudanese and Jordanian Islamists support this finding. Interviewees from both movements unequivocally acknowledge a definite role of bread riots in subsequent democratic openings.

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There should be no mistake, however, concerning the real motives and motivations of the liberalizing regimes: political reforms following mass riots are often carried out with the intention of manipulating the public and defusing serious crises of legitimacy and challenges to the rulers' hold on power. The superficiality of Arab political reforms attest to this: government accountability and respect for the social and economic rights of individuals are not demands that the ruling elites are eager to grant. The breakdown of democratization in Sudan (1989) and in Algeria (1992) and other setbacks (Egypt, Morocco, Tunisia, Yemen) highlight the fragility and uncertainty of Arab political reforms.

While H. L. Nieburg's thesis on the democratizing function of domestic political violence is pertinent mainly to consolidated democracies, it has some relevance to emerging democracies, on several grounds. The threat of violence as well as its "occasional occurrence" are "essential elements in peaceful and social change."[124] Among the democratizing functions of violence are to "instill dynamism into the structure and growth of the law, the settlement of disputes, the process of accommodating interests, and [to] induce general respect for the verdict of the polls."[125] In countries where elections have until recently not been a regular practice, bread riots served to express disdain for unjust and authoritarian rule as well as to mediate the public interests and concerns to the rulers. From this perspective, bread riots represent a kind of verdict on incompetent management of political and economic affairs that induce some "respect" in the form of concessionary responses (rescinding decisions to cut off bread subsidies—for example, in Tunisia in 1984—or instituting electoral politics) that accommodate the public interest, especially after the failure of coercive tactics. Similarly, the electoral gains can be said to have strengthened legality and the rule of law, foundations for peaceful social change.

Consequently, the finding by W. J. Dixon and B. E. Moon that domestic political conflict is always negative must be rejected.[126] There have been obvious openings in the authoritarian structure of the *mukhābarāt* state in Arab polities resulting from domestic conflict. Furthermore, Bienen and Gersovitz's chief assumption that domestic political violence always has only short-term effects should also be questioned.[127] Domestic conflict and protest can have long-term effects and beneficial outcomes in the form of political reform. Despite the superficiality of Arab political reforms and regressive and retractive setbacks (Algeria, Egypt, Sudan, Tunisia), there is a reformist momentum that hinders return to single-party or single-man rule in many key "democratizing" countries. Trepidations are inevitable in any democratization experience: the extension of the franchise to blacks (United States), aborigines (particularly Australian), and women (many European countries) is a relatively new phenomenon, considering that one or two hundred years have passed since the onset of democratic transition. The threat of domestic political violence or its eruption (1977) has kept the democratic experiment alive in Egypt; electoral and party politics have been sustained there for twenty years. Even the abortion of the democratic experiment in Algeria has not terminated democratic momentum (e.g., the parliamentary elections of 1997). The ongoing quasi-civil war[128] is being waged in the name of "democracy," with both the military-backed regime and the armed Islamists labeling themselves "democratic" and their opponents "anti-democratic." There is some oppositional presence, with many interlocutors taking part in the few government-sponsored talks to negotiate a way out of the present maelstrom. Although the 1995

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presidential elections and the parliamentary elections of June 1997 are yet to herald the promises of social peace and democracy,[129] their being held amid a state of ordered chaos is evidence that the democratic momentum, albeit slow, is alive. That momentum was boosted by the election of Abdelaziz Bouteflika to the presidency in April 1999, heralding a new era of renewed hope in national reconciliation (e.g., the amnesty granted to thousands of Islamic militants) and re-democratization (e.g., ongoing negotiations to rehabilitate the FIS in the political process). In fact, it is no exaggeration to state that Algeria will enter the 21st century as the best candidate for wider and deeper democratization in the Arab region.

The role of anomie, social upheaval, and political protest is largely presented as marginal to democratization. Substantial research has stressed the importance of civil society and an enlightened bourgeoisie as chief instruments of democratization, but without the development of a methodological and theoretical background to enable more focused analysis of the phenomenon of *khubz*-istes, understanding of Arab democratization will remain incomplete. Ever since the revolts of the radically minded *al-khawārij* (seceders) in the 7th century A.D., a tradition of protest, whether in the pursuit of liberation from foreign rule or of justice, has been present in Arabo-Islamic history.[130] Nineteenth-century Lebanon is a microcosmic example of an Arab semi-autonomous geopolitical unit where *ʿāmmiyyahs* (popular uprisings) in 1820, 1821, and 1857 by peasants not only struck at the very foundations of the *iqṭāʿ* system, but also led to the rewriting of the rules of the *imārah*'s (principality's) political game.[131] According to Abdo Baaklini, the covenant that was conceived in the aftermath of the second *ʿāmmiyyah* revolutionized, and in a sense democratized, Lebanese politics through the institution of such notions as popular sovereignty and popular consensus. That element of protest has resurfaced in recent history, and its operationalization has been most evident in the bread riots of the 1970s and 1980s in many Arab countries. Whether in Morocco or Egypt, these uprisings are part of a historical pattern:

> In January 1952, rioters attacked symbols of Western influence in Cairo, discredited the Wafdist government, and paved the way for Nāṣir's military coup. Every decade has witnessed a major *jacquerie*. A student rebellion stunned Nāṣir in 1968 and simmered for the following six years. Violent strikes have periodically paralyzed the country's major industrial complexes, including al-Mahalla al-Kubra (1975), Kafr al-Dawwar (1976 and 1984), and Hulwan (1989). When Egyptians mention the memory of 1977 they are not referring to an event, but invoking a symbol of a powerful and ancient tradition of revolt.[132]

These popular uprisings have established that political deference is a function of the state's capacity for redistributive justice and equity that renders political authority ipso facto good and worthy of deference. These have been the chief articles of the unwritten state-society pact. Defectiveness on the part of the state, whereby what society has been accustomed to as inviolable rights—literacy, subsidized health care, and strategic staple foods—become subject to recall, cancels that pact. Bread riots not only radicalize the street; they also serve as reminders of illegitimate political authority and pernicious governance. Burhan Ghalyun links Arab democratization not only to Arab regimes' realization of the futility of oppression and the necessity of bridging the gap between themselves and their peoples, but also to the masses'

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revitalized confidence and increased capacity for sacrifice in order to secure their rights, among other things.[133] While research on Arab democratic transitions has discounted the significance of bread riots, these riots have served as a catalyst to effect change in the direction of democracy.

## NOTES

[1]See the fine study of recent Arab political liberalizations by Michael C. Hudson, Louis Cantori et al., "The Possibilities for Pluralism," *American–Arab Affairs* 36 (Spring 1991): 3–26.

[2]One of the earliest works on the question of Arab democracy is Charles Issawi, "Economic and Social Foundations of Democracy in the Middle East," *International Affairs* 32 (1956): 27–42; see also Malcom Kerr, "Arab Radical Notions of Democracy," *Middle Eastern Affairs* (St. Anthony's Papers) 3 (1963): 9–40.

[3]See the good work by Fawaz A. Gerges, "The Study of Middle East International Relations: A Critique," *British Journal of Middle East Studies* 18 (1991): 208–440.

[4]Robert A. Dahl, *Polyarchy: Participation and Opposition* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1971).

[5]Evidence for this view is adduced in Augustus R. Norton, ed., *Civil Society in the Middle East*, 2 vols. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995 and 1996).

[6]See a similar idea in Carrie Rosefsky Wickham, "Beyond Democratization: Political Change in the Arab World," *Political Science and Politics* 27 (September 1994): 507–9.

[7]Louis J. Cantori, "The Old Orthodoxy and the New Orthodoxy in the Study of Middle Eastern Politics," *Political Science and Politics* 27 (September 1994): 516.

[8]See, for instance, John P. Entelis, "Civil Society and the Authoritarian Temptation in Algerian Politics: Islamic Democracy vs. the Centralized State," in *Civil Society in the Middle East*, 2:45. See also James A. Bill, "Comparative Middle East Politics: Still in Search of Theory," *Political Science and Politics* 27 (September 1994): 518–19.

[9]The coinage of this term belongs to Samuel P. Huntington; see his *The Third Wave: Democratization in the Late Twentieth Century* (Norman and London: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991). For the application of the term in the Arab context, see Mustapha K. El Sayyid, "The Third Wave of Democratization in the Arab World," in *The Arab World Today*, ed. Dan Tschirgi (Boulder, Colo., and London: Lynne Rienner, 1994), 179–89.

[10]A standard text for the study of democratic transitions is the voluminous work by Guillermo O'Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule: Prospects for Democracy* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

[11]See "Democracy, Islam, and the Study of Middle Eastern Politics," *Political Science and Politics* 27 (September 1994): 507–19.

[12]Michael C. Hudson, "After the Gulf War: Prospects for Democratization in the Middle East," *Middle East Journal* 45 (Summer 1991): 407–27.

[13]John L. Esposito and James P. Piscatori, "Democratization and Islam," *Middle East Journal* 45 (Summer 1991): 427–40.

[14]Louis J. Cantori, "Introduction," *Political Science and Politics* 27 (September 1994): 507.

[15]Ibid.

[16]Ibid.

[17]Korany, "Arab Democratization: A Poor Cousin," 512. Compare this work with the equally insightful article by Joshua Parens, "Whose Liberalism? Which Islam? Leonard Binder's 'Islamic Liberalism,'" *Political Science and Politics* 27 (September 1994): 514–15.

[18]Cantori, "The Old Orthodoxy," 516.

[19]According to data provided by the World Bank official Qaiser Khan in his presentation, "Social Protection in the Middle East and North Africa," Australian National University, Canberra, 11 September 1998.

[20]Ibid.

[21]Edward P. Thompson, "The Moral Economy of the English Crowd in the Eighteenth Century," *Past and Present*, no. 50 (February 1971): 76–136.

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[22]Ibid., 76–77.
[23]Ibid., 76.
[24]Ibid.
[25]Ibid., 78–79.
[26]Ibid., 79.
[27]Ibid., 78.
[28]Edmund Burke, "Understanding Arab Protest Movements," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 8 (Fall 1987): 336.
[29]Ibid., 342–43.
[30]Ibid., 343.
[31]Ibid., 342–43.
[32]Ibid., 342.
[33]Hasan al-Turabi, interview by author, Khartoum, 12 May 1994.
[34]Ishaq Ahmad al-Farhan, interview by author, Amman, 5 February 1992; Ibrahim Khrisat, interview by author, Amman, 6 February 1992.
[35]ᶜAbd al-Latif ᶜArabiyyat, interview by author, Amman, 18 June 1994.
[36]Al-Farhan, interview; al-Turabi, interview.
[37]Abu Bakr Jamil, interview by author, Amman, 19 June 1994.
[38]According to author's interviews in Amman with al-Farhan; Ibrahim Khrisat, 6 February 1992; Hamzah Mansur, 4 June 1994; Hammam Saᶜid, 4 June 1994; Yusuf al-ᶜAzm, 5 June 1994; Ruba al-Farkh, 11 June 1994; and Bassam Laᶜmush (of the IAF), 12 June 1994; and in Khartoum with al-Turabi; Hasan Makki, 16 May 1994; Hafiz al-Shaykh al-Zaki, 18 May 1994; Ghazi Salah al-Din, 19 May 1994; Al-Tijani ᶜAbd al-Qadir Hamid, 28 May 1994; and Ibrahim Muhammad al-Sanusi (of the NIF), 28 May 1994.
[39]This point was stressed by most interviewees.
[40]ᶜArabiyyat, interview.
[41]Suᶜad al-Fatih, interview by author, Khartoum, 10 May 1994.
[42]Mansur, interview.
[43]Ṭāriq al-Tall, interview by author, Amman, 20 June 1994.
[44]According to author's interviews with al-Turabi and al-Farḥān.
[45]Al-ᶜAzm, interview.
[46]Al-Sanusi, interview.
[47]Muhammad Abu Faris, interview by author, Amman, 13 June 1994.
[48]ᶜArabiyyat, interview.
[49]Al-Turabi, interview.
[50]Al-Fatih, interview.
[51]Al-Turabi, interview.
[52]Al-Zaki, interview.
[53]Burke, "Understanding Arab Protest Movements," 342.
[54]Ibid.
[55]Ibid., 335.
[56]Ibid.
[57]Ibid.
[58]Aḥmad Shalabi, interview by author, Cairo, 15 March, 1993.
[59]See Steven Heydemann, "Taxation Without Representation: Authoritarianism and Economic Liberalization in Syria," in *Rules and Rights in the Middle East: Democracy, Law and Society*, ed. Ellis Goldberg, Resat Kasaba, and Joel S. Migdal (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1993), 74.
[60]Heydemann, "Taxation Without Representation," 76.
[61]See Mālik Bin Nabī's essays written in the 1950s and 1960s in *Wijhatu al-ᶜalim al-Islami* (The Muslim World's Direction), trans. ᶜAbd al-Sabur Shahin (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1981), 5, 133.
[62]See how John P. Entelis applies the term when describing Algeria's political culture, describing *bulitiq* as "maneuvring and scheming to acquire more power" by Algerian politicians: John P. Entelis, *Comparative Politics of North Africa: Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 1980), 102.
[63]See David Seddon, "Riot and Rebellion in North Africa: Political Responses to Economic Crisis in Tunisia, Morocco and Sudan," in *Power and Stability in the Middle East*, ed. Berch Berberoglu (London: Zed Books, 1989), 114–35.

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[64]Ibid., 126.

[65]Ibid., 127.

[66]Ibid.

[67]Ibid., 128–29.

[68]P. Doherty and S. Edge, "Amman Attempts to Strike a Balance," *Middle East Economic Digest* 33 (15 December 1989): 4.

[69]Richard U. Moench, "The May 1984 Elections in Egypt and the Question of Egypt's Stability," in *Elections in the Middle East: Implications of Recent Trends*, ed. Linda L. Layne (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1987), 60.

[70]See, for instance, Jon Marks, "Algeria: The Debt Dilemma," *Middle East Economic Digest* 36 (6 March 1992): 8.

[71]See J. King, "Algeria: The New Political Map," *Middle East International*, no. 379 (6 July 1990): 18. For details on the impact of oil on Arab economies, see Samih K. Farsoun, "Oil, State, and Social Structure," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 10 (Spring 1988): 155–75.

[72]D. Pryce-Jones, "Self-Determination Arab Style," *Commentary* 87 (January 1989): 40.

[73]John Mortimer, "We'll Help Because We Have To," *The Middle East*, no. 191 (September 1990): 36.

[74]P. Goslin, "Algeria Stumbles on the Road to Reform," *The Middle East*, no. 179 (September 1989): 23.

[75]Mark N. Cooper, *The Transformation of Egypt* (London and Canberra: Croom Helm, 1982), 238.

[76]Ahmad N. Azim, "Egypt: The Origins and Development of a Neo-colonial State," in *Power and Stability in the Middle East*, 12.

[77]Khalid Duran, "The Second Battle of Algiers," *Orbis* 33 (Summer 1989): 403.

[78]For a similar argument, see, for instance, Cooper, *The Transformation of Egypt*, 240.

[79]On this question, see the monograph by Karima Korayem, *Distributing Disposable Income and the Impact of Eliminating Food Subsidies in Egypt* (Cairo: American University in Cairo, Cairo Papers in Social Science, 1982).

[80]Cooper, *The Transformation of Egypt*, 239–40.

[81]Ibid., 240.

[82]Ibid.

[83]Hugh Roberts, "The Algerian State and the Challenge of Democracy," *Government and Opposition* 27 (Fall 1992): 435.

[84]Ibid. The transliteration is added by the author.

[85]Duran, "The Second Battle of Algiers": 406.

[86]Jonathan Kuttab, interview by author, Sydney, 18 August 1988.

[87]Cooper, *The Transformation of Egypt*, 239.

[88]Seddon, "Riot and Rebellion in North Africa," 119–24.

[89]According to Satloff, twelve people were killed in the Jordanian riots. See his article "Jordan Looks Inward," 58. For the Algerian figure, see P. Goslin, "Algeria Stumbles on the Road to Reform," *The Middle East*, no. 179 (September 1989): 23.

[90]Dougherty and Edge, "Amman Attempts to Strike a Balance," 4.

[91]J. Hooper, "Fundamentalists Sweep Algerian Elections," *Guardian Weekly*, 24 June 1990, 11.

[92]Gene Sharpe, "The Intifāḍah and the Non-Violent Struggle," *Journal of Palestinian Studies* 19 (Fall 1989): 5.

[93]See Henry S. Bienen and Mark Gersovitz, "Consumer Subsidy Cuts, Violence and Political Stability," *Comparative Politics* 19 (October 1986): 25–44.

[94]Giacomo Luciani, "Economic Foundations of Democracy and Authoritarianism: The Arab World in Comparative Perspective," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 10 (Fall 1988): 465.

[95]For the rescinding of prices in Tunisia and Morocco, see Seddon, "Riot and Rebellion in North Africa," 114.

[96]For the reinstating of food subsidies following the 1977 riots in Egypt, see Yahya M. Sadowski, *Political Vegetables? Businessmen and Bureaucrats in the Development of Egyptian Agriculture* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1991), 156. See also Paul Rivlin, *The Dynamics of Economic Policy Making in Egypt* (New York: Praeger, 1985), 178.

[97]Seddon, "Riot and Rebellion in North Africa," 121.

[98]Ibid.

[99]Ibid., 122.

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[100]Barrington Moore, Jr., *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy: Lord and Peasant in the Making of the Modern World* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966).

[101]Rustow, "Transitions to Democracy," *Comparative Politics* 2 (April 1970): 337–63.

[102]While Lipset's correlation meets with wide acceptance, it does not mean there is not controversy or opposition. Cutright, who followed in Lipset's footsteps, carried out empirical research to substantiate that high socio-economic development corresponds to higher levels of democratic development. His findings have, for instance, been disputed by Deane E. Neubauer, "Some Conditions of Democracy," *American Political Science Review* 61 (December 1967): 1002–9.

[103]Seymour Martin Lipset, "Some Social Requisites of Democracy: Economic Development and Political Legitimacy," *American Political Science Review* 53 (March 1957): 75.

[104]Dahl, *Polyarchy*, 68.

[105]Ibid., 68–74.

[106]Ibid., 59.

[107]One of the first scholars to look at the relationship between socio-economic variables and democracy in the Middle East was Charles Issawi. See his "Economic and Social Foundations of Democracy in the Middle East": 27–42.

[108]As ranked by Coleman on the basis of eleven indexes of economic development in 1960. See the table in Gabriel A. Almond and James S. Coleman, ed., *The Politics of the Developing Areas* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1960), 543.

[109]Michael C. Hudson, "The Possibilities for Pluralism," *American–Arab Affairs*, no. 36 (Spring 1991): 4. Most of this edition is dedicated to the subject of democratization in the Middle East.

[110]See the definition of a rentier state in Hazem Beblawi, "The Rentier State in the Arab World," in *The Arab State*, ed. Giacomo Luciani (London: Routledge, 1990), 87–88.

[111]This view is, for instance, articulated, inter alia, by Luciani, "Allocation vs. Production States," in *The Arab State*, 84; Samih K. Farsoun, "Oil, State and Social Structure in the Middle East," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 10 (Spring 1988): 166.

[112]Farsoun, "Oil, State and Social Structure," 166. See also useful statistical data provided by H. Batatu showing a tenfold growth of Syria's state bureaucracy between 1960 and 1979 and a nearly eightfold increase in Iraq's between 1958 and 1978: H. Batatu, "Political Power and Social Structure in Syria and Iraq," in *Arab Society*, ed. Samih K. Farsoun (London: Croom Helm, 1985), 38, 43.

[113]See the case study on Egypt by Robert Springborg in "Egypt," in *Economic and Political Liberalization in the Middle East*, ed. Niblock and Murphy (London and New York: British Academic Press, 1993), 160.

[114]Farsoun, "Oil, State and Social Structure in the Middle East": 166.

[115]Ibid.

[116]Ibid., 167.

[117]Ibid.

[118]See Almond and Powell, *Comparative Politics: System, Process and Policy*, 286–88.

[119]Farsoun, "Oil, State and Social Struture in the Middle East": 167.

[120]Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 65.

[121]Recently, some leading Arab scholars have argued that democratization is a necessary process for integrating Arabs into a future federal state. Refer to Haseeb et al., *The Future of the Arab Nation*, 395–99.

[122]Huntington lists this as one of three factors contributing to third-wave democratizations: Huntington, *The Third Wave*, 59.

[123]F. F. Piven and R. A. Cloward, *Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1971).

[124]H. L. Nieburg, "The Threat of Violence and Social Change," *American Political Science Review* 56 (1962): 865.

[125]Ibid.

[126]W. J. Dixon and B. E. Moon, "Domestic Political Conflict and Basic Outcomes: An Empirical Assessment," *Comparative Political Studies* 22 (1989): 178–98.

[127]Bienen and Gersovitz, "Consumer Subsidy Cuts," 25–44.

[128]Lucile Provost, *La Seconde guerre d'algérie. Le Quiproquo franco-algérien* (The Second Algerian War) (Paris: Flammarion, 1996).

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[129]See Salima Ghezali, "*Fausse éclaircie en Algérie*" (False Dawn in Algeria), *Le Monde Diplomatique*, no. 503 (February 1996), 1, 12.

[130]See Khalid Kishtainy, "Violent and Non-Violent Struggle in Arab History," in *Arab Non-Violent Political Struggle*, ed. Ralph E. Crow, Philip Grant, and Saad E. Ibrahim (Boulder, Colo., and London: Lynne Rienner, 1990), 9–24.

[131]Abdo I. Baaklini, *Legislative and Political Development: Lebanon, 1842–1972* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976), 42–43.

[132]Sadowski, *Political Vegetables?*, 157.

[133]Burhān Ghalyūn, "*Al-dimuqratiyya al-ᶜarabiyya: judhuru al-ᵓazma wa afaq al-numuw*" (Arab Democracy: Roots of the Crisis and Prospects of Development), in *Hawla al-khiyar al-dimuqrati: dirasat naqdiyya* (On the Democratic Option: A Critique), ed. Burhān Ghalyūn et al. (Beirut: markaz dirasat al-wahda al-ᶜarabiyya, 1994), 110–11.

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