

Democracy, Liberalism and the Middle East

On the Universality of Liberal Democracy

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Preface

The field of academia is an intriguing place to be. The academic world allows room for abstract ideas, theories and thoughts fascinating for those who take part in it. Being a student of both philosophy and political science I have many times let my self reflect upon ideas and possible solutions to complex problems by mixing philosophical ideals with political realities. I believe these fields of study are inextricably linked. Even though academic can be defined as theoretical or irrelevant for direct, practical purposes, outcomes from academic production have something to say to the world outside the university. I especially find the relation between theory and practice important with regards to philosophy and political science and its relevance to policy makers. If all politicians were trained in those disciplines, the public debate might have sounded a little differently. Terms derived from political philosophical theory would be used more cautiously, and not merely thrown out to erroneously accuse someone for being a 'liberal' or an 'Islamist' for the sake of polarizing the debate. Another consequence would be that certain political problems could have been solved in a different manner when the contending sides acknowledge their agreement on fundamental ideas.

This thesis is an attempt to combine philosophy and political science in order to raise important questions and debates relevant for the practitioner in the diplomatic areas of peace and conflict. My initial project was to examine the Middle Eastern exceptionalism when it comes to democratization. What inspired me to do so was an event that happened abroad in the fall 2004. When I was an exchange student in political science at McGill University in Canada, one of the professors gave an extremely interesting lecture about democracy in the Middle East. He compared the region's government to the Western European and North American mature democracies, and to the new democracies in former colonies of Latin America. The causal explanations for why democracy was more or less consolidated in other regions of the world, where many, but when it came to the Middle East, the professor could not give an adequate answer. Many theories of democratization fall short when explaining its failure to succeed in the Arab world. My final project has been to critically discuss the universality of democracy in the first place, and thereafter analyze a selection of the explanations looking at certain preconditions for democracy and how an ideological transfer of liberal democracy is challenging in the Arab authoritarian context. I do not claim to give an answer to the puzzle, but rather a contributing piece.

I would like to thank my supervisor Lene Bomann-Larsen for all your helpful suggestions and comments, my brothers Arnt Olav and Vegard Foseide for correcting my English and my family and friends for believing in me and my project. I appreciate all the interesting discussions we have had on the topic. Finally I would like to thank my beloved Knut for being there for me and encouraging me during my time of writing this thesis. It would not have been possible without your help.

Oslo, May 13th 2008

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Content

- 1. INTRODUCTION 8
 - 1.1 THEMATIC INTRODUCTION: THE UNIVERSALITY OF DEMOCRACY AND FREEDOM 8
 - 1.1.1 *Contesting Democracy*..... 11
 - 1.2 PRESENTATION OF THESIS 13
 - 1.2.1 *Aim of thesis*..... 13
 - 1.3 CONTEXTUAL INTRODUCTION 14
 - 1.3.1 *Authoritarianism in the Middle East*..... 14
 - 1.3.2 *Structure of thesis*..... 15
 - 1.3.3 *Expectations, limitations and discussion* 16
 - 1.3.4 *Choice of approach*..... 17
- 2. LIBERAL DEMOCRACY AND DEMOCRACY PROMOTION..... 19
 - 2.1 THE WESTERN CLASSICAL VIEW..... 19
 - 2.2 CLARIFICATION OF CONCEPTS: 19
 - 2.2.1 *Defining democracy*..... 19
 - 2.2.2 *Democratization and democracy promotion*..... 22
 - 2.2.3 *The West and the rest*..... 24
 - 2.2.4 *Conceptions of liberty*..... 24
 - 2.3 EXAMINING THE NOTION ‘LIBERAL DEMOCRACY’ 25
 - 2.3.1 *Classical liberalism*..... 26
 - 2.3.2 *Individual freedom as the highest value*..... 27
 - 2.3.3 *The justification of political authority*..... 28
 - 2.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STATE..... 29

2.4.1	<i>Mill and Walzer on the limitations of the state</i>	29
2.4.2	<i>State and religion</i>	31
2.5	MODERN POLITICAL LIBERALISM	32
2.5.1	<i>Theories of justice</i>	32
2.5.2	<i>Theories of impartiality</i>	34
2.6	LIBERALISM IN NON-LIBERAL COMMUNITIES.....	37
2.6.1	<i>The rationale behind democracy promotion</i>	37
2.6.2	<i>External democratization forces</i>	38
2.6.3	<i>The values exported by the West</i>	40
3.	THE POSITION OF DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST	44
3.1	ILLIBERALISM IN THE MIDDLE EAST	44
3.1.1	<i>The state of democracy and freedom in the Middle East</i>	44
3.2	DEMOCRACY AND DEVELOPMENT	46
3.2.1	<i>Development as freedom</i>	48
3.2.2	<i>Freedom and good governance</i>	50
3.2.3	<i>Women's rights in Arab countries</i>	51
3.2.4	<i>Democratic development?</i>	52
3.3	CENTRAL EXPLANATIONS FOR THE STATE OF DEMOCRACY IN THE MIDDLE EAST	53
3.3.1	<i>Economic conditions preventing democratic rights</i>	54
3.3.2	<i>Rule of law as a precondition for freedom</i>	55
3.3.3	<i>Contrasting conceptions of freedom</i>	58
3.3.4	<i>Islamic reform to accept democracy</i>	59
3.4	THE RESISTANCE TO WESTERN DEMOCRACY PROMOTION	61
4.	FUTURE PROSPECTS FOR CHANGE	63

4.1	POLITICAL CHANGE IN THE REGION	63
4.1.1	<i>Prospects for Arab electoral democracy</i>	64
4.1.2	<i>Prospects for Arab freedom of speech</i>	65
4.2	POLITICAL REFORMS AND THE ROLE OF US	67
4.2.1	<i>Who wants democracy in the Middle East?</i>	67
4.2.2	<i>Do Muslims really want democracy?</i>	71
4.3	NEGATIVE TENDENCIES	74
4.4	POSITIVE TENDENCIES	74
4.5	FINAL REMARKS	75
5.	CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS	76
5.1	SUMMARY OF MAIN IDEAS	76
5.2	POLICY IMPLICATIONS	78
6.	LIST OF REFERENCES	82

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Thematic introduction: The universality of democracy and freedom

Democratization has the last few decades become a widely used strategy among Western foreign policy makers and international organizations as a tool for building global peace and sustainable development. The process of democratization is closely linked to the notion of state-building and liberal peace-building among practitioners using the concepts. Democratic practice is generally assumed to create political liberty, stability and prosperity. A good society needs more than anything else to be able to grant its citizens individual freedom through the right to express their opinions freely, to actively participate in the politics of their country, and to equally join in the decision-making of who is to govern their state. The rule of law is a precondition for such a society. A democratic system of governing, where the politics is guided by the will of the people is expected to provide human rights and political freedoms to its citizens. There is no clear recipe for a democratic system, and no universally accepted single, perfect form of democracy. That is why we experience such variety of democratic practices carried out in so many different states in all corners of the world. It is still a system in testing, and we are in want of workable solutions of which type of democratic practice serves the well-being of a society and its citizens.

Some argue that the concept of liberal democracy is an uncontested ideal and its claim to universality is justified, therefore it is highly debated and is a concept that should not be regarded as a guarantee for peace and freedom. Whatever one may think about liberal democracy, democracy without the 'liberal' prefix remains unchallenged in the current governments of today's regimes and in scholarly literature. No political system is deemed to better grant people political rights, civil liberties and long term individual freedom. The Finnish professor in political science,

Tatu Vanhanen, expresses the consensus saying that “democracy provides a better framework for human life than do autocratic political systems.”¹

The good governance projects supported through the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and United States Agency for International Development (USAID) all promote *democracy* as the best and foremost political system there is. A democratic government is what in the eyes of UNDP and USAID equals good governance and best can distribute wealth and aid among a state’s citizens. USAID is very clear on their strategic objective in their promotion of democracy, and legitimize their work for liberalization through democracy on the claim that “people throughout the world have demonstrated by their own actions that freedom is a universal concept.”² Hence it follows in their argumentation that through political and economic liberalization, freedom will be granted. USAID and the US Department of State’s grand mission in their *Strategic Plan* for 2007-2012 with the subtitle “Transformational Diplomacy” is to

“advance freedom for the benefit of the American people and the international community by helping to build and sustain a more democratic, secure, and prosperous world composed of well-governed states that respond to the need of their people, reduce widespread poverty and act responsibly within the international system.”³

Promoting freedom, democracy and reducing poverty go hand in hand in the US foreign assistance. In the same document we can read how US policy is “committed to peace and security, democracy, free markets and economic integration, a healthy environment, and humanitarian assistance”⁴ and how President Bush puts forth US ambitions of supporting “the growth of democratic movements and institutions in

¹ Vanhanen, Tatu: *Democratization*, p.1

² “USAID’s Strategies for Sustainable Development: Building Democracy”, quoted in Larbi Sadiki *The Search for Arab Democracy*, p.340

³ US Department of State, US Agency for International Diplomacy: *Strategic Plan*, p.2

⁴ Ibid. p.44

every nation and culture with the ultimate goal of ending tyranny in our world.”⁵ In order for political and economic liberalization to happen, it requires the establishment of democracy and through the policy of the USAID, liberalization becomes identical with democratization.

A non-profit, nonpartisan independent American organization named Freedom House annually conducts a survey on the level of freedom in the world. Freedom House too puts an equation mark between liberal democracy and freedom. Their assumption is that “freedom for all peoples is best achieved in liberal democracies.”⁶ Freedom House does research to see whether or not countries have free elections, political pluralism and participation, as well as how rights and social freedoms are enjoyed by individuals. If all their criteria are met, they range a country as free. Semi-democracies are rated as partly free and autocratic regimes are rated as not free. This can be used as an indicator for how the Western world views its own democratic practice, with all citizens as free, participating decision makers with substantial political rights and civil liberties, as the ideal political governing system. *The question is then, if this understanding of democracy should be exported to all corners of the world within the diversity of societies that exist.* It seems likely that non-pluralistic, non-secular societies can have a different democratic practice than Western, pluralist and secular societies. When defenders of democracy uncritically rely on Eurocentric definitions of democracy, or the orientalist worry about the defense of individualism and secularism as prerequisites for democracy, it does not show a debate where the contending sides are concerned with particularities or open to local variations.⁷ Democracy has to be ‘defoundationalized’ if it is to be relevant for the multitude of world cultures and peoples who are striving to establish good governance in their societies, Larbi Sadiki claims in his extensive analysis of

⁵ Ibid. p.4

⁶ Freedom House: *Freedom in the World 2007. The Annual Survey of Political Rights and Civil Liberties*, p. 982

⁷ Argument inspired by Larbi Sadiki

discourses and counter-discourses on Arab democracy titled “The Search for Arab Democracy.”⁸ By ‘defoundationalizing’ democracy, Sadiki means refiguring, rethinking and reimagining democracy as an ‘anti-foundationalist’ ethos that does not regard democracy to be fixed, singular and self-evidently superior. Anti-foundationalism rejects ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism and Western cultural imperialism because it opposes the Western self-appointed truth of liberal democracy as the legitimate source of norms of political practice.⁹ This thesis will argue along the lines of defoundationalizing democracy, however, in a less radical manner in the sense that it presupposes certain fundamental values required in a democracy.

According to Sadiki, no concept is more on the agenda of discussion than democracy; What is democracy? Which democracy? Whose democracy? are central questions raised by Sadiki. More important for the purpose of this paper is Sadiki’s question of whether or not it is possible for a concept, an ideal and a system that obtains almost universal interest to have any claim to singular applicability. Is democracy a singular or a pluralistic concept? If democracy is the best form of government for all countries, no matter their cultural background, ethnical homogeneity, political history and level of economic development, in what form shall it be introduced – does it have many forms that are equally good or is there only one universal form of democracy? Historically the discourse around democracy has revolved around what the best form of government is and not so much on how we can understand the concept differently in different contexts, especially when exporting it to currently non-democratic societies. This paper aims to focus on the latter.

1.1.1 Contesting Democracy

The British Prime Minister Winston Churchill said in a speech to the House of Commons in 1947 that:” Democracy is the worst form of government, except all

⁸ Sadiki, Larbi: *The Search for Arab Democracy*, p.2

⁹ *Ibid.*, p.53-63

those other forms that have been tried from time to time.”¹⁰ No one pretends democracy is perfect or all-wise, he continued, “but there is the broad feeling in our country that the people should rule, continuously rule, and that public opinion, expressed by all constitutional means, should shape, guide, and control the actions of Ministers who are their servants and not their masters.”¹¹ The essence of our classical, traditional understanding of a democracy is an idealistic notion of self-rule. Democracy is a system of government designed to let the people participate, influence and join in politics and governing. The word democracy derives from the Greek *demokratia* meaning ‘rule by the people’ in its literal sense, where every man can act best and live happily, according to Aristotle. The Athenian democracy was patriarchal and excluded slaves, foreigners and women. So the Athenian *demokratia* only vaguely resembles our notion of liberal democracy in the modern world.¹² Athenian democracy never possessed direct systems of sovereign citizens and representative governments. There was a great gap between the philosophers who constructed the term and the public they constructed it for. This discrepancy between concept and reality also exists to some extent today among policy makers who are imposing democracy on non-liberal societies. This is actualized in the way Western foreign policy makers sit in their offices and headquarters in the rich part of the world deciding on democratic reforms in poorer, less developed countries as if state sovereignty had no validity what so ever and the citizens were not familiar with the practices of liberal democracy. If the overall aim of Western foreign policy makers is to create a world community of liberal democratic states, their credibility in this quest becomes significantly lower when their political approach seems undemocratic in itself.

¹⁰ Churchill, Winston: House of Commons speech November, 1947

¹¹ Baltzersen, J.K.: “Churchill on democracy revisited”, 2005

¹² Dahl, Robert A.: *Democracy and Its Critics*, p.360

1.2 Presentation of Thesis

1.2.1 Aim of thesis

This thesis aims to present a critical assessment of the universality of the concept of liberal democracy based on perspectives from classical philosophy and political science. I will examine how Western democracy promotion is received in the Middle East and North Africa.¹³ The region has a highly authoritarian history and has yet to change considerably in order for the states to strengthen their peoples' rights and freedoms. My analysis of the case of the Middle East has implications to how universal the notion of liberal democracy is to be understood. I will argue that one of the obstacles to bringing freedom to the people of the Middle East is that democracy is – on the part of the promoters- based on a universalization of Western values, and on the part of the receivers, construed as a *Western* ideal. Furthermore, it can be difficult for the Arabs to adapt to the ideas inherent in the classical liberalist tradition, which are integrated in the Western understanding of liberal democracy. Thus one contribution to the future prospects for political change in the region may be to reconstruct the notion of democracy and freedom in a way that is less biased by Western values and more open to local interpretations. One way of doing this might be to separate certain ideals within liberalism from the practices necessary for a democracy, such as readjusting the role of individualism and secularism.

As democracy promotion has become a 'big business' for international organizations and foreign policy makers, it is especially interesting to examine the Western actors' role in the ongoing democratization efforts in the Middle East in general, and the way democracy promotion is received specifically. I want to examine how the Western classical view of liberal democracy fits into the Middle Eastern context. Moreover, I will suggest that the Western values baked into the concept of liberal democracy may partially explain the region's resistance to Western democracy

¹³ See chapter 2, paragraph 2.2.3 for exact definition of the Middle East.

promotion, as a part of the general hostility to ideology imported from the West. My main research question is thus: *What are the challenges of exporting the Western classical view of liberal democracy to the Middle Eastern context?*

This question generates three sub-questions which will be treated in the subsequent chapters of the thesis:

- 1) *What separates liberal democracy from alternative understandings of democracy?*
- 2) *What is the current position of democracy in the Middle East?*
- 3) *What are the future prospects for political change in the region?*

1.3 Contextual introduction

1.3.1 Authoritarianism in the Middle East

The Middle East and North Africa is historically and to present day the region in the world where there are fewest established democratic states. In fact, Oliver Schlumberger claims that “no single Arab country has ever reached a state in which its polity could reasonably be considered ‘democratic’.”¹⁴ The Arab states have for centuries resisted the international pressure for democracy and continued their authoritarian, hierarchical, patron-client, family dynasty dominated political rule.¹⁵

The oil producing countries in the Middle East enjoy prosperity, valuable natural resources, a high level of education and development, yet they do not succeed in consolidating democracy. Given that some of these factors are believed to be preconditions for democratic implementation, economic development in particular,

¹⁴ Schlumberger, Oliver: “Dancing with Wolves: Dilemmas of Democracy Promotion in Authoritarian Contexts” in Dietrich Jung (ed.): *Democratization and Development*, p.36

¹⁵ For further references on patrimonialism and authoritarianism, Eva Bellin: “The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East. Exceptionalism in a Comparative Perspective” in *Comparative Politics*, 2004 and for more on clientelism and resisting international pressure see Maye Kassem: *Egyptian Politics. The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule*”

the weak position of democracy in the regions stands as a paradox.¹⁶ There seems to be little political will among leaders in the Middle East to promote democratic practice. This could be explained through numerous causes, for instance the lack of historical experience of democratic rule in Arab countries, the strong political role of religion, the incompatibility between liberal ideals and Islamic values or the hostility towards Western ideas and concepts.¹⁷

1.3.2 Structure of thesis

The topic at hand is quite large, and a number of possible explanatory models are available for analyzing the problems of exporting democracy to the Middle East. This thesis does not aim to review all possible explanations, but seeks one possible answer in the concept of liberal democracy as a universal ideal, and assesses the particularities of the Middle Eastern context in the light of this. In order to conduct an adequate analysis and discussion about the universality of liberal democracy and its challenging adaptation to the Middle East, I will first present an overview of the classical philosophical views on liberal democracy. Second, I will provide an account of the current position of democracy in the Middle East. Having outlined the theoretical framework for the essay, I will discuss some of the challenges liberals face when exporting their values to the Arab context and analyze a selection of central explanations for the lack of democratic practice in the region. Finally I will look at what the literature says on strategies for Western democracy promotion and future prospects for political change.

¹⁶ See Seymour Martin Lipset: *Political Man; The Social Bases of Politics*, p.31 and Ronald Inglehart: “Changing Values, Economic Development and Political Change “ in *International Social Science Journal* No.145, 1999

¹⁷ See Homa Katouzian: *Iranian History and Politics* and Kjetil Selvik: “Demokratiproblemet i Midtøsten” in NUPI report 21, *Hvor hender det?* , 2007 on historical explanations, see Larbi Sadiki : *The Search for Arab democracy*” and Robin Wright: “ Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two Visions of Reformation” in *Journal of Democracy*7:.2, 1996 on the strong political power of religion and see Barry Rubin: *The Long War for Freedom* for hostility towards Western ideas and concepts.

1.3.3 Expectations, limitations and discussion

Based on my following analysis of the challenges of the ideological transfer of democracy, I expect to find evidence suggesting that there is a need for a new understanding of the concept of democracy. There is a need to critically discuss the ideal that one type of political system is universally valid and optimal for all different kinds of societies. Could it be that a pluralistic, secular Western society needs a different kind of democratic practice than a society in the Arab world where religion plays such a vital role? The universal application of substantive social, economic and political arrangements from liberal principles is indeed something that ought to be debated. I will suggest that the idea of democratizing the illiberal parts of the world often amounts to an attempt to apply a presumed universally valid concept of liberal democracy. A criticism of the politics and the rationale behind democratization gives fuel to the debate in international political theory between ‘liberals’ or moral universalists on the one hand, and ‘communitarians’ who are moral particularists, on the other. Communitarianism and liberalism, the latter often associated with ‘cosmopolitanism’, have various implications for different societies. Certain well-functioning societies can with confidence acknowledge that they want other societies to be like them and claim that is the best for all, while others find themselves unpleased with their current situation and think that their needs are different from the needs of other societies. One example could be that a society of laws and regulations gives individual freedom in one contextual setting, while it deprives citizen rights and liberties in another. While ‘negative freedom’ could be an ideal in Western, secular and multicultural societies, where citizens desire freedom from barriers or constraints, ‘positive freedom’ might be more wanted in the Middle East where people often are unified in a common perception of what constitutes ‘the public good’, and which is to be administered by the rulers.¹⁸ This springs from the Western history of the rule of law making citizens used to the adaptation to democratically elected laws and the

¹⁸ Sadiki, Larbi: *The Search for Arab Democracy*, p.224

legitimacy of Islam that has the authority to establish what the common good for a Muslim public is.

Setting aside the religious and philosophical aspects of democratization in the Middle East, we can look at the political factors necessary for change. Some countries in the region may have the external conditions and framework required for democratic practice, but the individual freedom for all citizens and decision makers is still not granted. Our challenge then is how to reconceptualize democracy and democracy promotion to successfully consolidate democracy in a Middle Eastern authoritarian context.

1.3.4 Choice of approach

The approach used in this thesis will be a review of scholarly literature as well as selected reports and articles from the media discourse on the topic of democratizing the Middle East analyzed with my research question both as a point of departure and as a guidance for direction a long the way. This thesis seeks to collect, compare and evaluate central theories and hypotheses within the field of classical political philosophy and political science regarding democracy and its contextual challenges in the Middle East.

The thesis will primarily be based on central liberal theories from a classical philosophical point of view supporting the idea of liberal democracy. Philosophers chosen for this purpose are John Stuart Mill and John Rawls and their works on liberalism and liberal democracy. Political scientists having done studies on democratization and democratic transition will serve as secondary sources, like Tatu Vanhanen,¹⁹ Robert Dahl,²⁰ S.M. Lipset.²¹ For empirical data on the current situation

¹⁹ Vanhanen, Tatu: *Democratization*

²⁰ Dahl, Robert: *Democracy and Its Critics* and *Polyarchy – Participation and Opposition*

²¹ Lipset, S.M: *Political Man: The Social Basis of Politics*

for democracy, development and human rights in the Middle East, I will use Freedom House,²² United Nations Development Programme²³ and Human Rights Watch.²⁴ On the subject of criticism to democratization and strategies for democracy promotion, Jean Grugel,²⁵ Dietrich Jung,²⁶ and Larry Diamond²⁷ will give valuable insights. Larbi Sadiki,²⁸ Homa Katouzian,²⁹ Muqtedar Khan³⁰ and Maye Kassem³¹ will be the main writers representing the Middle Eastern perspective on the democratic discourse.

²² Freedom House: *Freedom in the World 2007*

²³ UNDP: The Arab Human Development Reports 2002-2005 and Human Development Reports 2006 and 2007/2008

²⁴ Human Rights Watch, *World Report 2008*

²⁵ Grugel, Jean: *Democratization. A Critical Introduction*

²⁶ Jung, Dietrich: *Democratization and Development. New Political Strategies for The Middle East*

²⁷ Diamond, Larry: "Is the Third Wave Over?" in *Journal of Democracy* 7:3

²⁸ Sadiki, Larbi: *The Search for Arab Democracy. The Dialectic of State and Society*

²⁹ Katouzian, Homa: *Iranian History and Politics*

³⁰ Khan, Muqtedar: "Prospects for Muslim Democracy: The Role of the U.S. Policy" in *Middle East Policy*, Vol.X, 2003

³¹ Kassem, Maye: *Egyptian Politics: The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule*

2. Liberal Democracy and Democracy Promotion

2.1 The Western classical view

First it is necessary to clarify what the Western classical view of liberal democracy is, which will enable me to answer the question of *what separates liberal democracy from other understandings of democracy*. The following will give a descriptive account of the classical view of liberal democracy from a classical philosophical point of view, mainly based on the Western liberal philosophers John Stuart Mill and John Rawls. The aim of this chapter is to lay out the theoretical foundation of the modern view of liberal democracy and look at what gives democracy the extra label ‘liberal’. The chapter will include a clarification of concepts, a presentation of classical and modern liberalism and the common understanding of the notion of liberal democracy, and eventually a discussion about the rationale behind democracy promotion. I will examine which values Westerners export to the rest of the world under the policy of democracy promotion. This value-analysis will be used later on to discuss the challenges of exporting the Western values to non-democratic societies.

2.2 Clarification of concepts:

2.2.1 Defining democracy

The terms *democracy*, *democratization* and *democracy promotion* are at the centre of my discussion and will be clarified here and discussed in detail later. The first and most important term we need to have a clear understanding of, is *democracy*. The political scientist Robert A. Dahl describes a democratic state as one being able to consider all citizens as politically equal, and have a government that is

continuously responsive to the preferences of its citizens.³² Dahl puts a great emphasis on equality and the importance of citizen participation and public contestation which he regards as crucial characteristics for democracy. Democracy, Dahl proposes, is to be measured according to eight criteria which have widespread support. Those are: 1) the right to vote, 2) the right to be elected, 3) the right of political leaders to compete for support and votes, 4) free and fair elections, 5) freedom of association, 6) freedom of expression, 7) alternative sources of information and 8) institutions for making public policies depend on votes and other expressions of preferences.³³ These are the fundamental qualities that need to be fulfilled if a state is to be called democratic. However, there is a high degree of conceptual confusion about the term democracy. The political scientists David Collier and Steven Levitsky identify over 550 ‘subtypes’ of democracy.³⁴ Minimalist definitions of democracy have also been established, for comparative purposes, among others. Joseph Schumpeter defines democracy as a system “for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire the power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people’s vote.”³⁵ This minimalist definition, which identifies electoral competition as the essence of democracy, is termed *electoral democracy* and is common among Western policy makers who track and celebrate the expansion of democracy. Electoral democracy is a minimalist conception opposed to the more including term *liberal democracy* which requires fundamental civil freedoms as necessary in order to make competition and participation real and meaningful.

A liberal democracy, in contrast to an electoral democracy, has to have free, fair and regular electoral competition which includes all groups, as well as a political

³² Dahl, Robert A.: *Polyarchy- Participation and Opposition*, p.1.

³³ Ibid. p.3, Arend Lijphart: *Patterns of democracy*, p.48-49

³⁴ Collier and Levitsky cited in Larry Diamond: “Is the third wave over?” in *Journal of democracy* 7.3, 1996, p.21

³⁵ Schumpeter quoted in *ibid.*

opposition which grants that the outcome of the election is open. All citizens at full age (18) have the right to vote.³⁶ Real power should lay with the elected officials and the executive power is constrained. All officeholders are accountable to one another. No cultural, ethnic, religious or any other minority group is prohibited from expressing their interests in the political process. Citizens have unrestricted access to an independent media and multiple channels for expression and representation. Individuals have substantial freedom of belief, opinion, discussion, speech, publication, assembly, demonstration and petition. There is a rule of law and all citizens are politically equal under the law. These are the essential features of a liberal democracy given by Larry Diamond.³⁷ According to him, the best available empirical indicator of 'liberal democracy' is the 'free' rating in Freedom House.³⁸

When using democracy in the following, I will refer to a system of government where there is popular sovereignty and the right to vote is given to all persons over a certain age. Democratic governing is guided by a rule of law treating individuals as politically equal subjects before the law. There should be representation through periodic free, fair and competitive elections where the results are not fixed in advance. Citizens ought to be free to express their views in public, form associations with each other and be able to actively participate in politics and decision-making processes. In that way, one can ensure that the politics is guided by the will of the people. A real democracy is expected to provide these possibilities, fundamental rights and freedoms to its citizens.³⁹ I further take it as a given that all humans are universally entitled to those equal rights and freedoms that are expressed in the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The universal human

³⁶ Liberal democracies have universal suffrage with some specified and justified restrictions such as immigrants without citizenship, those declared incompetent or those who have been convicted for serious criminal offences.

³⁷ Diamond, Larry: "Is the Third Wave over?" in *Journal of Democracy* 7:3, 1996, p.22-23

³⁸ Ibid.,p.24

³⁹ See Introduction

rights ought to serve as fundamental cornerstones for every democratic society that deserves its name.

2.2.2 Democratization and democracy promotion

In addition to his requirements for democracy, Dahl lays out five criteria for a democratic process, illuminating how his definitions of democracy and democratization are connected. The five assumptions that justify a democratic political order are in his view 1) effective participation, 2) voting equality at the decisive stage 3) enlightened understanding 4) control of the agenda and 5) the inclusion of adults.⁴⁰ The terms *democratization* and *democracy promotion* might be used interchangeably, but the distinction is made with actual implementation and value-exportation. *Democratization* in its original use means the political action of an authoritarian state transforming into a consolidated democracy or, put in another way the transition from non-democratic to democratic forms of government,⁴¹ while *democracy promotion* entails the idea of exporting democratic values to other non-democratic countries. I choose to define democracy promotion as having little to do with the actual implementation of state reforms in another country, but rather the ideological transfer of values from one democratic state to a non-democratic one. Political researcher on authoritarianism in the Middle East and Northern Africa, Oliver Schlumberger, describes democracy promotion as promoting democratic governance and initiate political reform in a number of areas, like:

-Strengthening respect for human rights, including women's rights and the rights of the child (support for compliance with human rights and conventions)

-Civil and political rights such as freedom of the media, the right to participate actively in public and political life, mainly through competitive elections, eligibility for public office, and the like (support for democratic elections and the preconditions of their being meaningful, i.e., enhancing participation)

⁴⁰ Dahl, Robert A. : *Democracy and Its Critics*, p.111

⁴¹ Sodaro, Michael J.: *Comparative Politics*, p.19

-Strengthening the opportunities for the voluntary association of citizens for purposes of public interest, and facilitating their inclusion in decision-making processes in public affairs (support for civil society)

-Support for an independent judiciary, for the equitable application of laws, and citizen's access to the judicial system (support for judicial independence and the rule of law)

- Avoiding the concentration of power in the hands of a few and bringing "the state" closer to its citizens not in the sense of being a controller, but as being a service provider, especially to the poor and those remote from the central decision-making circles (support for political, administrative and fiscal decentralization) ⁴²

All of these issues are important for democracy promoters, which in a more general sense also include strengthening accountability, transparency and combating corruption. Schlumberger notes that although the list is not exhaustive, it makes up the key dimensions of democracy and is compatible to the typical definitions of democracy noted above. A state can fulfill some, but not all of these standards, and still earn the title democracy, although not a *liberal* democracy. When gathering all these individual elements, they make up a functioning democracy with important liberal elements like respect for human rights, freedom of expression, associational freedom, and an independent judiciary and constraints of power, similar to those liberal democracies known from Western Europe and North America.⁴³ Societies lacking many of these central elements of political institutions respecting human rights, enhancing political participation, providing political rights and civil liberties for their citizens are accordingly called *non-liberal societies* or *authoritarian regimes*. The legislative and judiciary power of authoritarian regimes is often weak and constrained, while the executive power has few limitations and lacks a system of checks and balances securing a certain degree of transparency and accountability.

⁴² Schlumberger, Oliver: "Dancing with Wolves: Dilemmas of Democracy Promotion in Authoritarian Contexts" in Dietrich Jung (ed.): *Democratization and Development*, p. 40-41

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p.41

2.2.3 The West and the rest

That brings us to the next concepts in need of clarification, namely *the West* and *Western*. These are terms frequently used in the democratic discourse, and some scholars refer to democratization as a form of *Westernization*. In this thesis, West and Western is defined in geo-political terms referring to the Western part of the world, the Anglophone countries of North America, Australia, New Zealand as well as the various countries of Western Europe. West is also used to describe democratic political systems in secular, pluralistic and liberal societies, as opposed to several non-Western countries where democratic governments not yet have proved to be solid. The *Middle East* refers to the countries in the region that encompasses the Arab states in Southwest Asia and the Maghreb countries and Egypt in Northern Africa from Morocco in the west to Iran in the east.⁴⁴ I choose to include Iran and Turkey when referring to the ‘Arab states’, even though the majority of the population in Iran is Persian and Turkey consist of a Turkish majority and a large Kurdish minority. Iran and Turkey are often included in the contemporary usage of the Middle East because of their similar geopolitical and religious interests to the Arab countries in the region. *Arabic Middle East* or what we call the *Arab world* will be used interchangeably when referring to Arab states, a term which excludes Israel.

2.2.4 Conceptions of liberty

The final concepts to be clarified, is the philosophical distinction within the tradition of liberalism between *negative* and *positive liberty*.⁴⁵ This distinction is relevant for my later treatment of different political ideals of freedom in Western and Arab societies, and the liberty concept found in political liberalism. *Negative liberty* means absence of barriers, constraints and obstacles in the pursuit of liberty. *Positive*

⁴⁴ The Middle East and North Africa include 21 countries: Algeria, Bahrain, Brunei, Egypt, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Oman, the Palestinian Authority, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Syria, Tunisia, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen. See “Defining the Middle East” in Dan Smith: *The State of the Middle East*, p.8-9

⁴⁵ The distinction between ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ freedom was first proposed by Thomas H. Green, and later restated by Isaiah Berlin in his essay: “Two Concepts of Liberty” (1958)

liberty is the possibility of acting in such a way as to take control of one's life and realize one's fundamental purposes. While negative liberty refers to, among other meanings, freedom from doing something because certain hindrances restrain your freedom, positive liberty can be said to refer to the opposite, which is freedom to do something because you have the opportunity to do so. The pursuit of liberty can under both aspects be understood as self-realization or self-determination. Western liberals tend to favor a negative concept of freedom, and generally claim that state interference should be strongly limited, something that affects the relation to democratic rule.⁴⁶

2.3 Examining the notion 'liberal democracy'

When describing Western democratic political systems, the notion liberal democracy is frequently used. 'Liberal' in this sense refers to regimes that are 'free', 'secular' or 'non-restrictive' in its popular meaning. The label liberal democracy has usually been given to societies within the Western world, but the number of free countries in the world is expanding and many new (third-wave) electoral democracies are developing in a liberal direction. We find some liberal democracies in Latin America, Africa and Asia, and Israel in the Middle East, but the most popular illustrating examples of liberal democracies, are Australia, Canada, the member states of the European Union, Iceland, New Zealand, Switzerland, Norway and the United States. The practices of these countries' political representation, electoral systems and governmental interference in the private sphere, are varying. Nevertheless, they all possess some common features that classify them specifically as liberal democracies. These democratic and liberal societal elements are the results of a long history of philosophical, cultural, economical and political development. Drawing the historical line from the classic philosophical tradition on democratic and liberal thinking, is a

⁴⁶ Berlin, Isaiah: *Liberty*, p.176-178

useful aid in our search for understanding the values held in modern, liberal democracies.

2.3.1 Classical liberalism

The root of the word liberalism derives from Latin *liber* meaning free, indicating the primary thought of this particular political philosophy. The origin of liberal democracy stems from the classical philosophical tradition of liberalism in the eighteenth century and the thoughts of among others John Stuart Mill. The system of thoughts behind liberal democracy was modernized by the twentieth century philosopher John Rawls and his principles of justice and ideas on modern political liberalism, to which I will return. John Stuart Mill's work was rooted on the British empiricism of John Locke, George Berkeley and David Hume and utilitarianism as we know it from Jeremy Bentham. Mill developed his own defense of empiricism and a liberal political view of society and culture. His main work *On Liberty* from 1859 transformed the concept of liberty into philosophy and gave it a central role in social policy and government. Mill's overall aim in his philosophical project is to develop a positive view of the human being's place in the universe, and contribute to the progress of human knowledge, human well-being and individual freedom. Mill strongly defends the idea of the free and sovereign individual; "Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign"⁴⁷ Mill proclaims.

Two fundamental problems are addressed within the traditional schools of liberalism: The examination of the concepts of liberty and right, and secondly the justification of the state's functions, especially the limits of the use of coercive, legitimate force.

⁴⁷ Mill, John Stuart: *On Liberty*, p.69

2.3.2 Individual freedom as the highest value

The first problem in liberalist tradition revolves around the scope, content and analysis of the individual rights. The individual has the right to be free from coercion, crime, violence or other obstacles or constraints to its exercise of liberty. The fundamental presupposition of liberal freedom tends to be a negative conception of freedom, seeing liberty as the absence of coercion or interference by others. If you are prevented from doing what you otherwise do, you are to that degree un-free. The liberal state's commitment to protect individual liberty then becomes solely to make sure citizens do not coerce or interfere with one another. Many liberals also posit a positive conception of liberty as freedom to act according to one's own will or pursue one's own interest in an autonomous way. The ideal of freedom as self-determination has its roots in classical liberalism, from among others Mill's *On Liberty*, where he so eloquently states that "the only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way (...)." ⁴⁸ Every individual has the freedom to pursue one's interests to the extent that it would not deprive others to do the same.

To John Stuart Mill, liberty means freedom of self from state or governmental restrictions. The right to liberty is the fundamental human right. Liberalism has taken many forms and competing visions, but a liberal is by definition someone who believes in liberty, and holds liberty as the highest political value. The fundamental principle of liberalism is that freedom is normatively basic and the a priori assumption is in favor of freedom, so it is not in need of any justification, Mill argued. The burden of proof lies with those who wish to limit freedom, especially with coercive means. It follows from this that political authority and the rule of law must be justified, because they both limit the liberty of citizens. John Rawls agrees with this fundamental liberal principle that freedom is normatively basic and that governmental actions need to be justified. Rawls developed further the influential social contract theory as one way of justifying the limitations of freedom and

⁴⁸ Ibid. p. 72

equality.⁴⁹ Philosophers of the social contract theory hold that persons' political obligations are dependent upon a contract or agreement between them to form society. Human beings are rational and self-interested, and will therefore choose to submit to a political authority in order to be able to promote their own interests. Rawls further developed this theory by means of principles of justice demarcates how we can construct political legitimacy in the first place, and what such a constitution can and cannot require of us.

2.3.3 The justification of political authority

The second problem addressed within the traditional school of liberalism is the justification of the state's functions. I will first look at the liberal point of view of whether or not we need a state and thereafter which role the state should play. Liberals claim that there is a need for a state in order to ensure that people do not violate each other's rights, for example through violence. The problem is that the state can only fulfill its task efficiently by exercising force. Liberals respond to this by saying that state sanctioned force is the lesser evil and that the exercise of state-force must be regulated by common laws so that it can be predicted and controlled. A state's actions can unjustifiably limit the liberty of its citizens, but political authority is justified in the sense that liberalism emphasizes that it is the basic task of the state to protect the equal liberty of all its citizens, also minorities within the state. Rawls expressed this task in his first principle of justice called 'The Liberty Principle' in *Political Liberalism*: "Each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all; and in this scheme the equal political liberties, and only those liberties, are to be guaranteed their fair value."⁵⁰ The liberalist can not be in favor of anarchy, because he sees the state as necessary to ensure that the individual's right is not offended by

⁴⁹ Earlier thinkers of what later formed liberal political theory from the seventeenth and eighteenth century are Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Immanuel Kant. They were all founders and adherents of the social contract theory.

⁵⁰ Rawls, John: *Political Liberalism*, p.5. Principle revised from the original given in Rawls' *A Theory of Justice*, 1971.

any other individual. This can be done with a certain portion of monopolized use of force, so it is fair to say that liberalism refers to a system of government that guarantees freedom for all.

2.4 Limitations of the state

Liberals generally claim that if one favors individual liberty one should place strong limitations on the activities of the state. The classical liberal point of view is that the state's only task is to ensure that fundamental rights are not violated. Another liberal point of view is that the state can do certain service-functions on top of its fundamental task; if it can perform them better than the free market. Rawls advocates this view by saying that the liberal state should lead an active distribution politics.⁵¹ This envisions a positive view of freedom as the pursuit of the good and seeking own self-realization, where a welfare state can aid its citizens through systems of health care, social security and education for all.

2.4.1 Mill and Walzer on the limitations of the state

Mill declares that men are never allowed to interfere with the liberty of action for others unless it is in self-protection. This he calls 'one very simple principle.'⁵² Mill's reason for writing this doctrine of liberty was that he feared a new form of tyranny was confronting mankind. That was not the tyranny of despotism, but the 'tyranny of the majority',⁵³ which was becoming prominent both in politics and social life. Mill was concerned about the rise of popular government and saw it as a precondition for the new form of 'despotism of custom'. In his eyes the society itself

⁵¹ Rawls, John: *Law of Peoples*

⁵² Mill, John Stuart: *On Liberty*, p.68

⁵³ *Ibid.* p.62

may become a tyrant because it has a tendency to impose “its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them”.⁵⁴

The American political philosopher Michael Walzer holds a similar view of the state as being tyrannical in his *Spheres of Justice* where he discusses the limitations of state power and how it is colonized; “(...) state power is itself imperialist; its agents are tyrants in their own right.”⁵⁵ The agents of state power override social meanings, Walzer says. He believes politics to be one of many spheres of social activity, and to him, ‘tyrant’ primarily has political connotations.⁵⁶ When Mill refers to the society as being a tyrant, he means that the will of the rulers becomes more and more identified with the will of the people and that there is a strong pressure of conforming to custom.⁵⁷ Mill explains this danger like this:

“The will of the people, moreover, practically means, the will of the most numerous or the most active part of the people - the majority or those who succeed in making themselves accepted as the majority; the people, consequently, *may* desire to oppress a part of their number, and precautions are as much needed against this, as against any other abuse of power”.⁵⁸

That is why the limitation of the government’s power over individuals is important, according to Mill. Forms of government are beneficial in the sense that they are grounded on the unending interest of man as a progressive being. Governments are to be evaluated in terms of their capacity to enable each person to exercise and develop her own capacities for higher forms of human happiness. For Mill, government is not a matter of natural rights or social contract, as in many other forms of liberalism. Government is necessary to contribute to the progressive development of the individual, and democracy and representative government is the

⁵⁴ Ibid. p.63

⁵⁵ Walzer, Michael: *Spheres of Justice*, p.282

⁵⁶ Walzer’s writings will be further treated later in this chapter.

⁵⁷ Mill, John Stuart: *On Liberty*, p.136

⁵⁸ Ibid.p.62

form which best encourages individuality. In his view, democratic governments provide moral training and encourage the development of natural human sympathies which result in the habit of looking at social questions from an *impersonal* perspective rather than that of self-interest. A part of Mill's philosophical and political project is therefore to make people fit for democracy if government is to be stable, and that entails freedom of expression and liberalizing the press to include social criticism and encourage political debate so that people can exercise their responsibility as a free electorate.

2.4.2 State and religion

Liberal democracies are characterized by a separation between state and church and a secularization of politics. Most liberal countries have a secular rule where politics and religion are not intermixed and where the freedom of belief stands very strong. The general view is that religion shall not interfere with the state's domain, and neither shall the state interfere in the religious sphere. The highest authority in a liberal democracy is the political leadership, not the church, and those who govern are obliged to respect the written laws of the country, not Holy Scriptures.

Rawls favors a separation of church and state, and sees it as necessary for reasonable, political rule. He is critical to the capability of those avowing to an extensive religious doctrine based on a religious authority like the church or the Bible to also "hold a reasonable political conception of justice that supports a constitutional democratic society".⁵⁹ He sees a clear contradiction between comprehensive religious and liberal doctrines, and finds them incompatible when formulating political conceptions which should allow for pluralist conceptions of the good.

⁵⁹ Rawls, John: *Political Liberalism*, p.490

Mill, on the other hand, is more sympathetic to religion and favored the idea of M. Comte's 'Religion of Humanity',⁶⁰ but he does not want to institutionalize religion in a rigid, hierarchical church. Nor does he want a mix of spiritual and temporal authorities and calls for a separation of them. The state has nothing to do with the individual's private religious belief, because freedom of belief has the highest priority for Mill. He suggests that some forms of religious practice suppress individuality and personal development, so they have no place in the modern, liberal world. The relationship between state and religion will be further discussed in chapter 3, as it can be seen as a major contributing factor to the difficulties of establishing liberal democracies in the Arab context.

2.5 Modern political liberalism

2.5.1 Theories of justice

John Rawls has formulated the principle ideas of classic liberalism into a political system of thinking and created a new conception of justice that is independent of religious, moral or philosophical doctrines. Rawls' main concern in *Political Liberalism* is "how it is possible that there exists over time a stable and just society of free and equal citizens profoundly divided by reasonable though incompatible religious, philosophical and moral doctrines."⁶¹ He suggests that this pluralism of doctrines is what characterizes a modern democratic society. Rawls wants to say how a well-ordered society where 'Justice as Fairness'⁶² prevails is to be understood once it is adjusted to the fact of reasonable pluralism. This adjustment will allow for a society of greater social justice and liberty with a constitutional democratic practice.

⁶⁰ Mill, John Stuart. *On Liberty*, p.73

⁶¹ Rawls, John: *Political Liberalism*, p.4

Justice as fairness combines two principles: ‘The Liberty principle’ and ‘the Difference principle.’ The liberty principle states that each person has an equal claim to basic rights and liberties. The liberty principle has priority over the difference principle.⁶³ The difference principle regards social and economic inequalities, and claims that in order to be justified, inequalities should satisfy two conditions: “first, they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society.”⁶⁴ The difference principle could also be used to argue for a global distributive justice where aid is given to governments that are unable to protect human rights for economic reasons, in order to help them to ensure the maintenance of liberal or decent political institutions.⁶⁵ Rawls himself does not support this universal application of the difference principle, because states are self-sufficient. Global distributive justice is only relevant as a means to serve the expansion of political liberalism globally.

In Rawls’ opinion, a well-ordered society of reasonable pluralism consists of ‘well-ordered’ peoples that could be either ‘liberal’ or ‘decent’. If one is to pursue a legitimate liberal international order it is consistent with tolerating ‘decent’ peoples. Decent peoples differ from liberal peoples in that they might have state religions and deny adherents of minority faiths to hold positions of power within the state and organize political participation via consultation hierarchies rather than competitive elections. However, a global society of liberal and decent peoples is possible, Rawls says, because liberal conceptions of justice with ideals and principles for international policy are possible for both a reasonably just, liberal people and decent, non-liberal peoples. This is realized through an ‘overlapping consensus’ of agreement on justice

⁶² ‘Justice as Fairness’ is two principles of justice from Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*

⁶³ The Liberty Principle is referred to earlier in the text. See paragraph 2.3.3.

⁶⁴ Rawls, John: *Political Liberalism*, p.6

⁶⁵ See the work of Charles Beitz for more on positive duties for the global justice and eradication of poverty. He argued for Rawls’ difference principles globally. Thomas Pogge and Henry Shue are also relevant for similar positions on global, distributive justice.

as fairness between societies with different religious and philosophical views or different conceptions of the good. The overlapping consensus is reached when transcending the conflicting religious, moral and philosophical views to arrive at a common understanding of an independent, political conception of justice and governance.

2.5.2 Theories of impartiality

The moral and political philosopher Brian Barry supports Rawls' conception of justice as fairness saying that it is the best worked out exemplar of justice as impartiality.⁶⁶ Barry's theory on justice as impartiality is not dissimilar to Rawls' overlapping consensus. Barry's theory is made on the terms of a reasonable agreement which is based on premises which "reasonable people who seeks to reach free, uncoerced agreement with others, would accept."⁶⁷ It also entails some sense of equality, as all people are to contribute in an equal manner and have to be able to feel that they have done as well as they could reasonably hope to, Barry suggests, and sums up that; "the whole idea that we should seek agreement with everybody rests upon a fundamental commitment to the equality of all human beings."⁶⁸ Justice as impartiality calls for principles and rules that are capable of forming the basis of free agreement among people seeking agreement on reasonable terms. Being impartial means not being motivated by private considerations. Hence it follows in Barry's reasoning that when we combine the principles of justice as impartiality and impartial behavior, we can assume that "any principles which can be impartially justified must of necessity be principles that mandate universal impartiality."⁶⁹ This is the fundamental premise behind the legitimacy of liberal democracy as a universal ideal.

⁶⁶ Barry, Brian: *Justice as Impartiality*, Preface

⁶⁷ Ibid. p.7

⁶⁸ Ibid. p.8

⁶⁹ Ibid. p.11

If impartial principles are accepted by all and is for everyone's best in a liberal society, the same principles must be valid for non-liberal societies as well. We have already seen how Mill viewed democratic governments as providers of that kind of moral training that enables people to choose an impersonal rather than a self-interested perspective on politics, which is quite consistent with the liberal ideal of impartiality.

The moral philosopher Thomas Nagel does not fully agree with the Rawlsian account of liberal impartiality. Nagel criticizes liberals for being partial when it comes to the value of individual freedom, whereas they claim to be impartial when it comes to individual freedom and limitations of state interference. A liberal comes in conflict with his own ideal of impartiality and tolerance when theories on political legitimacy distinguish between the values a person can appeal to in conducting his own life and those he can appeal to in justifying the exercise of political power. Rawls' overlapping consensus requires that one disregards one's own personal beliefs in religion, morality and philosophy in order to agree on a political conception of justice. Nagel means liberalism should provide the religious with a reason for tolerance.⁷⁰ It is not sufficient to exclude knowledge of one's religious beliefs from the original position on the ground that it is needed to make agreement possible. "The question is whether there is a viable form of impartiality that makes it possible to exclude such factors from the basis of one's acceptance of political institutions, or whether, alternatively, we have to give up the hope of liberal legitimacy."⁷¹ Liberal impartiality claims an authority that will not be universally accepted, Nagel argues, because it justifies the resistance of particular values in certain cases, and will not secure universal agreement.⁷² This is the problem with the Rawlsian conception of justice, because it does not offer any alternative, substantive moral ideas, it merely

⁷⁰ Nagel, Thomas: "Moral Conflict and Political Legitimacy, 1987, p.229

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid. p.240

talks about what could be reasonably rejected. Nagel claims that this version of liberalism requires a special explanation by reference to more fundamental moral ideas. Otherwise it would be difficult to see what form impartiality should take in political theory, and especially in the liberal idea of universal implementation of liberal democratic institutions in authoritarian societies. We cannot impose our own conception of the good on others. We need to know what is good for other people in order to distribute and promote the good. On the other hand, we cannot give others' interests and preferences more authority than our own, just because we accept the liberal ideal of impartiality. The liberal pursuit of the good is conceived for yourself and others within the limits of high-order impartiality. Nevertheless, this liberal conception of general impartiality seems to paradoxically claim greater authority than more special conceptions one believes to be true, Nagel objects.⁷³ I agree with Nagel in that liberals have problems with defending a universal application of the ideal of impartiality and its way of legitimizing political authority, because it does in itself hold an authoritative value of impersonal judgment in the political sphere. When the value of impartiality is not accepted in non-liberal societies, it is a liberal paradox that this value is wrongly, in the terms of liberal universal ethics, imposed on others. I therefore find liberal impartiality to be a non-neutral principle which through liberalism in international relations gives priority to certain distinct values over others.

The liberal paradox is more than in any other sphere of global politics, shown in the liberal communities in the West's attempt to expand democracy to authoritarian contexts. Larbi Sadiki addresses this issue in his work on Arab democratic discourse. Even if democracy and Western values are not instantly welcomed in the Arab world, Sadiki still advertises for some kind of transfer of Western standards by stating that: "No credible view of or quest for democracy in the Arab world or anywhere else can be taken seriously without some normative standpoint."⁷⁴ But Sadiki takes

⁷³ Ibid. p.228

⁷⁴ Sadiki, Larbi: *The Search for Arab Democracy*, p.54

precautions by specifying that a normative standpoint should not overlook, for instance, cultural specificity and the role of religion in many Arab countries.

Before discussing this any further, we will look at the legitimacy of democratization.

2.6 Liberalism in non-liberal communities

2.6.1 The rationale behind democracy promotion

Since democratic societies always are marked by a diversity of irreconcilable doctrines of religion, philosophy and moral, *tolerance* is by Rawls lifted as a crucial, liberal value to promote cooperation and stability in a society. The theory of justice does not provide a comprehensive conception of the good, but is compatible with a liberal conception of the role of justice; that governments should be neutral between competing conceptions of the good. However, that does not entail an acceptance of all forms of governmental practices. States violating human rights or behaving in an externally aggressive manner are ‘outlaw’ states and do *not* have the right to mutual respect and toleration possessed by liberal and decent peoples.⁷⁵ Rawls further asserts that violations of human rights can justify military interventions in the violating states, but hopes of course that such societies can be induced to reform peacefully by the good examples of liberal and decent peoples. In *The Law of Peoples* Rawls treats the possibility of transforming non-liberal societies into liberal societies. He is an advocate for the international legitimacy of democracy and a supporter of foreign democracy promotion. Rawls holds the ideal of the statesman as a political leader who looks to the next generation and promotes international harmony, even in the face of significant domestic pressure to do otherwise.⁷⁶ Although, if this would be the

⁷⁵ Rawls, John: *The Law of Peoples*, Ideal theory, part 1

⁷⁶ Ibid.

norm for practicing the liberal ideal of impartiality in international affairs, it seems that external legitimacy is given a higher authority than internal. This is both unfortunate and undemocratic, because for democratic transition to be successful and for democracy to be consolidated, it is crucial that it is accepted by the people.

2.6.2 External democratization forces

Robert Dahl strongly emphasizes how democracy has to be wanted by the people, and so does Mill in his article “A Few words on Non-Intervention”⁷⁷ where he says that a people cannot really be made free by outsiders, but must win freedom for themselves. This was the general belief up until the 1990s, before then democratization was seen as domestically driven and international efforts were seen as external supplements to national processes. When democracy started to spread to Latin America, and to some extent to Asia and Africa, the international dimension of democratization became on the agenda of political change. The importance of international presence and interactions between domestic politics and the international order is seen as important for shaping the politics of democratization.⁷⁸ Institutions, states, NGOs, transnational networks which are working for global governance have all developed different strategies and models to promote democracy. They have done this with mixed results and varying degrees of success, and there are numerous examples of projects of democracy promotion that have failed.

It can be argued that the US led invasion of Iraq in 2003 was a democratization project. In that case, it is a good example of a failed democratization project that has not succeeded in establishing a sustainable and survivable democracy, in spite of massive American political, military and financial efforts. Still, the prevailing view is that democracy promotion is a legitimate business because it advances liberal freedom and stable peace. With this view, comes the position that the leaders of one

⁷⁷ Mill, John S.: “A Few Words on Non-Intervention” in *Foreign Policy Perspectives* No.8, p.6 (first published in 1859)

⁷⁸ Grugel, Jean: *Democratization and Development*, p.116

society are able to dictate other societies on what it is that equals a good and just society. Michael Walzer criticizes this view and questions how we can say that one just society is better than another. “Certainly”, he says, “justice is better than tyranny, but whether one just society is better than another, I have no way of saying. Is there a particular understanding (and then a particular distribution) of social goods that is *good* simply?”⁷⁹ According to the liberal stance, it is problematic to operate with one particular understanding of the good, as we have already seen in our earlier discussion. Yet promoting liberal democracy as the only understanding of a just society is doing exactly this. The liberal therefore faces a dilemma of being forced to make a stance against his own ideal of impartiality and value-neutrality.

Walzer further claims that justice is relative to social meanings and that ‘just’ cannot require a radical redesign of a society opposed to the shared understandings of its members. Then justice itself would become tyrannical.⁸⁰ Walzer relies on a broader conception of justice, which requires citizens to rule in one sphere and to be ruled in another. Externally imposed ideologies must meet internal standards of justice in order to be legitimate.

Universal liberalism allows for state autonomy and people’s self-determination through the consolidation of democratic institutions. If the result of this self-determination is that citizens do not want a liberal state, it may be incompatible with the liberal values of for instance freedom of expression. An elected government may prohibit negative expressions about one religion and in that sense choose to limit the freedom of expression. Can universal liberalism still allow for self-determination even if it means it has to accept that a society wants an Islamic state? If it does not, liberalism would appear to be imperialist. In the case of Turkey, the citizens voted for an Islamic state in the latest election, but the military oppressed the public opinion and aided the secular government to continue in office.

⁷⁹ Walzer, Michael: *Spheres of Justice*, p.312

⁸⁰ Ibid. p.313

It is important to separate between the debates over whether liberal principles apply to all political communities and is a cosmopolitan theory or if it is a state centered, communitarian theory. It is possible to argue for liberal values within one political community and not for a universal, cosmopolitan liberal political community. According to Rawls, liberal political principles are not justified for all societies and there can be ‘decent hierarchical societies’. The respect for human rights and a social cooperative structure, however, apply to all peoples. The debate between communitarians and cosmopolitans was not important within classical liberal theory, but in contemporary political liberalism it has become more relevant. Modern political theory stresses the importance of democracy promotion in order to achieve global peace and sustainable development. As I have mentioned earlier, adherents of global distributive justice argue for a global adaptation of Rawls’ difference principle to eradicate social inequalities in order to expand political liberalism worldwide. If liberal principles require equality, redistribution and self-determination, it is crucially important whether these principles apply only within particular communities or whether their reach is global. Should liberal democracy only be applied to the West, where most are well off in already free and liberal societies, or should it be applied globally, where many live in severely un-free and illiberal societies? Democracy promoters have already taken a stand on this debate about the reach of the liberal political theory, and promote what they hold to be universal values. We will now look more into what actual values or standards the Western democracy promoters do export.

2.6.3 The values exported by the West

We have seen that liberal democracy is commonly described as a system that at the same time aims to limit the scope and reach of government over its citizens to preserve individual freedom, and have a popular sovereignty calling for majority rule through periodic elections.⁸¹ We recall that according to Larry Diamond, liberal

democracy is the only ‘real’ version of democracy. Diamond is inclined to dismiss minimalist definitions of democracy in merely electoral terms, and sees political and civil freedoms as necessary to ensure both electoral competition and a wider range of democratic functions. He claims that electoral democracies vary in degree of freedom⁸² and are so called ‘pseudo’ or ‘quasi’ democracies that fail to acknowledge political repression that marginalizes significant segments of the population. If India, with its violations of human rights in Kashmir is to be considered a democracy, there is something inconsistent with the term. The backdrop of the number of consolidated democracies after the third wave of democratization shows the shallowness of democratization and the difficulty with accepting electoral democracies as ‘real’ democracies. Diamond advocates for more consolidated, liberal democracies, not hollow pseudo-democracies. He criticizes Iran, Iraq, Algeria and Egypt for having electoral charades to disguise authoritarian despots because their elections are hollow and uncompetitive.

The same is true for many other countries in the post-cold war period when democracy has the ideological hegemony, Diamond argues. They clearly do not fulfill the standards of what a real democracy is, which include free and fair electoral competition and no reserved domains of power for the military or other social and political parties where the officeholders are accountable to the electorate and to one another. Diamond explains the ‘electoral charade’ with the growing recognition of free elections and that government’s feel compelled to hold elections in order to gain international legitimacy. These external demands for state legitimacy do not necessarily mean that elections ensure internal legitimacy.

The British political scientist Jean Grugel has evaluated the efficiency of the policies among a wide range of pro-democracy agents, and she finds good reasons to be skeptical towards their impact.⁸³ She claims that the major efforts that have been

⁸² See Freedom House ranking electoral democracies rated as not-free, partly-free and free in “Freedom in the World 2008: Selected data from Freedom House’s annual global survey of political rights and civil liberties”

⁸³ Grugel, Jean: *Democratization. A Critical Introduction*, s.135

made and the numerous, costly democracy programs have had little positive effect. This is due to their failure in counting on “significant support across a range of internal elites and civil society actors (...)”.⁸⁴ We cannot expect external forces of democratization to create enduring, stable and substantive changes in a society without supporting ongoing social pressure and mobilizing for democracy internally. No external support can provide this domestic pressure if it is absent, as seems to be the case in most Middle Eastern countries. What actually creates the most change is the new global political economy which is causing increasing interdependency between all parts of the world and which is, according to Grugel, responsible for “the prevalence of democracy as a discourse and an ideal because it is able to penetrate dependent societies and influence mentalities and aspirations.”⁸⁵ The pressures generated by the global political economy account for the diffusion and the ideal that liberal democracy represents the only legitimate version of the ‘good society’ while globalization of the economy at the same time reproduces inequality and reduces developing countries’ autonomy. The power of defining democracy lies with the Western authorities, institutions and agents, not with the developing countries. All these factors combined, make a successful consolidation of democracy problematic, especially when the recipes for democracy building have little roots in the social reality to which they are applied. Grugel concludes that the result is “that the dominant project for democratization is simultaneously a project of Westernization.”⁸⁶ That is precisely what foreign policy makers must avoid when designing strategies for democracy promotion.

Oliver Schlumberger also points out that when assessing functioning democratic elements, donors have their own Western home countries in mind.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid. p.139

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Schlumberger, Oliver: “Dancing with Wolves: Dilemmas of Democracy Promotion in Authoritarian Contexts” in Dietrich Jung (ed.): *Democratization and Development*, p. 41

Many of the ideals of liberalism are adopted in Western societies and values that we hold, such as impartiality, tolerance, liberty, the pursuit of the good and the freedom of the individual. The beginning of any design of strategies for the promotion of good or democratic governance stands as a process of a ‘self-awareness raising’ by the donor community itself about what makes a ‘good’ democracy. This derives from democratic theory because it may tell us about individual elements of democratic regimes, but not how these elements work in a given social, economic, political or historical context.⁸⁸

Many deep-rooted dogmas of democracy, like secularism, capitalism, individualism and nationalism are challenged in the Middle Eastern context.⁸⁹ This leaves democracy promoters with problems when designing and formulating strategies for democracy promotion, also because little is known about the relative importance of individual elements of democracy for the process of democratic transition. Schlumberger says that the democracy-agents must be aware of what political environment they are involved in and be careful with assuming that democratic reforms that have worked in the West are necessarily feasible in the Middle East. We need to increase the focus on the causes of the robustness of Arab authoritarianism and analyze the reasons why it so strongly resists the international pressure for democracy and the respect for human rights.

⁸⁸ Ibid. p.42

⁸⁹ Sadiki, Larbi: *The Search for Arab Democracy*”, p.53

3. The Position of Democracy in the Middle East

3.1 Illiberalism in the Middle East

In the introduction I asked *what is the position of democracy in the Middle East?* In this chapter I will address this question by looking at Arab scholarly literature and democratic discourse and theories on development and democratization. First I will give an account of the current state of democracy, freedom and development in the region, primarily based on the annual surveys of freedom in the world in 2007 and 2008 from Freedom House, the reports on human development from 2006 and 2007/2008 and Arab Human Development Reports from 2002 to 2005 from United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). These reports, together with the scholarly literature, will shed light on trends of democracy in today's Middle East, and a selection of explanations for the lack of democratic practice in the region will be presented. The chapter will end with a discussion about the challenges of the ideological transfer of liberal democratic values.

3.1.1 The state of democracy and freedom in the Middle East

The Middle East is one of the regions in the world where democracy has the weakest position. "No single Arab country can yet be classified as a democracy" Larbi Sadiki proclaims,⁹⁰ and there has not been one peaceful transfer of power in an Arab country for decades.⁹¹ The region is said to be the part of the world where autocracies are most robust⁹² and that it is the part of the world where democracy

⁹⁰ Sadiki, Larbi: *The Search for Arab Democracy*, p.13

⁹¹ Schlumberger, Oliver: "Dancing with Wolves: Dilemmas of Democracy Promotion in Authoritarian Contexts" in Dietrich Jung (ed.): *Democratization and Development*, p.34

⁹² Bellin, Eva: "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in a Comparative Perspective" in *Comparative Politics*, 2004

faces its greatest challenge.⁹³ Arab states make up the world's most un-free region. In contrast to all other developing regions, the Middle East and North Africa have not liberalized politically over the past one and a half decades. Sub-Saharan Africa, which is considered to be the least developed part of the world with the largest part of the population living in extreme poverty, has had a greater expansion of democracy with a larger percentage of free countries than the Middle East.⁹⁴ This is also true compared to Latin America, where the only authoritarian country is communist-ruled Cuba and the rest are considered free or partly free electoral democracies, according to Freedom House.⁹⁵

While the rest of the world has experienced a wave of democratization the last three decades the number of electoral democracies has nearly doubled since 1972,⁹⁶ the Middle East and North Africa have remained resistant to democratization. This region has in fact had a decline in electoral democracies, from three electoral democracies in 1972 to two in 2008.⁹⁷ In 1972 Lebanon, Turkey and Israel were classified as electoral democracies, and the present year only the latter two are classified as such. Egypt, Syria and Tunisia are also registered as moving backwards with a major decline of freedom.

According to the Freedom House survey for 2008, thirteen countries in Middle East and North Africa are designated as not free; seven as partly free and only one

⁹³ Wright, Robin: "Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two Visions of Reformation" in *Journal of Democracy* 7.2, 1996

⁹⁴ See Freedom House: "Freedom in the World 2008 : Selected data from Freedom House's annual global survey of political rights and civil liberties" and table in Oliver Schlumberger : "Dancing with Wolves: Dilemmas of Democracy Promotion in Authoritarian Contexts" in Dietrich Jung (ed.): *Democratization and Development*, p.35

⁹⁵ See Freedom House: "Freedom in the World 2008: Selected data from Freedom House's annual global survey of political rights and civil liberties" for regional comparisons.

⁹⁶ Bellin, Eva: "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in a Comparative Perspective" in *Comparative Politics*, 2004, p.139

⁹⁷ See Freedom House: "Freedom in the World 2008: Selected data from Freedom House's annual global survey of political rights and civil liberties"

country as a free, liberal democracy.⁹⁸ The free country is Israel, with the exceptions of the Israeli-occupied territories on the West Bank, Gaza Strip, The Golan Heights and East Jerusalem, as well as the Palestinian Authority-administered territories. Inhabitants of these occupied territories have limited political rights and civil liberties, and the Palestinian authorities are therefore classified as not free, authoritarian regimes.⁹⁹ Another regional example which further decreases the status of democracy in the Middle East is Morocco and the case of the occupied Western Sahara, also called ‘Africa’s last colony’.¹⁰⁰ The disputed territory of Western Sahara was never decolonized as it went from Spanish rule to Moroccan occupation in 1976, and has been denied independence ever since, despite numerous UN-resolutions about the Sahrawians’ right to a referendum and autonomy. Democracy is in a poor state in the Middle East and the lack of respect for human rights is dominant in several Arab states. That does not necessarily mean that the Middle East is less developed than other regions.

3.2 Democracy and development

I will now look at the relationship between the level of democracy and the level of development. A certain level of development and economic growth can be seen as a precondition for successful democratic consolidation. Wealthy countries are generally more democratic than less wealthy countries, but that does not mean that there is an inevitably positive relationship between wealth and democracy. The United Nations’ Human Development Report of 2007/2008 reveals a positive trend in human and economic development for most of the Middle Eastern countries. UNDP publishes annually a human development index (HDI). The HDI provides a measure

⁹⁸ Ibid. The grouping of countries is here done by me, according to the definition of Middle East given in paragraph 2.2.3 and Freedom House’s list of the level of freedom in independent countries.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ See for instance Pascale Harter: “Africa’s last colony”, 2003

of three dimensions of human development; 1) The ability to live a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), 2) Being educated (measured by adult literacy and enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels) and 3) Having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity and income).¹⁰¹ The HDI is not meant to give a comprehensive measure of human development, and it does not include important indicators such as respect for human rights, democracy and equality. It aims to provide one perspective on human progress and on the complex relationship between income and well-being with the basic objective that development is “to create an enabling environment in which people can enjoy long, healthy and creative lives”.¹⁰²

More than half of the Middle Eastern countries have a medium level of human development in a global study where all the countries in the world are rated according to their HDI. Less than half of the countries, Libya, Saudi Arabia, Brunei, Israel, Bahrain, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates are measured as having high human development and are ranked among the 60 most developed countries in the world.¹⁰³ In 2006 only five countries had a high ranking according to the HDI and Yemen had among the lowest ranking on the HDI globally. This clearly shows a major advancement in human development for the Middle East, as several Arab countries are higher on the list than two years before and no Arab country is ranked as having a low human development.¹⁰⁴

Criticism can of course be made of the statistical methods employed both by the Freedom House and UNDP. On the one hand, Freedom House obviously adapts a Western measurement of what democracy entails and accepts only liberal democracies as free countries. The countries classified as electoral democracies can,

¹⁰¹ UNDP: “The State of Human Development” in *Human Development Report 2006*, p. 263.

¹⁰² Mahbub Ul Haq quoted in *ibid*.

¹⁰³ UNDP: “The Human Development Index” from *Human Development Report 2007/2008*

¹⁰⁴ Yemen was ranked as having low human development in 2006 and this year it was in medium development, and only five countries had high development in 2006, compared to this year’s eight.

according to the survey, turn out to be what Diamond calls ‘electoral charades’ as Freedom House does not measure the actual outcome of the alleged democratic institutions, only their presence. Individual rights and liberties ought to be the main indicators for measuring democracy in a country, not just the existence of a democratic framework. On the other hand, UNDP can be criticized for putting too much emphasis on economic conditions such as economic growth and income per capita. These are solely quantitative indicators for development which fails to give the whole picture of human development which could have been given with more qualitative measures of for instance having a decent life. However, I do find Freedom House and UNDP’s global rankings of countries’ level of freedom and development as useful tools for comparative purposes and in the search for global trends.

3.2.1 Development as freedom

When observing that Arab countries annually climb higher on the human development ranking, it is a puzzle that freedom is in decline and the democratic rights for people in the region are not increasing in a similar manner. “Development can be seen (...) as a process of expanding the real freedoms that people enjoy”,¹⁰⁵ economist Amartya Sen says in his book *Development as Freedom*, where he explores the relationship between freedom as a basic constituent of and an enabler for development. Individual income and purchasing power parity can be important means to expand freedoms and achieve development. Yet human welfare is not to be equated with material wealth, and the factors determining the human quality of life are numerous, not singularly dependent on economic growth and stability. Quality of life, therefore, is what ought to measure human development and progress.

The Arab Human Development Reports (AHDR) from 2002 to 2005 show significant progress in many areas of human development the last three decades, but find the shortcomings of the Arab institutional structure as obstacles for further

¹⁰⁵ Sen, Amartya: *Development as Freedom*, p.3

building of human development. The areas of human development where the Arab states fall short are in knowledge acquisition, good governance, freedom and the empowerment of women. The first UN report suggest three goals the Arab states should strive for in order to reconstitute their societies: 1. Prioritize knowledge acquisition and deployment of human capabilities with the aim of maximizing human wellbeing in the region, 2. Absolute respect for human rights and freedoms to build the good governance needed for the realization of human development and 3. Empower Arab women and enable development of human capabilities that will give girls and women the same possibilities as their male counterparts.¹⁰⁶

The second AHDP report addresses the same challenges as the first report, but focuses in particular on the challenges in the academic field of the capacity to produce knowledge.¹⁰⁷ According to this report, the Arab knowledge enterprise has yet to become independent from Western academia. The absence of institutional support for academic research in Arab states causes significant brain drain to the West. This is not conducive to the process of democratization. The second UN report concludes that the Arab culture has the capacity to become a knowledge society of the third millennium, but there are too many political hindrances entrenched in the social and economical structure that prevents knowledge acquisition. School systems and education under authoritarian rule rarely encourage the development of individual talents or facilitation of independent, critical research. An Arab league report from 2001 similarly calls for putting an end to the Arab brain drain, and stresses how large economic and human losses Arab states suffer due to the migration of Arab intellectuals to Western countries.¹⁰⁸ The UN report recommends that the Middle East and North Africa prioritize the human capital it has which could form a strong infrastructure for a knowledge renaissance. Educational reforms are crucial in

¹⁰⁶ UNDP: "Creating Opportunities for Future Generations", *Arab Human Development Report 2002*

¹⁰⁷ UNDP: "Building a Knowledge Society", *Arab Human Development Report 2003*

¹⁰⁸ Arabic news: "Arab league report calls for stopping Arab brain drain"
Regional, Education, 2/9/2001

the process of development and democratization. Schooling will inform the public and make them aware of their rights and possibilities of demanding political reforms as a free electorate.

3.2.2 Freedom and good governance

The aspect of freedom is especially challenging in the Arab world, the UN reports finds, with all the international unfavorable political developments to the Middle East. The War on Terror and the occupations of Palestine and Iraq contribute to destabilizing the region and undermine the progress of democratization by stereotyping the Arab region as a ‘breeding grounds for terrorism’. What the region needs is not war or a constant international hunt for terrorists, but a fundamental reinforcement of freedom and the promotion and expansion of good governance.

The third AHDP report from 2004 is called “Towards Freedom in the Arab World” and concludes that the Arab world finds itself at a historical crossroads caught between oppression at home and violations from abroad. Arabs are increasingly excluded from determining their own future¹⁰⁹ because they are deprived their basic freedoms. For freedom to be guaranteed, it requires a system of good governance resting on effective, popular representation and accountability to the people upheld by the rule of law and an independent judiciary applying the law impartially.¹¹⁰ The third AHDP report describes present day Arab societies as fundamentally in contrast with free societies, and says that to achieve human development in the Arab world it is required that the Arab countries transform into their opposites.¹¹¹ This is quite a radical stance from UNDP, and seems unfeasible within the political culture of Arab societies. It therefore loses its value as a meaningful policy suggestion. Persisting tendencies in Arab social structures could

¹⁰⁹ UNDP: “Towards Freedom in the Arab World” *Arab Human Development Report 2004*

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

well lead to social, economic and political crises, the report predicts, and paints a depressive picture of the future prospects for freedom in the Middle East and North Africa.

3.2.3 Women's rights in Arab countries

The last and most recent report on Arab Human Development analyzes the situation of women in the Arab world and finds some positive trends. There has been an increase in the level of education among women and in female political representation, and a decrease in discrimination under labor, family and marriage laws. The reports also state that the civil society's struggle for freedom in Arab countries has intensified and that women's empowerment has deep, historical roots in the region, and is not merely a Western import to the Arab world. Nevertheless, Arab women are still denied the right to vote in both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, and are underrepresented in parliaments in Arab states. Despite higher female enrollment rates in university education, women do not enjoy equality with men when it comes to job opportunities. The obstacles women encounter outside family life derives from laws hindering women's freedom of action and movement, a highly male-dominated culture, high fertility rates and wage discrimination between sexes. When women in some Arab countries are not allowed to drive or travel, it obviously restricts their possibilities of self-realization and job acquisition.

The analysis in AHDR 2005 ends by stating that the basic principle of Islam is equality amongst humans and between men and women in particular. Arab and Muslim feminist movements fight to combat the jurisprudential interpretations of Islam that have contributed to the entrenchment of a lower status for women in some Islamic societies. Arab women are not free to reach their full potential and as long as they are deprived their liberty, the Arab societies cannot meet the UN goals of prioritizing education, respect human rights and empower women. The economical and social conditions are seen as hindrances for Arab women's strive for increased freedom, and reinforce female exclusion from political participation. If development

in the Middle East shall happen according to Amartya Sen's use of the term, it must expand the real freedoms people enjoy. A sole economic and social development in the region will not ensure real human development without being accompanied by political reforms and progress.

3.2.4 Democratic development?

Political renewal in the Arab Middle East and Iran will be incomplete without the inputs of women and their understandings of democracy, Larbi Sadiki declares.¹¹² No democracy can be established in a society where not all citizens are considered equal before the law, women and religious minorities included. The liberation of women will be realized in the Arab society by eliminating all that impairs the human dignity of women and enable them equal treatment with men. That means emancipating women from all diminishing factors such as ignorance, disease and fear as well as granting women the complete enjoyment of political rights. That entails first to give substance to the cosmetic reforms that hide repression of freedom through uninterrupted violation of human rights.¹¹³ These reforms are prevalent in the Arab political climate and simply staged to please the international environment that presses for democracy promotion.¹¹⁴ Most scholars tend to agree that changes in formal, democratic institutions without content do not necessarily have anything to do with real democratization. "Current political Arab change is not a matter of democratization, but is more adequately interpreted as "a re-equilibration and adjustment of authoritarian rule to change internal and external conditions."¹¹⁵ The more complex question of whether these changes can be turned toward democratization by external actors remains open. What is certain is that the region

¹¹² Sadiki, Larbi: *The Search for Arab Democracy*, p.254

¹¹³ UNDP and Oliver Schlumberger : "Dancing with Wolves: Dilemmas of Democracy Promotion in Authoritarian Contexts" in Dietrich Jung (ed.): *Democratization and Development*, p.33

¹¹⁴ UNDP: "Towards the Rise of Women in the Arab World", *The Arab Human Development Report 2005*

¹¹⁵ Grugel, Jean: *Democratization and Development*, p. 53, note 1

enjoys a lot of international attention and an increased pressure to democratize, at least formally. The strong international pressure for formal democratic institutions might be a contributing factor to the political liberalization only initiated by the incumbent regimes' as a survival strategy to maintain power.¹¹⁶ As I have said before, no peaceful transfer of power has taken place in any Arab country for decades, except intergenerational, so Arab political leaders' fear of losing power or even their life, has root in reality. Arab leaders are not likely to risk giving away their power voluntarily in a democratic election with an uncertain outcome. That could be tantamount to commit political suicide.

3.3 Central explanations for the state of democracy in the Middle East

The regime types we find in the Middle East have few Western counterparts and range from authoritarian republics, absolute monarchies, constitutional monarchies and one Islamic republic. It would be misleading to call any of the more liberal Arab countries either 'democracies' or 'semi-authoritarian', both from a quantitative and qualitative methodological view, Schlumberger suggests. According to him, all Arab regimes today fulfill the criteria of authoritarianism.¹¹⁷ A brief look at history shows that the democratic situation in the region has never been substantively different; all democratic experiments have failed. Does the Middle East lack the preconditions for democracy?

Many causes for the failed attempts to consolidate democracy in the Middle East are deeply rooted in historical, cultural, social, religious, economic and political factors that are complexly interwoven with one another. A common approach to the study of Arab exceptionalism with regard to democratization starts with the notion of

¹¹⁶ Schlumberger, Oliver: "Dancing with Wolves: Dilemmas of Democracy Promotion in Authoritarian Contexts" in Dietrich Jung (ed.): *Democratization and Development*, p.34

¹¹⁷ Ibid. p. 54, note 5

prerequisites for democratic consolidation. The lack of a strong civil society, an economy controlled by the state, the inadequate income and literacy level in general, few democratic neighbors¹¹⁸ and a weak democratic culture are all possible explanations of the region's failure to democratize. These are by no means exhaustive explanations of the problem of democracy in the Middle East, because it is a very complex and comprehensive theme, and an amplified explanation falls outside of the scope of this paper. I will focus on selected explanations emphasizing economic, historical and religious conditions.

3.3.1 Economic conditions preventing democratic rights

One can point at the state owned economy as undermining the capacity to build autonomous counterweight to the state, because the public sector accounts for a major share of employment and GDP generation in most countries.¹¹⁹ The social scientist S.M. Lipset's studies revealed a positive relationship between democracy and various indicators of economic development. He found that democracy is related to the level of economic development and hypothesized that the more a well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy.¹²⁰ He found that the general income level of a nation affects its receptivity to democratic norms. Lipset argued that it is easier to accept the idea that it does not matter greatly which side is in power and if some redistribution is in place, as long as there is enough economic wealth in a country.¹²¹ This argument could be used both ways, saying that as long as one is economically secure, who governs is not that important, and one could therefore be inclined to accept authoritarian rule, as is the case in the Gulf States. The

¹¹⁸ Bellin, Eva: "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in a Comparative Perspective" in *Comparative Politics*, 2004, p.139 and Oliver Schlumberger: "Dancing with Wolves: Dilemmas of Democracy Promotion in Authoritarian Contexts" in Dietrich Jung (ed.): *Democratization and Development*

¹¹⁹ UNDP *Arab Human Development Report* 2002 reports that government expenditures as a percentage of GDP average 30 percent in the Arab world, though this figure is likely an underestimate since many oil rich states like Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were not included.

¹²⁰ Lipset, Seymour Martin: *Political Man; The Social Bases of Politics*, p.31

¹²¹ *Ibid.* p.51

monarchies in the Arabian Peninsula are among the wealthiest countries in the world holding 2/3 of the world's known oil reserves and about 40 % of the natural gas.¹²² The power relations between state and society become increasingly unbalanced when the state controls the industry, the means of production and the economy. The state becomes economically independent of its citizens. The oil-rich Gulf States have generous welfare systems providing their citizens a 'replacement' for political influence which consequentially give them fewer incentives to criticize their regimes.¹²³ When the rulers do not demand taxes, the citizen's do not demand democracy.

Political scientists still debate conditions for successful democratization and the relationship between economic development and democratic consolidation.¹²⁴ We have already seen from UNDP Arab Human Development Reports that many Arab countries do progress in economic development and in literacy. Social and economic inequalities are still dominant, and so is the discrimination of women. Other explanations for the lack of democratic practice in the region could be found in the history of political development.

3.3.2 Rule of law as a precondition for freedom

In the previous chapter we read that classical liberalism advocates the limitation of legal restraints so that individuals have the maximum possible amount of freedom to enjoy life as best they can. Classical liberalists do not oppose law itself, but hold a negative conception of freedom and perceive governmental interference as an obstacle to freedom. In the liberal view, every individual has the freedom to pursue one's interest to the extent that it does not deprive others of their liberty to do

¹²² Selvik, Kjetil: "Demokratiproblemet i Midtøsten" in NUPI report *Hvor hender det?*, 2007, p. 4 and for a list of the world's proved oil reserves by geographic region and how much the Middle East holds, see International Energy Outlook 2007, figure 39

¹²³ Selvik, Kjetil: "Demokratiproblemet i Midtøsten" in NUPI report 21 *Hvor hender det?*, 2007, p. 4

¹²⁴ See Inglehart, Ronald: "Changing Values, Economic Development and Political Change" in *International Social Science Journal*, 1999

the same. Yet, European liberalism based on classical philosophy and enlightenment with a focus on individual rights and freedom, does not necessarily have to entail electoral democracy, Homa Katouzian writes in his book about Iranian history and the dialectic of state and society.¹²⁵ He suggests that European states have always been based on the rule of law, even if they were absolutist and despotic authoritarian regimes. The revolutions in Europe have therefore been about replacing the existing law and expanding the rights and liberties of the citizens. Many Arab countries have had a history of arbitrary rule without a foundation in law, and there has been continuity in the arbitrary change of power. According to Katouzian, what distinguishes the West from the East is one basic fact; Societies in the West have always based themselves on law and justice, while in the East there has been a constant struggle for power and a “recurring circle of arbitrary rule-chaos-arbitrary rule.”¹²⁶ The Iranian revolutions have both been revolts against the arbitrary rule, and a fight for normality and stability. The first revolution in the beginning of the 20th century was therefore about demanding law and justice, and this was granted by establishing a constitution based on democratic principles. A rule of law was by the reformists viewed as giving enhanced freedom. The Iranian reformists in the twentieth century advocated the importance of law, because to them, the law entails the concept of freedom itself. Freedom without a legal framework was not perceived as possible. People were tired of having arbitrary freedom, and struggled to obtain stable, political freedom established by the rule of law.¹²⁷

The conception of a good society which I suggested in the introductory chapter, and my definition of democracy used in chapter 2, also relies on the rule of law, and on a human rights based approach to citizens’ freedom. What is the relation

¹²⁵ Katouzian argues that European liberals like Adam Smith, David Hume, and John Locke did not enthusiastically advocate for representative government, nor popular democracy or even universal equality before the law. Their ideas did not go much further than the individual liberties of conscience, expression and the economic policy of laissez faire, Katouzian claims. The ideal of democratic government were first pursued by the American and French revolutions, Katouzian writes in *Iranian History and Politics. The dialectic of state and society*, p. 82

¹²⁶ Ibid. p. 25

¹²⁷ Ibid. p.89

between the claim that the rule of law is a precondition for democracy, and the view of the Iranian reformists on the rule of law as a precondition for freedom? Is the rule of law more fundamental in establishing a free society than democracy? The foundation for freedom then becomes rule of law, not democracy.

To be sure, the rule of law has been perceived as an inseparable part of democracy, and it is difficult to imagine the development of a democratic society without the rule of law.¹²⁸ The democratic institutions such as multi-party systems, competitive elections and a free press are embedded in the establishment of the rule of law. Without the rule of law, citizens would have no guarantee for the protection of their civil rights and liberties such as the freedom of expression and the right to freely participate in the politics of your country. What it is that can guarantee the continuation of the rule of law, is more uncertain, because the majority of the electorate can, within the constitutional restraints, choose to undermine the supremacy of legal norms and codes enforced by an independent judiciary. The electorate may also produce laws that deprives minorities or underrepresented groups their rights, and weaken the autonomy of the judiciary. Democratic institutions may be said to have been implemented to protect people's rights through the rule of law, not in order to promote mass sovereignty or representative governments.¹²⁹ European autocracies that were able to establish and maintain the rule of law, as Katouzian points out, were constrained by the powerful aristocratic elites, the church and different societal classes. These classes saw it in their interest to protect their rights and privileges through the law, especially with regard to property rights. In the case of early 20th century Iran, societal class structures of this kind were not present. The need for the

¹²⁸ See Sayyed Mohammad Ali Jamalzadeh's strong defense for the implementation of law quoted from Al-Jamal newspaper in 1905 in Homa Katouzian: *Iranian History and Politics. The Dialectics of State and Society*, p.85. Minxin Pei: "Economic Institutions, Democracy and Development", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999, pp.4 on the relation between the rule of law and political regimes and Larbi Sadiki: *The Search for Arab Democracy*, p. 224-5 on the importance of the rule of law for checks and balances and attain justice and liberty.

¹²⁹ Pei, Minxin: "Economic Institutions, Democracy and Development", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999, pp.4

establishment of the rule of law was founded on the aspiration to be free from arbitrary rule.

3.3.3 Contrasting conceptions of freedom

The Iranian reformists had a positive conception of freedom and regarded the law as an enabler of political development and freedom. This is in contrast with the modern, liberal conception of freedom as absence of legal constraints or state interference in the life of the individual. The Iranian reformists wanted a radical transformation of a society completely unfamiliar with the rule of law. However, the Western democratic experiment came too early and the Iranian society was not ready. The revolution managed to contribute to modernization and secularization, but when it suppressed religious movements and was skeptical to Islam, the Islamist opposition turned against the regime. The support for Islamism today dominates the political opposition in the region, and represents for many the strongest political alternative to incumbent governments.¹³⁰ Exceptions are Iran and Saudi Arabia, where Islamists in fact are in power positions.

The strong religious convictions and the resistance towards secularization might be a contributing factor to the current state of democracy in the region. A prominent Shi'ite scholar, Muhammad Husayn Fadl-Allah¹³¹ observes that “when it comes to democracy and dictatorship, the latter is much worse; when it is a question of democracy and Islam, Islam is the only choice.” He rejects democracy on the basis of popular sovereignty and argues that the democratic method does not yield legitimacy. According to Fadl-Allah, legitimacy derives from the Islamic framework and not from popular elections, and the imam is the only one who can permit freedom to criticize the government. In a non-Muslim pluralist society, Islamists should

¹³⁰ Selvik, Kjetil: “Demokratiproblemet i Midtøsten” in NUPI report 21 *Hvor hender det?*, 2007, p. 3 and Alan Richards: “Democracy in the Arab Regions: Getting There from Here”, *Middle East Policy*, Vol. XII, No.2, 2005

¹³¹ Fadl-Allah quoted in Larbi Sadiki: *The Search for Arab Democracy*, p.242

support freedom regardless of its *negative* aspects, Fadl-Allah says.¹³² The understanding of freedom for an Islamist is not the definition of freedom as being exempted from external control and interference for the individual. In the Arab nationalist conception, freedom is collectively defined, for the nation as a whole.¹³³ That is why freedom defined in individualistic terms becomes negative for Fadl-Allah. To Muslims, the liberal understanding of negative freedom does not entail real freedom, because that must be defined in religious terms.

3.3.4 Islamic reform to accept democracy

The Islamists' views on freedom, liberties and laws are not necessarily incompatible with all liberal values, supporters for Islamic reforms suggest.¹³⁴ The relationship between state power and religion might be more problematic, as the Islamists do not wish to separate as strongly between political and religious authorities as is practice in liberal democracies. The non-reformist Fadl-Allah is open to the possibility for Islamists to win government through the democratic method and adopt a few democratic elements, but he does not recognize the legitimacy of democracy. To him, Islam has the highest authority and it shall be realized through the state. This view is contrary to the liberal justification for separation between the state's domain and the religious sphere. Liberal thinkers do not believe that one conception of the good can claim universal validity, and thus operate with a pluralist conception of good within a pluralistic society. A state ruled by one conception of the good or by one religion cannot accommodate the diversity of values among its citizens. Rawls is a good example of a liberal thinker that does not recognize an Islamic doctrine to be consistent with a pluralist conception of the good. A legitimate political authority in a pluralist society has to accept religious and philosophical

¹³² Sadiki, Larbi: *The Search for Arab Democracy*, p.242

¹³³ Rubin, Barry: *The Long War for Freedom*, p.40

¹³⁴ See for instance Abdul Karim Soroush and Rachid al-Ghannouchi in Wright, Robin: "Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two visions of Reformation" in *Journal of Democracy* 7.2, 1996

pluralism and seek an overlapping consensus based on reasonable ideas. According to liberal ideals, an Islamic state recognizing only Islam as religion and its conception of a good society can therefore not be a legitimate, political authority. If a state is build on fundamental rights, such as freedom of expression and freedom of belief, it will be pluralist.

According to Muslim reformists, Islam preaches equality, justice and human dignity and has traditions of *ijtihad* (interpretation), *ijima* (consensus) and *shura* (consultation), which are central in a democracy. Neither does Islam lack a tenet of pluralism, hence Islam does not have to be a major obstacle to democratization, claim several Islamists and Muslim intellectuals who support democracy, among others the Iranian philosopher Abdul Karim Soroush. Islam is often presumed to be inhospitable to democracy,¹³⁵ but Soroush claims that there is no contradiction between Islam and the freedom inherent in a democracy. Islam and democracy have in fact an inevitable association. In a Muslim society one without the other is not complete. Following his line of arguing, to be a true Muslim, one must be free. And a true believer is one who has freely submitted to his faith, and can freely choose to leave his faith. To Soroush, this freedom is the basis of democracy. Soroush further holds that for an Islamic democracy to be legitimate, it must be chosen by a majority including both believers and non-believers. This is a theologically reformed way of justifying the implementation of democracy. In Soroush' teachings the relation between state power, the mosque and religious jurisprudence is being redefined. By downgrading the role of the religious leaders he creates a space for democracy to unfold. He argues against rigid thinking and elitism, and for secularization and a separation of religion from the state. This is a particularly sensitive topic in the Iranian context, where the Shi'ite Islam stresses the doctrinal and interpretative authority of Imams. Soroush is a believing Muslim and gives reinterpretations of the Quran and the

¹³⁵ Bellin, Eva: "The Robustness of Authoritarianism in the Middle East: Exceptionalism in a Comparative Perspective" in *Comparative Politics*, 2004, p.8

Shari'a, and provides a foundation for a pluralist and tolerant society.¹³⁶ The implementation of his teachings would signify a major modernization and accommodation of the classical interpretations of Islam and the role of religion and society.

3.4 The resistance to Western democracy promotion

In this chapter I have already stated several assumptions about the poor democratic practice in the Middle East, despite Western democracy promoters' attempts at building democracies in the region. The fact remains that the Arab states have for centuries resisted the international pressure for democracy and continued their authoritarian, hierarchical, patron-client, family dynasty dominated political rule.¹³⁷

Central historical explanations of the problem of democracy in the Middle East point at the colonial past and how the European occupation contributed to hostility towards the West and the influence of the great powers. The founding of the state of Israel was from an Arab point of view regarded as the worst form of imperialism,¹³⁸ and many hold that a solution to the Arab/Israeli conflict is the key to democracy and stability in the Middle East. Israel's close ties with the West and the actions of the state of Israel have certainly built up contempt against Western ideals and shaped the Arab states' perception of democracy. Many Arabs feel threatened of what they see as a cultural imperialist project of Westernization and the changes that are brought upon them. Anti-Americanism is currently very dominant in the Middle East, and US policy is seen as a tool for both Zionism and imperialism. The Saudi writer Khaled al-Suleiman wrote that the real US goal is to destroy the moral bonds of the Arabs'

¹³⁶ Wright, Robin: "Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two visions of Reformation" in *Journal of Democracy* 7.2, 1996, p.6

¹³⁷ Kassem, May: *Egyptian Politics. The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule*

¹³⁸ Selvik, Kjetil: "Demokratiproblemet i Midtøsten" in *Hvor hender det?* NUPI report 21, 2007, p.2

social behavior. Al-Suleiman depicts a scenario where the Arabs would become a society just like the US where sexual relations with minors is permitted and where drinking alcohol is like drinking water and smoking marijuana like inhaling air.¹³⁹

Extremist, religious education strengthens the perceptions of the West as ‘evil’, hegemonic and immoral. Increased knowledge and education about the West and its democratic ideals may contribute to a greater understanding of Western policies and intentions. There are indicators that Islam is under reforms of reinterpretation and modernization, and an increasing amount of reformers are now expressing their views publicly. However, reforms take time and the Islamic reformers are still a distinct minority. Authoritarianism and fundamentalism remain strong in the Middle East. The future prospects for political change are difficult to determine.

¹³⁹ Al- Suleiman quoted in Rubin, Barry: *The long war for Freedom*, p.132.

4. Future Prospects for Change

4.1 Political change in the region

The previous chapters have examined the liberal theoretical foundations for democracy and for the ideal of exporting liberal democracies. I have also looked at the state of democracy in the Middle East and discussed some of the contextual challenges of adapting to the specific liberal democratic values. Authoritarian regimes are traditionally not particularly prone to change and it lays in the nature of the system that stability and preserving the status quo is an important goal. However, the increasing pressure generated from the globalization of world politics and the strong international diplomatic advocacy for democracy and human rights *does* have an impact on the ability of survival for autocratic regimes. Thus far in the thesis, I have pointed at the weakness of the alleged democratic reforms certain authoritarian regimes have made in order to adjust to international pressure for norms of state's domestic conduct. I have called the democratic reforms 'cosmetic' and that they are nothing but 'electoral charades',¹⁴⁰ and I have accused the Western democracy promoters of putting too much emphasis on elections and not on the importance of internal legitimacy. I have made these accusations because I believe foreign policy makers' exaggerate the democratic effect of premature elections in newly established democracies.

This chapter will look at what I believe has a larger effect on democracy, within the context of the Middle East and North Africa, and focus on prospects for change in the future. There are various perspectives to take when studying democracy and democratization. Some scholars study institutional structures, such as independent judiciary, a functioning parliament and human rights laws. Others study

¹⁴⁰ Term borrowed from Larry Diamond

the role of the civil society and its function in stimulating the demand for democracy and freedom. I have chosen to study the fundamental principles of democracy such as freedom, legitimacy, equality, participation and the rule of law. In the following, I will focus on participation and freedom of speech.

4.1.1 Prospects for Arab electoral democracy

In many circumstances, elections do not create long lasting changes, nor do they contribute to the successful consolidation of democracy. Popular sovereignty means nothing if people do not have the opportunity to utilize the power vested upon them by freely participating in a competitive election. Freedom of speech, opinion, association and demonstration is vital in ensuring democratic practice. Public debate becomes meaningless if people do not have the freedom to openly debate political issues. Oppositional parties must be allowed to compete for the votes in a real, competitive election. Unless these freedoms and rights are established, elections risk becoming mere charades performed by the incumbent political leaders in order to claim they are democratizing the country and of course, to look good to the international society. Elections must be more than an illustration for the exterior, but ought to be a reflection of the domestic situation and the voters' preferences.¹⁴¹

In the last few years there has been a growth in free elections and an estimate for 2008 is that we will have 121 free elections globally in the world's electoral democracies. That is a clear increase from the 110 free elections we had four years earlier.¹⁴² However, only 90 countries are predicted by Freedom House as free in 2008, despite the much higher number of free elections.¹⁴³ The Middle Eastern countries have had a dramatic rise in national elections and an expansion of suffrage

¹⁴¹ See Dyer, Gwynne: "New democracies", 2004

¹⁴² Ibid.

¹⁴³ Freedom House: "Freedom in the World 2008: Selected data from Freedom House's annual global survey of political rights and civil liberties"

the last decade. The increase in electoral processes may prove crucial to the spread of democracy and is central in the debate about the expansion of political participation in the Middle East. Few elections have open outcomes, however, and the incumbent elites manage to structure the electoral systems in order to influence the election outcome. Restrictions on press freedoms and the governmental monopoly over the media also play a role in influencing electoral outcomes. The existence of regular elections should therefore be discarded as an indication of political liberalization or democratic transition, the political scientist Maye Kassem holds. One should instead not merely focus on the outcome of the elections, but also on what produced such an outcome.¹⁴⁴ In Egypt, the multi-party election is staged in order to reinforce authoritarian rule, not to change the political leadership.¹⁴⁵ The president has an ‘unchecked’ and ‘unbalanced’ power, and is the leader of the police and the military. His police closely supervise the elections and the counting of votes, and make sure the president does not get any surprises.¹⁴⁶

4.1.2 Prospects for Arab freedom of speech

Egypt has resisted the international pressure for democracy for decades and has been able to protect its own, personal authoritarian rule. The Emergency Law efficiently limits the freedom of speech, even if the constitution says otherwise. At a meeting in Cairo February 12th this year, information ministers from 22 Arab nations signed an agreement about limiting the freedom of speech. Only Qatar, the country housing the main office of the pan-Arab TV-channel Al-Jazeera and Lebanon refused to implement these new rules. The meeting was arranged by Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

The agreement signed by the ministers, authorizes the governments to suspend the permission for channels that have “offended Arab leaders, national or religious

¹⁴⁴ Kassem, Maye: *Egyptian Politics. The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule*, p. 186

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid. Kassem shows how the Egyptian police ‘fix’ the elections in 2000.

symbols”¹⁴⁷ and put restrictions on TV-channels and prohibits ‘insults’ to the government. The justification is that the media shall not jeopardize social harmony, national unity, public order or traditional values. The document states that the media shall respect human dignity in all their programs, and they shall respect the individual’s right to privacy and not nurture any hatred or discrimination. Neither should the channels transfer anything that provoke violence or terrorism, or show any material that could encourage smoking or drinking of alcohol.¹⁴⁸

Siham Faraj, president of an Arab human rights organization attacks the new law on the account that freedom should be the criteria to measure human advancement. He says the law about limiting the freedom of speech is meaningless because it is vague and imprecise.¹⁴⁹ Who decides what is offending to national or religious symbols? And what if the criticism of political leaders is true? Authoritarian regimes are not particularly tolerant when it comes to criticism. Journalists who say or write some thing unpopular, or contrary to the state’s official policies, risk being arrested. What does this say about the respect for freedom of speech in the future of the Middle East? The respect for the freedom of speech is very high in the Western democracies, and this freedom is of significantly important in a democracy. If people are not able to express their opinions freely, having a free, competitive election with a fully informed electorate becomes difficult to perform. Arab governments seem to tighten their control over their populations and halt the Arab reforms for democracy and human rights. This is a major obstacle for the future democratic prospects for the region.

¹⁴⁷ Ali, Ahmed: “Internasjonale Rapporter: Frykter for ytringsfriheten” in *Ny Tid*, No 11, 14-20 March 2008 , p.29

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

4.2 Political reforms and the role of US

The political reforms in the Middle East move both in an increasingly moderate, and reform-friendly direction, and in a more radical, religiously extremist direction. Current trends and policy suggestions from academic scholars specializing in the field show that the region's political development varies from country to country and that both moderate and radical movements gain support. In an article about the prospects for Muslim democracy, Muqtedar Khan analyzes the role of US policy in the Middle East. Khan says that democratization is the US policy choice to meet the challenge of anti-Americanism and the radicalization of Muslims; especially in the Middle East. The US' foreign policy makers hold that only democracy can weaken the conditions that stimulate political radicalism in the Muslim world. Khan says that according to this view, a quick transition from authoritarianism to more open societies will improve economic opportunities and foster responsible politics by making governments accountable and giving people a sense of participation. Comparative analyzes of democratization likewise conclude that if economic systems are transformed into market economies, the social basis of democracy will be strengthened,¹⁵⁰ and that promoting democracy can be a means of economic development.¹⁵¹

4.2.1 Who wants democracy in the Middle East?

The Bush administration operates by the view that democracy is both necessary and feasible in the Middle East.¹⁵² The US' commitment to democracy and freedom in the Middle East is their key goal in their war on terror. Bush said in a

¹⁵⁰ Vanhanen, Tatu: *Democratization*, p.189

¹⁵¹ Pei, Minxin: "Economic Institutions, Democracy, and Development", Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 1999

¹⁵² Khan, Muqtedar: "Prospects for Muslim Democracy: The Role of U.S. Policy" in *Middle East Policy*, Vol X, 2003, p.79

speech in 2003: “We support the advance of freedom in the Middle East, because it is our founding principle, and because it is in our national interest. The hateful ideology of terrorism is shaped and nurtured and protected by oppressive regimes. Free nations, in contrast, encourage creativity and tolerance and enterprise. And in those free nations, the appeal of extremism withers away.”¹⁵³

Democracy promotion has not always been on the US agenda for the Middle East, but when the status quo in the region was not stable anymore after September 11th, the United States was determined to push for democratization, regardless of the consequences, US diplomats William Burns and Lorne Craner asserted in a conference on Islam and democracy.¹⁵⁴ However, the diplomats also admitted that democracy in the Muslim world would perhaps make it more difficult for the United States to pursue its interests in the region. Many Muslims remain skeptical and cynical to the US interest in democracy in the Middle East, as democracy promotion never was the Americans’ interest in the past.

Certain examples of the selective nature of the American democratic offensive give good reasons to question the US intentions of democratizing Middle East. The United States has had an 80-year old relationship to the autocratic kingdom of Saudi Arabia without lifting the attention to the democratic conditions of the country. Why have they not demanded the Saudi regime to respect human and civil rights, when Afghanistan and Iraq are obliged to? The Saudi regime has long been an important ally of the US, but they have never pressured the kingdom to democratize or liberalize. Today’s pressure for democratic reforms in Saudi Arabia continues to be very modest.¹⁵⁵ A similar case we find with regard to the oppressive regime in Egypt and its relations to the US. Egypt is one of the biggest recipients of US aid after Israel in the Middle East,¹⁵⁶ and received more than a billion US dollars in military

¹⁵³ President Bush quoted in Muqtedar Khan “Prospects for Muslim Democracy: The Role of U.S. Policy” in *Middle East Policy*, Vol X, 2003, p.79

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p.79-80

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. p.80

¹⁵⁶ Kassem, Maye: *Egyptian Politics. The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule*, p. 179

assistance in 2006.¹⁵⁷ This despite the fact that the Egyptian government rules under an Emergency Law that has a severely restricted freedom of expression, belief and association. Many human rights abuses have been reported in Egypt, human rights organizations are being closed down and thousands of people are being detained without charge under the law, according to Human Rights Watch.¹⁵⁸ When questioned about the need for political reform and the issue of human rights in Egypt shortly after 9/11, US ambassador David Welch responded: “Egypt is our friend, and we do not put pressure on friends.”¹⁵⁹ The Egyptian government took an active antiterrorism stand and was therefore welcomed as an important US ally in fighting terrorism.

Other authoritarian regimes do not have such a positive relationship with the United States, and President Bush labeled both Iran and North Korea along with Iraq as “the axis of evil”. Libya, Syria, Sudan and Cuba were not considered much better.¹⁶⁰ The international community’s efforts of undermining authoritarian regimes can be a potentially positive step in the long-term development of democracy, but it can hardly be predicted to serve its purpose when it is done in such a selective manner. When other authoritarian regimes gain international recognition and economic support, a common trend has emerged where specific authoritarian regimes are directly or indirectly encouraged by Western democratic patrons. Morocco, Jordan, Qatar and Kuwait are all close allies with the US, and crucial to US interests. One may suspect that geopolitical advantages, access to cheap oil and rich markets overrun the idealistic claim of promoting good governance.

However, the US is not alone in indirectly supporting Arab authoritarianism. The Norwegian government holds shares in a company that has trade relations with

¹⁵⁷ Human Rights Watch: *World Report 2008*, p. 470

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 465

¹⁵⁹ Welch quoted in Maye Kassem: *Egyptian Politics. The Dynamics of Authoritarian Rule*, p. 179

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 178

the theocratic oppressive regime in Iran while Norwegian politicians at the same time publicly disapprove of anti-democratic states and authoritarian ideologies.¹⁶¹

Norwegian companies also do business with Morocco in the occupied territories of Western Sahara, which means they indirectly support the occupation and directly deprive Sahrawians' of their right to decide over their own resources.¹⁶² If the Western powers' strive for democratic expansion in the Middle East is going to be perceived as credible among the recipients of democracy, the West's commitment to democratic values such as freedom, equality and human rights should includes all Arab states, not only a few chosen ones. The Libyan intellectual Dr. Mohammad Al-Houni goes as far as classifying the friendly relations between the US and various Arab countries in the past as one of the main motivations behind Arab and Islamic terrorism.¹⁶³ With the international support of some Western countries through public friendship or trade relations, authoritarian regimes can to a larger extent gain legitimacy of their own regimes. The group of oppressive regimes who are not enjoying beneficial Western friendships can be subjected to international boycotts or exclusions of other kinds that in turn might contribute to reinforce their hostility towards the West.

Arabs and Muslims have several reasons to be skeptical towards the US administration's policy pronouncements about bringing political and religious freedom and even the attempt to create a liberal democracy in Iraq.¹⁶⁴ The Iraqis are not free to choose whatever form of political system they want, former Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld has maintained.¹⁶⁵ The US will not allow for an Islamic

¹⁶¹ See Keshvari, Mazyar: "Et norsk paradoks" in *Aftenposten*, 2008, and Hydro: "Leteavtale i Iran", 2008

¹⁶² See Norwegian Refugee Council: "Fish, phosphates and international business" in *NRC Reports. Western Sahara*, 2/2008, p. 14

¹⁶³ Dankowitz, A.: "Libyan intellectual Dr. Muhammad Al-Houni: The Arabs must choose between Western Civilization and the legacy of the Middle ages" in *Inquiry and Analysis series No.240*, 2005

¹⁶⁴ Khan, Muqtedar: "Prospects for Muslim Democracy: The Role of U.S. Policy", in *Middle East Policy*, Vol.X, 2003, p.82

¹⁶⁵ Ibid.

state in Iraq. Yet, according to Khan, democratization will lead to Islamization. And when Islamists are in power, they will be able to resist US influence in the region with legitimate means. This is not an outcome the US can risk, Khan says, so US foreign policy has for years in fact been one of the barriers to democracy in the Middle East. This policy is difficult to reverse, and so is the Muslim skepticism. Khan suggests that “in order for the United States to facilitate the democratization of the Middle East, it must gain the trust and cooperation of Arabs and Muslims in the region.”¹⁶⁶ Even if Arabs fear US intentions, the superpower will play an important role in future political development in their region.

I have discussed whether or not the US, and to a lesser extent other Western powers, have credible intentions when claiming they want to democratize the Middle East. The intentions of the West become problematic when seen in relation to the difference of democratizing for the sake of the inhabitants well being or pursuing own, national interests. I will now go on to look at what kind of political government the inhabitants of the region wish for themselves.

4.2.2 Do Muslims *really* want democracy?

Many voices hold on to the view that Muslims and the Arab world are not ready to adapt to democracy. Muslims are often assumed to have an instinctive hostile attitude to the democratic idea. British-American historian Bernard Lewis says that religious neo-Islam and liberal democracy is clearly conflicting because the so called ‘fundamentalists’ regard liberal democracy with “contempt as a corrupt and corrupting form of government.”¹⁶⁷ According to Lewis, Islamists are at best willing to see democracy as a possibility for them to gain power. However, they are not likely to embrace democratic practices and give away their power if they lose an election.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid. p.82

¹⁶⁷ Lewis, Bernard: "Islam and Liberal Democracy: A Historical Overview" in *Journal of Democracy* 7.2, 1996, p.54

Surveys conducted by Pippa Norris and Ron Inglehart revealed that Muslims overwhelmingly prefer democracy to any other form of government.¹⁶⁸ There is nothing in Islam or in Muslim practice that is fundamentally opposed to democracy, justice, freedom, fairness, equality or tolerance.¹⁶⁹ Few Muslims reject democracy because they resent the West, and they do not allow the West to have the ownership of this universal value, Khan argues. The hundreds of millions of Muslims who go to the voting polls in Indonesia, Bangladesh and Malaysia do so because they believe in the democratic ideal. There are more nations in the Muslim world that claim to be democratic than Islamic¹⁷⁰ and one out of four majority-Muslim countries has democratically elected governments.¹⁷¹ Given that these findings represent the reality of democratic practice in large parts of the Muslim world, it is possible to claim that there is little dispute between Islam and democracy for a large number of Muslims. With regard to the Arabic Middle East, where only a minority of the Muslim electoral democracies is situated, the compatibility of Islam and democratic practice is in need of further recognition.

According to a global survey conducted by the international poll centre Gallup, more than 90 % of the 1, 3 billion Muslims in the world are against terrorism and for women's rights and democracy.¹⁷² The survey also shows that 93 % of Muslims are moderate, and that they are concerned with improved relations with the West. Their critique of the West comes forth in the responses to what they least esteem in the Western societies, being what Muslims perceive as moral decay and breakdown of traditional values. On the other hand, the majority of Muslims admire

¹⁶⁸ See Mufti, Siraj: "Muslims Love Democracy," *Muslim Democrat*, Vol 4, No.2, 2002, p.1 and Pew Research Center: "Views of a changing world", 2003

¹⁶⁹ Khan, Muqtadar: "Prospects for Muslim Democracy: The Role of U.S. Policy" in *Middle East Policy*, Vol.X, 2003, p.85

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Haass, Richard N.: "Towards Greater Democracy in the Muslim World" in *The Washington Quarterly* 26:3, 2003, p.141

¹⁷² The survey is one of the most extensive of its kind, conducted from 2001 to 2007 researching attitudes among 50 000 questioned Muslims in 35 countries.

democracy, gender equality and the technology in Europe and US. The media forgets to cover these views along with the extremist group of political radical Muslims. Gallup Centre for Muslim studies recently published a book called *Who Speaks for Islam? What a Billion Muslims Really Think*. The book aims to change the negative image the media usually depicts of Muslims. Historian of religion and expert on Islam, Kari Vogt, confirms that the findings of the survey are accurate.¹⁷³ Research institutions have long shown that the majority of Muslims have moderate views, but the media nevertheless choose to focus solely on the radical Islam that indeed exists, but it is not the whole story, Vogt explains. The media thus becomes a political actor contributing to the inhospitable picture of Muslims dominating in the West. The media can play an important role in the public debate and contribute in the framing of people's opinions and perceptions.

The British Muslim Iffit Qureshi writes in a feature article about what she calls the selective democracy of the West, that there is no critical reflection in the way the West perceives Islamists.¹⁷⁴ Many still incorrectly think Islamist despise Western modernity, freedom of speech and democracy. Qureshi says we have a responsibility to de-mystify the stereotypical images of Muslims and Westerners have of each other. One of the challenges of improving the relations between the West and the Arab world is to bring to a halt the perpetual "demonizing" of the other through media, political rhetoric and misperceptions of the other's values, ideas and traditions. Muslims participating in the Gallup survey around the world, encourages the West to improve relations with Muslim societies by moderating their views towards Muslims and respect Islam. It is conceivable that we need to get rid of the misperceptions about Muslims in the West and about Westerners in the Arab world. Recognizing the importance in correcting each other's perception, will not alone improve democratic

¹⁷³ Saghir, Noshin: "Muslimenes sanne ansikt" in *Ny Tid*, No 14, 11-17 April 2008, p. 25.

¹⁷⁴ Qureshi, Iffiti: "Vestens selektive demokrati" in *Aftenposten*, February 10, 2008

relations, but it might be a beginning of such development. Hence, it is a mutual responsibility of both Arabs and Westerners to take the necessary steps.

4.3 Negative tendencies

What then, is left to say about the tendencies towards political change in the Arab region? I will briefly summarize the negative tendencies that do not point in direction of political reform. Democratically elected leaders continue to be a rare species in the Middle East. Freedom of speech, independent media and transparent, competitive and free elections are not frequent in any Arab country. The Cairo-meeting where so many Arab information ministers agreed to restrict the freedom of speech is a notable setback for Arab democracy. Another hinder to democracy is the increased support for extremist, religious movements, terrorism and the global jihad-movement with strong anti-American sentiments. The extremists' perception of the West, especially the US as the imperialist and hegemonic enemy is a motivation for anti-democratic movements.

4.4 Positive tendencies

There are at the same time several positive outlooks for the future of Arab democracy. I have already pointed out the increase in national elections, although their effect on democracy is disputed. More and more Arabs have been given the right to vote in recent years and gender equality is on the agenda. Women's rights are improving and female participation in politics is increasing. Islamic reforms are on the move with re-interpretations of the Quran discovering its democratic potential through reformers like Soroush who is promoting an Islamic version of democracy. Recent surveys show that the majority of Muslims are in favor of democracy. Another positive outlook is that the international climate is not favorable to overt authoritarian rule and has a growing tendency to do something about it. This may open up for the possibility that the West have an incentive to start a new and

improved way of thinking about democratization. All attempts at democratization, even if they fail, can form a part of history and the collective memory of communities and contribute to democratization in the longer term.

4.5 Final remarks

The authors of *Who Speaks for Islam?*, John L. Esposito and Dalia Mogahed, concluded that conflict between the West and the Muslim world is not inevitable. The conflict is about politics, not about principles, they concluded. Chapters 3 and 4 have presented material which might suggest that the majority of Muslims does not find essential democratic and Islamic principles irreconcilable. It does not necessarily have to be a dispute between Islam and democracy, even the first Islamic state established by the prophet Muhammad, was a multicultural and multireligious federation ruled by consensus of those who governed. The constitution established the importance of consent and cooperation for governance, and treated Muslims and non-Muslims as equal citizens of the Islamic state with equal rights and duties. The Islamic state can serve as a model for developing modern Islamic democracies. And it does not necessarily have to be as morally liberal and value pluralist as the liberal democratic model.

The unwillingness of Arab leaders to implement liberal democratic practices in their respective countries could be explained with the fact that it is not democracy per se they have a problem with, but rather the principles founded in liberalism. That the state should be guided by liberal principles and operate with a pluralist conception of good and be impartial in moral issues, is challenging in the religiously influenced societies of the Middle East. Moreover, as long as the basic principles of democracy are compatible, such as freedom, equality before the law and consensus rule, there is reason to believe that the ideological transfer of democracy will be possible to.

5. Conclusion and Policy Implications

5.1 Summary of main ideas

What are the challenges of exporting the Western classical view of liberal democracy to the Middle Eastern context? In the conclusion of the thesis I will return to the main research question and the sub questions by summarizing the answers provided in the preceding chapters.

1) *What separates liberal democracy from alternative understandings of democracy?* This has been answered by looking at what an inclusive definition of liberal democracy entails compared to a minimal definition including little more than the presence of an election. The theoretical foundation of classical liberalism rooted on John Stuart Mill presents the freedom of the individual as the highest value and is based on a negative concept of freedom. The modern political liberalism, building on John Rawls, reflects the core values of modern liberal democracies. Those values are impartiality, tolerance, liberty and the freedom of the individual. For a state to be guided by these principles, it should accommodate religious and ethnic pluralism by a secularization of politics, the protection of minority rights through law, a democratic constitution and emphasize the freedom of expression and the freedom of belief. To many Arabs this liberal state is perceived as a threat to their societies when democracy promoters imply that liberal democracy is the only legitimate, good society.

2) *What is the position of democracy in the Middle East?* An account of the poor state of democracy and the vast illiberalism in the Arab world gave a response to this, ending in a discussion and analysis of the compatibility of democracy and the religion and culture of Islam. This is manifested in the hostility towards Western values many Arabs possess. They hold their culture and religion highly esteemed, and

perceive democratization as a threat of Westernization and a decline in their moral, social behavior and traditional values.

3) *What are the future prospects for change in the Middle East?* This question has, on the basis of my findings, shown to be the most difficult question to answer. Several Arab philosophers suggest an Islamic reform to accept democracy and argue that the inherent values and ideals of Islam are perfectly compatible. However, political Islam and the extremist interpretations of its radical adherents postpone the process of initiating political reforms. The lack of political will and democratic understanding of the incumbents in power slows down the pace of reforms.

The main challenges of exporting the classical liberal democracy to the Middle Eastern contexts can accordingly be seen as the different conceptions Arabs and Westerners have of democracy and freedom, something which is only strengthened by the misperceptions they have of each other. I have therefore argued that we should reconceptualize, or rather de-Westernize, democracy in order for it to fit into the Middle Eastern context and not be seen as a demoralizing, hegemonic concept of Western imperialism. There is reason to believe, according to recent global surveys, that the majority of Muslims embrace their conception of the democratic ideal. I postulate that an Islamic version of democracy can be a good way of reconciling the differences between the West and the Arab world, where the liberal ideals of individualism and secularism are not given such a central position in the foundations of the state as in the West. Further research on the possibilities of establishing an Islamic, modern democracy rooted on the model of first Islamic state adjusted to the criteria of democracy¹⁷⁵ emphasizing civil liberties, human rights and political freedoms would be highly enlightening.

¹⁷⁵ Such as listed by Robert A. Dahl in 2.2.1

5.2 Policy implications

It seems clear that the strategies for democracy promotion in the Middle East must change somehow. The internal legitimacy for democracy must be home-grown and rooted in the people, it cannot be externally imposed. The liberal ideal of the individual's right to self-determination is also transferred to sovereign states' right to autonomy in international politics, when the world is seen as a community of liberal societies. According to this analogy,¹⁷⁶ every sovereign state must then have the right to independently choose its own domestic politics. The Arab states themselves must initiate any major political changes in their region. Furthermore, the responsibility does not lie solely with the leaders or with the people. Democracy promotion does not just have a top-down or a bottom-up strategy. The bottom-up strategy presupposes an already functioning civil society, and that is not always the case. A top-down strategy is difficult to perform when the will of the leaders is weak or absent, and when they have little support in the people. Creating democracies requires not just a favorable global order, but collective action and radical processes of social transformation within nation states.¹⁷⁷ For democracy to be successfully consolidated it requires more than political changes; democracy must become an integrated part of the society, even in the culture and in the mentality of the people.

The Libyan Dr. Muhammad Al-Houni calls for a change of Arab mentality in order for the region to accept democracy. The Arabs must understand that the world has changed and choose between the "Western Civilization and the legacy of the Middle Ages."¹⁷⁸ That entails to abandon the patriarchal Bedouin values, challenge the interpretation of Islam by religious fundamentalists and create law abiding states.

¹⁷⁶ See Michael Walzer: *Just and Unjust Wars*, p.58-59 for his use of the 'domestic analogy' comparing a society of states to a society of individuals in his theory of aggression.

¹⁷⁷ Grugel, Jean: *Democratization. A critical introduction*, p.247

¹⁷⁸ Dankowitz, A: "Libyan intellectual Dr. Muhammad Al-Houni: The Arabs must choose between Western Civilization and the legacy of the Middle Ages" in *Inquiry and Analysis series No.240*, 2005

The old concept of Jihad ¹⁷⁹ is no longer justifiable in the present reality, Al-Houni argues, and further states that an attempt to implement the medieval religious laws is bound to fail and it will only postpone the realization of democracy in Arab society. ¹⁸⁰ The Arabs have only one of two options, according to Al-Houni; the Western civilization or the Arab religious legacy of the era similar to the European Middle Ages. Continuing to uphold their own cultural institutions will only do themselves harm, says Al-Houni, and encourages a stronger tie with the West in order for the Arab way of thinking to become “a philosophy of life and freedom and not one of death and hatred.”¹⁸¹

Al-Houni has the view that the Arab mentality is so deeply rooted in medieval legacies that it does not adjust to the modern world and is not receptive to conceptions of democracy. He uses strong formulations to express his point regarding what the Arabs believe and do not believe. It is not in the capacity of this thesis to suggest what the Arab mentality is or what Arabs want. Neither has it been my intention to come up with exhaustive causal explanations of the problem of democracy in the Arab world. I have simply focused on a selection of some of the most significant explanations for why democracy has not yet been consolidated in the Arab world, mainly from a historical, economic and ideological perspective. The ideological explanations have been particularly important, as I have defined democracy promotion as an ideological value transfer. I have suggested that one explanation for the challenging consolidation of liberal democracy in Arab countries is the separation of state and religion in liberal democracy. The liberal state is pluralistic and secular, while religion has a central place in the Arab state and a complete secularization is low esteemed. Another possible explanation for why democracy promotion in the Middle East has not succeeded this far, is that the

¹⁷⁹ Jihad means both inner and outer struggle for the sake of Allah, and it is the use of Jihad as an attack of others Al-Houni criticizes.

¹⁸⁰ Dankowitz, A: “Libyan intellectual Dr. Muhammad Al-Houni: The Arabs must choose between Western Civilization and the legacy of the Middle Ages” in *Inquiry and Analysis series No.240*, 2005

¹⁸¹ Ibid.

inhospitable perception Arabs have of the West makes them reluctant to welcome Western reforms. A consequence of this is that Arabs get the wrong impression of democracy and fear the whole project of democratization being nothing but Westernization. A third explanation is that democratic reforms rarely transform an authoritarian society when externally imposed. Reforms have to be accepted and grown from within a country in order to be successful. Based on what is presented in this thesis and the limited scope of this paper, I do not have the sufficient grounds to draw any conclusions with regard to the prospects for Arab political change, or point out broad implications for foreign policy making. However, I have raised several important questions and discussions which are crucial for the practitioners of democracy promotion and policy makers to consider and reflect upon. The divergence between the West and the Middle East is explained both politically and principally. My contribution to the debate is that if we redefine democracy in such a way that it shows not to lead to a decline of the moral in the society or pose a threat to Muslims' faith and culture, the chances of succeeding in consolidating democracy are higher. Arab and Western scholars would gain an expanded understanding of what democracy *can* entail through an enlightening debate and dialogue about the *positive* effects of democratic governance on the one hand, and of secularization on the other. For Arabs to lose their fears of democratization simultaneously being a project of Westernization, it would be in order to completely reconceptualize democracy in a way that makes it less 'liberal' and less 'Western', and to separate democratization from liberalization is one step in the right direction.

6. List of References

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