

Eros and Demos: Reading John Dewey in the Arab World

Rachid Boutayeb

Doha Institute For Graduate Studies

Al Tarfa Street, Zone 70

Al Daayan-Wadi Al Banaat Doha, Qatar

Email: rachid.boutayeb@dohainstitute.edu.qa;

rachid.boutayebb@gmail.com

Abstract:

The following pages represent an endeavor to explain why Dewey's understanding of democracy, education, and religion implies great relevance for understanding the present Arab-Islamic crisis. The historicism of Abdallah Laroui, the social theory of Hisham Sharabi, and the political anthropology of Abdellah Hammoudi emphasize that the persistence of political authoritarianism in the Arab world reflects a malaise in the culture or society and above all a crisis of education — an education that remains patriarchal or neo-patriarchal, emphasizing the communal and undermining the individual. The thinkers mentioned above explain that a reform of *Demos* cannot come about without a reform of *Culture*. This is another reason John Dewey's meditations on democracy and education, or democracy as a way of life, are of great importance for today's Arab societies. Basically, this paper deals with the relevance of Dewey's work and shows why we cannot achieve a *democratic transition* without a *cultural transition*, which includes an education strategy regarding democracy.

Keywords: Dewey, Education, Democracy, Experience, Inheritance, Religious, Religion, Arab World

Introduction

This paper defends the relevance of Dewey with respect to the study of modern Arab culture. Given the questions raised in this context, all of which are expressions of a divorce between the dominant culture and democracy or democratic culture, Dewey's political philosophy does not offer ready answers but a methodology for critically formulating these questions. What makes Dewey's philosophy relevant is first its conception of democracy. He believed that democracy should not be limited to any particular culture, nation, or race.¹ The second element that encouraged me to deal with Dewey's political philosophy was his understanding of democracy as a way of life linked to the individual rather than to an elite. The third element is the centrality of education in his philosophy for the democratic process. And the fourth is his immanent understanding of religion.

In my analysis, I would like to examine the Arab crisis, which is characterized on the political

level by a persistence of authoritarianism and on the social and cultural level by a perseverance of patriarchalism, through the works of Abdallah Laroui, Hisham Sharabi, and Abdallah Hamoudi. Through their contributions, I will focus on the three dimensions of this crisis namely, historical, social, and political – all of which remain closely linked, directly or indirectly, to the issue of democracy. I believe that the Arab crisis stems from a lack of cultural or educational development. Additionally, I will turn to Dewey's conception of democracy, education, and religion because it contains fundamental and inspiring elements for my reflections on understanding the current Arab crisis. This paper has implications with regard to the political science approach with respect to the Arab crisis, which advocates for a democratic transition without addressing the need for cultural change.

My approach is an intercultural one that is aware of the fact that Western philosophy, in the language of Chakrabarty, is *indispensable* but, at the same time, *inadequate*. (Chakrabarty 2000, 16) It is inadequate or insufficient because it is also a philosophy that emerged in a particular historical context – in the case of Dewey, that of America from the first decades of the 20th century and in dialogue with the questions of its time. About Dewey, I will focus on the *indispensable* of his political philosophy for the Arab context without claiming that this philosophy provides us with a ready-made recipe. Instead, it helps us to determine our questions, ask them differently than in the prevalent ideological discourse, and be more creative, experimental, and pragmatic. In summary, I aim to read Dewey's philosophy from the Arab context of the present and to illuminate its critical potential or actuality for this context.

1. Culture vs. Democracy: Interpreting the Arab Malaise

I start from the following premise: A political or democratic transition presupposes a cultural transition. In Arab communities, we are introduced to power before we are introduced to our freedom or individuality. A striking example of this is the prevalent view of the body in this society, which I have selected as the starting point of my discourse, and for good reason. The body, as a symbol of individual autonomy (Le Breton 2013), is frequently forgotten in modernization projects and is commonly sacrificed. But how do Arabs think about their bodies today? What are their attitudes toward sexual freedom? What about the position of women in society? What role does religion play? What does political power look like? In a book closer to an ethnological study, Shereen El Feki will examine the reality of the body and sexual life in contemporary Arab society. The writer was not interested in discussing various theories about sex, but rather, over the years, she traveled to several Arab countries, from the Arabian Gulf, through Egypt and Tunisia to Morocco, following what was called the Arab Spring, and she met specialists, theorists, clerics, representatives of civil society organizations, doctors, and psychologists, etc. She is not exaggerating in writing at the beginning of her book, "If you really want to know a people, start by looking inside their bedrooms." (El Feki 2013) El Feki reiterates what we all know and live by, namely that the Arabs know from an early age that they must stay out of three areas: politics, religion, and sex. The author explores the

contrast between Arab and Western societies, highlighting that it is not solely based on democratic values but also attitudes towards women and sexuality. According to the author, the differences between Islam and the West have more to do with *Eros* than *Demos*. She examines Sayyed Qutb's trip to the United States and observes that the central figure in contemporary Islamism only saw "*sexual disintegration*" and "*family disintegration*" in American civilization.² Qutb's advocacy of an "Islam" that restricts women's freedom and controls their actions reflects the authoritarian regimes' approach to maintaining power by strictly regulating children's sexual lives, as Wilhelm Reich observed. In his words, "It creates the individual who is forever afraid of life and of authority and thus creates again and again the possibility that masses of people can be governed by a handful of powerful individuals." (Reich 1974, 72)

El Feki does not exaggerate in highlighting with Wilhelm Reich that any project of freedom can only succeed if it sexually transforms the human being, stressing that the patriarchal interpretation of religion, the crisis of the education system, and the combination of all this with a flaccid political system – despite the "Arab Spring" – are hindering the achievement of radical change. In terms of women, their status and role in society, and thus in terms of the body and sexual freedom, the young generation who took to the streets to drive Mubarak and others from power, as she writes at the end of her book, were eventually forced to return to their homes; in other words, they returned to the clutches of the patriarchal society that produced the Egyptian dictator, and it will inevitably create another. The following analyses confirm El-Feki's observations, and they also confirm, as we will see in the second and third parts of this paper, the relevance of Dewey's understanding of democracy and religion for the contemporary Arab world.

1.1. Cultural Backwardness

Abdallah Laroui believes that the problem of the Arab world lies in its historical backwardness; a delay "concerning the liberal era as it was prepared in the second half of the 18th century and as it flourished in the 19th century." (Laroui 2021, 8) In his opinion, "Arab culture, in its classical expression, and the most influential part of its contemporary modern expression, is opposed almost point by point to liberal culture." (Laroui 2021, 8) Laroui addresses many issues, including the relationship with the past in contemporary Arab culture, the rejection of historical thinking, the subordination of knowledge to religion, the denial of secularism, and the rejection of modernity and its legal and political achievements. Laroui is right to ask, "Isn't the secret of an underdeveloped society, in the final analysis, the unconscious will of the elite to save its absolute at the expense of living individuals, rather than keeping the living if the absolute were to dissolve?" (Laroui 2021, 105)

But what are the consequences of continuing the past in the present? Laroui's response is clear, "A-historical thinking leads to only one result: not seeing the real, and if we translate that into political terms, we say that it reinforces dependence at every level." And dependence "does not just mean loss of freedom", but also "the persistence and deepening of historical backwardness." (Laroui

2021, 176) Laroui sums up the Arab malaise in what he calls “*dualism*”, which, in his view, represents a “*fact*” and a “*policy*”. He even speaks of an “*educational policy*” of constantly “*deepening dualism*” for political reasons. This education aims to maintain the political system and its elite in place. (Laroui 2021, 188-189)

1.2. Education to Unfreedom

Abdellah Hammoudi explains, how the *Master and Disciple* diagram or scheme, as a mystic form of education and initiation, extended beyond Sufi structures and remains the modus operandi of power relations and political institutions in the context of Arab authoritarianism, like in Morocco or Egypt. (Hammoudi 1997) The main question of his anthropological work is the following: “How can we account for the prevalence of authoritarian political systems in our societies from the Atlantic to the Gulf?” (Hammoudi 1997, 1) The various works of political scientists who have tried to explain the persistence of authoritarianism in the Arab world in political terms have failed. The developments after the so-called *Arab Spring* are striking evidence that reducing authoritarianism to its political dimension explains its symptoms rather than its causes, causes that are more of a religious-cultural nature, as Hammoudi pointed out decades before. For this reason, too, the critique of dominant politics should *nolens volens* be a critique of the dominant culture or the dominant cultural model and value system that constitutes, serves, and legitimizes this politics. It is about “a sort of grammar which governs daily interaction and ensures the reproduction of existing authority and power relations in a human climate fraught with strong undercurrents of ambivalence.” (Hammoudi 1997, 5) In this closed system, political participation is only possible as obedience. Any form of opposition is eradicated and dehumanized. At the heart of this system is the sultan or monarch, who alone decides the fate of the community. He is the symbol of their unity and the guarantor of their integration. As Claude Lefort explains, the power in the pre-modern monarchy “*was embodied in the king.*” (Lefort 1986, 27) In other words, power could not be separated from the king’s body, as he is its sole and legitimate owner. As Hammoudi notes, quoting Abdellah Laroui, the system is legitimized by “the classical theory of the caliphate... [...] this theory can justify any situation, to the extent that even an impious and immoral sultan cannot possibly be deposed.” (Hammoudi 1997, 67)

The *Master and Disciple* schema is anchored and reproduced through education at all levels of society. It is a religious-political education that condemns individuality, emphasizes the collective, and perpetuates subjugation and ruling authority in the name of religion.

1.3. The delayed Society

Hisham Sharabi presents a compelling explanation of the reality of contemporary Arab societies and their structures through his concept of neopatriarchy. This concept combines *modernity* and *patriarchy*, resulting in a society that is controlled by groups such as sectarian groups, tribes, ethnicities, or religious movements. Sharabi writes,

The persistence of clan or sectarian allegiance in neopatriarchal society reveals how extensively modern patriarchy has been tied to primordial forms. Neither the city nor the society or state have succeeded in evolving social forms providing for genuine, alternative structures. Kinship and religious affiliation remain the ultimate ground of loyalty and allegiance, stronger than abstract ideology. (Sharabi 1988, 28-29)

And adds further:

Despite all ideological appearances, the individual's basic affiliation in "modernized," neopatriarchal society is to the family, the clan, the ethnic or religious group. For the common person in this society the concept of society or fatherland is an abstraction which has meaning only when reduced to the primordial significations of kinship and religion. In social practice the authority of father, tribal head, and religious leader (rather than considerations of nation or class) determines the direction and object of individual allegiance. (Sharabi 1988, 45)

And even when this society knows modernity, it does not live it except as *dependency*. It does not live tradition except as *traditionalism*, as Abdelkebir Khatibi expresses. (Khatibi 1983, 29) Modernity is instrumentalized only to rehabilitate the old structures. (Sharabi 1988, 4) This modernization project in the Arab world postponed democracy until state-building was complete, resulting in a monster state that works against individuals and society. Sharabi argues that neopatriarchal societies cannot be considered truly modern or traditional. They distort and misrepresent pre-modern communities, while only superficially reflecting the values and institutions of modern society. Sharabi sees neopatriarchy as a totality that controls economics, politics, society, and culture. (Sharabi 1988, 5) The central figure around which the whole of society revolves, this delayed society, as I prefer to call it because it did not separate its flesh from the flesh of the community or did not discover the individual, is the figure of the patriarch. It is a figure that establishes vertical relationships, as Sharabi calls them, between power and authority and within various social institutions and associations, from school, family, and political parties. In language that reminds us of Laroui's critique of *dualism*, Sharabi talks about "*neopatriarchy's schizophrenic duality*", quoting Nagib Mahfouz, who, better than any modern Arab writer, has portrayed the contradictions of the modern Arab city and Arab man. (Sharabi 1988, 8) Arab man, like Arab society, remains torn between two "*regimes of truth*", as Sharabi notes. This has disastrous consequences for the new generations, who today live trapped in a *social Nihilism*³ that is expressed in various social pathologies, such as illegal and legal migration, religious extremism, political abstinence, sectarianism, etc.

From all these previous analyses, it is clear that the problem of today's Arab societies manifests itself in a crisis of education because it is about *disciplining* rather than *educating* or an education that does not strive to connect the generations to the future, as Kant wants, but to an imaginary memory or identity. It robs people of both their individuality and their future.

2. John Dewey: Democracy as a way of life

Given the previous discussions, the current Arab-Islamic crisis is to be understood as an educational one. The societies of the *Master and Disciple scheme* know *discipline* and not *education*. The individual remains a pale copy of the collective. That is why the paths to renewal, to social association, and to democracy are blocked. The triad of *democracy*, *education*, and *religion* that concerned me in this text can be better understood starting from Dewey's political philosophy – I mean the relevance of his emancipated and pragmatic political philosophy to the Arab-Islamic context, where people in the 21st century still mourn and long for their deceased dictators, and where the dominant thinking is unable to overcome its pure eyes and understand that the long-awaited democracy without the creation of a new man or an education for democracy, one that creates society from new, will not be able to protect itself from the authoritarian forces. Here are five points from Dewey's political philosophy that shed light on the educational crisis in the Arab world today:

2.1. Education for the present

Democracy is not on the edge but at the center of the educational project – against state paternalism and religious guardianship, Dewey argues, and entirely in the spirit of Kant of the Enlightenment text, for a democratic education that fosters individual development. Democratic education aspires to replace the traditional, undemocratic education system and its dogmatic *modus operandi*. This education prioritizes something besides the past and rejects the concept of inheritance. It is essential that the past does not dictate our lives, and we should have a democratic relationship with it. This means keeping the rights of future generations in mind and valuing experience over blind allegiance or closed belonging that the fundamentalists of all colors propagate. It does not mean that Dewey is defending a nihilism of the past, as 19th-century anarchism did. In Dewey's words, "As a society becomes more enlightened, it realizes that it is responsible not to transmit and conserve the whole of its existing achievements, but only such as make for a better future society." (Dewey 2008, 23-24) He further explains his attitude towards the past as follows:

A knowledge of the past and its heritage is of great significance when it enters into the present, but not otherwise. And the mistake of making the records and remains of the past the main material of education is that it cuts the vital connection of present and past and tends to make the past a rival of the present and the present a more or less futile imitation of the past. Under such circumstances, culture becomes an ornament and solace; a refuge and asylum. [...] The past is a great resource for the imagination; it adds a new dimension to life, but on condition that it be seen as the past of the present, and not as another and disconnected world. (Dewey 2008, 70)

2.2. Emphasis of the Individual

In Dewey's view, democracy is not just a superstructure or a form of organization of political power but extends to society, the individual, and the public sphere. The institutions and laws that

characterize a democratic state are of little value if they do not help to realize democracy at the level of individuals and in a democratic manner. The democratic state is an extension of individuals and their freedoms. It is to Dewey what moral law is to Kant: I choose it of my own free will. Dewey writes,

Democracy as a personal, an individual, way of life involves nothing fundamentally new. But when applied it puts a new practical meaning in old ideas. Put into effect it signifies that powerful present enemies of democracy can be successfully met only by the creation of personal attitudes in individual human beings; that we must get over our tendency to think that its defense can be found in any external means whatever, whether military or civil, if they are separated from individual attitudes so deep-seated as to constitute personal character. (Dewey 1976, 226)⁴

In contrast to the *separatist state*, as I call the contemporary Arab state, that prioritizes *modernization* over *modernity* or individual rights and freedoms and separates itself from society and its destiny. The democratic state, as defined by Dewey, is closely intertwined with culture and the individual. Instead, it is in a free, critical, open, and continuous dialogue with the culture that expresses the individual and his aspirations, which Axel Honneth, for example, will consider as he links Dewey's position with Durkheim's. (Honneth 2011, 504) For Dewey, as Honneth emphasizes it, "[D]emocracy is for him primarily the superior form of government, because it makes use of the intelligence of all subjects concerned in the reflexive management of social problems." (Honneth 2011, 505) This is not an elitist undertaking. In other words:

Democracy is the faith that the process of experience is more important than any special result attained, so that special results achieved are of ultimate value only as they are used to enrich and order the process. Since the process of experience is capable of being educative, faith in democracy is all one with faith in experience and education. (Dewey 1976, 229)

Or as Ruth Anna Putnam emphasizes it, "What makes society, in Dewey's eyes, the ideal type of organism is precisely that, when democratically organized, it makes ethical individualism possible." (Putnam 2017, 445)

2.3. The Incompleteness of the State

No less important is Dewey's conception of the incompleteness of the state. The democratic state is not complete, nor does it seek to be so. Instead, unlike the totalitarian, theocratic, and neoliberal state, it does not accept completion because it contradicts democracy as an expression of a constantly transforming culture. "By its very nature, a State is ever something to be scrutinized, investigated, searched for. Almost as soon as its form is stabilized, it needs to be re-made." (Dewey 1946, 31-32)

This is another reason Dewey's understanding of democracy is not a blank cheque for capitalism. He would certainly reject the idea of an *end of history*, as the neoliberal frenzy propagates

it. His harsh criticism of the marketization of the press of his time is proof that he is not far removed from Horkheimer's and Adorno's critique of the culture industry, (Honneth 2011, 507-509) but without their pessimism – a pessimism that in the end leads to a closed form of critique and also to political apathy or hopelessness.

2.4. Democracy as Cooperation.

Cooperation is central to Dewey's understanding of democracy. According to Honneth: "Dewey, in contrast to republicanism and to democratic proceduralism, takes his orientation not from the model of communicative consultation but from the model of social cooperation." (Honneth 1998, 765)

This implies a rejection of negative freedom, which cuts individuals off from the destiny of society or ethical life. This is a reason why Honneth sees Dewey as close to the young Marx and far from Tocqueville. (Honneth 1998, 767) Already in one of his first texts on democracy, namely *The Ethics of Democracy*, Dewey defends the idea of an "internal connection between cooperation, freedom, and democracy." (Honneth 1998, 767) Democracy is not an arithmetic game or a numerical majority, and individuals are not isolated islands. But this cooperation is not an unworldly one. It presupposes a genuine division of labor. (Honneth 1998, 776)

2.5. Democracy as a Way of Protest

Dewey's concept of democracy as a way of life is of great importance in the age of neoliberal globalization. Today's critical theory has explained that since the 1970s, we have been dealing with a process of divorce between democracy and capitalism or with "the process of the de-democratization of capitalism through the de-economization of democracy." (Streeck 2017, 28) This is also why people in the democracies feel abandoned by politics. It is further why we are experiencing harsh criticism of representative democracy from both left and right populism. This critique of democracy in the West is instrumentalized by the anti-democratic forces in the Islamic world to legitimize the dominant political and social order. Democracy in its neoliberal age has decoupled from democratic citizenship. It has degraded into a representative rather than an emancipatory experience, as Dewey understands it. In other words, it has distanced itself from the social destiny of society. Equal participation in social life, the adaptation of institutions to new developments, and the habit of experimentalism are all part and parcel of a living democracy. (Hyttén 2016, 986-987) Therefore, it is not wrong to see the new social movements fighting for a just globalization and protesting against social degradation in many parts of the world as a form of this experimentalism. (Hyttén 2016, 991) They certainly align with Dewey's understanding of democracy as a social cooperation and an emancipatory project for the individual and the collective. We should not forget that Dewey saw in "*passivity, complacency, and hopelessness*" a danger to democracy. (Hyttén 2016, 994) The opponents of neoliberal globalization teach us, in the sense of Dewey, that history is open, that democracy is an unfinished project, and that another world is still possible.

3. Dewey's Legacy and the Islam of Today

In his book *A Common Faith*, Dewey defends the religious against organized religion. He understands organized religion as a throwback to a premodern value system that focuses on a supernatural God and not on human beings. (Dewey 1934, 2) The belief in a supernatural is, for Dewey, an enemy to true faith. (Ryan 1995, 163) On the other hand, the *religious* expresses a specific experience anchored in life and society. To say *religious* and not *religion* is to accept that religion plays a role in social existence, not from the outside and not as a metaphysical or institutionalized authority or pre-established value system, but from the inside of society. Dewey is not distant from Kant's religion of reason. Still, he is more decisive than Kant in his rejection of a supernatural deity and entirely in agreement with Hegel's rejection of institutionalized Christianity. Dewey remained an Enlightenment in his critique of religion. We must not forget that institutionalized religion chiefly emptied the religion of its ethical message. Religion, in its supernatural variation, separates morality from the realm of nature, i.e., experience, by tracing values and ideals back to the supernatural. For Dewey, our task is to liberate the religious from the metaphysical or to understand the religious in and out of the social and its interactions. We can understand this better by looking at historical Islam. We will soon see that Islam did not know the concept of *man* and that of *history*. (Hanafi 1992, 17) It is a faith that revolves around *God* and not around *man*.

It is no exaggeration to claim that "traditional religion's belief in a supernatural world blocks the road to moral progress and human betterment in this world." (Baurain 2011, 84) Nevertheless, I am of the opinion that the problem with religion lies not in its conception of a supernatural God but in our idea or image of that God. Nevertheless, Dewey's critique of official religion involves an act of democratization because it starts from the idea that the individual can know the truth of faith, independent of the power of official theology and its hierarchies. To say it in concrete language — the problem of religion lies in fundamentalism and its intolerance of ambiguity.⁵ In the Islamic world, it is a fundamentalism that seeks to transform religion into a political project and to dominate society and the individual in the name of a past ideal that it knows only by *heredity*, an ideological one, and not by *experience*. And it is not a rhetorical exaggeration if Abdelwahab Meddeb writes, "We must understand that the emergence of this thin and poor Islam acts first and foremost against Islam itself as a civilization and a culture." (Meddeb 2002, 51) And he does not exaggerate too when he calls the theocentrism of Maududi, the father of modern Islamism, totalitarian and nihilist because it sacrifices man to a closed religiosity. As Nasr Abou Zeid has rightly analyzed, "The important thing for this discourse is to extend its hegemony through the consecration of the principle of sovereignty, which brings everything back to God and abolishes man's free will." (Abou Zeid 1999, 144-145)

Olivier Roy, for his part, tries to decipher the phenomenon of *poor Islam*, its etiology, and its message. He finds an explanation for it in *deterritorialization*, i.e., in globalization and *deculturation*. Both phenomena concern the other:

Deterritorialization is not only associated with the movement of people (which only affects a small percentage of the global population), but also with the circulation of ideas, cultural objects, information and modes of consumption generally in a non-territorial space. But in order to circulate, the religious object must appear universal, disconnected from a specific culture that has to be understood in order for the message to be grasped. Religion therefore circulates outside knowledge. Salvation does not require people to know, but to believe. (Roy 2013, 6)

According to Roy, we are witnessing a *deculturation* of religion in the context of globalization. We must add, however, that the case of Islam, which reflects a backward society, is more delicate because – in Laroui’s language – it has not experienced “*the liberal moment*”. The dialogue with modernity and its epistemological, political, and legal achievements is still pending with Islam, and not with Western Christianity. In the Arab world today, we live in Islam without its culture. We also experience it without ethics because today’s Islam condemns individuality as heresy. In the name of an imaginary purity that has nothing to do with the rich history of Islam, we have sacrificed this religion and its cultural heritage to fundamentalism. As Abou Zeid defends, Islam’s cultural heritage is “not unique but multiple and in constant motion, changing according to the nature of the forces that produce it. Heritage cannot be traced back to a single datum but to several trends and currents expressing different positions, ideologies and visions.” (Abou Zeid 1999, 20-21) For this reason, I advocate a democratic approach to this cultural and religious heritage, free from any form of ideological appropriation. A fruitful encounter with this heritage is only possible within a democratic education system.

In this light, what characterizes the *religious* as conceived by him in his book *A Common Faith*? In Bradley Baurain’s words:

The religious is characterized by a rejection of creeds, doctrines, rituals, and other elements of organized religion. Instead, an authentically religious attitude or orientation is existential and humanist. Moral faith rests not upon a divine Supreme being or divinely revealed truths, but upon the dynamic potential of inquiry to discover knowledge and pursue ideals, that is, to act on experiential knowledge in order to improve life. (Baurain 2011, 75)

To paraphrase, Dewey offers a critique of religion that aims to free it from its traditional rituals and dogmas. It is important to note that Dewey’s approach is not atheistic, as I mentioned earlier, because atheism could amount to replacing one set of “institutionalized belief system” (such as religion) with another “institutionalized belief system” (such as secular dogma).⁶ Instead, Dewey advocates a religion rooted in spirituality and personal experience, which involves establishing meaningful connections with other humans and society at large. His goal is to encourage individuals to live a religious life that is in tune with the modern world and its scientific advancements. As Baurain explains it, “From Dewey’s perspective, the authentically religious holds the potential to unify the natural, scientific, moral, and social dimensions of experience.” (Baurain 2011, 80)

Habermas' position is not different when he asks religion to express its convictions in the secular language of modernity. (Habermas 2001, 21) In an earlier work, Dewey notes that "[r]eligion has lost itself in cults, dogmas and myths." (Dewey 2007, 330) It is unable to address modern society and modern man. To use Helmuth Plessner's language, it realizes itself more as *social radicalism* or as a communal temptation. (Plessner 1999, 103-104) In the sense of Dewey, religion must be democratized, which means allowing itself to be liberated from a premodern authority and ideal. The only authority that recognizes religion in a democracy is that of experience. (Baurain 2011, 81)

Concluding Remarks

Given all of the above, we can say with Dewey that the relationship between education and democracy is organic and that its function is to build a democratic individual and a democratic society. As he emphasizes, "The devotion of democracy to education is a familiar fact. [...] Since a democratic society repudiates the principle of external authority, it must find a substitute in voluntary disposition and interest; these can be created only by education." (Dewey 2008, 80) The individual creates society to the same extent that society makes the individual. Hence, Dewey's praise of Hegel's contribution and his assertion that historical or social institutions contribute to the formation of the mind strongly means that the education project is a social project and should be so, not as Rousseau thought. But Dewey, at the same time, criticizes Hegel's idealism for linking the work of institutions to the spirit of the world, but especially his ideal conception of these institutions and the absolute goal he sets for it, will bring it to swallow up "concrete individualities, though magnifying The Individual in the abstract." (Dewey 2008, 57) Just as Dewey refuses to tie education to an absolute goal that liberates institutions and hinders the individual's freedom, he refuses to limit it to rigid ideals that prohibit movement or change, as with Plato's philosophy of education. Plato believes that change inevitably leads to chaos. Dewey also criticizes the Platonic idea that education only follows the establishment of the ideal state because this implies that the state is not the natural outcome of the inner movement of society. (Dewey 2008, 83) The same platonic idea is repeated in different languages by the proponents of the democratic transition in the Arab World since, in their social and cultural blindness, they link the spread of democratic culture with the emergence of a democratic state.

Last but not least, let us not forget that education is never truly completed; it will be present throughout the democratic life of the citizen. For this reason, any discourse on democratic transition risks not only not understanding the indispensability of education for democracy but also the meaning of democracy itself, which cannot be reduced to a political institution or a government. My defense of considering the culture of society in all thinking about democracy, or the necessity of liberating society to liberate politics, or the necessity of building a political and social culture that will support the democratic transition does not mean at all that I adopt a culturalist position that speaks of the consistent and absolute essence of Arab-Islamic culture and its hostility to democracy. Arab-Islamic culture cannot develop towards democracy under unjust political and economic

conditions. The democratization from above that Arab political scientists defend today is nothing more than an echo of the putschist mentality that has dominated nationalist circles in the Arab world for decades. They have remained faithful children of the prevailing political culture.

Regarding the question of religion, it is essential to emphasize their social and historical nature. Islam changed radically when it moved from the Arabian Peninsula to the Mediterranean in the Middle Ages, and it will change when it moves from a context of tyranny to a democratic context. This entails welcoming cultural change. However, when I say that cultural change is necessary, it does not mean that I fall into the essentialism of Huntington or Fukuyama and their fellow culturalists because the cultural shift I call for does not condemn Islam but the political power that abuses it against democracy and individual freedoms.

Even if Abdelwahab El-Affendi presents several pieces of empirical evidence that confirm that democratic culture is not a condition for democratic transition, (El-Affendi 2010, 16) what such analysis overlooks, the results that cannot be generalized to all regions of the world, and what El-Affendi misses is that the goal of the democratic transition is not a democratic transition in itself. It does not lie in the liberation of the state but in the liberation of man, and what that means is building free social relations, not only horizontally between the ruler and the ruled. As George Tarabichi writes in language reminiscent of John Dewey, democracy cannot

be a system of government without being a system of society. It is not permissible for the relations between the rulers and the ruled to proceed without the relations between the ruled themselves. Although it is by definition a system of the state, it is in essence a system of civil society. (Tarabichi 2006, 17)

Hisham Sharabi is right when he sees the patriarchal structures of Arab societies as allies of authoritarianism. We cannot live our freedom and experience our democracy in a patriarchal Islam, but only in an Islam that has gone through the Kantian cold-water cure of modernity. In other words, the claim that today's Islam or its culture is not hostile to modernity is the product of a mindset alienated from the reality of Arab society. Such an approach springs from a false conception of democracy, devalues education, and ultimately reproduces the *separatist state* it rightly criticizes.⁷

Endnotes:

1. Dewey writes: "Intolerance, abuse, calling of names because of differences of opinion about religion or politics or business, as well as because of differences of race, color, wealth or degree of culture are treason to the democratic way of life." John Dewey, "Creative Democracy: The Task before Us," In *The Later Works of John Dewey, 1925–1953, vol. 14, Essays*, edited by J. A. Boydston, Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1976, pp. 227-228.
2. It must be pointed out that Sayyed Qutb, who received an American scholarship to study education in America, is the same one who attacks pragmatism and its conception of education, but often in ignorance of its meaning, not only for the American context but also for the Arab-Islamic context.

- See: Nadia Duvall, *Islamist Occidentalism. Sayyid Qutb and the Western Other*, Berlin: GerlachPress, 2019, p. 76.
3. By this concept, I mean the various forms of bovarism or escape from reality among the young generation, which are an expression of a structural crisis in Arab societies and an expression of the failure of the modernization project.
 4. As explained by Mathieu Gagnon, a Canadian specialist in Dewey's Philosophy: "In a way, the State is not conceived of as an authoritarian monologue imposing itself on culture but as being in dialogue with it. as a response to the problems that emerge from it. Which also means acting on it to reconstruct it.", See his doctoral thesis: *Savoir ce que l'on fait. L'héritage hégélien de la bildung dans la philosophie de la culture de John Dewey*, Laval University 2022, p. 353 (Manuscript).
 5. According to sociologist Donald Levine, Protestantism promotes purification, austerity, and anti-pluralism by rejecting religious differences and other sects. Levine believes this Puritan ideology is responsible for America's unique desire to control nature to an extreme extent, ultimately leading to an aversion towards ambiguity in American culture. Donald N. Levine, *The Flight from Ambiguity. Essays in social and cultural Theory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, p. 37.
 6. Gordon Mitchell explains Dewey's position as follows: "Both militant atheism and supernaturalism are, in his opinion, preoccupied with humankind in isolation from their fellows and from nature". Gordon Mitchell, "The Sacred in the Everyday: John Dewey on Religion in Public education," In *Pragmatism, Education, and Children. International Philosophical Perspectives*, edited by Michael Taylor, Helmut Schreier, Paulo Ghiraldelli, Jr., Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2008, p. 114.
 7. Abdelwahab El-Affandi presents a convincing picture of the "Separatist State", as I call it, in the Arab context. He underlines that the state of national independence inherited the colonial state and must be understood as an extension of it. It is a state alienated from society and its fundamental issues. Instead, the matter is related to an Institution at war with society, "seeing in every move within civil society as a threat, every independent economic development a mortal danger." Abdelwahab El-Affandi, "Political culture and the crisis of democracy in the Arab World." *Democracy in the Arab World. Explaining the Deficit*. Edited by Ibrahim Elbadawi and Samir Makdisi, Abingdon: Routledge, 2010, p. 30.

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