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Democracy in a Multipolar World[†]

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Summary

Introduction

I have decided that the best way to address the theme of this conference, 'Interrogating Democracy in International Relations', is to examine the implications of my agonistic approach for envisaging what democracy could mean in a multipolar world.

I will begin by presenting the basic tenets of the theoretical framework that informs my reflection on the political. It has been elaborated in *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*, co-written with Ernesto Laclau[1]. In this book we argue that the two concepts needed to grasp the nature of the political are 'antagonism' and 'hegemony'. Both point to the need for acknowledging the

[†] [N.T.] O texto foi originalmente publicado em **Millennium: Journal of International Studies**, v. 37, n. 3, p. 549-561, 2009.
[1] LACLAU, Ernesto; MOUFFE, Chantal. **Hegemony and Socialist Strategy**: Towards a Radical Politics. London: Verso, 2001.

dimension of radical negativity and the ever present possibility of antagonism which impede the full totalisation of society and foreclose the possibility of a society beyond division and power. They require coming to terms with the lack of a final ground and the undecidability that pervades every order; this means, in our vocabulary, recognising the hegemonic nature of every kind of social order and envisaging society as the product of a series of practices whose aim is to establish order in a context of contingency. The practices of articulation through which a given order is created and the meaning of social institutions is fixed are what we call 'hegemonic practices'. Every order is the temporary and precarious articulation of contingent practices. Things could always have been otherwise and every order is predicated on the exclusion of other possibilities. It is always the expression of a particular configuration of power relations. What is at a given moment accepted as the 'natural' order, jointly with the common sense that accompanies it, is the result of sedimented hegemonic practices; it is never the manifestation of a deeper objectivity that would be exterior to the practices that brought it into being. Every order is therefore susceptible of being challenged by counter-hegemonic practices which attempt to disarticulate it in order to install another form of hegemony.

In *The Return of the Political*, *The Democratic Paradox* and *On the Political* I have developed this reflection on 'the political', understood as the antagonistic dimension which is inherent in all human societies. I have proposed to distinguish between 'the political' and 'politics'; 'the political' refers to the dimension of antagonism which can take many forms and can emerge in diverse social relations, a dimension that can never be eradicated; 'politics' refers to the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and to organise human coexistence in conditions which are always potentially conflicting because they are affected by the dimension of 'the political'.

The denial of 'the political' in its antagonistic dimension is, I have argued, what impedes liberal theory's ability to grasp the roots of violence and to envisage politics in an adequate way. Indeed 'the political' in its antagonistic dimension cannot be made to disappear by simply denying and wishing it away, which is the typical liberal gesture; such negation only leads to impotence, an impotence which characterises liberal thought when confronted with the emergence of antagonisms and forms of violence that, according to its theory, belong to a bygone age when reason had not yet managed to control the supposedly archaic passions.

The main problem with liberal rationalism is that it deploys a logic of the social based on an essentialist conception of 'being as presence' and that it conceives objectivity as being inherent to the things themselves. This is why it cannot apprehend the process of construction of political identities. It cannot recognise that there can only be an identity when it is constructed as difference and that any social objectivity is constituted through acts of power. What it refuses to admit is that

any form of social objectivity is ultimately political and that it must bear the traces of the acts of exclusion which govern its constitution.

The notion of 'constitutive outside' can be helpful here to make this argument more explicit. This term has been proposed by Henry Staten[2] to refer to a number of themes developed by Jacques Derrida through notions like 'supplement', 'trace' and 'différance'. Its aim is to highlight the fact that the creation of an identity implies the establishment of a difference. When dealing with political identities, which are always collective identities, we are dealing with the creation of an 'us' that can only exist by its demarcation from a 'them'. This does not mean of course that such a relation is by necessity an antagonistic one. But it means that there is always the possibility of this relation us/them becoming one of friend/enemy. This happens when the others, who up to now had been considered as simply different, start to be perceived as putting into question our identity and threatening our existence. From that moment on, any form of us/them relation, be it religious, ethnic or economic, becomes the locus of an antagonism. What is important here is to acknowledge that the very condition of possibility for the formation of political identities is at the same time the condition of impossibility of a society from which antagonism would have been eliminated. Antagonism is therefore an ever present possibility.

1. An Agonistic Model

An important part of my reflection has been dedicated to the elaboration of what I call an 'agonistic' model of democracy. My objective is to provide what Richard Rorty would call a 'metaphoric redescription' of liberal democratic institutions which, I claim, is better able to grasp what is at stake in pluralist democratic politics than the two main models of democracy currently on offer, the aggregative and the deliberative ones. In a nutshell, my argument goes as follows. Once we acknowledge the dimension of 'the political', we begin to realise that one of the main challenges for pluralist liberal democratic politics consists in trying to defuse the potential antagonism that exists in human relations. Indeed, the fundamental question is not how to arrive at a consensus reached without exclusion, because this would require the construction of an 'us' that would not have a corresponding 'them'. Yet this is impossible because, as I have just argued, the very condition for the constitution of an 'us' is the demarcation of a 'them'. The crucial issue then is how to establish this us/them distinction which is constitutive of politics in a way that is

[2] Ver STATEN, Henry. **Wittgenstein e Derrida**. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985.

compatible with the recognition of pluralism. Conflict in liberal democratic societies cannot and should not be eradicated since the specificity of 'modern democracy' is precisely the recognition and the legitimation of conflict. What modern liberal democratic politics requires is that the others are not seen as enemies to be destroyed but as adversaries whose ideas can be fought against, even fiercely, but whose right to defend those ideas will never be put into question. To put it in another way, what is important is that conflict does not take the form of an 'antagonism' (struggle between enemies) but the form of an 'agonism' (struggle between adversaries). A well-functioning democracy calls for a confrontation of democratic political positions. If this is missing, there is always the danger that this democratic confrontation will be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values or essentialist forms of identifications. Too much emphasis on consensus, together with aversion towards confrontations, leads to apathy and to disaffection with political participation. This is why a liberal democratic society requires a debate about possible alternatives. It must provide political forms of identifications around clearly differentiated democratic positions, or, to put it in Niklas Luhman's terms, there must be a clear 'splitting of the summit', a real choice between the policies put forward by the government and those of the opposition. While consensus is no doubt necessary, it must be accompanied by dissent. Consensus is needed on the institutions which are constitutive of liberal democracy and on the ethico-political values that should inform the political association, but there will always be disagreement concerning the meaning of those values and the way they should be implemented. In a pluralist democracy such disagreements are not only legitimate but also necessary. They allow for different forms of citizenship identification and are the stuff of democratic politics. When the agonistic dynamics of pluralism are hindered because of a lack of democratic forms of identifications, passions cannot be given a democratic outlet and the ground is laid for various forms of politics articulated around essentialist identities of nationalist, religious or ethnic type and for the multiplication of confrontations over non-negotiable moral values, with all the manifestations of violence that such confrontations entail.

2. Towards a Multipolar World

My agonistic model has been elaborated to provide a proper understanding of the nature of a specific political regime: liberal pluralist democracy. However, I think that some of its insights, for example the importance of offering the possibility for legitimate, 'agonistic' forms of conflict in order to avoid the explosion of antagonistic ones, can be useful in the field of international relations. Indeed the situation in the international arena is today in many respects similar to the

one found in domestic politics, with its lack of an agonistic debate about possible alternatives. Since the end of the Cold War we have been living in a unipolar world and the absence of legitimate alternatives to the dominant hegemonic order means that resistances against this hegemonic order cannot find legitimate forms of expression. This is why those resistances breed conflicts, which, when they explode, take antagonistic forms, putting into question the very basis of the existing order. As I have suggested in *On the Political*, it is the lack of political channels for challenging the hegemony of the neo-liberal model of globalisation which is at the origin of the proliferation of discourses and practices of radical negation of the established order.

Contrary to some currently fashionable views, I do not believe that the solution to our current predicament lies in the establishment of a cosmopolitan democracy. The problem, in my view, with the cosmopolitan approach is that, whatever its formulation, it postulates the availability of a world beyond hegemony and beyond sovereignty, therefore negating the dimension of the political. Moreover, it is predicated on the universalisation of the Western model and therefore does not make room for a plurality of legitimate alternatives. All those who assert that the aim of politics – be it at the national or the international level – should be to establish consensus on one single model end up foreclosing the possibility of legitimate dissent and creating the terrain for the emergence of violent forms of antagonisms.

In my view, the challenge that we are facing is therefore the following: if on one side we acknowledge that every order is a hegemonic order and that there is no possible order 'beyond hegemony', but on the other side we also acknowledge the negative consequences of a unipolar world, organised around the hegemony of a hyper-power, what is the alternative? My suggestion is that the only solution lies in the pluralisation of hegemonies. Abandoning the illusory hope for a political unification of the world, we should advocate the establishment of a multipolar, agonistic world organised around several big regional units with their different cultures and values. I am not pretending, of course, that this would bring about the end of conflicts, but I am convinced that those conflicts are less likely to take an antagonistic form than in a world where a single economic and political model is presented as the only legitimate one and is imposed on all parties in the name of its supposedly superior rationality and morality.

Let me clarify here an important point. By speaking of an 'agonistic' world order, I am not trying to 'apply', strictly speaking, my agonistic domestic model to the field of international relations. What I am doing is bringing to the fore some similarities between those two very different realms. My objective is to stress that what is at stake in both cases is the importance of acknowledging the dimension of 'the political'. We need to realise that, instead of trying to bring about a consensus that would eliminate the very possibility of antagonism, the crucial task is to find ways to deal with conflicts so as to minimise the risks of them taking an antagonistic form. But

of course the conditions are very different in the domestic and the international domains. The kind of 'conflictual consensus' based on divergent interpretations of shared ethico-political principles that is necessary for the implementation of an agonistic model of liberal democracy cannot be expected at the global level because such a consensus supposes the existence of a political community which is not available at the international level. Indeed, to envisage the world order in terms of a plurality of hegemonic blocs requires relinquishing the idea that they need to be parts of an encompassing moral and political unit. The illusions of a global ethics, global civil society and other cosmopolitan dreams impede our ability to recognise that in the field of international relations one can only reach prudential agreements, and that all attempts to definitively overcome the 'state of nature' between states by the establishment of a global covenant run into insurmountable difficulties.

I am going to refer to Norberto Bobbio's model of 'institutional pacifism' to illustrate my point because it provides a good example of those difficulties. Bobbio's cosmopolitan approach[3] consists in applying Hobbes's contractualism to the relations between states. Utilising the Hobbesian distinction between *pactum societatis* and *pactum subjectionis*, he argues that what is needed to create a peaceful international order is, in a first move, that states establish among themselves a permanent association through a treaty of non-aggression, jointly with a series of rules in order to resolve their disputes. This stage of *pactum societatis* should be followed by their submission to a common power that would ensure their effective adherence to the agreed treaties, using force if necessary (*pactum subjectionis*). Bobbio distinguishes three stages: the first, the polemical stage, the situation in the state of nature in which conflicts are resolved only by force; the second, the agonistic stage that corresponds to the *pactum societatis*, which excludes the use of reciprocal force to resolve conflicts and settles them by negotiation; and finally, the pacific stage, which is when a *pactum subjectionis* is established with the existence of a Third Party able to enforce the agreements established in the agonistic stage. The pacific stage would see the overcoming of the state of nature in international relations, and Bobbio believes that, although we have not yet reached the stage of a *pactum subjectionis*, the creation of the United Nations was an enormous step forward in that direction. He proposes to make a distinction between two different judicial figures: 'one who, despite his superior authority, does not have the coercive power to enforce his decision (as still happens in international law today) and another whose superior authority grants him this power insofar as the pact of obedience has entrusted the use of legitimate force to it and to it alone. Only when the Judge has coercive power is the pacific stage wholly

[3] BOBBIO, Norberto Bobbio. Democracy and the International System. In: ARCHIBUGI, Daniele; HELD, David (Eds.). **Cosmopolitan Democracy**. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1995.

achieved.'[4] The current situation is one in which the United Nations finds itself in the position of a powerless Third Party Judge. This is due to the fact that states remain sovereign and have not yet abandoned their monopoly of force to a common authority endowed with exclusive rights of coercive power. For Bobbio, a peaceful international system requires the completion of the transition from the agonistic to the pacific stage by the concentration of military force in the hands of a supreme international authority.

Although inspired by Hobbes, Bobbio's project departs from him in two significant aspects. Hobbes of course asserted that the passage from a state of nature to a civil union was not possible in the field of international relations, and he repeatedly denied the possibility of both a *pactum societatis* and a *pactum subjectionis* among states. The pact of submission of which his *Leviathan* offers a model could only exist within a state. Moreover it was of an autocratic nature. Bobbio intends to go further. Not only does he want to apply this model to the relations among states, he also wants the Third Party to acquire a democratic form. This is why he insists that this entrusting of coercive power to a superior entity should be the result of a universal agreement founded on democratic procedures. He asserts that peace and democracy are inextricably linked and that, for the power of the international Leviathan not to be oppressive, it is important that the states, which are at the origin of the contract through which the 'superstate' holder of a legal monopoly of international force is established, are democracies constitutionally committed to the protection of the fundamental rights of their citizens. The problem of course is that not all existing states are democratic, and this leads him to difficulties that he openly acknowledges:

> I am well aware that my whole argument is based on conjecture inspired by the Kantian idea that perpetual peace is feasible only among states with the same form of republican government (the form in which collective decisions are made by the people) – supplemented by the idea that the union of states must also be republican in form ... Like any conjecture, my thesis may be expressed only as an 'if-then' hypothetic proposition: 'If all the states were republican, if the society of all states were republican, then ...' 'If' is the stumbling block.[5]

Bobbio is clearly caught in a vicious circle that he formulates in the following way: 'states can become democratic only in a fully democratised international society, but a fully democratised international society presupposes that all the states that compose it are democratic. The completion of one process is hindered by the non-completion of the other.'[6] Bobbio is nevertheless hopeful for the future because, in his view, the number of democratic states is increasing, and he believes that the process of the democratisation of international society is therefore truly under way.

[4] Ibidem, p. 25.
[5] Ibidem, p. 38.
[6] Ibidem, p. 39.

There are of course many people today who would disagree with such optimism, among them Robert Kagan, who, in his recent book *The Return of History and the End of Dreams*, argues that the global competition between liberal and autocratic governments is likely to intensify in coming years. Kagan is of course a neo-conservative concerned with the maintenance of American hegemony, but many people on the left are also sceptical about the optimistic, 'smooth' view of globalisation.

The question, however, is not a matter of pessimism versus optimism, and it should be addressed in a different way. If, as I have argued, every order is by necessity a hegemonic one, it is clear that the political unification of the world advocated by Bobbio, if it was ever to happen, could only take place under the hegemony of a central power. Bobbio's figure of a democratic international Leviathan, created through a pact of submission by which all states agree through democratic procedures that a Third Party Judge will have the coercive power to resolve their conflicts, could only be a global hegemon. His hoped-for democratic world order would in fact be a unipolar world where, in the name of universalism, the Western model of democracy would have been imposed worldwide. This would have dire consequences and, as I have already indicated, we are currently witnessing how attempts to homogenise the world are provoking violent adverse reactions from those societies whose specific values and cultures are rendered illegitimate by the enforced universalisation of the Western model.

It is time, I submit, to relinquish the very idea of a *pactum subjectionis* among states and acknowledge that peace in a pluralist world can only be reached through the establishment of a variety of *pactum societatis*, i.e. a multiplicity of pragmatic multilateral agreements which will always remain precarious and contingent. Against Bobbio's illusion that a pacific stage could ever be reached in the field of international relations, it is necessary to accept that the agonistic stage is the only alternative to the state of nature. To envisage what are, under the current conditions of globalisation, the most adequate forms of constructing such an agonistic order, this is the challenge that we are facing.

3. Which Democracy for a Multipolar 'Agonistic' World?

What could be the place of democracy in such a multipolar order? This is the question that I want to address in the last part of my article. It is evident that a multipolar world will not necessarily be a democratic one and that several of its poles might be organised around different political principles. Since we have discarded the presence of an impartial Third Party Judge, able to impose what would be deemed the only legitimate order, a coexistence of political regimes is unavoidable. This is of course the situation that we are beginning to witness, with the first signs of the advent

of a multipolar world in which China, certainly not a democracy, will no doubt play an important role. My position on this question is that a multipolar world composed of a variety of regimes would certainly be better than the current unipolar one because it is less likely to foster the emergence of extreme forms of antagonism.

But I do not think that we need to discard the possibility that democracy might become established worldwide. However, this question would have to be envisaged in a different way, abandoning the claim that this process of democratisation should consist in the global implementation of the Western liberal democratic model. Democracy in a multipolar world could take a variety of forms, according to the different modes of inscription of the democratic ideal in a variety of contexts.

As I have argued in *The Democratic Paradox*,[7] liberal democracy is the articulation between two different traditions: liberalism, with its emphasis on individual liberty and universal rights, and democracy, which privileges the idea of equality and 'rule by the people', i.e. popular sovereignty. Such an articulation is not a necessary but a contingent one; it is the product of a specific history. Indeed, the liberal democratic model, with its particular conception of human rights, is the expression of a particular cultural and historical context, in which, as has often been noted, the Judaeo-Christian tradition has played a central role. Such a model of democracy is constitutive of our form of life and it is certainly worthy of our allegiance, but there is no reason to present it as the only legitimate way of organising human coexistence and to try to impose it on the rest of the world. The kind of individualism dominant in Western societies is alien to many other cultures, whose traditions are informed by different values, and democracy understood as 'rule by the people' can therefore take other forms, in which for instance the value of community is more pregnant than the idea of individual liberty.

The dominant view, found in many different currents of political theory, asserts that moral progress requires the acceptance of the Western model of liberal democracy because it is the only possible shell for the implementation of human rights. This thesis has to be rejected but that does not necessarily mean discarding the idea of human rights. It might in fact continue to play a role but on condition that it is reformulated in a way that permits a pluralism of interpretations. To elucidate this issue we find important insights in the work of Raimundo Panikkar, who, in an article entitled 'Is the Notion of Human Rights a Western Concept',[8] asserts that, in order to understand the meaning of human rights, it is necessary to scrutinise the function played by this notion in our culture. This will allow us, he says, to examine later if this function is not fulfilled in different ways in other cultures. Panikkar urges us to enquire about the possibility of what he calls

[7] MOUFEE, Chantal. **The Democratic Paradox**. London: Verso, 2000.
[8] PANIKKAR, Raimundo. Is the Notion of Human Rights a Western Concept? **Diogenes**, v. 120, p. 81-82, 1982.

'homeomorphic', i.e. functional, equivalents of the notion of human rights. Looking at Western culture, we ascertain that human rights are presented as providing the basic criteria for the recognition of human dignity and as being the necessary condition for a just social and political order. Therefore the question we need to ask is whether other cultures do not give different answers to the same question.

Once it is acknowledged that what is at stake in human rights is the dignity of the person, the possibility of different manners of envisaging this question becomes evident, as well as the different ways in which it can be answered. What Western culture calls 'human rights' is in fact a culturally specific form of asserting the dignity of the person and it would be very presumptuous to declare that it is the only legitimate one. Many theorists have pointed out how the very formulation in terms of 'rights' depends on a way of moral theorising which, while appropriate for modern liberal individualism, can be inappropriate for grasping the question of the dignity of the person in other cultures. According to Francois Jullien, for instance, the idea of 'rights' privileges the freeing of the subject from its vital context and devalues its integration in a multiplicity of spheres of belonging. It corresponds to a defensive approach which relinquishes the religious dimension and presents the individual as absolute. Jullien notes that the concept of 'rights of man' does not find any echo in the thought of classical India, which does not envisage man as being isolated from the rest of the natural world. While 'liberty' is the final word in European culture, for the Far East, from India to China, the final word is 'harmony'.[9]

In the same line of thought Panikkar illustrates how the concept of human rights relies on a well-known set of presuppositions, all of which are distinctively Western, namely: there is a universal human nature that can be known by rational means; human nature is essentially different from and higher than the rest of reality; the individual has an absolute and irreducible dignity that must be defended against society and the state; the autonomy of that individual requires that society be organised in a non-hierarchical way, as a sum of free individuals. All those presuppositions, claims Panikkar, are definitively Western and liberal, and they are distinguishable from other conceptions of human dignity in other cultures. For instance, there is no necessary overlap between the idea of the 'person' and the idea of the 'individual'. The 'individual' is the specific way in which Western liberal discourse formulates the concept of the self. Other cultures, however, envisage the self in different ways.

Many consequences stem from those considerations. One of the most important ones is that we have to recognise that the idea of 'autonomy', which is so central in Western liberal discourse and which is at the centre of our understanding of human rights, cannot have such a

[9] JULLIEN, Francois. **Le Monde Diplomatique**. February 2008, p. 24.

priority in other cultures where decision-making is less individualistic and more cooperative than in Western societies. This in no way signifies that those cultures are not concerned with the dignity of the person and the conditions for a just social order. What it means is that they deal with those questions in a different way. This is why the search for homeomorphic equivalents is a necessary one. Societies that envisage human dignity in a way which differs from the Western understanding of human rights would also have a different way of envisaging the nature and role of democratic institutions. To take seriously 'value pluralism' in its multiple dimensions therefore requires making room for the pluralism of cultures, forms of life and political regimes. This means that, to the recognition of a plurality of understandings of 'human rights', we should add the recognition of a plurality of forms of democracy.

Next to human rights, another crucial issue for democracy is the question of secularisation. In fact, even in the West there is a long-standing debate about the relation between democracy and the mode of existence of a secular society. As Jose Casanova has convincingly shown,[10] an impasse has been reached in that debate between the European and the American approaches and the different ways in which they envisage the nature of a secular society and the link between secularism and modernity. On one side, there are the European sociologists who believe that the decline in the societal power of religious institutions and the decline in religious beliefs and practices among individuals are necessary components of the process of modernisation; on the other side, there are the American sociologists of religion who reject the theory of secularisation because they do not see any decline in the religious beliefs and practices of the American people. What is really at stake in this debate is the following question: should secularisation be seen as a necessary feature of modernity and should it be seen as a precondition for modern liberal democratic politics? I am going to leave this question aside because the issue that I want to tackle is another one: even if we give an affirmative answer to this question in the context of Western democracy, does it mean that secularisation is a normative condition for all forms of democracy? Or should we not envisage the possibility of democratic societies where such a process did not take place? Casanova asks: 'Can the theory of secularisation as a particular theory of historical development be dissociated from general theories of global modernisation? Can there be a non-Western, non-secular modernity?'[11] I would like to make this question even more precise and ask: can there be a non-Western, non-secular modernity with a non-secular form of democracy? If, as many people assert, the European concept of secularisation is not particularly relevant for the United States, it is clear that it is even less relevant for other civilisations with very different modes

[10] CASANOVA, Jose. **Rethinking Secularization**: A Global Comparative Perspective. Hedgehog Review Spring, Summer 2006.
[11] Ibidem, p. 10.

of social structuration. What could be its relevance, for instance, for worldly religions like Confucianism or Taoism? As Casanova notes, their model of transcendence can hardly be called 'religious' and they do not have ecclesiastical organisation. In a sense they have always been 'worldly' and do not need to undergo a process of secularisation. One could say, for instance, that China and the Confucian civilisational area have been secular '*avant la lettre*'.[12]

The best way to avoid those pitfalls is to acknowledge the possibility of multiple modernities and to accept that the path followed by the West is not the only possible and legitimate one and that non-Western societies can follow different trajectories according to the specificity of their cultural traditions and of their religions. Once it is granted that the set of institutions constitutive of liberal democracy – with their vocabulary of human rights and their form of secularisation – are the result of a contingent historical articulation in a specific cultural context, there is no reason to see their adoption worldwide as the criterion of political modernity and as a necessary component of democracy. A pluralist approach should therefore envisage the possibility of other forms of articulation of the democratic ideal of government by the people, articulations in which religion would have a different type of relation with politics and in which human rights (provided we want to keep this term) would be conceived in ways which depart from their formulation in the individualistic liberal culture.

To be sure, in many parts of the world we find intellectuals and activists who are engaged in precisely that kind of reflection, working to elaborate a vernacular conception of democracy inscribed in their respective cultural and religious traditions. In the case of Islam, for instance, Noah Feldman has shown that what is at stake is how to envisage a constitutional order grounded in the sharia and devoted to the rule of law. He examines different attempts to visualise how a democratic Islamic state, a state governed through Islamic law and Islamic values, could reconcile divine sovereignty with the democratic principle of popular sovereignty. Mainstream Islamism, he notes, has accepted the compatibility of the sharia and democracy but differences exist concerning the mechanisms of reconciliation. The most prominent solution is 'for the constitution of the Islamic state to acknowledge divine sovereignty rather than establish popular sovereignty and then use it to enact Islamic law. On this theoretical model, the people function somewhat as the ruler did in the classical constitutional order: they accept the responsibility for implementing what God has commanded.'[13] According to some interpretations, this democratically elected legislature responsible for enacting the provisions of the sharia would need to be supervised by a constitutionalised process of Islamic judicial review. Feldman is aware of the difficulties that the

[12] Ibidem, p. 10.
[13] FELDMAN, Noah. **The Fall and Rise of the Islamic State**. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 119.

establishment of such a democratic Islamic state will encounter, but he insists that it would be an error for the West to see it as a threat to democracy and to try to destroy those who are advocating it.

The situation is no doubt different in other parts of the world, and in each case the solution will have to take account of specific circumstances and cultural traditions. But all those who want to develop vernacular models of democracy face the same problem with respect to the West: its refusal to acknowledge forms of democracy different from the liberal democratic one. Western powers are adamant that the only legitimate democracy is their current interpretation: multi-party electoral democracy, accompanied by an individualistic conception of human rights, and of course by free market policies. This is the model that they claim to have the moral duty to promote, or impose if necessary. The disastrous consequences of the imposition of such a model can be seen worldwide. To take the case of Africa, for instance, several authors have pointed out that the catastrophic conditions existing in many African countries are the consequence of the inadequate political system that was bequeathed to them by their former colonisers. Independence often left them not as stable national states but as a patchwork of ethnic fiefdoms, burdened with parliaments based on those of the former colonial power. In countries with so many ethnicities with their own language, customs and culture, multi-party democracy has led to political fragmentation and bitterly divided politics. Many specialists recognise that forms of democracy more adapted to African customs are needed and that governments of national unity might be better suited for holding those countries together and fostering their development.

As far as Asia is concerned, the situation is again different. There one of the challenges might be to reconcile the democratic principle of popular sovereignty with Confucianism and Taoism. The idea of 'Asian values' is often rejected on the grounds that it is used as an excuse by authoritarian rulers to justify their domination. In some cases there might indeed be some truth in this claim, but this should not lead to the dismissal of the legitimacy of such a notion. In the end those issues should be decided by the people concerned and it is not up to us Westerners to tell them how to organise their own societies. The thought that I would like to share with you in concluding is that we should acknowledge that the world is a pluriverse and realise that to accept a diversity of political forms of organisation will be more conducive to peace and stability than the enforcement of a universal model.

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