Islam as a Democratic Interlocutor?
Towards a Global Concept of Democracy

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It is interesting to make the observation that Islamic fundamentalists and Western political analysts have both come to the same conclusion as regards a so-called ''Islamic exception'. The former assert this position in defence of a set of doctrinal precepts unique of its kind which incorporates all aspects of human existence. They are thereby led to declare that Islam embraces a concept of democracy by whose very nature it is not admissible either to evince any scepticism as to its democratic potential, or to seek from outside any other experience by which to enrich it over and above what it already possesses. As good exegetes of the Qur'anic text, they base their arguments on passages from the scripture where effectively the ideas of counsel or consultation – *shura* (شورى) in Arabic – and of consensus – *ijma'* (إجماع) – do appear to demonstrate that the pillars of democracy are in fact Muslim in essence. In consequence, it would serve no useful purpose to import so-called democratic values and norms from the West in order to amend the Muslim tradition which a certain discourse, necessarily acquired from the West, does not fail to devalue by stigmatising its authoritarian aspects. This extreme point of view nevertheless ignores the fact that bringing new light to bear on an already rich tradition cannot but assist in leading us forward. There is no better evidence of this proposition than the way thinkers and philosophers from within the Islamic realm, from Kindî to Ibn Khaldûn, assimilated and appropriated elements of the Western heritage which some today would regard as being subversive.

The latter, that is to say, Western analysts, for their part tend to denounce Islam's propensity for propagating only authoritarian regimes and, on the strength of their observation of this hard-to-deny phenomenon, assert that the Muslim religion embodies an essentially anti-democratic character. More explicitly, by holding up the uniqueness of the democratic experience, and by applying a relatively deficient form of causal reasoning, they reach an explanation for the current authoritarianism of Muslim countries. Resolutely Eurocentric, they vigorously uphold the idea

by which the single and unique origin of democracy was to be found in ancient Greece. The idea that democracy was born in Athens is one of those unshakeable truths which over time have acquired the incommensurable status of holy writ. And yet, the Roman sources of democracy as just as important as its Greek origins, in the sense that it is rather from these that Western modernity has drawn its *raison d'être*, and to a large extent its institutions. Seen from this perspective, Western tradition is a little too precipitate in claiming a single source for democracy in Greece whereas it effectively owes it birth to a Roman experience which was by its nature much closer to the requisites and the mind-set on which it was progressively built. The idea of the sovereignty of the people is in fact much more Roman than it is Greek, something which cannot be gainsaid when the Athenian restriction of citizenship to free male native residents of the city is borne in mind.

The narrow exclusivity of this theoretical outlook advanced by certain Western political philosophers is today taking a particular form, that of affirming, albeit in more or less tentative fashion, the hegemony of the liberal model of democracy it terms both of its value and its validity. Such is the position of Fukuyama, for example, who asserts that the advent of liberal democracy has sounded the end of History.[1]

Despite this, for some time now a re-examination of the unique status of this democratic model is beginning to take shape, essentially through the work of Amartya Sen. According to that author, the democratic phenomenon could not be about a civilisation or a tradition which had sharply defined contours, nor, *a fortiori*, about a unique experience whose modalities and other practices are precisely circumscribed. In two articles from 1999 and 2003 devoted to discussing the occurrence of democratic processes in early non-European societies, Sen shows that India and the medieval Arab-Muslim world both witnessed remarkable democratic experiences, where tolerance and respect for others were not mere empty expressions.[2]

My purpose here is to line up side by side these two separate viewpoints of Islamic exceptionalism by showing that they both, the one as much as the other, are based upon a narrowness of theoretical conceptualisation and a denial of historical realities. I shall attempt to demonstrate the extent to which it is possible to illuminate typically Muslim concepts of 'high democratic potential', such as *shura* (شورى) and *ijma'* (إجماع) by the measure of certain Western theoretical experiments, both ancient and contemporary, whose character and interest I intend to clarify.

That said, it is not a question of replacing one Eurocentrism for another, but of bringing to light the way in which one Muslim in particular, in this instance Ibn Khaldûn, sensed the significance and utility of the Roman model of democracy for his own tradition when he compared the Muslim *shura* (شورى) with the Roman Senate. In the process, it is certainly a defining encounter that will be illuminated, but it was far from being a moment of destiny.

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I would like to show how it is possible to go beyond these two opposing views and establish the possibility of a democratic Islam based on the values of a participatory republic, rather than on those of liberalism. The issue is, in other words, to reveal that

the failure of contemporary democratic experiments in the Islamic world should not be considered an epistemological failure. In order to achieve this, I shall anchor my arguments around a certain number of philological and historical observations.

Let us start with an initial component, which focuses upon the juxtaposition of two different readings of the Qur'anic passages devoted to rendering explicit the idea of *shura* (شورى). There are essentially two verses involved, verse 159 of the 'Surah of Al-Imrân', as well, naturally, as verse 38 of the 'Surah of the Consultation' (or 'Counsel' according to the translations):

> Thus it is by God's mercy that thou art gentle to them. And hadst thou been rough or hard-hearted, they would certainly have dispersed from around thee. So pardon them and ask protection for them, and *consult them* [شاورهم] *in (important) matters.* But when thou hast determined, put thy trust in God. Surely God loves those who trust (in Him). [(*Al-Imrân* III, 159; our emphasis]

> Those who hearken to their Lord and establish regular prayer, *who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation* [بينهم شورى أمرهم], who spend of what We bestow on them for sustenance; [*The Consultation*, XLII, 38; our emphasis]

Nevertheless, other, though much less explicit, verses are often used to put forward the importance of the idea of consultation and the bringing together of ideas in the Muslim religion. Such is the case for example of the 'Surah of Taha' (XX) in which the medieval sage Al-Mawardi saw a very clear allusion in favour of deliberation and consultation in political decisions. Basing his argument on verses 29 to 32, in which Moses addresses Pharaoh and requests that he be assisted in his noble task, Mawardi shows that if the prophet himself asks for help from another to carry out his mission, then the sharing of a certain level of political power should not only be accepted by the different leaders, but also institutionalised as being a constitutional principle (Al-Sulami, 2003: 246 n. 23).

This idea is very often used to show that Islam is perfectly able to conceive of the *shura* (شورى) as a system of government and not simply as a council of the wise acting as a consultative body. Such is precisely the thesis whose relevance the Saudi Arabian Al-Sulami is striving to demonstrate, providing us unfortunately with a very interesting example of what the Muslims of today should *not* be doing.

It should be observed first and foremost, and without implicating Sulami in the matter, that this is a question of high stakes; it involves depreciating the classic interpretation of *shura* (شورى) as a council (*al-Nasiha'*) in favour of the more ambitious and more significant interpretation of it as a system of government whose purpose is to purify the political dimension of Islam of entrenched elitism. The traditional institution, a council of the wise chosen often on a very arbitrary basis (birth, influence, rank) and who are regarded as the sole individuals fit to give their opinions and to guide the decisions which will eventually be taken, in no way could be thought of as corresponding to the idea one might have of an egalitarian democracy. Hence, conceiving the *shura* (شورى) as a system of government provides assurance against a democracy of the elite, reserved exclusively for a handful of so-called enlightened personalities, political leaders, tribal chiefs and influential theologians.

However, doesn't privileging such a reading amount to showing rather too much theoretical audacity and engaging upon a hermeneutics which is, at the very least, impetuous and which risks upsetting not only those purists most ardently attached to the letter of the Qur'anic text, but equally sceptics of all persuasions likely to cast doubt on this major theoretico-conceptual divergence from orthodoxy? Sulami, who is well aware of this risk, would appear to have found the convincing counter: it would be sufficient to show that the interpretation of *shura* (شورى) as a system of government was precisely that which was current in the very early years of Islam, that is, the era of the Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs. Any attempt to throw doubt on this interpretation would thus be effectively defused; from being considered suspect, it would now gain in legitimacy through its close association with what is the norm *par excellence*.

But by this argument, Sulami is simply denying a historical reality which is effectively incontestable: the idea of *shura* (شورى) as a system has never in fact existed in Islam, whether at its beginnings or subsequently. The Prophet and the Rightly Guided Caliphs relied on a strictly limited committee of the wise, chosen from among Mohammed's companions. The composition of the council charged with the election of the first Caliph after the Prophet's death speaks for itself: the Ansar and the Muhajirun were in concert with each other to exclude any other party, with the selection procedure furthermore taking on the form of pure co-optation.[3] This accounted for how it was that Abu Bakr, leader of the Muhajirun, was elected.

Things changed very little with the accession of the second Caliph, Umar. It is true that his reign is often presented as satisfying all democratic requirements: the establishment of a *shura* (شورى) council (which historiographers, despite their divergent approaches, generally divide into three distinct assemblies) seems indeed to be trending in this direction. But it quickly becomes apparent that this indeed is not the case. Thus, the upper assembly consisted of the Companions of the Prophet (the Ansar and the Muhajirun), whereas the general consultative committee for its part was composed of the Companions who had fought at the memorable battle of Badr, and of tribal chiefs; a third assembly numbered 'a selection of Companions from among the Muhajirun and the Ansar' (al-Ansari, quoted by al-Sulami, 2003: 49). The principal conclusion that can be drawn from this stratification of the consultative bodies is that the circulation of members between the assemblies seems to have been a basic premise (at least between the upper and lower assemblies, given that both were formed from the Muhajirun and the Ansar). Thus it is difficult to see how such a system could have avoided creating a certain number of conflicts of interest. Added to which, some hold the view that the motives that lay behind the setting up of this triple assembly are not very clear. Rotter sees in this structure a sort of antechamber to caliphal power instituted by the pretenders to the supreme role in the service of their own political ambitions. Thus Aylon, following Rotter's perspective, asserts that the constitution of the *shura* (شورى) 'by Umar could have been a forgery, wrought by the supporters of various groups interested in the subsequent struggles for the Caliphate' (Aylon, 1977: 524, as in Rotter, 1982: 7-16).

The idea that the *shura* (شورى) remained a purely formal organ is strengthened by the fact of the election of the third Caliph, Uthman, the choice of whom was influenced essentially by the good relations that he had maintained with the Prophet, by

his relative youth (he was the youngest of the pretenders, having at the time only just passed forty years of age) which made him in principle more open to influence than an older man more experienced in the machinations of politics, as well as by his irreproachable reputation, 'rather than by his supposed qualities as a dependable, flexible and circumspect candidate' (Aylon, 1977: *ibid*.).

All this demonstrates how unenvisageable it is to consider the *shura* (شورى) of Islam's beginnings as a system of government; it was *at best* simply a consultative body. As a consequence, the efforts of Sulami and all those who support the same interpretation seem strangely directed towards a past which they re-read and reshape through the prism of their own convictions, bringing grist to the mill of those who see in this form of myth-making the evidence of the so-called 'future-in-the-past' syndrome (Laroui, 1967: 65–69). It is, however, a future that draws its vitality from sources in the present, along with a demythologisation of their past, that Muslims stand in need of today.

It is apparent from this perspective that if the concept of *shura* (شورى) is to be revisited, it must be done in a totally different manner. To my way of thinking it is much more fruitful and significant to think in terms of a tendency, a disposition, and propensity than in terms of a structure as does someone like Sulami, and more generally as the fundamentalists of all quarters are devoted to doing. Out of this, what is there that prevents thinking of *shura* (شورى) as *deliberation* and not as consultation or counsel as one is habitually invited to do? Deliberation, all things considered, is nothing other than one of the possible forms that consultation takes, an interpretation set one tone above, to use a musical image. Nothing in the Qur'anic text impedes such a way of seeing things. Granted, for the first occurrence of *shura* (شورى) in 'Al-Imrân', things are very clear; what is referred to there is indeed a consultation in the strictest sense of the term. On the other hand, it is difficult to be as categorical with the second occurrence: the advisory process or consultation to which the affairs of the community are to be submitted does not rule out an interpretation in terms of a deliberation, meaning a public discussion, with the pursuit of a certain consensus as the key element. It is through such hermeneutic tension that this semantic expansion of the notion of *shura* (شورى) may be legitimised. In this respect it is not by pure chance that medieval Arab philosophers, faced with the need to find an equivalent for the Aristotelian term 'deliberative' (συμβουλευτικός), translated it as مشوري, that is, by a derivation from the root *shâwara* which has given *shura* (شورى).[4]

This terminological choice is thus neither neutral nor arbitrary. It implies envisaging a definition of democracy that is much broader than that with which it has customarily been associated. The outcome is that democracy should not be exclusively thought of in terms of voting and elections, but equally in terms of public debate. It is rather ironical to note in passing that neither Islamic fundamentalists nor certain orthodox opinion in the West have comprehended that there is no absolute need that a regime should satisfy strictly *structural* conditions (such as following a particular set of voting procedures as laid down by the constitution) for there to be democracy. Sulami is one of a number who lose their way in considering this matter, since his work comes down to a point-by-point comparison of the Muslim *shura* (شورى) as a system of government, such as it appears in the outlook of the Sudanese Islamist Hassan al-Turabi, whom he considers a progressive, with Western liberal democracy.

Sulami (2003: 3) writes in this perspective that his aim is to bring out the degree of compatibility that there is between these two types of political systems. But reasoning by way of analogy or convergence does not make sense here: it presupposes in effect that the model to be followed is that of liberal Western democracy and that one should be pleased every time that, within Turabi's proposed structure, quite apart from the latter's intrinsic value, there can be found even the slightest link with Western institutions and practice.

However, there exists a path other than that taken by Sulami, a path followed by those who believe in the glimmerings of democracy that can be perceived within Islam without for all that exaggerating its democratic potential to the extent of legitimising a certain number of counter-truths. This latter tendency, besides, is vain and valueless in that, as we have seen, it remains in the thrall of a certain latent Euro-centredness, thus failing to acknowledge the extraordinary polymorphism that democracy can take.

It is precisely this polymorphous perspective that Sen adopts when, drawing upon the Rawlsian idea of the 'exercise of public reason' which identifies the nature of 'self-debate' and 'deliberation', he declares that a broadened concept of democracy should 'include the opportunity for citizens to participate in political discussions and so to be in a position to influence public choice' (Sen, 2003: 29). Criticising Huntington's narrow outlook that democracy must necessarily be associated with elections, Sen very aptly demonstrates that conceiving democracy as public debate has a double advantage. Firstly, that of not limiting democratic engagement to certain specific occasions; secondly, that of not organising public life purely around these electoral timetables. It is thus that he comes to write that 'in the broader perspective of public reasoning, democracy has to give a central place to guaranteeing free public discussion and deliberative interactions in political thought and practice – not just through elections nor just for elections.' (Sen, 2003: 29). What must be clearly understood here, however, is that it would be completely wrong to regard this broadened view of democracy as an ersatz version of the classic perspective, a sort of 'make-do' version to which non-Westerners would be relegated. To the contrary, it is the only path possible for all who aspire to live in a peaceable world.

I now come to the second component of my presentation, based around an observation of fundamentally historic degree which relates to explaining the reason for the 'impotence of democracy' in the Islamic realm today. The problem facing Muslims today arises from the fact that the notable figures of Arab thought in the past did not have access to Roman texts and had to make do with reading, translating and reflecting on the texts of political philosophy composed by Plato and Aristotle. Thus the level of rejection and scorn that this Greek philosophic tradition showed towards democracy, which it considered to be at best a form of government deviating from the norm, and at worst a government of the corrupt and the incompetent, could not but influence an Arab political thought which was already inclined, by its very nature, towards reproducing the paradigm of submission and obedience by which Islam, as its very name indicates, is imbued.[5]

To sum things up concisely, the apparent impossibility of establishing a Muslim form of democracy at the present time is due to the fact that Islamic societies did not have the awareness, in far-distant times, to draw appropriately on the sources of

'sound tradition' which could have set them on the road towards democracy. All of which goes to confirm the idea that democracy cannot simply be implanted in any soil whatever if it is not derived from a tradition which suitably cultivates it and nourishes it.

But in the absence of such a tradition, the only possible way ahead is to undertake a hermeneutic project so that it may be reappropriated while avoiding its being corrupted. Thus, as the concepts of *ijma'* (إجماع) and *shura* (شورى) do not of themselves provide a completely satisfactory framework for elaborating an Islamic model of democracy, a more convincing approach would be to use them as the basis for legitimising a work of reappropriation of a tradition and a culture which are not in themselves democratic and for perceiving how it is possible in this context to modify them without distorting their nature. In relation to this work of reappropriation, Muslims were a hair's breadth away from realising it in the 13th and 14th centuries, but they unfortunately missed the opportunity which would probably have changed the course of their history. They were offered a second chance in the 19th century, but then once again they did not have sufficient awareness to grasp it.

Indeed, Ibn Khaldûn, in his great work on the history of peoples, makes, in an aside, an extremely interesting and bold link between the Roman republic and the Muslim *shura* (شورى). Two passages seem particularly pertinent from this point of view:

> The Romans unanimously refused to allow themselves to be governed by a king [ملك]. As a result, they elected three hundred and twenty senators [شيوخ] whom they charged to govern them. It was thus that they were able to conduct their affairs [يدبرون أمرهم] until the moment when Caesar triumphed and took the title of emperor. All those who succeeded him took the title of emperor (Ibn Khaldûn, 1956: 401).

And, a little further on:

> [. . .] Ibn al-'Amîd, historiographer of the Christians, has declared, concerning the historical beginning [مبدأ] of the reign of these Caesars, that the government of Rome was at that time in the hands of those senators who governed it and were of the number three hundred and twenty. [The Romans] had indeed sworn never to allow themselves to be governed by a king [ملك], and in consequence they were governed by these men. They in their turn would appoint one of their number at their head and gave him the title of consul [شيخ]. In those times they chose to elect Aganius[6] who governed them for four years and took the name of Caesar [. . .]. Julius Caesar succeeded him for three years, then Augustus Caesar (Ibn Khaldûn, 1956: 406).

Even if the term *shura* (شورى) is not explicitly mentioned here, it is obvious that Ibn Khaldûn is implicitly describing the mechanism of consultation as conceived by Islam. With the intent of retracing the history of the Romans, the Arab philosopher thus sets out in particular their political customs and especially points up the clear refusal of the people of Rome to be ruled by a king, preferring instead for this function a Senate of 320 men. These latter, Ibn Khaldûn goes on, were empowered to appoint as leader a consul who remained in office for only a limited term (four years for Aganius, three for Julius Caesar.) This political rotation, along with, naturally, the

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rejection of monarchical government because of its tendency to lapse into tyranny, clearly reflects the democratic character of the political system entrenched in Rome.

It is extremely interesting to note how Ibn Khaldûn interprets the structure and organisation of the Roman political regime from the perspective of the Qur'anic verse quoted earlier, according to which the believers 'conduct their affairs by mutual consultation'. But in fact he made this interpretation unwittingly, caught up as he was within the paradigm of submission which prevented him from extending this extraordinary intuition any further and asserting explicitly and clearly the legitimacy of the Roman experience and system.

How do the different hermeneutic schemes present in the Khaldûnian text operate and inter-relate? Let us begin with the term أمر such as it appears in the expression يدبرون أمر هم. Though polysemic in its origins, it here corresponds very precisely to the Latin *res* (as in *res publica*). We should furthermore recall that أمر and أمير, which means 'prince', come from the same triliteral root أمرَ, which shows the implicit parallel drawn by the Arab historian between the Islamic Caliphate and the Roman republican regime. This parallel between the Caliphate and the Republic gains further legitimacy and relevance in the light of a second term used by Ibn Khaldûn, that is, مبدأ. This word is polysemic as well, in that it can mean at once beginning, principle and command. Now 'principle', which comes from the Latin *princeps*, has also a derivative in 'principality' which, one may easily accept, can fully refer to the Muslim Caliphate, which was none other than government by a prince (تدبير الأمير). It may be recalled in passing that from the caliphate of Umar, the caliph was titled the 'Prince of Believers' (أمير المؤمنين).

The reference to Ibn Khaldûn is certainly important because of the linkage that the philosopher makes between these two realms that everything (or almost everything) divided, but not only for that reason. He was in fact the favoured theoretical source for Muslim thinkers at the time of the Arab renaissance of the 19th century. Khaldûn's thought inspired them in their efforts to understand the causes of the decadence of their civilisation. But between the relatively late discovery of Khaldûn's writings, which left these intellectuals little opportunity for more objective analysis, the fact that many of them often did little more than seek in them confirmation of what they themselves had already set down, and the blocking, in that decadent atmosphere, of any attempt to move in the direction of a constitutionalist interpretation of the Muslim *shura* (شورى) (the initiatives, for example, of Tahtāwī, Khereddin or Ahmed Ibn Abi Dhiaf), the tremendous potential offered by the linkage made by Ibn Khaldûn was definitively lost to Muslims.

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The question we are now left with is the following: to what extent is the republican model of democracy in its Roman form capable of assisting us rediscover our own tradition? The interest of this model lies, in my view, in the way it apprehends the idea of what democracy is. This equates to the possibility of contesting orthodoxy of whatever form within the ambit of a public debate which is not reserved for an elite – as is indeed the case in the Greek version of democracy. In classical Roman

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times indeed, the public space was the arena of conflict between two social categories whose private interests were completely opposite: the Senate on the one hand and the Roman people on the other. But more than that, this conflict between them was the essential modality of the political sphere. The plebeians and the patricians, who had naturally quite divergent interests, nevertheless managed to reach agreement on the fundamental principles, creating thereby a balance to which the name democracy could be given. The strength of the Roman democracy derived precisely from the fact that it was not so much the capacity to harmonise divergent opinions that counted – in other words that is, achieving a consensus – as rather the possibility it provided for expressing heterodox, different, even contrary opinion.

Now it is apparent that Muslim tradition is able to appropriate, at least normatively, this idea of contestation. But this is something that Islamic orthodoxy has never understood, choosing rather to project the spectre of discord (فتنة) that this might bring, and promoting the importance of consensus instead of contestation, neglecting that the latter has never been an end in itself but rather the means of achievement of the former. It can be noted in passing that Arab-Muslim history is rich in 'contestatory episodes' which are yet in no way synonymous with dissidence, as shown by the experience of the مرجئة who proposed, in all humility and wisdom, that the judgement process by which it was decreed that such a person was a believer and such a heretic, that such a one was bound for heaven and such another bound for hell, should be suspended (Khadduri, 1984: 28). That solution, which was contestatory by its very audacity, might be compared to the climate of tolerance *cum* indifference established by the process of secularisation that was in progress in Europe at the time of the great division between Catholics and Protestants. But in the example quoted, unfortunately, such a progressive spirit has never been adopted, whether in the period of the مرجئة or by their posterity.

Contestation is nevertheless the most appropriate means of arriving at what Rawls, who is by no means a social republican, calls an 'overlapping consensus'. The importance of this notion for us Muslims is that it is based on the idea that it is possible to integrate viewpoints and stances that are authentically 'metaphysical' in the Rawlsian sense, that is, religious standpoints among others, into the arena of public debate. By thus taking seriously fifteen years ago the revival of interest in religion across the world and by conceding to it a genuine legitimacy within societies that are liberal and multicultural, Rawls opened the way for Habermas, whose current activity, which consists of asserting the necessity of considering these same societies as now 'post-secular' ones, is a good demonstration of the enhanced awareness that is emerging, thanks to globalisation, of a thorough-going reconceptualisation in progress around the modernist category of secularity.

My impression is that globalisation, envisaged in this way as a typically postmodern phenomenon, represents an undreamed-of opportunity for Muslims in that it allows them to set up democratic regimes which, if I may be permitted the expression, 'speak their own language'. Since it is no longer necessary to conjugate democracy with secularism in the sense of a complete rejection of the religious domain as an element of the public sphere, we are now able to conceive of a democracy that is founded on the principle of contestatory debate around the questions that Muslims have not managed to resolve since the death of the 3rd Caliph nearly fifteen centuries

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ago, excessively mired as we are in a glorious past but which is now totally inoperative.

This debate should not be conceived as an end in itself, but rather as a transition, a sort of strategic good governance framework where all participants engage in dialogue in order to arrive at a further stage which will progressively see identities being relieved of their 'metaphysical' burdens beneath which they are currently staggering.[7] This process is in no way utopian or magical. To quote James Buchanan, it is but the logical consequence of that 'government by discussion' which is democracy, a government which 'implies that individual values can and do change in the process of decision-making' (Sen, 2003: 29).

These 'discussion-formed identities' will thus be led to exchange the 'universalised particularity' which, at least for some, they were trying to impose on the world, for a 'common universality'. It will be their responsibility, to the same degree as all other humans on the planet, to determine the substance and modalities of this, but that as they say is another story.

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Notes

1. In this respect it is interesting to note that this partisan propensity can be found even among philosophers who might have been thought beyond any tendency towards proselytism. There is in John Rawls for example, despite everything, a very clearly favourable prejudice towards liberal democracy. One has only to observe his explanation, behind a politically correct veil of tolerance, that the so-called 'decent societies' are, under the influence of an international invisible hand, destined eventually to become liberal to understand this. His political preconception proves to be very seriously buffeted by this comprehensive tendency whose thread runs through his *Law of Peoples*.

2. 'Democracy as a Universal Value' (1999) and 'Democracy and its Global Roots' (2003). Nevertheless, the fact that someone like Sen, who applied himself to demonstrating the plurality of the democratic experience and the numerous non-Western variations of it that had occurred, nevertheless still situated the genesis of the democratic idea in ancient Greece, without as much as a word being devoted to the Roman experience, provides a sense of the extent of the difficulty.

3. The terms *Ansar* (الأنصار, les Médinois) and *Muhajirun* (المهاجرون) are two generic terms that designate Mohammed's companions. But whereas the former refers to citizens of the town of Yathrib who were very early supporters of the Prophet and his cause, the second term serves to distinguish those faithful who chose to migrate from Mecca to Medina to follow him on his exodus.

4. For συμβουλευτικός, see *The Art of Rhetoric* 1358b and its anonymous Arabic translation, 1976: 17

5. Islam means 'submission'.

6. Aganius, or Janus. It is extremely curious to see that Ibn Khaldûn includes a demi-god among the political leaders of Rome.

7. One may have recognised in these ideas the notion of strategic essentialism propounded by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

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