DEVELOPMENT OF CIVIL SOCIETY
AND DEMOCRATIZATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

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Introduction

Civil Society is a term used to denote groups and organizations (non-state and non-governmental) that advocate the diverse interests of various sections of society. The existence of a civil society indicates that people are part and parcel of democratic governance, where liberty and the right to associate without fear or pressure, constitute the foundational principles of social order. The individual is the fundamental category of the notion of civil society, as the latter is the product of his free will and action. It is difficult, therefore, to imagine the existence of civil society in an authoritarian political order, where individual liberty is subordinated to the dictates of the regime. Democracy and civil society are linked in a relationship of mutuality. Liberty and democracy fosters the development of civil society and a vibrant civil society by aggregating and articulating the interests of people expands the democratic space. This space constitutes a vital link between individual and the state. It is a conduit through which people communicate their aims and aspirations to the state. The state is then able to carry out informed distribution of values and resources. Civil society, by constantly debating issues in the process of interest articulation, maintains a vigilant eye on the actions of government, thus keeping a check on possible abuses of power.

The London School of Economics Centre for Civil Society defines civil society in the sense that we are familiar with: "Civil society refers to the arena of uncoerced collective action around shared interests, purposes and values. In theory, its institutional forms are distinct from those of the state, family and market, though in practice, the boundaries between state, civil society, family and market are often complex, blurred and negotiated. Civil society commonly embraces a diversity of spaces, actors and institutional forms, varying in their degree of formality, autonomy and power. Civil societies are often populated by organisations such as registered charities, development non-governmental organisations, community groups, women's organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, trades unions, self-help groups, social movements, business associations, coalitions and advocacy group." [1]

The term has acquired common currency in the in the early 1990s as a result of significant events in international politics that set the tone for the coming decades. First, the demise of authoritarian regimes of the Soviet-East European block in the late 1980s and the emergence of societies free to engage in associational activities without the fearing a clamp down gave boost to the notion of civil society. Second, groups representing, advocating, and fulfilling citizens' interests became significant aspects of political and social life with the shrinking of state in the developing world as a result of the impact of globalization. Third, under the Washington consensus, donor agencies such as the World Bank and IMF channelled loans to debt-ridden

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[1] "What is civil society?" Definition by the Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics, available at http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/CCS/what_is_civil_society.htm (1 March 2004).

countries bypassing inefficient and corrupt governments to non-governmental organizations in the name of strengthening people's participation in the development process. Moreover, withdrawal of people from electoral process in developed countries (evidence in the declining percentage of voter turnout in the US and Europe) and a prevailing sense of apathy among them rendered civil society an attractive notion. It had the potential to reengage people back into the political life by initiating debates on issues of common concern, thus fostering solidarity in the public sphere.[2]

With the emergence of a plethora of social movements on a global scale in the early 1990s, embodied in ecology movement, gay rights movement and various peace movements, among others, civil society emerged as a key terrain of affirmative action to construct 'an alternative social and world order.'[3] There is an increasing recognition that international organizations and national governments have to recognize the significance of civil society in the life of the citizens. The United Nations set up a high level panel on civil society 'with a view to identifying new and better ways to interact with non-governmental organizations and other civil society organizations; to identify ways of making it easier for civil society actors from developing countries to participate fully in United Nations activities; and to facilitate, manage and evaluate the relationships of the United Nations with civil society and to learn from experience gained in different parts of the system.'[4] The Civil Dialogue initiated by the European Commission in the 1990s was a first attempt by the European Union to give the institutions of society and businesses a voice at the policy-making tables.[5] In the same spirit, a 2004 report of the WTO, advises nation-states on the best way to share sovereignty for mutual benefit and examines the impact of what authors call the 'global associational revolution'. They consider the rise and influence of civil society to be irreversible and advise the WTO on how best to engage with and negotiate with the non-state actors.[6] One can stay that civil society is here to stay and although scholars, political activists, and policy makers acclaim the notion, there is also a trend to take a critical look at the concept.

History of the Concept

While philosophers have since the days of the city-state of Greece tried to understand the pressing issues of their time – concerning the nature of the state and society, powers and practices of the state and government; rights and duties of citizen; coexistence of individual and collective good; the expanse and limit of freedom; management of differences of capacity and opinions; and dispensation of justice – employing civil society as a framework to understand these issues emanates from an eminently modern conception of individual, society and state. Civil society is based upon the notion of individual rights and liberty: free individuals associate to regulate their lives in a manner compatible with their self-interest. The concept of civil society can be directly related to the rise of capitalism which has individualism as its foundational principle. It is therefore essentially a modern concept. The Greeks for example would not have appreciated the concept

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[2]See Neera Chandhoke, "What the hell is 'civil society'? Available at http://www.opendemocracy.net/democracy-open_politics/article_2375.jsp (17 March 2005).

[3] Robert Cox, "Civil Society at the turn of the Millenuim: Prospects for an Alternative World Order", in Louise Amoore, *The Global Resistance Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 103-4.
Review of International Studies, vol. 25, no. 1, 1999.

[4]In the note by the Secretary General of the United Nations on *Report of the Panel of Eminent Persons on United Nations–Civil Society Relations*, available at www.un-ngls.org/orf/Final%20report%20-%20HLP.doc (11 June 2004).

[5] Op. cit., Centre for Civil Society, London School of Economics (1 March 2004).

[6] "Transparency and Dialogue with Civil Society" in WTO Report entitled, *The future of the WTO: Addressing institutional challenges in the new millennium* (2004), available at http://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/10 anniv_e/future_wto_chap5_e.pdf.

because they had no notion of inalienable individual rights. They did not distinguish between state and society. State was an ethical entity, an end in itself because human beings could attain self-perfection and self-fulfillment only through the state.[7]

The theories of social contract which emerged to justify the emerging bourgeois society considered state to be an artificial creation, a product of a contract among free individuals. The state became necessary because human beings were incapable of living without the existence of a defined political authority. While English philosopher Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679) emphasized the need for an absolute power because this alone could save men from anarchy and chaos, John Locke (1632-1704) supported a limited state. Both held that the essence of human nature can be gainfully understood in conditions of the 'state of nature', a logical abstraction from society. Hobbes asserted that human beings are motivated by self-interests. More often than not, the interest of one human being is contradictory with the interest of the other. All human beings are equal (the nature having made them so in the faculties of body and mind), such that, as Hobbes says, no one can claim for himself any benefit to which another may not pretend.[8] Therefore, the state of nature is a condition of war of all against all. In such as situation life is 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short.'[9] Guided by the instinct of self-preservation, which illuminates their reason, individuals realize the need for a mechanism to protect themselves.

Each individual, thus, agrees to enter into a covenant with another, to give up one's natural liberty and sovereignty to a common power. Hobbes calls the multitude so united in a common power, state, or Leviathan. Hobbes does not distinguish between the State and society; the contract establishes both. It appears that Hobbes proposes two kinds of relationships: One, between the individuals and the sovereign, in which the former by their own free will, submitted to the latter; and second among the individuals, wherein, under the watchful eyes of the Leviathan, are compelled for reasons of peace and security, to limit their natural rights in a way that would be compatible with the rights of the others. The first arrangement denotes the state and the second represents the civil society. Hobbes' paradigm shows that the state is imperative for the sustenance of civil society.[10]

Another theorist of social contract, John Locke, put forward the concept of a limited state and a limited society. In Locke's view, individuals are both social and rational and therefore the state of nature is peaceful and orderly. It is governed by the law of nature. In the state of nature individuals possess the right of liberty, health and property. However, it was marked by uncertainties because the laws of nature were understood by the individuals in their own way and was therefore not definite. This threatened natural rights and regression of society into anarchy. It was out of this concern that people enter into a contract and constitute a common public authority. In two treaties of Civil Government, Locke sets forth the nature of government and the system of reciprocal obligations between government and individuals.[11]

In the first treaty people place themselves under the public authority to protect themselves from the inconveniences and shortcoming of the state of nature. This authority has the power to make laws and enforce them. The second treaty imposes limitations upon this authority;

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[7] See Eric W. Robinson (ed.), *Ancient Greek Democracy: reading and sources* (MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), pp. 175-6.
[8] Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, edited with an introduction and notes by J. C. A. Gaskin (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 82
[9] Ibid., p. 84.
[10] Hobbes' *De Cive* in ibid., p. xviii
[11] See John Simmons, "Locke's State of Nature", in Christopher W. Morris (ed.), *The social contract theorists: critical essays on Hobbes, Locke and Rousseau* (Critical Essays on the Classics) (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., 1999).

individuals never surrender their natural rights to the authority and thus the powers of the state are limited. It is limited also because it derives power from the people, and because it holds power in trust for the people. Moreover, it is must operate within the bounds of civil and natural law.[12] According to Locke, social life existed prior to the birth of the state, because even without authority people lived in society in an orderly fashion. The notions of primacy of society in relation to the state, inalienable natural rights of individuals and limits on state power gave shape to the liberal tradition in state- (civil) society relations.

Both Hobbes and Locke set forth an idea in which peaceful coexistence among individuals could be ensured through social covenants. They considered civil society as a realm governed by reason and guided by natural rights of the individual. However, they did not view civil society as a realm separate from the state. Rather they underlined coexistence of state and society. In their analysis of relation between state and society, Hobbes and Locke were influenced by the experiences of their times. They challenged the divine right theory of the state in their claim that human beings are capable of fashioning their political order.

The contract theorists were speaking for the emergent capitalism and the bourgeois class. Strongly influenced by the chaos during the Civil War in England, Hobbes built his philosophy of state and society on the founding principles of capitalism: self-interest of individuals and a state with unlimited legal sovereignty that would provide a framework of positive laws for the reconciliation of individual interest in their various associations in society. Before Hobbes the fundamental question was: anarchy or order? Locke, on the other hand, grappled with struggle between the divine rights of the king and the political rights of the parliament in the context of the Glorious Revolution of 1648. This influenced Locke to propound a theory of a limited state, where free-market capitalism could flourish without interference. In making life, liberty and property the inalienable rights of the individual, Locke laid the foundation of 'possessive individual', of a capitalist society[13]. Individuals with their repertoire of Natural Rights, would associate freely in capitalist relations of production in society, and the conflict, if any, resulting from such an association would be resolved by the law-adjudicating authority in the state.

The thinkers of Scottish Enlightenment were the first to explicitly link the notion of civil society with market economy. One of its leading exponents, Adam Ferguson, uses the term almost interchangeably with market society. In his influential text, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, Ferguson says that civil society emerges with market economy. In a market economy, production outside the household and for commercial use brings together individuals in a relationship of interdependence. This fosters the development of civil society, where individuals aggregate their energies for production, based on the assurance that private gains in the form of property would be safeguarded.[14]

Hegel too linked the rise of civil society with the development capitalism. He held that civil society emerged to serve the interests of the market economy. In *The Philosophy of Right*, he distinguished between *burgerlichen gesellschaft* (civil society) and *der staat* (the political state). He defined the former as a set of social practices created by the capitalist economy that reflects the ethos of the market. It is a realm that offers opportunities for self-realisation in ways in which

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[12] See Joshua Cohen, "Structure, Choice and Legitimacy: Locke's Theory of State", in ibid. Christopher Morris (1999), p. 156.

[13] See C.B. Macpherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1962). Also see James Tully, *An Approach to Political Philosophy: Locke in Contexts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), p. 80.

[14] Adam Ferguson, *A History on the History of Civil Society* (Philadelphia, 1989), Part IV, available at http://books.google.com/books?id=-04uAAAAYAAJ&pg=PR3&dq=Adam+Ferguson&source=gbs_selected_pages&cad=3#v=onepage&q=&f=false.

earlier forms of society did not. Being a product of the market, civil society must also succumb to the same pitfalls as the market itself, which originate in self-interested action.[15] When inequalities created by self-interest and avariciousness 'affords a spectacle of extravagance and want as well as of the physical and ethical degeneration common to both'[16], civil society can no longer be viewed as part of man's moral end. That is why civil society must be controlled by the state in order to sustain moral order in society.

Agreeing that civil society is linked to the capitalist mode of production, Marx held it represents the interests of the bourgeoisie. Unlike Hegel, he eschewed from assigning a positive role to the civil society. The state as superstructure also represented the interests of the bourgeois class. Therefore, it was incapable of playing a role of mediator in conflicts that arise in civil society.[17] For, Marx both would wither away in the event of a socialist revolution to give way to a just society. Departing from Marx, Gramsci did not consider civil society as a part of the socio-economic base of the state but a part of the superstructure. The state is not to be understood in the narrow sense of the government; instead, Gramsci divides it between 'political society', which is the arena of political institutions and legal constitutional control, and 'civil society', which is commonly seen as the 'private' or 'non-state' sphere, including the economy. The former is the realm of force and the latter of consent. He stresses, however, that the division is purely conceptual and that the two, in reality, often overlap. He views civil society as a site for problem solving and calls it a realm where ideological capital of the bourgeois state is produced and reproduced, which ensures the hegemony of capitalism.[18] Gramsci believes that the revolutionary party - is the force that will allow the working-class to develop organic intellectuals and an alternative hegemony within civil society. He believes the proletariat's historical task is to create a 'regulated society' and defines the '<u>withering away of the state</u>' as the full development of civil society's ability to regulate itself.[19]

Gramsci's account informs much contemporary thinking on the New Left on Civil Society. Robert Cox, for example, views civil society as a surrogate for revolution. Depicting globalisation of production and neo-liberal economic orthodoxy as benefiting the integrated class and encouraging 'exclusionary and covert politics', Cox views civil society as 'crucial battleground'[20] for citizens to regain control over public life and as potential agents for transformation of the state. Others like Jurgen Habermas (1984;1996), with due recognition of the pluralism that pervades modern society, view civil society as necessary to defend democracy against the threat posed by modern state bureaucracy, which seeks to encompass more and more of social life. Rather than posing a problem as in earlier Marxist account, civil society is now viewed as providing a solution. Civil Society is seen as vital to protect autonomous public opinion and integrity of the public sphere, two pillars of democracy.[21]

Making a clear distinction among civil society, state and the economy, the New Left sees civil society as an important site for counter-hegemonic struggle and assigns a key role in

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[15] See "Civil Society", in Hegel's Philosophy of Right, available at http://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/hegel/works/pr/prcivils.htm#PR182.

[16] Hegel, quoted in *op. cit.,* Chandhoke, 2005.

[17] See Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (Cambridge University Press, 1970). Available at http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/index.htm.

[18] Perry Anderson, "The antinomies of Antonio Gramsci" in James Martin, *Antonio Gramsci: Critical Assessments of Leading Political Philosophers*, (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 346.

[19] See Walter L. Admason, "Gramsci and the Politics of Civil Society," *Praxis International*, vol. 7, nos. 3-4 (Winter 1987-88), p. 322.

[20] Op. cit. Cox in Amoore, 2005.

[21] Muthiah Alagappa (ed.), *Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004), p. 29.

defending the society against the state and market and in formulating democratic will to influence the state. The neo-liberals are influenced by the conception of associational life given by Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859). Tocqueville, who did not use the term civil society, crafted his conception of associations as performing several key functions: meeting unmet social needs in the context of weak central government; intermediating between personal and local interests and the national common good, preventing tyranny of the majority; limiting state power; and preventing abuse by the state. His civil society, operating in conditions of socio-economic equality and political freedom, is composed of voluntary associations that cooperate for collective purposes. The interplay of the interests of these associations would guard against domination by a single interest and check the tyranny of the majority and other excesses of democracy. Tocqueville conception of civil society is based on a limited state that would confine itself to the political sphere and guarantee the legal framework and other conditions (such as socio-economic equality) necessary for the effective functioning of civil society. The neo-liberal school conceive of civil society and its institutions in instrumental terms vis-à-vis the state, influencing state policy or altering a regime type and not as distinct site for governance and reform that is independent of the state.[22]

Taking into account the history of the development of the concept the following ideas emerge about civil society. First, free-willed individuals are at the core of the notion of civil society. Second, it is a realm within the state, where associational life fosters a based on the notion of common good instead of fragmented self-interests. And, third, civil society is also an arena which protects public opinion and guards the public sphere from interferences of the state, two vital functions for the promotion of democracy. These ideas would be examined in the following section with reference to civil society in the Middle East

Civil Society in the Middle East

The term civil society gained currency in the context of promotion of democratization in the Middle East in the post-Cold War era. Civil society as non-state groups functioning at the level of citizenry, helping resolve the problems of collective action, and acting as vehicles of specific aspirations is considered to increase prospects for democratization. Democratisation in the Middle East, therefore, has become strongly linked with the study of whether civil society exists in the Middle East, together with its strengths and weaknesses and future prospects. A number of events in the region fuelled optimism regarding the existence of a vibrant civil society in West Asia. The Iranian revolution led by the merchant class, the rise of Islamist movement in the 1980s claiming to represent the people, and the declining oil prices with implications for weakening of state structure buoyed those expecting to see a flicker of democracy in a largely authoritarian region.

A number of writers of Orientalist disposition such as Bernard Lewis, Daniel Pipes, and Samuel Huntington reject the possibility of the existence of any kind of civil society in the Arab countries of the region. They contend that the absence of the notion of individual and individual rights make civil associations antithetical to the concept of collective *umma* present in Arab and Muslim societies. They further argue that Arab and Muslim societies are inherently despotic which precludes the possibility of having social and political institutions mediating between individual and the ruler. Others such as Augustus Richard Norton, Muhammad Muslih, Michael Hudson and Asad Abu Khalil believe that with economic liberalization and the consequent weakening the state,

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[22] Ibid., p. 30.

civic groups have grown into a thriving sector, placing a check on many regimes.[23] Civil associations serve as a means to mediate with the authoritarian governments for social justice and human rights, and provide a forum for mobilizing people towards alternative forms of negotiation and political action. Civil society, thus, harbingers indigenous paths to democratization and political pluralism in the region.

The issue of autonomy of civil associations is a crucial issue in an authoritarian political milieu. As the civil associations are dependent on the state to provide legislations and institutional mechanism to guarantee their autonomy, that fact that such legislations rarely exist in the contemporary Middle East accentuates their dependence and forces them into negotiations with state officials to enforce an imprecise set of rules and regulations. In the context of such negotiations, neo-orientalists have pointed out that civil society produces authoritarianism not democracy, as the states in the region are unwilling to share power or show tolerance towards these groups. They 'assert that the proliferation of social movements will discourage any trend towards power sharing and greater tolerance in the region, if it does not breed civil war and anarchy'.[24] From a neo-orientalist perspective, therefore, the absence or presence of civil society cannot be linked indisputably to the unfolding of democracy in the region. Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon and Gaza Strip are cited as examples where the absence in the past or the contemporary growth of civil society in the present has not ushered democracy, at least on in its full form. On the other hand, many others point to the strong empirical evidence between the growth of civil society and the promotion of democratisation citing the examples of the countries mentioned above.

The argument linking civic activism and democracy is based on the assumption that associational life has the potential to defy authoritarian regimes, force liberal reforms and trigger the process of democratic transition. Indeed, 'people power' would set off a 'ripple effect' that would be the key to democratization in the Middle East. Development agencies such as World Bank the UNDP, the EC (the Barcelona Process) and USAID, subscribe to the same belief that sustained opposition from below will generate regime shifts from above and have therefore consistently provided financial support to civil society groups. However, this optimism needs a reality-check, especially in the context of the survival tactics of authoritarian regimes, that construct a faced of liberalisation, while in reality they remain as repressive as ever.

The emergence of autonomous associations in the Arab Middle East can be traced as far back as the Ottoman Empire. They subsequently proliferated during the period of the Mandate and were disbanded by the authoritarian regimes that emerged during the inter-war and post war period. It was only in the late 1980s, when economic crisis and unemployment resulted in widespread dissatisfaction with the state that civil society started to acquire a more prominent role. Given Middle Eastern regimes' incapacity to meet popular economic and political demands, associational activity virtually boomed. This is how a public space was carved, where the dissenting energies of activists 'drew citizens into political life to an unprecedented degree' and thus generated the development of a wide range of associations with their own bureaucratic structure and preoccupation to formulate policy alternatives.

Today, most scholars affirm that 'both intermediate powers and autonomous social groups exist in the Middle East'[25] performing a crucial role in many societies of the region. They are

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[23] Beverley Milton-Edward, *Contemporary Politics in the Middle East* (Cambridge: Polity/Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 156.
[24] Yahya Sadowsky, "The new orientalism and democracy debate", in J. Beinin and J. Stork (eds.), *Political Islam: Essays from the Middle East Report* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), quoted in ibid., Milton-Edward, 157.
[25] Yahya Sadowsky, "The New Orientalism and the Democracy Debate," *Middle East Report*, No. 14-21 (July-August 1993) quoted in Ali R. Abootalebi, "Middle East Economies: A Survey of Current Problems and Issues,"

primarily engaged in providing essential services to the people, where the state has failed or it has been absent. Certain crucial questions must be asked at this juncture. How well organized and autonomous are these groups? How capable are they in counterbalancing the state power? How do they help in promoting political liberalisation and democracy? A look a civil society in some of the states of the region would provide an answer to these questions as well as throw light on the prospect of the development of civil society and emergence of democracy in the region.

In Egypt, since the economic liberalization (*infitah*) announced by President Sadat in 1974, there has been a dramatic growth of civil society reflected in the increased in number of registered associations from 7593 in 1976 to about 16,000 in 2003.[26] This in turn has made government grant concessions on some form of democratic reforms. Under President Mubarak, the regime has sought to balance between the pressures for reform of the political system towards greater pluralism and the ingrained fear within the regime concerning devolution of power to the people or their representative institutions. For instance, political parties have been allowed to function and by an amendment to the law in 2005 they have been protected from arbitrary dissolution or prevention from political practice but at the same time the new Law on Associations (2002) gives Egyptian authorities far-reaching controls over NGOs including human rights groups and their affiliated works. A provision of this law grants the government new powers to refuse registration of a group or to shut down an existing one, to monitor and oversee an NGO's key activities, including foreign fundraising.[27]

In Lebanon, a weak state and market-led economy offers much more opportunities for civil societies to flourish. Article 13 of the National Constitution guarantees freedom of meetings and freedom of association within the framework of the law.[28] Civil society groups are sustained by kinship, confessional allegiance and other primordial affinities. The six major religious sects offer many of the material resources for organizing Lebanon's rich associational life. Each sect in a sense projects its own civil society, but there are also many professional associations and environmental, advocacy, trade unions, and women's groups that cross confessional lines and favour the integration of a national Lebanese civil society, as do some of the media.

As the economy of Lebanon is based on free market principles, the inevitability of political reform has become increasingly difficult for the Lebanese leader to ignore. Norton contends that 'while some restructuring has of the political system has occurred, there is little prospect for comprehensive political reforms while power remains in the grip of a coterie of politicians… [and] the government operates like a giant patronage machine, enabling newly entrenched political bosses to create network of clients and grow richer on sweetheart deals.'[29] In this context civil society could play an ambiguous role in political reconstructing as its survival depends upon on a weak state.

In the early 1990s Jordan offered an encouraging example of democratisation in the region. By the middle of the decade it became clear, however, that Jordan had not democratized successfully; rather a façade was maintained to 'satisfy[ing] local demands for greater participation, and international, particularly American conditions of democracy for aid-giving and

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Meria Journal, Volume 3, No. 3 September 1999, available at http://meria.idc.ac.il/journal/1999/issue3/jv3n3a6.html

[26] Quoted in "Civil Society: Egypt" available at http://www.pogar.org/countries/theme.aspx?cid=5&t=2.

[27] "Egypt: Civil Society Groups Severely Restricted", available at http://www.hrw.org/en/news/2005/07/03/egypt-civil-society-groups-severely-restricted, (3 July 2005)

[28] "Civil Society: Lebanon", available at http://www.pogar.org/countries/theme.aspx?cid=9&t=2.

[29] Augustus R. Norton, "Lebanon: with friends like these…" *Current History*, January 1997, quoted in *op. cit.,* Milton-Edward, 2000, p. 158.

other financial assistance'.[30] In 1989, the Jordanian government adopted an IMF sponsored economic liberalization program that required Jordan to decrease subsidies, taxes, and government borrowing from the domestic banking system. This led to a gradual withdrawal of governmental institutions from the economic and political arena, followed by a decrease in government services.

As the government reduced its role in the economic sphere, the vacuum was filled by social groups that provided welfare services to citizens. Such liberalization measures allowed for the reestablishment of organizations that had been previously banned, such as political parties, and those associations that had been disbanded in the years before the democratic reforms. It also allowed new civil society organizations to develop and flourish. Currently, there are more than 2,000 civil society organizations across the country working on diverse issues with varying degrees of success.

The drawing up of the National Charter included representation from all elements of Jordanian society. Once adopted in 1991, the Charter ensured Jordanian citizens the right to organize within a framework of political pluralism and rule of law. However, although it seemed promising in terms of political reform, the legislation gave wide discretionary powers–including the right to refuse licenses to or even dissolve certain organizations–to those government institutions charged with oversight. Therefore, despite the legal guarantees offered in the National Charter, civil society organizations have suffered from constraints on their ability to form and operate that have been imposed on them by multiple governmental and judicial authorities that supervise their activities. As a result, Jordanian civic groups have not succeeded in playing a significant role in voicing public demands for democratic reform. Nazih Ayubi points out that Jordan's path to democratization in many ways reflects manifestation of cosmetic democratization 'for the Yankees to see' and must be viewed a continuing process in which the destination – full democracy – is still a long way off.[31]

The development of civil society in Palestine was induced by two significant events in their national history: Israel's occupation of the West Bank and Gaza in 1967, and the establishment of the Palestinian National Authority in 1994. In response to the first event, one important priority, in addition to resistance to occupation, was self-preservation as a people. Ten years through occupation this translated into an ideology of *sumud* or 'steadfastness' in the face of adversity. Sumud was not conceived in passive terms; on the contrary, it required organization, service delivery, networking, mobilization, and the creation of 'support systems' of various types ranging from medical-care centers to income-generating projects. It is within this broad context that a new generation of organizations was established, each seeking to fulfill some of the needs of Palestinians under occupation.[32]

The second important factor to influence the development of civil society in Palestine was the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. A host of new issues that the Palestinians faced now revolved around the nature of the relation between government and society and the type of political system that would be established. One central question revolved around whether the PLO will succeed in making the transition from a national liberation movement in exile to a government accountable to the people on issues that had not been faced before. One main concern was whether the highly centralized decision-making process in the PLO on the eve of the Oslo accords would translate into authoritarian tendencies in government. A host of new issues faced the Palestinians revolving around the nature of the relation between government and society, and the type of political system that should

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[30] Beverley Milton-Edward, "Jordan and façade democracy", *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 3, 1993, pp. 191-203.
[31] Nazih Ayubi, "Islam and Democracy", in D. Potter et al. (ed.), *Democratisation* (Cambridge: Polity/Open University Press, 1997).
[32] George Giacaman, "Perspectives on Civil Society in Palestine", available at http://www.muwatin.org/george/welfare.html.

be established. Once a new Palestinian political formation emerged on the ground in Palestine after Oslo, the threat to civil society from such a unitary model and history became quickly apparent, especially in light of the disarray of the opposition within the PLO and the resultant weakness of political parties.

Civil Society in Iran emerged, albeit in rudimentary form, during the presidency of Rafsanjani. In the aftermath of the revolution, there was no room for any group whose programs contradicted in any way with the main values adopted by the Islamic political system. Though the Islamic constitution gave room for the establishment of political parties, any opposing view was severely dealt with. The new political elite formed what was known as the Islamic Republic Political Party (IRP), which was the main political force and forefront of the religious establishment. Dissenters were accused of collaborating with the West and working against the Islamic revolution. Many people known for their hard defence of freedom, justice, and democracy were banned from working in politics or running for public offices. Only those who were willing to declare their full and unconditioned commitment to the new political system were allowed to function within the new framework.[33]

President Rafsanjani (1989-97), who sought to rebuild the Iranian economy after the prolonged war with Iraq, emphasized the role of the individual in the reconstruction efforts. The process of reconstruction required a high level of cooperation between the government and the society at large, which marked the beginning of creating a real civil society. The curb over print media was lifted to a great extent and publications such as *Zan and Jamiah* discusses domestic and international issues. On the political level, Rafsanjani called for the formation of a political front under the name of Servants of Reconstruction. Acting as an umbrella for the activities of the supporters of Rafsanjani's economic and social policies, Servants of Reconstruction contained the first seeds of what later became known as the Reformers' Camp under President Muhammad Khatami (1997-2001), who became a symbol of civil society.[34] The boom in the number of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) attempting to push the limits of social and political freedoms further provoked a backlash from the conservative camp, whose members believed that they were the true defenders of the Islamic revolution and its values. With the election of President Ahmadinejad in 2005, the flicker of democratization witnessed during the presidency of Rafsanjani and Khatami evaporated as a new cycle of harassment of human rights activists and reformists ensued.

Any discussion of civil society and democratization in the countries of the Gulf must take into account the rentier character of their economies. In a rentier economy the state has monopoly on rents and employs a policy of expenditure around this revenue. Benefits are distributed to citizens, and the state demands nothing in terms of economic revenue. The economic structures are built around the production and export of oil, which constitutes the public sector and are controlled by the state. The public sector is the largest employer and manned by a large bureaucracy. A patron-client relationship is thus perpetuated eventually leading to consolidation of state's hold on society. The share of private sector in the economy is miniscule. High government expenditure and huge subsidies inhibit the growth of independent groups and associations that can assert for larger freedom and accountability. However, with the decline in oil revenue since the late 1980s and

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[33] See Amal Hamada, "Civil Society in Iran: A Critical Review", available at http://www.islamonline.net/servlet/Satellite?c=Article_C&pagename=Zone-English-Muslim_Affairs%2FMAELayout&cid=1172072094957 (25 February 2007).

[34] Ibid. See also Ladan Boroumand, Roya Boroumand, "Illusion and Reality of Civil Society in Iran: An Ideological Debate", available at http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m2267/is_2_67/ai_63787334/?tag=content;col1.

rising unemployment and food shortages, voluntary self-help groups have emerged that depend up the patronage of the state for their survival.[35]

Conclusion

Civil society is a sphere of organised voluntary groups such as clubs, guilds, syndicates, federations and unions that operate in the public domain and provide a buffer between state and citizens. They help in advancing democracy by fostering an environment of free expression of ideas and opinions and by advocating civil liberties in political life. They call for the expansion of associational and media freedoms and perceive themselves as the front line of political change. They are regarded by the UN as the richest source of civic vitality in the Arab world, guiding citizens with an invisible social hand. The emergence of civil society organisations in the Middle East appears to give an impression that democratisation had been heralded in the Middle East. It would be, however, simplistic to assume that civil society organizations indicate a strong grassroots surge meant to challenge authoritarian regimes in the Middle East. In fact, authoritarian governments have strengthened their position vis-à-vis civil society and do not appear any closer to downfall than before. This paradoxical situation emerges primarily from the fact that most of the civil society organisation depend on the regimes for patronage and support. Authoritarianism implies an interventionist state, which is contrary to the notion of civil society. Civil society in Middle East emerged not because the political culture became more liberal but to fill the fill the void left by the state's pulling out in many social issues. Here voluntary Islamist associations have acquired increasing significance. They often constitute offer the strongest opposition against the ruling elites and their efficacy in delivering goods to the people make them salient in different countries of the region and important for democratisation. Thus civil society in the Middle East consists of various interest groups and associations that differ across countries and sectors of society. They are limited by control mechanisms employed by the authoritarian regimes and are animated by agendas that are apolitical in nature.

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[35] See, op.cit. Milton-Edwards, 2000, pp. 70-84.