A Return to Partisan Politics? Partisan logics and political transformations in the Arab world

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Partisan logics and political transformations in the Arab world

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1 From the outset, the project to edit a book on political parties in the Arab world faced a double challenge.

2 The first reveals an analytical question, even a theoretical problem: how should one consider special and unique forms of political organization in contexts where political parties exist as structures within clientelist organizations, as tributaries to communitarian or tribal considerations with little real power over the political destiny of their societies?

3 The second challenge is of an empirical nature: how should one perceive political activity in a context of scarcity using non-current data? Recent publications devoted to the region’s political parties, all persuasions considered, are few in number and deal with the history of these parties more than their sociology. It is therefore incumbent upon the academic investigator to research the parties in the field and identify their current issues.

4 In view of the transformations that characterize both the public and the private arenas of the Arab political world, this challenge seems stimulating. Observers of the political changes operating in Eastern Europe or Latin America attribute to these processes a decisive role in contemporary democratic transitions. Some authors point out that political parties were closely linked to the emergence of “Western representative democracies”, with the party represented as the “child of universal suffrage and democracy” (Weber, cited in Seiler, 2001). In the Arab world, other types of organizations, notably associations have been put forward in recent decades as prime agencies for regime change. If we refuse to anticipate the democratization of regimes, we do not exclude the hypothesis of a pluralization and liberalization of their political spaces. Instead, we propose an examination of the various relationships between the development of political parties and political transformations – transformation of the regime or within the regime (Albrecht and Schlumberger, 2004).
In the light of these issues, what is happening in the parties of North Africa and the Near East? We made the assumption that in a period characterized by a “crisis of representation”, party organizations are particularly interesting places in which to observe changes in political action, against a caricatured image of a political arena characterized by the confrontation between authoritarian regimes in search of a second wind and Islamist movements, often summarily presented as dissident groups or, depending on the case, simply as non-democratic: “in the absence of viable secular parties, political competition in the Arab world is reduced to a dangerous confrontation between Islamists and rulers” (Ottaway and Hamzawy, 2007, p. 3). On the other hand, a focus on the emergence of partisan life, including its unexplored aspects, its defeats and its pretenses, leads to an examination of the changing patterns of political activism, of political competition and political socialization. It is from this perspective that the first chapter aims to think about partisan politics in the region.

We should note that if we chose to work on six Arab countries – Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Iraq, Bahrain and Yemen – we did not, in so doing, envision an Arab “political space” (Camau and Geisser, 2003, p. 19). Our reflection draws upon the six countries but is not confined to the borders of the Near East and North Africa. Nor do we claim to cover all situations in the region either. We seek instead to focus on what we can learn from both similarities and differences observed in these countries: a first common denominator certainly lies in the logic of repression with which political parties may have been confronted and the context of limited pluralism in which they develop and evolve: a “feckless pluralism” (Carothers, 2002) resulting in a disconnection between the governed and the political elite or a system of “dominant-power politics” (Linz and Stepan, 1996) where participation in political life is relatively closed and where contestation is poorly institutionalized. The high-cost of political activism has led to the creation of specific categories of collective action (Geisser, Vairel and Karam, 2006). Oddly, the academic literature has focused little on this issue.

Several of the cases included in this study emphasize political contests which confront the “sociations” and presuppose partisan engagement. Far from making concessions in the face of a voluntary even if only nominally free collective action, primary social loyalties persist and seems to continue to “saturate” the character of political relations and above all one’s reading of these relations (Picard, 2006, p.46). Are such primary social loyalties an obstacle to the development of a partisan system? Do tribalism, ethnic or community networks, local, national or transnational ‘asabiyat, including their renewed forms, account more efficiently for the defense of special interests and the demands made of central political institutions? (idem)

The case studies we chose are also characterized by important differences, particularly regarding the conditions for the creation of political parties and the rules of the political game. Some of areas studied emerged from colonial experience and have national movements whose legacy remains central. Others, such as Yemen or Bahrain, were spared direct colonial domination (Burgat, 2005, p.191). Some, Lebanon and Morocco in particular, following independence established a multi-party system, even if this system in practice is strictly proscribed, limited in its actions and diffuse (Tozy, 1999). Others like Algeria’s National Liberation Front or Iraq’s Arab and Socialist Baath party have been consolidated over several decades, into a single party, or “state party”, intolerant of all opposition or dissent. In Bahrain, partisan activity remains forbidden until this day. For each of these countries, the socialist experience differed also markedly.
It is in light of these preliminary remarks that we propose to organize our thoughts regarding three issues: Are the political parties of these six countries in crisis? How have partisan dynamics been affected by the formation of regional States, and how is this legacy expressed today? Do “new parties” stand out today, especially in the vein of Islamist movements which seem to be reinvesting partisan organizations at many levels?

Are Arab Parties in Crisis?

The theme of the “crisis of parties” or the crisis of the “partisan system” runs through the literature on these six countries. This fact echoes the general thesis of the decline of “classical” partisan organizations. Depending on the analysis, some highlight the persistence of proto-partisan organizations, while others foresee the development of post-partisan systems, with the study of innovative or alternative modes of collective action, social movements, networking, etc. (Lawson and Merkl, 1988). These issues come under the theme of “crisis of representation” (Catusse, 2004) or the crisis of some parties, notably “secular” parties (Ottaway and Hamzawi, 2007). The presumed death of political parties (or of some of them) or at least their ban, leads first to examine three issues raised within our fields:

On the one hand, what are we taking about? Has the partisan paradigm been (inappropriately) “imported” (Badie, 1992, p. 177), or used as a distorting mirror for political organizations that would not recognize themselves in it?

On the other hand, what are the causes of weakness in today’s parties? Empirically, has the partisan call become blunted? How do anti-partisan feelings and denunciations conjugate? Where, in the end, will one find the partisan “counter-performances”?

And finally, does the rhetoric of crisis, denial or the death of partisanship hide the real place that central political organizations occupied and continue to occupy, the leftist movements of yesterday, the Islamist movements today?

An Object without interest?

For nearly a century in most countries of the Arab world, political parties existed formally as instruments for political mobilization and for the organization of political contests and elections. More precisely, the category “party” (hizb) is used to speak of political organization and the regulation of such activity, whereas specific signs are used to speak of “clans” (āshīra), “communities” (tawā’if), “associations” (jam‘iyāt), “political clubs” (endiyya sīyāsiyya), enterprises (mu‘asasāt), unions (naqābāt), and so forth. Often, it is in the context of the national struggle and following independence that the term has stood out. This is the case of hizb al-Istiqlāl (1943) in Morocco, the Lebanese Communist Party in 1924 (el-hizb el shuyū‘î el-lubnāni), and the Iraqi Communist Party (el-hizb el shuyū‘î el-iraqî) in 1934. A generic term used in law, the label “party” is challenged in practice. The names given to “parties” may also take other references: “front” like the FLN (jabhat al-tahrîr al-watani) in Algeria (1954), “movement” (haraka), “gathering” (tajjamu‘), “current” (tayyār), “union” (ittihād), “organization” (tanzîm), etc.

Partisanship was also established (or not) in normative law. Following the “second-liberal era” (Salamé, 1991, p. 319 ff.), independence struggles and the emergence of Arab nationalism, political organizations were repeatedly constrained by laws governing
“political association” and subordinated to successive regimes – Morocco (1996, 2005, 2006), Algeria (1989, 1997, 2002, 2008), Yemen (1991, 2001), Iraq (1960, 1971, 1991, 2004 and 2005) – associations (Lebanon, 1909, Bahrain, 2006). Some political organizations are banned as a result of a general prohibition concerning political parties, often out of fear of sedition (fitna). This holds true for regimes emerging from nationalist movements (where the party embodies indivisible national unity), but exclusively. In Bahrain for example, between 1975 and 1999, all partisan activity was prohibited. The 1999 law on communitarian associations (ahliyya) prohibited the formation of partisan religious associations and the 2005 law on political associations refused recognition for political associations with a religious base. In Yemen, as noted by contributors to this book, the reference to “partisan spirit” (al-hizbiyya) was connoted disparagingly: “in collective representations, the reference to the party is associated with division, corruption and exclusive and narrow allegiances. In the 1980s, the Yemeni contemporary political scene was largely influenced and dominated by the formula of the General People’s Congress out of which, at least formally, the structure of partisan or call to hizb in the name of a solidarity which transgressed and stigmatized the partisan divide.” In Iraq, with the establishment of the Baathist regime, parties were not able to develop without minimal control from the National Front (al-jabha al-wataniyya). In Lebanon, the Syrian Nationalist Social Party (al-hizb as-sûrî al-qawmî-al-ijtima’î) was prohibited from 1949 to 1971. In other cases, on the contrary, as in the Moroccan elections of 1997 and following, candidates without party affiliation are compelled to join partisan organizations in order to run for public office.

The media also contribute to “party” naturalization. The term is employed in a consensual manner to give prominence to partisan activities in their political pages. Indeed, the history of the partisan press and wider partisan media is rich and has contributed greatly to informing political debates and giving voice to public intellectuals and ideologues (Aflaq, 1978, Qutb*, 1990, Qasim, 2005). This is verified in the field, including in censored contexts. Each of the two main political associations in Bahrain has a magazine, the association al-Minbar al-taqadumî publishes the magazine Akhbâr al-minbar, and the association al-‘Amal al-dîmuqrâtî publishes the magazine al-Majala al-dîmuqrâtiyya (Al-Murshed (2008)); in Morocco, political parties have their own official organs, such as al-Ittihàd al-ishtirakî and Libération for the USFP, al-‘Alem and L’Opinion for the Istiqlâl, in addition to at-Tajdid for the Party of Justice and Development, etc. In Lebanon, the television channel al-Manâr is a media tool for Hizballah, Future TV for the Future Movement, OTV for the Free Patriotic Movement, and so on (Lamloum, 2008; 2009). In Yemen, the weekly al-Sahwâ and al-Madîna are the organs of al-Islâh.

In summary, the object “party” is certainly not itself a “new” object in the Arab world. On the contrary, it delimits and is delimited by a political arena for actors (who create parties or criticize them), which draws on a century of political history (a history which shorter in the case of Bahrain).

And yet, in the region the object “political party” has long been regarded as unworthy of attention, especially from the social and political sciences. It must be said that research on the partisan phenomenon was hampered by the regimes and even by political parties themselves, reluctant to face self-criticism (Malki*, 2008). Despite pioneering work (Waterbury, 1970; Batatu, 1978), there are few recent studies on political parties in the Arab world. Those that have been documented essentially take one of three forms: a history of political thought (Hourani 1962, Abdel-Malek 1969, Al-Douri* 1984, Salamé
1987, Khalidi et al. 1991), biographies of leaders, the fate of the individual often mistaken for that of the organization he led (Abdel-Malek, 1970), and finally, partisan monographs (Darraj and Barout*, 1997, 1999, 2000) which are few in number and frequently end with the years 1970/1980.

Recent growth of political parties and contemporary mutations in Arab regimes, have stimulated a prudent renewal of interest in the political object. Over the past decade, several works in the social sciences have uncovered new problems and stimulated a renewal of interest.4 Party monographs or political currents denote the displacement of interest of the scientific community and political actors (Eshtay* 1997; Charara*1996; Norton, 1999; Kienle, 1990; Tozy 1999; Mallat*, 1993) with most attention focused on the development of Islamist organizations. Nevertheless, such studies remain relatively marginal compared to studies that focus or have focused on political currents5 and more recently on economic elites.

Few studies focus on forms of militancy within party structures, on the recruitment and sociology of militants (Favier 2004; Bennani Chraibi, 2008), as if “the parties” were devoid of members and merely vehicles for leadership of personalized clans or networks. This is the thesis of F. El-Khazen (2003), in Lebanon, who speaks of political parties “in search of partisans.” However, an exploration of political staff is informative as to shifting social cleavages and transformation of the logic of collective action within and around the parties. This is evident in the recent work of M. Bennani-Chraibi (2007) in Morocco and his contribution to this to this volume: they allow the diachronic and synchronic juxtaposition of militancies that are more often opposed: the opposition of Islamist versus Marxist militancies, or political versus associative organizations.

Major trends in the literature (in Arabic as in other languages) reveal two periods of scientific production on political parties. These in turn, reflect the role of political parties in their respective sociopolitical contexts. The first period of high interest on the subject developed in the mid-sixties to mid-seventies, when the regimes stabilized. It was informed on the one hand by research on political modernization, and on the other hand by the pluralization of national politics in the aftermath of independence for several of the countries studied. The second is more recent: it begins in the nineties, when liberalization is listed at the top of national reform agendas. The issue of political Islam attracted the interest of observers and led to a blossoming of political activity in the fields studies, either because of the retreat of the single party system (as in Algeria), renewed permission to create autonomous political parties (Iraq, Bahrain, North and South Yemen, etc.) or because of successive divisions (Morocco, Iraq).6

Thus in Bahrain, political activity went from eight political organizations (tanzimat siyâsiyya) not recognized as a parties in 1973, to fifteen political associations (jam‘iyat siyâsiyya) in 2007. In Algeria, following the 1988 “Spring of Algiers”, over 60 new parties are registered before some are prohibited in 1992 (first and foremost the FIS). Between 1990 and 1991, with reunification, the number of Yemeni parties grew from single party hegemonic systems that characterized both North Yemen (General People’s Congress) and South Yemen (Socialist Party) to a multiparty system with about forty official and recognized parties. In Morocco, with each election, the number of parties grew to 30 registered parties in the 2009 legislative elections. For that matter, observers of Moroccan politics speak of “scissiparity” and “atomization of the partisan field” (Santucci, 2006b). “New” parties seem to emerge from lengthy “fraternal” dissidence or “filial” frustrations which the party is unable to resolve internally (idem.). For A. Khatibi (1998), the
multiplication of political parties, by splitting and successive cloning, expresses the predominance of a pervasive culture of authority that creates the bond of political community through “birthright and patriarchy”, the result of which is a legitimization of any new political party founded on the principle of a “symbolic lineage.”

This cautious return to the party, for both political actors and researchers, is accompanied by a questioning of the relevance of the concept. Thus, not all contributions to the special issue of the journal, *Revue des Mondes Musulmans et de la Méditerranée* (REMMM) devoted to political parties in the Maghreb (Baduel and Catusse, 2006), dealt specifically with party organizations. Thus, M. Djaziri (2006) questions the point of using this concept to describe political organizations in Libya when partisan activity is prohibited and punishable by death. The same question is raised in this volume with respect to Bahrain. Two additional contributions to this special issue focus on political movements that do not take a partisan form. In the case of *arch* in Algeria, K. Dirèche-Slimani (2006) considers that we are facing new names, actors and practices that “upset the traditional representations of politics in Kabyle and Algerian milieux”. Indeed, we frequently encounter this problem in the region, where the supply of political organizations is particularly dense and where political parties pale in comparison to advocacy organizations and social movements (Karam, 2006; Bennani Chraïbi and Fillieule, 2003; Geisser, Karam and Vairel, 2006). T. Desrues (2006) shows that Moroccan agrarian syndicalism is precisely a kind of mobilization that refused the partisan form: “the corporatist formula which tends to become institutionalized [in Moroccan agrarian politics] provides, without consideration for the risk of political competition and cooptation, a means of professional control as well as a monopoly and a personalization of representation.” We will have the opportunity to re-discuss these two arguments and the questions they raise in relation to other examples.

Yet other cases show that usage of party references is varied and evokes multiple processes. As with European communist parties (Kriegel, 1970), parties are sometimes exalted by capitalizing and singularizing the name: this is often the case where the political landscape is dominated by a single party, and is true in Lebanon today, where the party *Hizballah* is commonly shortened simply to “The Party” (*al-Hizb*). Nevertheless, the article by Catherine Le Thomas in this book and other authors show that precisely in this case, the label “party” may be simplistic or inaccurate to describe the social and political activities, which is to say religious and military activities, enacted in the haze of “satellite” organizations (Harb, 2005, p. 167) that some authors have characterized as “counter-society” (Charara*, 1996)

North Africa and the Middle East have also been the breeding grounds for a reflection on regional “proto-parties”, a re-actualization of Max Weber’s concept (Camau and Geisser, 2003). Thus, the societies examined experienced a blossoming of “parties”, more often described as elitist groups committed to the pursuit of profits and a place of choice among competing channels of cooptation, rather than as groups with committed organizational leadership seeking power itself and building popular support through democratic means (La Palombara and Weiner, 1966). More likely, these organizations would make a place for themselves in the political arena by renouncing ambition and the exercise of power. M. Shtuway* (2006) notes that in Jordon the near majority of founders of political parties that emerged after 1992 (the date of approval of political parties and multiparty system) are incumbent bureaucratic elites. Some have sought to create a state party, using these structures to reinvest public institutions in the era of democracy. Such
parties have for the most part remained elitist and their membership a reflection of the calculation of personal political gain. In Yemen, the development of the Yemeni Congregation for Reform (al-Islâh) beginning in 1990 (the year when Yemen adopted a multi-party system) played out in waltz-like hesitation with public authorities. As shown in the contribution of L. Bonnefoy and M. Poirier, “discreet, peaceful and intellectual,” the party elite manage their own inclusion into the intricacies of power, “a political scene that pluralizes (through the institutionalization of the opposition) and ‘de-pluralizes’ at the same time (through monopolization of government resources).”

Furthermore, if since 2003 (the U.S. invasion of Iraq and the fall of the Baathist regime), the number of declared Iraqi parties exceeds 200, “few of them have a history or political activity of note so as to be taken into account on the Iraqi political scene. Most of them are simply political slogans. For this reason, it is difficult to classify them, especially as they have no clear activity that could indicate their ideological orientation, no communication, and some of them do not even have local headquarters.”

This raises the issue of labeling and the very construction of the social category “political party”, underlined by the different contributions to this volume. This is particularly interesting given that “the play on words is [certainly] more present in countries in which political organizations have not been yet stabilized” (Offerlé, 1987, p. 7).

These doubts about the uses of the concept and therefore about its scientific value and the obvious risk of conceptual stretching deserve attention. As an analytical category, as a label or stigma in the political competition (ibidem), as an identity marker, as a tool for mobilization and even for manipulation, the “political party” is polymorphic. This pushes us to question seriously the conditions for a “return to the party” as we propose. The pertinence and usefulness of studying partisan phenomena in the region – if only because political actors organize themselves into political parties – and we here should take such behavior into consideration – is less about rediscovering a “new political object” or giving meaning to an organizational shell devoid of content, than it is about considering the region as the source of an original and plural construction of politics to be analyzed as such.

Failure of the parties

Beyond the question of defining political parties, readings show that not only is the partisan object considered without interest in the region, but that political parties are often left out by the observers. This leads to analyses that are frequently normative and present the disadvantage of implicitly or explicitly disqualifying the object of the study (if this can be justified in the context of actual political action, this is very annoying from a strict approach of social sciences).

The weakness of parties

Indeed, the view most frequently encountered in this volume is that of the “weakness of political parties”. It is about “a common place” that we observe elsewhere (Fretel and Lefebvre, 2004). Such weakness is here aggravated by the extreme limitations on the pluralism in which the parties develop. According to F. Abdel-Jabbar, two elements essentially contributed to the “weakening” of the Iraqi Communist Party: the repressive apparatus of the Baathist regime between 1970 and 1980, and, from 2003, the
strengthening of political and militia violence, the confessional conflict and the development of conservative Islamist movements, which have undermined the popular base of the party. Paradoxically, it is against all this that the Communist Party now hopes to strengthen its project. This is the same evidence that M. Ottaway and A. Hamzawi (2007, p. 1) bring forward: “Conditions in most Arab countries are quite difficult for secular parties, just as they are for any political organization seeking to act independently of a government or even more, to challenge a government. But the crisis of secular parties is also in part of their own making.”

Asserting that political parties are weak invokes a sociological explanation. Many elements however, and we will return to these later, prove that, it is necessary to locate this on a scale relative to political strength or weakness. Such an approach is also an element in the public discourse and the maneuverings of political actors.

The argument is often used by political parties, especially in times of tension and internal crises as evidenced by the Lebanese Communist Party in 2005 in the aftermath of the assassination of Rafik Harriri. At that time a dissident group denounced the line taken by the party that led to catastrophic results, which affected the party and its supporters. “The party’s effectiveness has been reduced and the party is isolated from the people, devoid of intellectual or political influence. The party is weakened, its alliance with groups close to its ideological family utterly defeated”

Such “anti-party” rhetoric and the discrediting of partisan systems continue to operate and are used as often by “outsiders” as they are by the public authorities. Such discourse is largely fueled by opinion makers.

In the end, the arguments advanced that such weaknesses prevent parties from fulfilling the roles “expected of them,” are numerous: the authors first denounce organizational weakness. Parties are often described as poorly organized, highly personalized, even at the service of a man, a family, or a clan like the Takritis for Iraqi Baathists (Luizard, 1998), or as a confessional or ethnic community as in Lebanon (El-Khazen*, 2002). These papers underscore that political parties are often characterized by a low degree of institutionalization, the absence of militants and fragile resources. Many such parties appear only during electoral periods. Their ideologies are weak. Finally, they would only rarely be capable of securing, monitoring, and controlling effective mobilizations. In other words, according to these authors, parties are mainly empty shells which would explain how it is that many groups are simply personifications of a partisan life constructed around the groups’ leadership activities: the party “said this” or “did that”. This finding is not limited to the fields addressed in this volume.

Party dysfunction

Another critique of political parties in the region is the charge of “dysfunctionality.” The argument is sometimes explicit, sometimes implicit: the party, it is claimed, does not function like a “real” party. Alternatively, parties are said to “no longer be what they used to be” in reference to some golden age often de-historicized, or, to go quickly, the Arab liberal age (Salamé, 1991, 1994).

On this basis, political parties in Arab countries are not always considered as such by analysts. Party organizations are considered elements of authoritarianism, poorly organized for the conquest of power and reproducing within themselves an authoritarian and personalized behavior devoid of civic conscience. The “developmentalist” literature
thus made of Arab parties, foreign difficult to transplant in political societies where civil society is challenged by primary social loyalties: family, clan, and ethnic or communitarian groupings. For B. Badie (1989) for example, three party features would be “non-transferable” because shaped historically in a European context: the “sociation” in Weber’s sense of the decline of communitarian societies, the rationale linking the development of political parties to the conquest of power and electoral mobilization and finally, “the partisan game” which would impose itself onto other social divisions (Charaf Eddin*, 2006, and El-Kourani*, 2004).

These arguments are neither empirically or theoretically satisfying. Culturalist explanations (by instance in Islam, a mutual distrust arising from the schism, or the quest for the Umma) produce de-historicized explanations. The weight of history on the fragile formation of Nation-States and the stigma of the single-party system are certainly more interesting subjects for discussion. In fact, revolutions and independence movements have contributed largely to defining the political arenas where conflict (and partition) are not institutionalized, where unanimity is incarnate in the independent and revolutionary state as a State party: as in the case of the FLN in Algeria or of the Iraqi Baath (Batatu, 1978; Devlin, 1976) where the contrast is strong between partisan excitement following independence – right vs. left, tradition vs. modernity, conservatism vs. progressivism, urban elites vs. new middle classes, pro-west vs. pro-soviet, capitalism vs. socialism, religious vs. secular, etc... – and the total silence that “falls like a lead screed” a decade later (Picard, 1996). The Baath party and their leadership “clique” eliminated all forms of contestation even within the party (Luizard, 1998). Can we still speak then of a party? The ambition of a monopolist party is that of power without sharing, without alternating, without competition: “promoted as a basic institution of the state, the nature of the political party is changed. A number of political scientists designate such a state by the term ‘party-state’, and the hyphen is essential. In no way should we consider a party-state as comprised of a system of parties” (Seiler, 2001, p. 7). From the organizational representation of interests and from ideas involved in political competition, it becomes a central hub of the power apparatus, regulating in a total manner the political and social life.

In other cases, if the functioning of parties is not questioned, it is the partisan system itself that is described as dysfunctional: J.C. Santucci (2006b) describes a Moroccan multiparty system as either a purely symbolic system and foil for personal gain or as an instrument of political control. He shows how the recurrent and exponential multiplication of political parties in the country is mere scissiparity feeding a feckless pluralism: While keeping the rotation and the competition for power out of reach for their citizens, public authorities tolerate a form of opposition and political expression that does not question the legitimacy of leadership. This thesis is shared by many authors who believe that the monarchy, in order to better control the political game, “accompanies” the emergence of social conflicts which would otherwise translate as the emergence of a political party. In contrast to what one may describe as a “partisanization” of the political scene in Eastern Europe during the last decade (Heurtaux, 2005), here, the exponential development of partisanship discourages the development of parties. In a game that is becoming loose, they are unable to monopolize the political game. Even in Lebanon, where political life is largely governed by partisan organizations, these are often described as limited by confessional representation, even reduced to organizations in the service of a man or a family.
In sum, the monist and unanimous representation of society and the State as driven by nationalist and revolutionary movements or by the monarchical institutions has, in many cases, discredited partisan representations of political society (or parts of society). Hegemonic parties in Algeria and Iraq that have hindered partisan life are characterized by their grip on society and their “nationalization” of public life. And where multiparty systems developed, these did so essentially as a “limited pluralism” in which real power lies elsewhere than in the partisan arena (at the Palace, in the case of Morocco, in the communities in the case of Lebanon).

The absence of democracy and civil society?

The failures attributed to partisan organizations and systems in the region are often associated with two “failings” endemic to political society: a lack of democracy and a lack of civil society. We will not dwell here on the rich literature that these issues have generated (Bishara*, 1998) nor with the contrasting positions to which they have given rise. The debate, “why the Arab world is not democratic?” (Salamé, 1991) has weighed on the marginalization of political parties for two decades.

We have already noted that parties are generally presented as necessary elements for the emergence and development of representative democracies. The structure and institutional nature of partisan systems contribute to the organization of political competition while the forms assumed by political life in representative democracies promote rational and bureaucratic party structures (Gaxie, 1996). Political practices have been professionalized for the benefit of institutionalized partisan structures. Political parties have succeeded in imposing themselves on at least two privileged arenas: the national Parliament and elections. In these arenas, political parties have imposed themselves as vital to the conception and organization of representative democracy, regulating political life, by affirmation of “political rights” for example, or by legislation of electoral laws, the regulation of political organizations and oversight of public finance. They are also, in theory at least, and as final arbiters for the selection of political personnel, the principal means for channeling national elites.

Such history, anchored as it is in geography and circumstance, is sometimes expanded to explain, by reverse logic, the weakness or dysfunction of partisan systems in other parts of the world, and particularly in the Arabic world (Baduel, 1996, El Kourani*, 2004). Two points are emphasized by these authors: first, the parties could not develop because of the authoritarian characteristic of the system: either because they were banned (the cost of collective action is then exorbitant), or because they are diverted from their purpose. J. Waterbury (1970) for instance wrote that in Morocco, “opposition to His Majesty” became a systematic “sectarianism” in “opposition to His Majesty”. Moreover, for a context in which dissension is risky, the majority program finds itself challenged by a call for unanimity. Secondly, and conversely, the absence of partisanship strengthens the authoritarian regime: “The crisis of secular parties is emerging as a major obstacle to democratic transformation in the Arab world” (Ottaway and Hamzawi, 2007, p. 2). These approaches help to explain how partisan and political systems are narrowly interrelated. However, they are also tautological, even simplistic for some; if it can be shown that Western democracies and partisan politics are historically mixed, it remains difficult to make the case that they are necessarily and unequivocally related (Manin, 1996). From
this point of view, the undeniably partisan Arab life amply documents the modalities of a multi-party system which is both authoritative and limited (Santucci, 2006a).

Another supposed defect weighing upon partisan life in Arab societies is the difficulty in developing civil society and alternatively, the importance of notables in the political process. Some authors approach the use of “civil society” and related media coverage in Arab countries as mere imported objects without socio-historical roots in the community, or even, as a new ideological tool in the hands of Arab intellectuals confronted with the failure of modernizing projects and the strengthening of the Islamist discourse (Bishara*, 1998, p. 271). In our case, and in view of the escalating demands of civil society and increased calls for action “in the name of civil society”, and in view of the comparative devaluation of party organizations, the debate lies elsewhere. Several authors particularly in a European context have described the emergence of the party system as a transition from a system of parliamentary dominance of party organizations to one in which party organizations dominate parliament (Duverger, 1992): an empowered civil society is perceived as a counterbalance to the power of the elites. Field observers however, frequently insist, not only on personalized political functionality, but on the weak linkages between political society and civil society. If civil society is frequently described as the precursor of democratic transformations, we are less concerned with the improbable or “imported” character of such organizations than we are with the tepid political demands that are presented in the public sphere by associations or movements which call themselves “civil society”.

On the one hand, partisan identities appear fragile and poorly linked to the construction of causes in civil society. This, at least, is what several of the contributions to this volume highlight. Groups have difficulty organizing mobilizations around social cleavages, and even more so, in gelling these cleavages in the words of S. Lipset and S. Rokkan (1967), as indicated by M. Djaziri (1997) in his discussion of political parties in the Maghreb. This is also noted in the sections that follow, the studies of the “Yemeni Congregation for Reform” (al-Islâh) or the Justice and Development Party (PJD) in Morocco. The first gathers tribal elites, merchants, and religious people around a flexible and adaptable ideology. The second tends to euphemize, at least with regard to municipal professions, its relation to Islam and its social discourse. Proffering a managerial approach and “moral clientelism”, the PJD addresses a heterogeneous electorate while C. and F. Eshtay* (2008) show that the contemporary Lebanese Communist Party priority is more concerned with the refusal of sectarian division than it is with the defense of class interests, perhaps because, for Lebanese communists, sectarian divisions would prevent the expression of social cleavages.

Political formations are often organized around a single individual and serve that person’s pleasure (Messara 1996). Such individuals include notables, families, clans, groups that adapt and adopt new clothes according to the transformations of the political scene: the Hamula in Palestine (Legrain, 1996), tâ’ifa (communities) in Lebanon [Picard, 1994, Messara 1996], the reinvented ‘asabiyya (Seurat, 1985), etc. According to this perspective, the “politics of the name” trumps “the politics of number” (or of majority). Individual leaders and families; not political parties, eventually monopolize the levers of political mobilization and representation. It occurs for instance among Lebanese political parties, where transmission of partisan responsibility by blood ties (and sometimes in the name of bloodshed) is common. It is also observed in the tribal identification of certain parties.
Whatever it is, these approaches must be nuanced. Recent studies show how individuals and the criteria of notability transform and embrace the changes of the partisan system (Favier, 2003). Parties themselves create their own elites, who are more or less faithful depending on the case. At the same time, we see militant activists who speak forcefully and translate social divisions and conflicts, sometimes with heavy repression: in a nutshell, leftist movements yesterday, Islamist movements today.

**And yet they mobilize...**

In summary, the parties in these countries are “misidentified” political objects, suspected of inconsistency, of structural weaknesses, and victims of a type of authoritarian regime developed during the twentieth century. However, as pointed out by Kh. Suleiman* (2004, p. 436) in a stimulating conclusion of a book on the internal democracy of the Arab parties, the question as to whether or not there are political parties in the Arab world is not in itself very enlightening, “otherwise, what should one call these dozens of organizations that claim body and soul the tribute of political parties?” *(ibidem)*.

The political landscapes of the countries included in our study feature organizations that mobilize and contribute to regulating the political game on behalf of partisan identity. More than parties engaged in an electoral contest – many have distanced, even excluded themselves from electoral politics – they have all contributed to founding diverse activisms.

Despite the lack of credibility or confidence revealed in the studies with regard to the partisan system and growing rates of abstention in the most recent polls, as well as other indicators of a “crisis of the parties”, some party organizations continue to provide structures of commitment and leadership, especially at election time. Hence the need to abandon an “objectifying” and unequivocal conception of political parties, in favor of a study of a variety of cases, including parties that are not necessarily in the spotlight, and that may be witnessing the transformations and constraints which face political processes as much as the more studied political groups.

**The Path of History**

The approach we have adopted in this book favors an historical perspective. To understand partisan transformations one must first understand how the development of political parties and their current metamorphosis are linked to the history of regional State formation. At a comparative level, the concern of historical context allows us to explore recurring forms or innovative features in recent partisan formations.

In view of the complexification of the political landscape and beyond the “democratization” or “crises of the parties” rhetoric, there appear two narrative histories on the partisan phenomenon in the region. Like the studies compiled in this book, most contemporary works evoke a recent “transformation” or “change” with respect to an earlier period, that of “old regime”, which should determine, at least in part, a contemporary socio-political context. This is so much so that two historical narratives seem to combine, that of a short time frame of contemporary changes, sometimes attributed to a process of democratization or authoritarian reform, and that of a longer time frame allowed for the formation of political regimes, for the singularity of chosen
trajectories, for the reinterpretation of primary social relations and modern political identities. It is in the interlacing of this long history and this short history that the stakes of a metamorphosis of the Arab parties can be understood. The first wears the glasses of comparison with the international reformist agenda; while the second positions parties in their social, historical contexts, and even with respect to specific places.

**Short histories that resemble each other**

At first glance, the recent trajectories of Arab partisan societies prove remarkably similar. In the six countries of the study, leaders and activists of political parties are engaged in a new deal, with different stakes that vary depending on the case: “Alternance” with the nomination of a socialist Prime Minister in Morocco, the introduction of multiparty politics, the interruption of the electoral process and the search for “civil concord” in Algeria, emergence from the Lebanese civil war, the unification of the two Yemen’s, the fall of Saddam Hussein’s regime in Iraq, development of a “national pact” in Bahrain. It seems that the redefinition of “political pacts” (Leca, 1994) or the development of novel political contracts is at play. This new era for the parties (with possibly new political spaces for action and legitimization) falls at the intersection of three main processes: those of the internal dynamics of parties, those of the changing rules of partisanship, and finally those of international influences.

**Internal dynamics**

The investigation of what J. Charlot (1989, p. 361) called the “hidden side” of parties, their inner and backstage lives, has not given rise to many studies on our fields. In the case of Turkey, S. Vaner (1985, p. 5) makes the same claim. He explains this by the fact that, in this case, such studies provide little of use to party differentiation: most parties in Turkey are “cadre” parties, little inclined to seek new members (Massicard, 2007, p. 8). Such is certainly less evident in the Arab world, at least in our fields of investigation. But, for lack of reliable and detailed data, it is not easy to show, beyond the conventional presentation of political parties.

It is true that the doors to partisan organizations are not often easily opened. In addition to opacity or the withholding of information a favorite strategy for some organizations, access in the field is largely conditioned by the constraints of repressive regimes and the careful reflexes they can generate. Proximity in the field or permission to investigate on the part of the organization is often necessary to maintain an extended presence. Such an approach offers the advantage of access to the party’s inner workings, including familiarity with both tacit and explicit organizational codes. But this in turn can reduce the effective critical distancing necessary for analysis or even lead to different forms of censorship in the restitution of findings.

Based on available surveys, some big common tendencies are distinguished. We will merely point out here those that seem most interesting.

Many partisan formations are seeking a second wind in face of the alienation they suffer and the trend towards professionalization of their activists. In most cases, the number of militant activists has been decreasing even though, paradoxically, the pluralization of the political landscape gives them more leeway as public actors. This translates not only as a high abstention rate, but as difficulty in recruiting candidates and reliance on untrained
paid staff. The difficulties are also expressed as fickle a partisan loyalty (known to Moroccans as “partisan nomadism”) which contrasts inversely with the far more radical and committed militancy observed elsewhere. As for partisan activism, it has become more professionalized, salaried even institutionalized. If in some cases this is evidence of a lack of mobilization (benevolent activism would no longer be what it was) in other cases, it is described by observers as well as by militant partisans, as the gage of superior political efficacy: such is the case of the PJD in Morocco, where local officials, and all partisan groups highlight their political virginity (their recent entry into the political fray) but also the professionalization of their elected activities to which they would devote themselves totally.  

Recruitment of political personnel plays an important role in partisan transformations. The centralization of partisan organizations and their personalization continue to be highlighted. The institutionalization of managerial authority however, expressed for example in the organization of pointless and uncompetitive party congresses, is not always the rule. In generational terms, Arab parties management frequently recruited among militants of the 1950s and 60s is today in need of renewal. Thus, most of the papers in this volume reflect managerial tensions between opposing currents, the old guard being sometimes reversed or at least marginalized, weakened as in the case of al-Islâh in Yemen or al-Wefâq in Bahrain or the Moroccan USFP. For new parties, leadership is not always uniform. Unlike the purges or exclusions of the Iraqi and Syrian Baathist parties, the link between the party and its elected officials is quite often fluid and negotiated. Candidate selection is variable and may just as well reflect bargaining or some form of negotiation between the national governing body and the local elite. Such negotiations arise in consultation with the “party base” but are subject to rigorous selection and consistent with the representation the party leadership wishes to impart to the candidate, as in the case of the Moroccan PJD. 

Studies of party members and activists are virtually non-existent whence the great value of the work initiated recently by M. Bennani-Chraibi, on the political personnel of Moroccan parties, a necessary piece of scholarship unmatched on the scale of the region. Combining a quantitative treatment of data describing activist career paths with qualitative analysis, the study will apply unpublished and detailed data to examine the process of diversification and political recruitment. In her contribution to this book, M. Bennani-Chraibi reveals how the Socialist Union of Popular Forces is changing its political leadership and how a party of militants has been transformed into a party of notables. 

Observers will often confuse the supporter, the member, party executives, militants, even the reader of the partisan press or the client of the local or national political leader. This is more often the case when membership conditions are blurred, informal or poorly defined, or hidden when a party is illegal, or when, as with the Lebanese Hizbollah, and in earlier times, as with certain communist party organizations (Kriegel, 1970, p. 214-220), operating procedures were secretive and not publicly disclosed. Joining a party may include initiation, but in all cases it produces social and political identities. The chapter of C. Le Thomas in this book demonstrates that the latter emerge in structures of socialization, of controlling or of training that are not strictly limited to narrowly defined party limits. 

After inspiring much new work through the 1970s and 80s (Hottinger, 1961, 1966; Gubser, 1973, Johnson 1986; Gilsenan, 1986), studies of party leadership became relatively
infrequent. Even if most studies highlighted the often oligarchic organization of political groups, recent work, for example in the Middle East, shows that the leadership figures, or *zu'amâ* of yesterday are quite different from those of today. Not only do the inherited relationships between *za'im* and his followers combine with generational effects, but the institution of *zu'amâ*, by which a leader ensures the loyalty of the local community in exchange for economic redistribution and defense of community interests, is also changing with the transformations of political economy (Picard, 2001). This translates even within partisan structures, especially when weakly institutionalized, as a search for new resources, strategies, and leadership qualities. This is even more striking when, at the disappearance of a senior member, new leadership seeks to revive not only their social networks within and without the party, but also the charismatic dimension of their power.

Finally, in terms of internal dynamics, problems arising from the use of weapons have proven determinant in several cases: in some cases it has led to disarming militias (for example, in post war Lebanon), transiting from armed modes to peaceful modes of political regulation (as in Lebanon, but also in Yemen following unification); while in other cases, as in Iraq, where partisan activists, whether to protect, impose or oppose, took up arms and radicalized their actions following the fall of S. Hussein.

Beyond that there is the question of partisan resources. As noted by E. Massicard (2007, p.12ff.) with respect to the knowledge of Turkish political parties, it can translate into two dimensions: those of the collective resources of parties and those of the individual capital of their members. Their financial resources are little known. Emphasis is placed on collectively controlled resources, including the conquest or preservation of political posts, (elective or administrative), the social rooting of associations and other structures which serve to advance recruitment and promote party loyalty, and ethnic (as in Yemen) or confessional communities (as in Lebanon or Iraq). For instance, in Iraq following the 2003 invasion, there were created twelve new Christian political groups, fourteen Turkmen, and four Kurdish formations (Jameel and Abdel-Jabbar*, 2008). In Algeria, the Gathering for Culture and Democracy, while not explicitly Berber, claims a cultural affinity to the Kabyle Berbers.

However that may be, the remarkable introduction of regulatory measures for party finances through legislation governing party formation and elections constitutes a new situation for the partisan life of several of the countries in our survey. Such legislation cuts both ways, however. First, the legislation addresses a concern for transparency in the partisan world and its resources. At the same time, such legislation operates like the sword of Damocles in the hands of public power, who see in this legislation new ways to legally interfere in the internal affairs of political parties, notably their challengers.

**Rules of the partisan game**

A number of substantially similar reform programs seems to preoccupy contemporary partisan actors. Rather than deal in general terms with liberalization or “de-liberalization” of political regimes (Kienle, 2001), we focused on the evolution of structures of political opportunities (Tarrow 1998) that represent renovations or changes in the legislative framework within which partisan actors are constrained to act. As it happens, such changes have accelerated over the last decade.
Let us first mention the adoption of new constitutions, often with referendums upon which competing political parties took positions (Morocco, 1996; Bahrain, 2002; Yemen, 1990, 1994, 2001; Algeria, 1996, 2002, 2008; Iraq, 2005; Lebanon, 1990). In Lebanon, Yemen and Algeria, constitutional reform was less about pluralizing the political arena than it was about ending civil conflict and endorsing a set of common rules based on a political pact that “sets rather the preconditions for different political supplies to be self-restrained and consistent enough not to be considered by the other party, or parties, as an unacceptable threat that would justify the breach of ‘democratic rules’” (Leca, 1994, p. 36). In other cases, the adoption of this new political framework relates more to the search for regulation of political conflicts arising over the issue of power and of the imagined political community. Iraq since 2003 is the most striking example.

These countries have also experienced major reforms in terms of “political rights” and of the “right to politics”, the distinction having been suggested by J. Heurtaux (2005) with respect to Poland. Following 1989, what he terms the “partisanization” process is played out in struggles on the codification of political competition, with a strong tendency toward the “jurisdiction of political activity” and the “politicization of law”. Over the past decade our fields of research have indeed experienced the transformation of law governing political activities – electoral laws, laws on political parties, freedom of the press, public and associative liberties, etc. – inaugurating a kind of “political pluralism”, at least from a procedural viewpoint. The substantial character of this pluralism, however, is challenged by each of the chapters that follow. If Lebanese parliamentarians did not adopt a new law on political parties, the drafters of the constitutional reform which passed the Taif agreement (1990) affirmed the liberal orientation of the existing law. In the other cases, the most recent legislation liberalizes the space of partisan action, while retaining tight even arbitrary oversight by the central government. This accompanies the remarkable growth in recognized political parties that we have already noted.

Constitutional reform and the legalization of multiple parties in Algeria, followed by the suspension of the electoral process in 1991 offers a telling analysis of the hesitant waltz of political reform. The transition to multiparty system for the benefit of reforms “from above” and corresponding mobilizations “from below” seem like an excessively fragile prelude to democratization. Regarding multiparty “false pretenses”, some stress, as in Morocco, that “after all, power remains concentrated in the hands of the same forces since independence, through the institutions that crown or mediate their political preponderance.” (Santucci, 2006a, p. 162). But there is also evidence of the emergence of new political forces in recent decades, supported largely by the legal and political reforms that “opened” the partisan scene: The Party of Justice and Development in Morocco, the Islamic Salvation Front in Algeria, Hizballah in Lebanon, al-Islâh in Yemen, the Sadrist Movement or Hizb al-fadîla al-Islâmi in Iraq, etc.

The influence of external factors: a domino effect?

Obviously, the short life-cycles that characterize the partisan landscape across the region are intimately linked to transnational processes and especially to the neo-liberal agenda.

Engaged over the years, and even decades for some, in a process of economic liberalization which has accompanied the discourse on democratization (or at least of the need to comply with a number of procedural criteria), regimes are in the process of
renegotiating their return to a market economy. These socio-economic changes are not without effect on partisan formations that assume, in a more or less pluralistic and reactive manner, the demands arising from the social cleavages brought about by these reforms (El-Salahi* and El-Maitama, 2008). This raises at least two questions: First, why do socialist parties have so much trouble advocating for social claims which arise in the wake of the neo-liberal steamroller? And secondly, has the development of Islamist parties been nurtured, at all or in part by the new populism and social consequences of precipitous economic reforms? Remarkably, and despite the impending economic question for each of the countries studied, an economic agenda (and controversies that might arise) is virtually absent from most political parties' programs.

We should note that the Arab regimes on which we have focused display autonomy in coping with what would be an international agenda of democratization; even more so if we consider the process of “partisanization”. In their collective work on political parties in conflict-prone societies, published by the United Nations, B. Reilly and P. Nordlund (2008) do not include any Arab parties, as if these were to be excluded from a collective reflection on the role of partisanship in the process of democratization, mediation of interests and the regulation of conflict. Finally, international assistance programs directed toward Arab political parties are of recent origin and modest compared to the donor assistance provided for the development of civil society, whereas elsewhere, “spurred by the liberalization of previously Autocratic states in African, Asia, Eastern Europe and Latin America, the international community began to invest heavily in concepts of democratic promotion, electoral support and ‘good governance’ as essential elements of economic development and the creation of stable and peaceful states” (ibidem , p. 5).

In sum, in view of the short history of these last fifteen years, the development of partisan dynamics in the six countries discussed in this volume shows a number of remarkable common characteristics: their number increases significantly. They are formally subject to new game rules. Ideological orientations have become more accommodating of strategic considerations, including partisan formations who claim a distinctive ideological identity, notably Islamists. Partisan actors are more inclined to cultivate interdependent relations with regimes and central administrations, be it in terms of co-optation, prohibition, infiltration or distancing. Legal interpretation, arbitrary behavior and public finance for political organizations, for the most part dependent upon public resources (with the notable exceptions of Lebanon or Iraq), place political parties under “probationary liberty”, and the constant threat of legal sanctions and even dissolution. Finally, and contrary to the professional militant of the 1960/1970’s, the relation to the party seems precarious: most forms of activism are flexible, fluid, and prone to various “infidelities”. This is measured as much at the level of the militant base as it is among political leaders themselves who change hats or create new parties at will, depending on circumstances and the ability of their own partisan formation to advance their individual careers. What follows is a blurring of labels that confuses even the militant base and reduces opportunities for recruitment. In addition, the political parties generally do not to be key stakeholders in the political process, nor in policy making, especially because of the weakness and marginalization of parliamentary institutions. The relationship of political parties to “civil society” or at least to a vast network of associations, is finally renegotiated: Far from a binary or Manichean scheme between a vulnerable partisan society, and an active and dynamic civil society, analysis of
the partisan phenomenon in our field shows, as if proof were needed, the extent to which the spheres are entangled. At times, when partisan activity was prohibited, the political association served as a front, just as the association al-Taw’yya al-islâmiyya (the Islamic awakening) in Bahrain served as a façade for the Islamist party al-Da’wâ at a time when political associations were outlawed. At other times, the association may serve as the party’s operational arm, organizing social activities, guiding and training youth, outreach to certain target populations, at a local level, in the universities, etc. In other cases, associative and partisan structures compete so that human rights or civil liberties organizations assume the fight for political causes such as scheduling elections or the reform of political laws. It is worth noting that among our various fields of expertise, other forms of interaction come into play in terms of mobilizations and the organization of partisan society: communitarian groups, families, tribes, these are the glue of partisan organizations that are true to their “primary social interests” or undermine partisan mobilizations which transgress their social organization, in the name of class interests or betrayal of the social order.

The singular effects of the long history

Beyond these common features, the singularities of partisan trajectories in all six countries can be explained in large part by the specifics of the history of formation of their States. Three entries allow us to discuss this:

First, the local history of the concept of political party is sometimes very recent and poorly consolidated and at other times, installed and tested. Sometimes the object “political party” is clearly distinguished from other forms of political organizations. At other times it is confused with other types of mobilization.

Next, the history of the major political movements is closely interwoven with that of the formation of nation states. In Morocco or in Algeria, parties led the movement for national liberation. In other cases, parties played a secondary role behind personalities or political and community leaders. The national struggle, decolonization and construction of the nation state gave rise to different political and partisan situations. In Yemen (prior to unification) and in Iraq, there developed the single party or quasi-single party, with a partisan coalition acting as façade. In Algeria, the single-party became a “state party”, while in Bahrain, partisan activity is outlawed. In other countries the multiparty system characterized from the outset the formation of a system of consociation, as in the case of Lebanon, or of a limited and feckless pluralism as in Morocco which is ruled by royal institution. In this way and by reading the long history we may distinguish the profoundly different experiences between parties with ideological, parliamentary or governmental heritage, and others that are recent creations and are only just learning the basics of power sharing. A prior clandestine existence is also a discriminatory experience and has influenced the trajectory of many partisan formations.

Finally, the ideological history – particularly the ideology of developing regimes – highlights the effects of socialist, nationalist and/or revolutionary legacies: particularly in terms of legitimization or de-legitimization of partisan plurality.
New Political Objects, Globalized and Singular?

If preceding developments call for a re-conceptualization of the analysis of political parties in the Arab world, it seems equally important to us that we should reexamine their typology, or even to review new evidence for their understanding and classification.

Various typologies of “Arab parties” have been produced. In particular, B. Badie (1989) distinguished a number of party types in the “Muslim” world, from “single parties” like the Algerian FLN to political parties defining themselves through the “outlines of a political ideology” such as the Baath party, parties that are used as a vehicle for “promoting the legitimacy of a leader” like the Tunisian Neo-Destour party, parties that are themselves constituent elements of the regimes they support, especially in the “traditional monarchies”, “pressure parties” that are also constituent parties but function in a latent manner like the Egyptian Wafd or the Moroccan UNFP parties, and finally, parties that perceive their agenda from the standpoint of a “counter legitimacy” advocating the construction of an alternative political system. Now let us look at how such typologies are inoperative.

Among French authors, P. R. Baduel (1998) attempted adaptation of S. Lipset’s and S. Rokkan’s (1967) system of analysis, in order to classify Arab parties according to various established dualities: “religious vs secular”, “center vs periphery”, “owners vs workers”, “State vs civil society”. Here again the criteria are questionable. M. Camau and V. Geisser show for example that the four cleavages of S. Lipset and S. Rokkan are not easily extensible to describe the Tunisian partisan landscape a finding that may be generalized to other countries in our study. These cleavages are present in these societies to be sure, but political organizations follow a logic that can be far more decisive: “it is in fact, from a strategy of equivocation regarding social cleavages that they intend to draw their partisan legitimacy, not from the exacerbation of differences. Thus they contribute to improve the externality of the political order in relation to societal issues” (Camau and Geisser, 2003, p. 248).

We may also, like F. El-Khazen (2003, p. 613) in the case of Lebanon in the 1990s, distinguish “loyalist”, “authorized” or “forbidden” parties. The first have been represented in parliament and government since 1992, the second have no representation in political power and banned parties are systematically tracked, directly or indirectly by government authorities. Given the evolution and pluralization of partisan landscapes, this classification hardly reflects contemporary dynamics where the blurring of boundaries between ruling and opposition parties is progressively becoming the norm: either because of government alternance (see, for example the 1998 “Alternance” in Morocco); or simply because the very notion of opposition may itself refer to highly differentiated political strategies, including for the same context and where opposition can be constructed as against the regime or in concert with the governing coalition (the case of Lebanon and the after-war is striking from this point of view).

Several of our authors have chosen to adopt other classifications. In Yemen, the parties are classified as “clan” (‘āshā’irî), “tribal” (qaba’ilî), “confessional” (mazhab) “traditional” (taqldî) or “modern” (hadîth) (El-Salahi and El-Maitama, 2008). In Iraq, they are sorted according to leadership andmay be “religious” (dînî), “traditional” (taqldî), “clan” (‘āshā’irî) or “nontraditional” (gheyr taqldîyya) and may overlap with modes of bureaucratic, charismatic, military, Leninist or elitist organization. These classifications
useful to describe the partisan landscape, may however have the disadvantage of the freezing it into rigid categories, not helpful in understanding the dynamics that are today reshaping partisan organizations.

In the end, it seems that two processes deserve particular attention in describing the linkages between contemporary partisan logic and regime transformations: the processes by which public debate and action are politicized and de-politicized, and the generational effects of activism.

**Politicization and de-politicization of the partisan landscape**

The transformations of the political landscapes of the six countries of our study, raise issues concerning politicization, de-politicization and over-politicization and consequences for partisan actors. The promotion of “good governance” and of “new public management” coupled with regime change, call for the expertise, technical knowledge and business approach, at least in a formal manner. Political correctness is increasingly defined through “good management” criteria. At the same time, as anti-partisan discourse becomes settled, issues of political representation are relegated to subordinate priorities and municipal and parliamentary arenas are abandoned (Baaklini, Denoeux and Springborg, 1999; Dupret and Ferrié, 2008; Salem; Krayem and Antoun, 1998; Lebanese Center for Policy Studies, 1999, 2002a). In this anti-political logic, the development of associations occurs “above and beyond” the pale of the party (Zaki 2009), or even for “lack of” party (Karam, 2006). In return, one pretends to “discover” the degree of politicization of institutions, actors, associates, technocrats, experts, etc. By emphasizing their share of parliamentary action or of local commitment for example, Islamist militants invest these tribunes, providing them with renewed political vitality.

This raises two questions: to what extent does the transition from old regime to new affect the potential of political parties, that is to say, their ability to renew their engagement in power competitions, to produce collective identities, to mediate public spaces? And how does militancy change in their midst?

**The old and the new regime**

In the framework of this inventory of partisan dynamics for six Arab regimes, our various contributions are based either implicitly or explicitly on an historical perspective that distinguishes a “before” and an “after”, an “old regime” and a “new regime”, reflecting implicitly the emergence of “new parties”. This merits deeper examination. As we have seen with respect to the historicity of partisan processes, strong continuity and resilience combine with elements of disruption and innovation. Regarding the internal dynamics of parties and their inclusion in the political field, this can be broken down into several areas.

The transition from clandestinity to legality affects relations between partisan organizations and civil society, which could in turn provide refuge in times of repression or when a partisan organization finds itself competing but in a subordinate position. While ensuring broad political competition, legalization may simply test previously banned parties, or parties that were heretofore merely tolerated, especially as legislative agendas may require a revision of strategy, of discourse, of modes of action and mobilization and even the accumulation of new political resources.
The transition from opposition to government has also produced complex opportunities and constraints for competing parties. The movement from radical and exclusivist positions (which can go so far as to deny the legitimacy of the other, whether opponent or ruler) to the formalization of political pact, based on the rejection of violence and the formalization of a compromise on the minimal rules of the game, resulted in the participation of the near-majority of political parties in the most recent elections, and even their participation in government. Again, this is a test and an expensive test not just for the governing parties. The parties who abandoned their status as “historic opposition” to participate in a governing coalition were obliged to renounce modes of action and legitimization that until then were paramount to their conception of the competition for power. This was the case for the Moroccan USFP, whose members, leaders, activists and voters found themselves with resources, social position and political legitimacy diametrically opposed to what had been their lot for over three decades. In Yemen, al-Islâh finds itself divided between a tendency toward emancipation with respect to the regime under whose tutelage it could easily develop and become institutionalized, and its role as an opposition party in the context of a multi-party although hardly pluralistic system.

The end of ideologies?

Another recurring issue is that of the mutation or even the erosion of ideology. In reality, the decline of nationalist and class ideologies seems at first to be compensated by the excitement and discourse of primary identity. Partisan organizations then become a forum for the representation of Muslim identities, Sunni or Shiite, especially for “Islamists” parties, but also for communitarian or ethnic parties.

The decline of class identity is matched by the displacement of the lines of cleavage between secular and religious movements. The crisis of the social state and the shrinking of the redistributive capacities of regimes that turn to private companies or associations to satisfy their social obligations have encouraged the return of notables, both at the local and the national level. It may be observed in the entry into politics of businessmen, traders or employers who are active in labor and corporatist unions, but also in municipal councils, parliaments and political parties. Even if new ideologies and group identities may thus be drawn, the main trend identified is that of the “decline of ideology” in favor of strategic politics: the ideological characteristics of the parties become blurred because of strategies and political arguments (to participate or not in government, to build coalitions, etc.). This is reflected by the resemblance and weak consistency of political platforms of parties, especially at election time. Should we, on this point, advance a secular politics against Islamist parties, while hypothesizing that the weakness of the former is tied to their difficulty to develop a clear vision? M. Ottaway and A. Hamzawy (2007, p. 18) emphasize that “political parties competing in elections do not always have to have a vision, but they need at least a message about what they will do if they win the elections.” In our field, the Islamist message is also vague and eventually not particularly ideological. It tends however, to “couple the religious appeal with social services for their constituencies, never taking them for granted” (idem).

Such variability in the program is accompanied by a clientelisation of militants, which is to say, it would be less the ideology than the provision of services that make supporters loyal. This is what PJD elected officials expressed in our Moroccan research. These
characterize their relationship to Islam and the Islamic content of their programs in the
most euphemistic of terms, preferring a discourse on their willingness to help their
electorate and the citizens of their circumscription. This is also what L. Bonnefoy and M.
Poirier show in Yemen where the plasticity of the doctrinal and programmatic structure
of al-Islâh and the eclecticism of its surroundings – at the same time Islamist, commercial
and tribal – are tools to favor client relations but also “partisan nomadism”. In Algeria, A.
Boubaker (2008) stresses that the development of the Salafi movement, in the context of
ad-Da’wâ as-salafiyya, responds in a way to the neutralization of the political vocation of
Islamist parties, namely that they be banned or radicalized and equipped with weapons,
or that they have exchanged their ideological fervor for positions of power, as in the case
of Hamas or en-Nahda.

What partisan militancy?

90 We would like to conclude this passage on contemporary partisan dynamics with a few
remarks regarding militancy. If work on collective action has appreciably developed over
the past decade, advancing original and innovative theories (Bennani-Chraibi, Fillieul,
2003; Karam, 2006; Favier, 2004, Vairel, 2005, etc.), virtually none of this work has been on
contemporary partisan militancy. If the study of partisanship is opened to the study of
militant careers, would that not be because militants move from party to syndicate,
passing through associations and other places of engagement? It appears to us that the
partisan militancy deserves attention of itself. For this reason, the study of militant
trajectories should include a blind but central angle. We shall limit ourselves to pointing
out to several lines of analysis.

91 First, the arena for public mobilizations is reforming, as we have repeatedly emphasized.
If nostalgia for the “second liberal era” (Salamé, 1991, 1994) reaches here and there,
lamenting that militancy is no longer what it used to be, others have shown instead how
such expertise and the militant experience move and transpose from generation to
generation in different partisan structures. Could it then be a conversion from leftist
militancy: if some are disengaging, others (sometimes Islamists) are investing new
partisan (Burgat, 2007) or associative (Bennani-Chraibi, 2003) arenas. A framework
analysis but also analysis of the social environment and networks of engagement can
greatly enrich a field about which little is known and for which there is not much
documentation. Such an investigation would include data to confirm or refute the thesis
according to which the actual political and electoral resources of most Islamist parties
reside in a militant approach which if not exceptional is at least innovative: existing
studies stress the discipline, expertise and dedication of Hizballah militants in Lebanon
and to a lesser degree, PJD militants in Morocco (Fawwaz, 2004; Harb, 2005; Chaib, 2008),
compared to other political formations.29 In the field, the gaps between partisan ideology,
even if vague, party slogans and militant discourse are often striking, raising in this way
questions about a party’s ability to provide a framework for their militants.

92 Next, militant partisan trajectories cannot be understood without regard to the
transformations of the arenas of mobilization, and most notably, to the development of
social movements and vast network of associations. Far from observing an opposition of
civil society and partisan society, or even, civil society at the service of partisan society,
we find at least four moving configurations: first, in Lebanon, in the civil movements
(Karam, 2006), and Morocco as well (Vairel, 2005), party structures are circumvented by
alternative arenas. Militants engage or reconvert their militancy into associative structures for lack of anything better: for want, they say, of a political party able to represent their interests and political vindications. For such cases associations as antechambers to political organization become potential competitors. Analysts of professional and trade syndicates show these may also serve as places of refuge for vested interests when the transition to partisan life is blocked or proves to be particularly onerous (Gobe, 2006; Bianchi, 1989). Further, associations develop out of service to a political party, as “social institutions”, in the words of contributing author, C. Le Thomas, in relation to the schools “of” Hizballah. As places of mobilization and socialization, they are also places for the dispensation of social services, creators of loyalty or at least, of familiarity, as demonstrated by L. Bonnefoy and M. Poirier in their discussion of the charitable association, al-Islâh (jam‘iyya lil-Islâh al-ijtima‘i al-ìjta‘iyya): although officially independent of the party, al-Islâh nevertheless contributes to the dissemination of party ideas and contributes much to the party's popularity. In a third case, the associative and partisan structures neither compete nor are they directly intertwined, they simply represent different structures in the process of militancy which are often accumulated as places and causes of engagement (this may be the case now for a number of human rights associations that welcome among their ranks the abused opposition of left parties, lay militants and even Islamist militant, and for the most part those without party affiliation.) Finally, a fourth possible configuration as in Bahrain, but also in the emblematic case of the association al-‘Adl wa al-ihsân in Morocco, the associative space serves as a alternative space for potential political parties formally excluded from electoral competition and political representation.

93 Finally, if we stressed earlier that militancy would professionalize and would assume the contours of management, generational effects on militant structures remained to be explored. A number of studies show that partisan frameworks continue to age and that for some of the organizations, the leadership dates back to the founding generation. Such studies also show, as in the case of Bahrain, that divisions emerge in or around the political groups in the course of generational renewal. It would also be particularly useful to continue work on the many facets of party engagement: cadres, elected representatives, professionals, militants, combatants, voters, brokers (muftah intikhâbî), sympathizers and readers all maintain very different relationships to the party and deserve recognition.

Conclusion

94 This volume therefore calls for release from purgatory of research the object “political party”. The chapters which follow reflect the variable linkages between partisan development and the transformation of regimes in Morocco, Algeria, Lebanon, Iraq, Yemen and Bahrain. Based on unpublished data and a field approach, these chapters discuss many facets of partisan life in political societies characterized by their limited pluralism and reputed alternatively as being either authoritarian or undergoing democratic transition.

95 L. Bonnefoy and M. Poirier’s chapter on the difficult construction of an alternative project for the Yemeni Congregation for Reform, M. Hennad’s chapter on the Algerian FLN and H. A'boushi’s chapter on the re-conversion of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, concern themselves primarily with the effects of mutations of the partisan game,
the consequences of the transition from underground to legality, from opposition to cooptation, from state party to multi-party system. They pay attention to the institutional and legal framework in which partisan activity takes place and to the links between “the right to politics and political rights”.

The following chapters look into the life of the parties, the renewal of the elites and their modes of selection, on the preferred forms of militancy, on the internal party conflicts and on the variety of their activities, notably social. Thus, A. Mirza El-Mursheh outlines the internal dynamics at the al-Wefâq in Bahrain, paying particular attention to generational effects within this association in search of a partisan system. C. Le Thomas looks at the process of political socialization at work, in schools operated by the Hizballah movement in Lebanon. In Morocco, M. Bennani-Chraibi examines the parliamentary “notabilization” of a “party of militants”, the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, and M. Catusse and L. Zaki study the transformation of profiles and practices of the local representatives of the Justice and Development Party.

Finally, two last short chapters, that of F. Abdel-Jabbar’s chapter on the Iraqi Communist Party and that of R. Tal’at Jawhar on the Turkmen Front in Iraq, bring to light some reflections on the reshaping of irakian partisan system, underlying the production of identity and political allegiance within the Nation State. The paradigm of a single party has, in the name of defending the integrity of the nation state, undoubtedly influenced the ordering of authoritarian and hegemonic regimes in the region. But the development of ethnic parties, communitarian and confessional parties and infra- or supra-state parties is also one of the recurring characteristics of regional political arenas.

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NOTES

1. For a critical discussion of this literature, see R. Gunther, J.J. Montero, J. Linz (2002).
3. See the contribution of L. Bonnefoy and M. Poirier to this volume.
4. Today some publications, recent gatherings and research programs reveal renewed interest as evidenced by the two REMMM volumes (1998, 2006), the conferences and publications of the LCPS (2002; 2006) and the research program of the Institute for Strategic Studies, etc. See: Aboujaoudé, 1985; Malki*, 1993; Eshtay*, 1997; Abdel-Jabbar, 2003a-b, etc.
5. To go quickly, in the 60s, on the national movements see: Antonios, 1938; Berque, 1967; Batatu, 1984; Al-Douri, 1984). For Arabism in the 1960s and 70s see: Khalidi et alii, 1991, Carré, 1993 or Dawashi, 2003. And finally, for Islamis in the 80s, see: Carré et Michaud, 1983; Etienne, 1987; Kepel et Richard, 1990; Roy, 1992; Kepel, 1993; Burgat, 1995; Abdel-Jabbar, 2003a-b, etc.
6. For a table representing the divisions inside certain Iraqi political parties, see the contribution of A. Jameel* and F. Abdel-Jabbar (2008) to the project Arab Political Parties Studies: www.appstudies.org.
7. This designates partisan formations that are still in an embryonic stage, evolving in a kind of partisan proto-history. (before the introduction of universal voting in Europe) as opposed to parties exercising mediation functions, in the name of a certain idea or general interest founded on the free association and not on primary integrated forms. (Camau and Geisser, 2003). See the contribution of A. Jameel* and F. Abdel-Jabbar (2008) to the project Arab Political Parties Studies. www.appstudies.org.
8. See the contribution of L. Bonnefoy and M. Poirier to this volume.
9. See the contribution of M. Catusse and L. Zaki to this volume.
10. See the contribution of C. Eshtay* to the project Arab Political Parties Studies. www.appstudies.org.
11. In this we recommend the conclusions on a much larger scale of B. Reilly (2008).
12. See the contribution of L. Bonnefoy and M. Poirier to this volume.
13. See the contribution of M. Catusse and L. Zaki to this volume.
15. See the contribution of M. Bennani-Chraibi to this volume.
16. Evidently with exceptions, as evidenced by the high participation rates for the 2009 Lebanese legislative elections.
17. See the contribution of M. Catusse and L. Zaki to this volume.
18. See the contribution of B. Bennani Chraibi to this volume.
19. See the contribution of M. Catusse and L. Zaki to this volume.
20. See the contribution of B. Bennani Chraibi to this volume.
21. The political parties gained a monopoly on political competition despite unfavorable conditions: the form "party" imposes itself on other concurrent forms of political action, for example associative.
22. For example: the Lebanese Forces Party in Lebanon in 1994, The Islamic Salvation Front, FIS (Front Islamic du Salut) in Algeria in 1991, the Bahraini Center for Human Rights in 2004, etc.
23. With notable exceptions: for example the militant base of Hezbollah in Lebanon has shown for two decades, and in different situations (elections, mobilizations, etc.), a solid allegiance to the party and to its leader.
24. For a table tracing the link between associations and political parties in Bahrain see: El-Khawaja* and El-Murshed (2008).
25. See the contribution of C. Le Thomas to this volume.
26. See the contribution of M. Catusse and L. Zaki to this volume.
27. See the contribution of M. Bennani-Chraibi to this volume.
28. See the contribution of M. Catusse and L. Zaki to this volume.

INDEX

Index géographique : Méditerranée, Moyen-Orient, Maghreb
Mots-clés : culture politique, développement, économie, État, lien social, mondialisation, partis politiques, société civile

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