Chapter 7
Military vs. Citizens in the Arab Zone:
An Assessment from Political Philosophy

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ABSTRACT

All the political systems of the Arab-Islamic zone are authoritarian, with the exception of Tunisia where fair elections recently took place and political alternation was accepted. Lebanon is another exception in the sense that state prerogatives – shared between antagonist religious communities – do not enjoy sufficient power to exert coercive policies. But apart from these two cases, this global authoritarian environment is of no avail vis-à-vis any initiative that would aim at forging some idea of citizenship – with its obligations and privileges – amongst the population, and particularly among the military. The present analysis will concentrate on the links existing between authoritarianism and citizenship, with an emphasis on Arab armed forces considered within their sociological contexts, since these entities are as much the emanation of the people(s) as the physical manifestation of the regimes' strength. The issue will be addressed through two perspectives: politics and philosophy.

INTRODUCTION

All the political systems of the Arab-Islamic zone are authoritarian, with the exception of Tunisia where fair elections recently took place and political alternation was accepted. Lebanon is another exception in the sense that state prerogatives – shared between antagonist religious communities – do not enjoy sufficient power to exert coercive policies. But apart from these two cases, this global authoritarian environment is of no avail *vis-à-vis* any initiative that would aim at forging some idea of citizenship – with its obligations and privileges – amongst the population, and particularly among the military. The present analysis will concentrate on the links existing between authoritarianism and citizenship, with an emphasis on Arab armed forces considered within their sociological contexts, since these entities are as much the emanation of the people(s) as the physical manifestation of the regimes' strength. The issue will be addressed through two perspec-

tives: politics and philosophy. It will be as much a general reflection as a precise study of some cases taken from the Arab world's present history. As indicated, the idea is to consider the role played by Arab military in actual political transitions. Are they factors of repression or of evolution? And in which way can they contribute to implement the notion of citizenship within peoples long deprived of fundamental political rights? Finally, which considerations may urge them to push towards peaceful and negotiated solutions, or on the contrary, prevent them from doing so? It must be noted that the requests articulated by the recent popular uprisings, since the end of 2010, were formulated in terms of liberty, democracy, elections, participation, development, etc., all of these being but universal demands (even if the concerned sociological contexts were specific).

BACKGROUND

It has to be admitted that the Arab political systems do not globally suit the criteria of the accomplished State in the sense that the different civil services do not function according to competence, that is, with a full participation of all citizens. On the contrary, through nepotism and corruption, when it is not terror, the general reinforcement of the administration (including the armed forces) aims mostly at increasing the repressive ability and resources monopolization, for the sole benefit of a small group. This model fits all the Arab world, except the two aforementioned cases. Doubtlessly, the re-examination of some philosophers who pondered over what links warrior's condition to citizenship will help us comprehend, within the framework of (Arab) authoritarian and despotic systems, the reasons behind: the refusal to govern men through the acquiescence of their free will; the systematic use of violence against the people; the enrolling of soldiers separated from society; the absence of any ethical finality among the political elite; and the instilling of distrust between citizens

to prevent any coordinated action. It seems impossible, within the limited scope of this chapter, to go through all the philosophical literature that has been written on the subject. If exhaustivity remains impossible, it is also certainly useless since few good and relevant references suffice, as the stoic Seneca (Nero's tutor) used to say.[1] Secondly, the classical philosophers do not appear to have been surpassed on fundamental issues by neither modern nor contemporary ones, who have finally just reformulated in their own terms their predecessors' analysis. Thirdly, it would seem curious if a given political philosopher arrived at totally different conclusions than another one, especially if we take for granted that reason aims at apprehending the truth, which can only be one (even if it can be perceived and expressed differently according to diverse cultural contexts). In this sense, since we are dealing with human experience, we have relied on authors whose ideas seem particularly appropriate for our purpose.

As far as we know, classical Arab philosophers were scarce and largely influenced by the prism of religion, according to which God' will must remain the supreme reference (whereas, in theory, pure reasoning should only be based on a rational approach).[2] Reflecting on citizenship was therefore not really relevant since one could only speak of obedient and submissive subjects towards the religious and political leader: the caliph (that is to say God's deputy on earth). For reasons probably specific to Arab and Islamic culture, medieval philosophy was completely supplanted – in terms of legitimacy – over the centuries by jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the essential principle of which is to base legal reasoning on Islamic law's prescriptions, with a slight amount of intellectual independence (Tibi, 2005, p. 64). In the end, this tendency was reinforced by what may be called the Islamic revival (*nahda*, from the end of the XIXth century onwards) that took the form – yet with some notable exceptions – of religious, historical, cultural, ethnic, linguistic, etc., self-apologia, to the detriment of methodical investigation and

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