

American Culture of Democracy and International Conflicts

Mr. BELAID Allal
Doctoral Student,
Mentouri University of Constantine

Abstract

This article intends to reconsider the conceptualization of the American democracy in the light of today's world changes and regional political configurations. It also aims at exposing the concept between theory and practice in the American foreign affairs. Relying on the writings of contemporary eminent figures in the field of politics, history and economy, this article investigates the implications of American democracy supposedly hostile to war-solutions when dealing with global issues and its role in enhancing international conflicts by creating two irreconcilable poles between democratic and non-democratic political entities. Briefly, this article endeavors to clarify how the advance of democracy in 'the end of history' era perpetuates new rivalry divisions which may put the world in jeopardy.

ملخص

يسعى هذا المقال الى إعادة النظر في تقييم الديمقراطية الامريكية في ظل تغيرات عالمية مهمة وتفاعلات سياسية إقليمية حديثة. ارتأيت من أجل ذلك عرض معاني فكرة الديمقراطية من الناحية النظرية و التطبيقية وفي مجال العلاقات الخارجية للولايات المتحدة و أهم ما في ذلك هو البحث في دور هذا المفهوم – المعبر على سياسة منتهزة منذ مطلع القرن الحالي- في تجسيد توترات سياسية وثقافية بين دول وكتل إقليمية وهذا أمر عرّض بلدان متعددة لأخطار حقيقية كما أنه بإمكانه أن يعرّض العالم لحروب و أزمات حادة في المستقبل.

One of the most debated issues in contemporary world meetings is the wide spread of American culture. Different disciplines in the humanities try to explain the phenomenon on the basis of their principles and their scientific limitations. Economists for their part rely on their delineated area of investigation based on statistics and numbers' philosophy to synthesize that it is a consistent consequence of the post Cold War era and of the instantaneous

Revus des lettres et des langues.....Numero : 24/2017

growth of global market. Historians in turn do agree on the fact that the phenomenon has a whole identity and time line where other factors, other than economic, have largely contributed to endorsing its process. However, it is clear that cultural issues are not suitable subjects for history because they are in permanent evolution and hence volatility.

In other words, knowing that history is premised on identified facts and past events, some characteristics of culture may represent a buffer in front of historians to come out with reliable results in their analyses.

At the same time, because of relying on their mainstream of thoughts, tendencies in social studies may cheat or at least fail in bringing arguments and in making their investigations explicit. For these reasons, it is impossible to carry on a research in cultural studies only from one scientific angle. A researcher on this large ground needs to be a multi-talented scholar able to check and verify economic, political and historical variables. Historical objectivity, for instance, is significant in assimilating development of events and major changes in the past that had shaped societies over time. Likewise, anthropological spontaneity is also important in studying specificities of societies which make the world heterogeneous. In addition, economic influences and practices are obviously indispensable in the study of cultural evolution in relation with modernity and progress. Thus, a scholarly intellectual in the ground of culture and in this complex techno-economic world needs to answer several interrelated questions to locate his orientations in the intermingling social facts.

Accordingly, this analysis about the conceptualization of democracy as an important fabric and a key aspect of American culture relies mainly on a multifaceted argumentation fetching ideas from several domains in addition to personal inference. It unveils different perceptions of the concept among researchers and thinkers, in the past and the present, as it goes through its denotations as well as connotations to show how it fashions international conflicts and their legitimization from the sides taking part in them. In other words, though the extensive meaning of democracy denotes hostility to war-resolution in dealing with international issues, it is noticed that nowadays the concept is widely implicated in wars led by the United States and other said democratic countries. Hence and with commonsense, we come to the question of: what is the relation between American democracy and the conflicts of the new millennium?

Revus des lettres et des langues.....Numero : 24/2017

As an intellectual subject, democracy is an old challenging form of government which goes back to Greece and Rome. Fundamentally, it rejects concepts such as aristocracy, oligarchy, theocracy, and mainly dictatorship and classical absolute monarchy. As the name and the literal translation from Greek ('*démos*' people, '*kratos*' power) indicate, democracy is a rebellion against an old authoritarian tradition that excludes the majority of people from ruling their political unite that might be a country, a nation or another possible division and subdivision of an independent territory. Briefly, it is a political system that ensures a fair representation of people in official documents ruling a given country.

Contrary to other forms of government in which political decisions are in the hands of one privileged social class, democracy theoretically permits all social categories, including minorities, to participate in making their destiny which is also that of their homeland through a conventional constitution. When founded on the consent of the people, the latter guarantees separation of powers, justice and freedom under the scrutiny of law which, in the American context, defends individual liberty in so far as it does not hurt others' liberties.

Many people confuse democracy with a majority government as it is the case nowadays with many developing or even developed countries where an opportunist ruling class takes the advantage to flee ahead with their exclusive programs and sometimes unconstitutional behaviours. Actually, this perception is nothing but another form of hegemony that can be dangerous whenever there is an excessive exclusion of and oppression of the minorities. It creates hatred and feeling of vengeance among social classes. Sensitively, social history teaches mankind how much it is possible to a marginalized class to become stronger and take over the halter of the state if ever new geostrategic configurations occur. In some way, Carl Marx has premised his theory of duality in social classes on this perception of democracy where one social class-majority it is or minority- denies the other. This irresponsible behavior from *legitimate* rulers often ends in revolutions. Democracy then is not the government and the institutionalization of the majority to exclude the other social subgroups. On the contrary, it is the government of the people, all the people, without exception. This is the reason why actual and lasting democracies are practiced in parliaments that includes all representatives of the people whose voices are taken into account regardless of their number, and this

Revus des lettres et des langues.....Numero : 24/2017

is why a good ruler is that who listens to all the voices of the people regardless of their partisanship.

Eventually, democracy is deeply rooted in the American political culture, and it is largely enacted in people's daily life. In practice, the United States is a country that is historically functioning through democratic institutions. Since independence, American politics is located in Abraham Lincoln's statement of: "Government of the people, by the people, for the people." Besides, even the Declaration of Independence of 1776 makes an assault against the monarchy system and the abuse of individual rights that are considered 'natural' to preserve human dignity. Multiple historical documents and pacts signed in the New World highlight that all people are equal in the sight of God¹ and so are they in front of the law.

Notwithstanding its use for granted to describe post independence American political system, democracy has its origins in the cultural context of the colonial period. In fact, the growth of a democratic consciousness among the intellectual class had led later on the founding fathers to suppose the alternative of independence. Democracy is then presumed a political notion rooted in the culture of tolerance and respect of the other in the context of the immigration of the 17th century. It is also reasonable to think that democracy was imposed by the socio-cultural realities of a heterogeneous country (in the new world) made up of 100 percent immigrants.

Coming from different nationalities and human races because of different circumstances and fleeing multiple social scenarios in Europe and elsewhere, immigrants met in America "a hideous and desolate wilderness full of wild beasts and wild men," as described by William Bradford. Later on, the same immigrants met in the western frontier line in front of a strong resistance from several Indian tribes which became sooner the reservations' prey in the settlers' hand. This common destiny as well as the regular dangers facing peoples of diverse cultures consolidated remarkably their ranks. Accordingly,

¹ Colonial America was to a large extent religious. Till today, in some regions, Puritanism continues to shape the American character, as it had been in the past the highest institution of most of American states. Besides, the word 'God' is repeated in many official texts including The Mayflower Compact and The Declaration of Independence.

Revus des lettres et des langues.....Numero : 24/2017

“a manufacturing civilization” as stated by Frederic Jackson Turner, “American social development [in which democracy is included] has been continually beginning over again.” To govern such a crucible of cultures, democracy imposed itself and proved to be the most suitable political way of government that responded to the needs of all the communities.

In addition, Native American tribal structures had already existed in some Indian confederations long before the British settlement of North America promoted the idea of political representation, exchange of experiences and thus participation in decision making in the soul of the thirteen colonies. The contact of the two cultures, unknown to each other, had significantly revolutionized the spirit of leadership in the mind of the founding fathers. Several historical testimonies reveal that Benjamin Franklin, who assisted the ratification of the Articles of Confederation, attended several assemblies with the Iroquois confederation, *Haudenosaunee*. One of the attendances took place in 1754 in Albany, 22 years before the Declaration of Independence was written. As a result, Franklin “came away inspired by the successful model of independent states united under one rule of law” (Lyons). The Iroquois system was a democratic one; it brought together in the atmosphere of checks and balances at least five autonomous tribes which were in the past in permanent wars over lands and other natural resources.

Within a democratic political entity, cultural tolerance is mixed with compromise and justice in order to establish an upright society where everybody’s dignity and property is safe from tyrant rulers and foreigners. Obviously, all these principles symbolizing the platform for every democratic country were available in the United States and some other constitutional (also called parliamentary) monarchies in which Great Britain, Spain, Denmark and other European countries are included. But the question after all is whether all these democratic values were applied to all people living in the United States? And are they still respected in the mass media age to think of sowing it in different corners of the world? These rhetoric questions lead to the other one: whether democracy is the ideal political system knowing that in “The End of History” period it is all the time connected with liberalism with all its contradictions and weaknesses. This pushes us to think the concept from another perception different from the idealized one.

Revus des lettres et des langues.....Numero : 24/2017

In fact, from the beginning, the American democracy was criticized by intellectuals: Americans and non-Americans. Already in the 1840s, an American essayist, political philosopher, poet and one of the outstanding fathers of American post-colonial literature questioned incessantly democracy in the United States. In the atmosphere of the Westward Expansion, Henry David Thoreau regarded the mistreatment of human beings and the minority Indian groups as an assault against human dignity and thus an assault against the natural progress toward the ideal democracy. From his view, “the progress from an absolute to a limited monarchy, from a limited monarchy to a democracy, is a progress toward a true respect for the individual” (72); something which was not right for all 19th century America. Without doubt, Thoreau’s vision of democracy in relation with the individual and the economic tendency of a society is profound. Therefore, it is inconceivable for him to think of a democracy in a country where an individual may be a slave or continuously harassed. Sufficiently bloated of eclectic knowledge and of awareness of the local cultural realities, Thoreau came to wonder whether “a democracy, such as we know it, is the last improvement possible in government” (Ibid).

Another important criticism comes from the technocratic class of society, in which arguments are based on the functioning of the hidden side of the American political administration. Here, the emphasis is on the recent observations in both Houses of the Congress (Senates and Representatives) which are said to be controlled by some forces other than the American citizens. These observations have provoked a great deal of mistrust in Washington’s democracy because denying self-determination and total independence from external forces in decision-making in the Legislature is denying democracy as a whole in the federal government. This stream of criticism, rigorously defended by famous figures such as Noam Chomsky, John Pilger and Joseph Stiglitz, is an assault against groups of influence to which voices are in a way or another louder than that of the other citizens.

In this context, democracy is seen as that of the lobbies which exercise control over two crucial factors in the process of policy making: the mass media and the congress. Briefly, the former is nowadays the first and the last means which shapes and even produces public opinion in the United States. Thus, they make a powerful weapon in the hands of the lobbies during different political ceremonies. In addition, it is widely thought among the political class that the one who owns the information owns the election. The latter is at the mercy of

Revus des lettres et des langues.....Numero : 24/2017

the former. In other words, if the lobby controls the means of communication, this denotes that to some extent it is able to decide who is to be in the congress. Furthermore, Congress is at the mercy of the lobbies who are also capital owners. Being an important source of money ready to finance campaigns, lobbies in exchange may practice pressure on the congress to pass (or veto) laws that will promote the personal interests of their corporations.

Joseph Stiglitz, a noble prize economist and a former chief economist of the World Bank, calls this American democracy that “of the 1% by the 1% for the 1%.” In his writings, Joseph Stiglitz he shows clearly how recent statistics demonstrate that the gap of inequalities in the United States is widening because of this behaviour that diminishes equality of opportunity, applauds corruption and threatens democracy. He synthesizes that in the following way:

Americans have been watching protests against oppressive regimes that concentrate massive wealth in the hands of an elite few. Yet in our own democracy, 1 percent of the people take nearly a quarter of the nation’s income— an inequality even the wealthy will come to regret.

In short, these views go to argue that democracy may be that of the façade if ever forces- other than people’s ones- are practiced for personal interests. As far as American liberal democracy is concerned, there is a significant trend of scholars who defend the view of capital owners’ political hegemony over the American public institutions. Thus and in this way, American democracy is criticized inside the United States.

As a result of a large process of cultural Americanization, the same democracy has become in recent years a new ‘big stick’ of American foreign policy. In fact, the wide spread of American culture, side by side with the technological development in the means of communication and the American propaganda, has provoked a great interest in the concept. Since the end of the Cold War, the White House has worked to make of world’s political structure a liberal democracy.

In its support, Francis Fukuyama calls this project “The End of History” arguing that, in few years, liberal democracy will spread across the globe and this will lead to a global peace. In a more hypothetical study, the French economist and state adviser, Jacques Attali predicts that one aspect of contemporary Western political consequences in the near future is the birth of a “hyper-democracy.” Basing his missionism on the principles of a liberal

Revus des lettres et des langues.....Numero : 24/2017

democracy, Uncle Sam has made it clear on several occasions that it will not tolerate a peer competitor in the field, as it intends to remain the unique guardian of the new international system.

In fact, the last process towards homogenization of the global political structure on the American cultural model started more than three decades ago, yet the results are more and more deceiving international communities. Instead of moving right to the ideal city of peace, the world is on the contrary moving to the opposite direction. What happened is that because of being overwhelmingly Americanized, the world is divided into two tendencies: sometimes one opposing the other. In his book *The Clash of Civilizations*, though Samuel Huntington referred to the idea of world's cultural division in the spotlight of liberal democracy, he visibly overlooked the role of the United States in endorsing such observable fact. Actually, globalization which is a techno-economic unification of the world aiming at homogenizing diverse cultures has most of the time provoked obscurantist responses and cultural reclosing of non-western Societies.

What is not easy to be understood by every power moving to make an empire is that the world social structures are naturally heterogeneous, and every attempt to erode this global psychology is likely to provoke tragic frictions. Nowadays, there is a palpable intellectual consensus over the fact of cultural diversity which in itself questions not only the American practices of democracy but also its standardization for the entire world. In other words, saying that the American system is the ideal one is mistaking war for sport. Besides, democracy may be practiced in different ways depending on the cultural background and the social interest of every society, and the fact of imposing - in a way or another- one's own democracy on a given society is an anti-democratic behavior.

In effect, promoting American democracy has organized gigantic social movements which carry new perspectives and challenge radically the emerging and triumphant neo-liberal philosophy. Cultural resistance, that is a reactionary movement to cultural hegemony, has given birth to local and international conflicts in which several parts of the world take part. In an allusion to the escalating tensions caused by the United States in the name of democracy,

Revus des lettres et des langues.....Numero : 24/2017

Jean Bricmont comes to infer that this is why a political- not a terrorist- struggle against cultural domination of a little minority over an immense majority is more than ever necessary (250). Over time, the incursion of the American political tradition to other parts of the world has given birth to internal splits. The making of a new political class as opposed to the existing one has triggered new rules for the race to power in the awakening countries. In many cases of such kind, the race ended in civil wars and divisions.

For example, though the issue started during the Cold War between communists and nationalists, China is still today facing the spinoffs of the growth of the American culture which made of Taiwan the American envoy of democracy in the Far East. Officially, Taiwan is part of the Chinese mainland to which it was given back after the Second World War. However, because of the commitment of the White House to establish a democracy in the hemisphere and because of its weight in international organizations, today an independent democratic government- sustained by the United States with its capital Taipei- is ruling Taiwan. Indeed, in most analyses the issue is said to be strategic and economic for both Beijing and Washington, but no one can deny the role of culture in making the starting point which has led later on to the ideological split in the Chinese society and the role of the United States in deteriorating the ties between the province and mainland China.

In the same context, most criticisms made on the Arab revolutions, which started in Tunisia with a domino effect reaching Syria, Egypt and Yemen, shows that they are the result of a Western political plot in order to protect or regain their interests in these countries. In addition, some of the critics unveil the American commitment to protect the state of Israel seen as the only democratic country on behalf of liberal principes in the Middle East. It turns out that this kind of revolutions is also a logical result of a cultural expansion of American democracy to other countries historically and culturally ruled by an autocratic political class. Since their independences, the peoples of these countries have developed a national pride which in turn has isolated them from the external world for a long period. Their strong belief in Arab nationalism, in addition to a vulnerable independence, promoted the growth of an autocratic system.

Yet, due to the new cultural configurations that occurred in recent years in an attempt to modernize these societies and their opening to other means of communication and the launching of the internet, a new generation of

Revus des lettres et des langues.....Numero : 24/2017

citizens, side by side with the existing one, comes out of the earth to adhere and claim democratic institutions in its own country. This generation of citizens in the Arab world is remarkably influenced by the American culture which Washington encourages through its embassies' programs headed by The National Endowment for Democracy.

At this level, it is worthy noticing the role that this generation may play in modernizing and developing their countries in the light of democracy, if ever the clash with the existing structures is avoided and if ever democracy is adapted to social values of the Arab world. This shows also that the rebellion against some Arab governments denotes a spontaneous consequence of the wide spread of American culture and the growth of democratic consciousness. What is then sure is that all people taking this way have to protect their own revolution from being spoiled by opportunist neo-liberal businessmen who want to make of democracy a manual of wealth.

The reactionary movement against the American culture of democracy is also seen as a result of the interventions of the United States to establish democratic government in Latin America and Asia. Recent revelations demonstrate that American democracy outside its borders is a fake and an economic investment for the benefit of American corporations. They reveal that the White House has only one burden which is to protect Uncle Sam's interest throughout the world. Actually, all American initiatives in the name of democracy hide plenty of pictures of wars and destruction. Moreover, for the United States, it is easily conceivable to accept a referendum- which is a democratic act- to make legal homosexuality in some of its states, but it has never accepted a democratic government in other countries representing a danger to its economic backyard that has no frontiers. Some call this policy 'banana democracy'; some call it 'oil democracy', but one thing that is clear is that in such democracy there is no respect of human dignity and no respect of universal suffrage.

In this particular instance, several revelations of ex-officers of the Central Intelligence Agency and other departmental agents testify that many heads of government democratically elected in Latin America and elsewhere in the world were assassinated or removed from their office only because in respect of their people they refused to answer the prescriptions of Washington. Chileans for instance still remember president Salvador Allende broadcasting his last words: "avenues along which free men will walk to build a better

Revus des lettres et des langues.....Numero : 24/2017

society.” John Pilger devoted a lengthy documentary entitled *The War on Democracy* to show how American Culture of democracy functions in foreign countries through military coups to ensure economic presence to corporations such as American Fruit Company and American Oil Company. Symmetrically, in one of his interviews, Professor John Mearsheimer said that he took the position against the American way of defending democracy abroad because “it threatens democracy at home.” In fact, the behavior of the American administration created a feeling of mistrust and at the same time of fear among international communities.

Consequently, it mobilizes people in different forms of political and sometimes armed bodies against the United States and, for these people, the National Endowment for Democracy, which in the words of Ronald Reagan “offers hope to people everywhere,” is no more a refuge but a means of propaganda to spread American culture and then gives its multinational corporations access to others’ wealth.

At the end, it is important to clarify that theoretically the culture of democracy has largely contributed to the societies’ emancipation from oppression and other forms of liberties’ abuse, for it aims fundamentally at preserving and restoring human dignity. Since the American War of Independence, the concept has become the motto of all the uprisings against the colonial administrations, and it has represented the matrix of the Third World revolutions against European imperialisms. However, in practice American democracy in the light of capitalism has been harshly criticized in the United States for worsening inequality among the American citizens and often rejected by the external world for its hypocrisy. In recent years, on a large scale process of cultural Americanization, democracy has become paradigmatically the foundation on which American hegemony is legitimized and pragmatically pushed forward to work Washington’s profits. Consequently, this phenomenon has provoked new cultural configurations which have in turn eroded the social integrity of some countries because of the birth of new political perspectives. Moreover, the globalization of liberal democracy has stimulated transnational reactions of societies and mobilized them in spontaneous cultural bodies either to denounce or to fight the sophisticated scourge. In fact, the results of this phenomenon are by now eminent and may expose the world to colossal conflicts in the future.

Work Cited

- Turner, Frederic Jackson. *The Significance of the Frontier in American History*.
< <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~HYPER/TURNER/home.html>>
- Lyons, Chief Oren. "The Roots of American Democracy." April 17, 2013. <
[http://media.bioneers.org/listing/the-roots-of-american-democracy-
chief-oren-lyons/](http://media.bioneers.org/listing/the-roots-of-american-democracy-chief-oren-lyons/)>
- Thoreau, Henry David. "On The Duty of Civil Disobedience." October 11,
2016. <<http://www.constitution.org/civ/civildis.htm>>
- Stiglitz, Joseph. "Of the 1%, by the 1%, for the 1%." May 2011.
<[http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2011/05/top-one-percent-
201105](http://www.vanityfair.com/news/2011/05/top-one-percent-201105)>
- Fukuyama, Francis. *The End of History and the Last Man*. New York: the Free
Press, 1992.
- Attali, Jacques. *Une brève histoire de l'avenir*. France : Fayard , 2006, p. 11.
- Huntington, Samuel. "The Clash of Civilizations." *Foreign Affairs*. Vol. 72.
No. 3. Summer 1993, p. 25-29.
- Bricmont, Jean. *Impérialisme humanitaire : Droits de l'homme, droit
d'ingérence, droit du plus fort ?* Le Maghreb : Les édition Apic,
2005, p. 250.
- Pilger, John. *The War on Democracy*. June 2007.
<<http://johnpilger.com/videos/the-war-on-democracy>>
- Mearsheimer, John. "Will Democracy Have Competitors in the 21st Century?"
December 1, 2014. Cornell University: College of Arts and Sciences.