

Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to analyze the theoretical relationship between Islam and liberal democracy and their compatibility.

The methodological approach is historical and comparative, using sources from both Western and Islamic academic world to have a major comprehension of the question and to do an analysis as neutral as possible.

The debate, centered on the chances of implementation and development of democracy in the Muslim societies, started with the Iranian revolution in 1979, but has become increasingly public after 9/11 and the following events related to the fundamentalist Islamic terrorism.

The discussion is focused on Western and Islamic point of view, due to the different cultural, especially religious, background.

The Western attitude toward Islam turns out to be often negative, because is mainly based on stereotypes and prejudices, which are clearly observable on the various reports of media: the Muslims are described as fanatic, irrational, belligerent and dangerous. Those thoughts led western thinkers to assume that democracy would be a better political system and that a form of secularism is strongly needed.

Anyway the political model proposed by the western theorists cannot be accepted, because it provides a separation between religion and politics, a separation that for several Muslims is in contrast with the Islamic principles. Indeed the Muslim world is not ideologically monolithic. It presents a broad spectrum of perspectives ranging from the extremes of those who deny a connection between Islam and democracy to those who argue that Islam requires a democratic system. In between the extremes, in a number of countries where Muslims are a majority, many of them believe that Islam is a support for democracy even though their particular political system is not explicitly defined as Islamic.

As a consequence of the debate about the link between religion and politics, the question is which type of democracy should be exported by the western societies: a democracy as a merely electoral process and political participation or as social, political, cultural and juridical texture, constituted by individual rights, equality, separation of powers and a “check and balances” system.

In the first hypothesis, it seems that there aren't real obstacles, but even though several Muslim countries tried to improve their political system, there is still the need of acquisition of the principle of liberal democracy, which absence could increase the risks of government apparently democratic, which are instead led to the institution of autocratic system.

In the second hypothesis, the situation results more difficult, because the presence of religion, the inequality between individual, especially gender's inequalities, could interfere with the implementation of democracy.

Enlightening the main characteristics of the democratic and Islamic political culture, I tried to determinate the compatibilities and incompatibilities between the two systems and analyze which are the elements that could represent a starting point for the creations of an Islamic democracy.

In the first chapter entitled, “**Liberal Democracy**”, is presented an examination of Western Democracy, its historical development, the definition of its principles, progressive approach to liberalism through the theory of John Rawls.

The idea of “Democracy” forged by the most important Western thinkers is based on the practice of elections in Greece in the Fifth Century B.C and it is referred to the government in which all eligible citizens are meant to participate equally in the proposal, development and establishment of the laws by which their society is run.

There are many definition of democracy, such as the one of Amartya Sen, who associated to free election the protection of right and freedom, the respect of legality and the warranty of free discussion and free expression.

Of course this assumes the creation of institutions which guarantee the regular democratic process, and the citizens' consciousness of their role in society.

Western world proposes a model of liberal democracy, based on constituent elements such as free elections, constitution, pluralism and different forms of representation, which are accompanied by sociological factors. In fact, democracy is often associated with concepts such as respect for human rights, religious tolerance, and freedom of speech and of the press association; thereby it protects both the public and the private sphere

Anyway the debate on the dimension of democracy is broad and there is still no established definition of ideal democracy. Core ideals of democracy serves as parameters to guide democratic action ,and as argued by Robert Dahl, the ideal system would include the following: 1) the right to free expression, 2) the right to form and participate in independent political organizations, including political parties, 3) the right to vote in the election of officials in free and fair elections, 4) The right to run for office, 5) the control of agenda and 6)the right to gain access to independent sources of information.

Those elements are necessary but not enough to define the system. In fact Dahl overlook what happens after the election, i.e. if the fundamental freedom described previously are really protected. For this reason is necessary for the modern democracy the liberalization, which is considered by Schneider and Schmitter, as “the process of making effective certain right that protected both individuals and social groups from arbitrary or illegal acts committed by the state or third parties ”. Liberalizations was admittedly always implicitly included in the over-arching process of democratization, but what is not directly stated is that this inclusion occurred only after the country consolidated legitimacy into the system of government.

Democratic success can be found in the protection afforded to minorities and oppositional group, and this fact again highlights the need for liberalization as it is the only effective means to incorporate minority groups. And when is it referring to minorities, arise one of the problems that has had more prominence in the development of democracy: the role of religions. For many theorists, religions must not have any

political role, which allow them to limit or control decisions, however they should be protected and it must be guaranteed their action in public sphere, throughout organizations, propaganda but with the respect of other's thought. It is not necessary a completely laicization of the state, but just a resizing of religious ideals ,to be compatible with the political systems, as it happened in most of the western countries. Because these requirements, which are gaining importance in the political sphere, political liberalism represents a source of technical resources and regulations that expands the functionality of democracy. Democracy and liberalism results theoretically in contrast, and their evolution and connection started with the idea of "social contract" theory by J.J. Rousseau, passing by the liberalism of J. Locke and culminating with the theory of Rawls, which represent the reconciliation between the liberalism and democracy.

Rawls reformulated the problems of society by developing a new form of liberalism that defended democracy and its values, reconciling the religious needs with those lay in a functional system. His theory of justice, though it is an autonomous doctrine, search in the religious doctrine the "overlapping consensus", becoming the most functional answer to the demand of an ordered society based on pluralism and justice. He formulated his principles as: 1) each person has an equal right to the most extensive liberties compatible with similar liberties for all. 2) Social and economic inequalities should be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged persons, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of equality of opportunity.

The second chapter, "**Element for the definition of an Islamic democracy**", is focused on some characteristics of Islam, and on its peculiar political and juridical system, enlightening the contradictions too.

As A. A. Jamal "citizens across the region, by majority above 75 percent, believe that democracy is the best form of government". However, this statement appears in conflict with the political reality, in which the experiments of democratic development are absent or bankruptcy. Especially in the conservative Muslim area, is the predominant

belief that Islam and democracy are incompatible because the Islamic concept of God's absolute sovereignty, in contrast to the popular sovereignty promoted by democracy.

In Muslim society, law is a product of God's revelation, which is expressed through the Shari'a, and the strictly connection between this and the creation of the State.

Furthermore Muslim fight the West and its democratic aspirations, because the fear of modernity, which is seen as the treat to their traditions, the most important elements of their culture.

To clearly describe the core values of Islam is a daunting task. In no way will this seek to be an exhaustive survey of the principles of Islam.

Shari'a could be translate as "Islamic law", and it could be represents the peak of the Islamic juridical culture, being a divine law. It is the results of the revelations of God, interpreted by the judges and scholars of the Quran. So it doesn't represent the original fundament of Islam, but become part of this slowly through the rationalization of the dictates.

Another juridical font is the Fiqh which represent the positive law. The technique by which the fiqh develops its own rules in the absence of the divine dictates of the Quran are, among others, the qiyas and jima, which is the consensus.

The Islamic law is not rigid or static, but dynamic and evolutive, based on the rationalization and elaboration of human thought, which is considered as a divine gift. What Bhutto explains is: "While sacred texts are constant and divine, interpretation should evolve over time based on changes in the social and political environments."

The contradictions arise when we speak about human rights and their protection. Shari'a has the same function of the Declaration of human rights regard the civil and criminal law, because in its original meaning, it repressed authoritarian regimes and repudiated the abuse over citizens. However there is a different concept of freedom, which is recognized in legal sense, but not as a positive law, because it doesn't derive from human law.

The basic principle of political and religious Islam are multiple, some of which are shared by the western philosophical and political thought. However in Muslim countries

they are protected and applied in a different ways, depending on the political and historical context. In fact, Shari'a and the other instrument for the Islamic law could become a negative weapon, if reprocessed in a fundamentalist perspective, leading to extremes the more ambiguous concepts of scriptures, applying them in an instrumental way.

Equality of rights, for example, is one of the strongest criticisms moves from Western to Islam, because the principle, even if present in the sacred texts, has been applied in different ways over the centuries. Sometimes has been observed, allowing the creation of free society and surprisingly egalitarian, in other circumstances was apparently considered, because the minorities has been often victims of discrimination, especially religious groups. The category of non-muslim is called "dhummi" , which mean "protected", as sometimes has happened, but in the case of fundamentalism regimes citizens who professed other religion were considered as traitors to persecute.

Other forms of discrimination are found against the atheists, which possibility of existence is often not recognized. The same contradictions can be found in other aspects of Muslim culture such as for example slavery, the status of women, the practice of corporal punishment and sanctions that culminate with the" jihad", i.e. the right to war, and together imply a strict adherence to the concept serious violation of fundamental human rights, and in the text I'm trying to describe the contradictions that arise when considering these principles, which are the basis of Islam.

In the third chapter, which is about "**The compatibility, incompatibility and criticism between democratic systems and Islamic principles**" I try to do a comparative analysis of the compatibility and incompatibility between the two systems, considering the elements which emerge from the previous chapters, including the theories of the major theorist of both the cultural universe, and describing the attempt of Algeria to establish an Islamic democracy.

The universe of democracy contains a lot of question in is field of investigation, which regard its universality. What theorists ask is if it's a specific cultural idea or if it

is possible to assume that non-western society possess their standard of responsibility and participation, and their pace of development.

On the other hand, after international political events, such as the wars carried forward from the States with the attempt to import democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan, the question is if Islam, with its emphasis on the authority of the scriptures and religion, could open its door to a politics which is more flexible and to government with broad participation.

Each possible answer, both positive and negative, must be contextualized within the broader field of inquiry that concerns the idea of Islam as a possible threat to the Western world that has been associated with the reflection on its compatibility

Of course the universe of reference is slightly objective, with a debate acutely politicized , that goes beyond the orientalism, identified the Middle East as the field of the Muslim world and the modern religious fundamentalism.

This confirm that the West sees Islam as monolithic and peculiar identity, on the contrary a more detailed analysis shows that it is an entity characterized by a plurality of forms, of course fundamentalism, but also societies in which the principles of Islam has been adopted in a more moderate ways and in which exist levels of religious supports, that are protected. So before talking about “clash of civilization” it is need to talk about “clash inside civilizations”.

For example, the Sunnis, the most widespread Islamic confession, recognizes the plurality within itself, allowing a peaceful coexistence between minorities, through the mediation between the extremes and the search for balance.

This happens using the principle of Jima, the consensus, and this type of society could be considerate as similar as the western ones. The idea of consensus, the dialectic decision-making and participation could be elements that favor the implementation of a liberal democracy. But in some case it is said that the problem of secularization is the biggest obstacle. In the paper is analyzed the theory of Stepan, which is called the “Twin toleration”, which represents the minimum boundaries of freedom of action that should be guarantee by the authority independently by the religious authorities ,and at

the same time guarantees for individual and religious groups, without interference of political institutions.

In the end I analyze the case of Algeria, and the attempt of the first Islamic political parties, the “Islamic Salvation Front”, to achieve power in a democratic ways, through free elections, public participations, and activism. The party won the elections, but it but was removed after 5 days through “a peaceful blight” by the former political leader. Even if failed, this event opens a new perspective of the problem recasting the debate moving on the compatibility between Islamic democratic state and democratic western state.

In summary what emerged from the analyzes, is a prospective of compatibility that expected a resizing of the idea of western democracy, in favor of the inclusion of compatible principle pre-existing in Islamic religious.