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"The difficult road to modernisation"

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Abstract: The recent Arab revolutions must be understood from a historical perspective. We will examine the complex and contradictory processes of modernisation which these societies have undergone in the course of the last centuries. We will highlight the parcially exogenous nature of this modernisation as well as the strengthening of some 'traditional' phenomena such as clientelism and communalism involved in it. The oligarchic nature of Arab societies and States has mainly been a consequence of all those imbalances. The recent revolutions against the current state of affairs have been possible thanks to the formation of broad social coalitions. Nevertheless, to what extent those coalitions will succeed in overcoming both clientelism and authoritarianism instead of their reproduction under renewed forms, is something that remains to be seen.

I. Beyond circumstances, beyond culturalism

The Arab revolutions currently underway, bring about a wide variety of interpretations. There is an interesting geostrategic perspective which focuses on the rivalries and alliances among the different local operators (no matter whether they are state-owned or not), the strategies

undertaken by the great international powers, and the expected long-term effects over the regional political map. But even though this kind of approach may be very useful, it must be completed by a different one which studies the reasons why these societies are fragmented into a myriad of opposing political actors, and why they are so dependent on foreign powers. In order to avoid a cursory analysis of phenomena, the contextual analysis should be combined with a more structural one which looks into the deep and underlying processes that cause this unrest. Thus, it would be preferable to address the social structures and their dynamism on a longer-term perspective, something that necessarily involves a more sociological and historical view (Braudel, 1986). Beyond all the manoeuvring that the different players may perform, it is also necessary to look into the reasons which make this game the way it is. We must overcome not only this obsession with current circumstances but also, and most importantly, any kind of culturalism which will just confine people's actions to orientations contained in their culture. This comfortable reductionism has particularly hit this part of the world. It has tried, and keeps trying, to account for every sphere of the social life of these communities, based on the principles of Islam to the point of replacing the sociological analysis by the exegesis of its sacred texts. However, no culture or religion are as homogeneous and consistent as it is suggested there, nor are people limited to just implement their mandates mechanically. On the contrary, people reinterpret these mandates depending on their specific situation, which is largely shaped by the objective dynamics of social structures (Castien Maestro, 2003a: 39-56). The studies on cultures and religions, while useful in their own level, are proved to be unable to grasp the complex logic of social life by themselves.

On the basis of this theoretical strategy, we will try to understand the current Arab revolutions as the result of a series of structural imbalances accumulated over the past years. These revolutions could possibly result in the beginning of a solution for these imbalances and this will be our fundamental hypothesis. Of course, it is still a very tentative proposal, which is going to lead to the field of the essay. We do hope, however, that in further studies, we can reformulate many of these ideas in a more operational and empirically verifiable way. What is important now is to draw up the first research guidelines. From our point of view, Arab societies have suffered great difficulties to modernise themselves over the past two centuries. This was mainly due to the influence of traditional social structures which did not enable an endogenous modernisation at the time. The change came from outside and did it in a hasty and unequal way, which preserved and even strengthened these legacies of the past. The final outcome was a contradictory and unbalanced modernisation process that has resulted in a partial deadlock which may just be starting to get unlocked.

II. Modernisation and social integration

When we speak about modernisation we refer to a long historical process by which societies become more complex and heterogeneous but also, internally more cohesive. This conception, which is part of the knowledge background of sociology, may turn out to be very fruitful, but only if handled with care. To start with, any clear-cut and dichotomous opposition between the

"traditional" and the "modern" society should be discarded. Such a dualism may be useful for pedagogical and analytical purposes but it may also lead to dangerous simplifications. Modernisation should not be understood as a teleological process, intrinsically linked with a purpose, since it may be due to very different and unevenly present causes. Nor should be seen as and "advance" or a "progress" towards what is considered to be better from a moral point of view. In other words, it is necessary to make a clear distinction between modernisation theory (understood as a theory with scientific aspirations) and what might be called 'the modernist ideology' (Castien Maestro, 2003a: 232-244). With the relevant precautions in place, we can define modernisation as a process by which social life becomes more complex. This process also entails its own division into different and relatively autonomous spheres of activity, since they are largely governed by their own regulations, which are not directly derived from any unified normative system. One of the fundamental strands of this general process of structural differentation lies in secularisation, that is, the autonomisation of several of these spheres of activity with regard to the mandates contained in a given religious world view (Castien Maestro, 2009a: 151-152). While it is true that the different societies are not metaphysically forced to follow the same path, it is equally true that in a progressively globalised world, the pressures which push them towards modernisation increase progressively. Modern societies are technologically and organisationally more efficient, what makes them more attractive as a role model, and above all, more competitive in different fields, including the military field itself. Taking this into account, it should come as no surprise the fact that world history can largely be summarised in a myriad of modernisation tests with varyingly succeful outcomes over the last centuries. Arab societies have been part of them, and achieved very significant successes in this respect, but have been lagged behind with regard to other parts of the world, especially the western world, consigning them to a clear neocolonial dependency.

Modernisation entails, as we already stated, an increase in the internal social cohesion, that is to say, its degree of structural integration. The development of division of labour intensifies any kind of exchanges, which are also fostered by the advances in transportation and communications. But a modern society is not only a de facto more integrated society. It really ought to be more integrated in order to operate more efficiently in different fields, since a greater coordination among its several collectives and organisations is required. This coordination may only exist on the basis of common objective interests, like those being fostered by economic integration, but also on the basis of a normative and self-defined community. The unbiased interest in order to establish a coordination and the subjective consciousness about the benefits of doing it are not enough. In order to be able to interact adequately, it is also necessary that the regulations and the identities of those involved are similar to each other, thus assuring certain compatibility between them. They must be included in broader normative identity systems, which will be able to encompass other more specific. By way of illustration, the world has witnessed the development of modern nationalisms over the last centuries; first in the West and then in other places. This is a process which is clearly linked to the building of more centralised States and more integrated markets (Gellner, 1989). It is not a simple mechanical proces at all. Identities and cultures are sometimes consciously constructed, partially at least,

and can be adapted to this conciliatory purpose. However, this modernisation process, while making the structural integration more decisive, also generates some obstacles that hamper its realisation. Not for nothing, the greater structural differentation makes both the existence of this identity and the common regulations more difficult. Thus, the fact that different spheres of activity are governed by their own regulations violates the normative homogeneity and even the survival of an overview about reality (Lukács, 1985: 7-49). In the same way, such a complex social life, with so many different tasks and ways of life, favours the bursting of opposing identities. It is important to note that the building of these progressively broader societies results in the absorption of those collectives which had more particular "essential" identities, and which are now more difficult to match (Geertz, 1987: 219-261). All these new identity challenges can only be faced by means of a permanent and arduous cultural engineering work which is not going to be always succeful.

Another necessary condition in order to achieve this structural integration lies in the stable and predictable nature of social relations. To make this possible, the actions that define these relations ought to adhere to a precise and internally consistent normative system. When this is the case, the expectations of each respective player involved in the relationship must be clear, and this will allow them to know what to expect when interacting with others. As a result, ambiguities will be reduced along with the possibilities of generating personal profit. None of this means, on the other hand, that the roles that people take on cannot change. Both roles and regulations will be able to change in an orderly manner. Conflicts are not going to disappear, but their development will be more limited and there will be established procedures in order to solve these conflicts. This stability will bring over an institutional strength, that is, stable institutions which will be able to adapt to different circumstances and stand firm against staff changes, especially those changes that may occur in the leading group. Thus, such institutions will acquire greater autonomy with respect to the people who constitute them. However, the subjugation to stable and abstract regulations undeniably implies depersonalisation, a mitigation of the influence that idiosyncrasies and interests of a more personal nature might exert. Thereafter, people should try to put, at least relatively, those eventual relationships external to the institutional framework on hold. Despite the restrictions on personal freedom that all this brings (Weber, 1964), the resulting social stability clearly encourages a greater social integration, since coordination is easier to achieve when everybody knows what they have to do. On the other hand, if this social stability works in favour of social integration, it also benefits from the aforementioned cultural and identity homogeneity. In this way, common normative codes foster a better understanding of people's behaviours because they make them more predictable and make it easier the creation of a stable system of reciprocal expectations or the incorporation into an existing one. Nevertheless, when the codes in use are different or even incompatible, behaviours are more unpredictable and social life becomes more unstable. Probably, those conflicts and sharp alterations regarding the quality of established relationships will also tend to multiply.

III. Modernisation and social integration in contemporary Arab societies

If we look now at contemporary Arab societies, we will observe a clear distance between the reality of these societies and the aforementioned ideal model. Their structural integration is quite poor. This is clear at regional level, for example, in which the several States do not hold many comercial relations and they tend to be political enemies. But it is also this way within each country. Here, the lack of internal cohesion is evident at all levels. Economically speaking, these countries have got distorted economies where the most dynamic sectors fail to push up others and inequalities among regions and social strata are offensive. But this is what also happens in the field of political relations since there is a patent disparity between the several society projects. In this respect, there are watered-down compromises between the various tendencies and a concomitant exclusion of almost all of them by a decision-making system that is under the control of a small oligarchy (Ayubi, 1996; Martín Muñoz, 2004). Cultural and identity agreements along with the institutional and normative stability also have symptoms of weakness. There are huge disparities regarding life styles, world views and identity ascriptions. Along with the gap between secularists and Islamists we find two more gaps: one that divides the several religious confessions and other one that separates those who foster an Arab identity and those who prefer others such as Berber or Kurdish. There has been an attempt in the legislative field to reconcile an Islamic-based law with other inspired by the western positive law, which has caused a plethora of contradictions. While equality between men and women is formally decreed in a number of areas, this equality is refused when it comes to marriage law. This cultural and identity heterogeneity enriches these societies in many respects. The existence of this diversity, which is not greater than the one found in some other parts of the world, is not the real problem, though. The problem is the absence of common identities, projects and regulations with a broader and conciliatory spirit. It is not only about the confrontation between several groups but also about the fact that this incoherence is also found in the daily life of the common individual. Thus, an oscillation between several doctrinal and identity discourses can be observed, as well as a striking dichotomy between discourse and behaviour or between the different ways of dealing with situations. This basic incoherence leads straight into a deep normative ambiguity, that is, the possibility of switching among several standars of behaviour depending on the case, or legitimising any kind of behaviour in accordance with the particular set of standards which better suits a given situation (Castien Maestro, 2003a y 2003b). This normative ambiguity destabilises the proper functioning of public and private institutions and forces them to rely much more heavily on personal interests, strategies and idiosincrasies.

At first sight, this cultural and identity incoherence, this profound eclecticism could just be explained as the result of an accelerated modernisation along with a marked westernisation. On the one hand, the rapid social changes that have taken place in the last generations might have widened the gap between those social sectors which have been more involved in these changes, and those which remained rooted in more traditional ways of life. On the other hand, and just like in the rest of the world, this modernisation has been accompanied by a massive import of western elements. Along with the zeal to imitate those who rule the world, this way of resorting

to an external culture has come from the suitability of those solutions previously tried out in the West in order to solve some of the challenges posed by the ongoing modernisation. In this way, it seems quite logical the adoption of western technology as well as its organisational methods or even many of its cultural manifestations, since they are more appropriate for the new and emerging ways of life. But this new and relative cultural mimicry might not be equally affecting all areas of existence nor being implemented with the same determination by all segments of society, thus further increasing this internal disparity. On the basis of both explanations, which are also perfectly compatible, the current state of confusion might be overcome in the future. According with the first of them, it seems reasonable to expect that the more backward sectors will eventually be able to catch up with those which are more advanced. However, given the internal economic imbalances, there is a risk that part of the society may stand back for a long historical period. As for the disorders caused by the import of western elements, it would be right to hope that one day those imported elements together with the autochthonous could be combined in a more harmonious way. This would lead to better determine which elements of tradition should be preserved, which of them should be changed, and which should be taken from the West along with the way to take hold of them (Castien Maestro, 2003b y 2009b: 88-92). This will make it possible to elaborate a cultural and identity synthesis not only more internally coherent but also more acceptable for the vast majority of the population. This is the aim of many social and political sectors, from Salafists to the revolutionary Left, despite the fact that their proceedings and the results they want to obtain are radically different.

This initial response brings us face to face with new questions. We should also consider the reasons why this cultural and identity synthesis is being so difficult to achieve. It could just be a matter of time, but this optimism raises some objections and perhaps this work is much more complicated than expected. Maybe the contradictions between the native and the foreign, or between the western and the Islamic, are not very easy to resolve. But the truth is that along with this line of argument, which currently has many supporters, there is another possible explanation that seems more consistent. The disparity among all the syntheses available, might be a reflection of the disparity among the opposing groups. It would therefore be a further effect of the poor social integration which could also act on it within the framework of a bidirectional relation. If this cultural and identity factionalism comes to a large extent from a deeper social factionalism, it would be rather naive to believe that a more clever synthesis will be able to solve it. People would not reach agreement, not so much because they may be incapable of doing so, but rather because they would probably not be very interested in doing it. This last circumstance brings us back to the internal dislocation of Arab societies. The ongoing cultural and identity syntheses are often characterised by a biased and closed-minded tone which have excluded those social sectors that were different from those who supported a particular synthesis, like for example Saudi Arabia (Castien Maestro, 2007). On the contrary, we can also find an accentuated eclecticism which is able to please, only to a limited extent, to very diverse and opposing groups in order to secure a minimal inclusion for everyone, despite being run by an authoritarian power which will play the role of arbitrator. This means to block the development of a real conciliatory synthesis as is the case of Morocco since its independence (Castien

Maestro, 2011; Zeghal, 2006). Thus, and despite some achievements, the different cultural syntheses which have been tried out so far, worked as real conciliatory agents to a very limited extent. This was due to a clear and narrow political exploitation which was aimed at consolidating the power of its managers who are in most cases the owners of the State. It could be said that the prevailing authoritarianism has blocked the emergence of these conciliatory syntheses along with the social integration they may have promoted. Nevertheless, this authoritarianism did not come out of the blue. It is the consequence of a dislocation of society, whose division into opposing groups has complicated the creation of a broad coalition against the ruling oligarchies, something that seems to be finally changing. But at the same time, in the absence of any other reasonable method, this social division turns authoritarianism into an effective way to achieve a minimal social cohesion. This is precisely what gives it the legitimacy with respect to those who suffer it. At the same time, this authoritarianism fractures society mainly because of the hostility that its victims feel towards those other groups which benefit from it. But also, as a result of a conscious strategy on the part of the ruling oligarchy aimed at avoiding the emergence of any other group able to challenge its power. Our analysis has led us again to the decisive influence which is exerted by the weakness of social integration. Authoritarianism operates as a mediator between that integration and the weakness of cultural and identity syntheses. In this context, it appears to be important to further investigate the deepest roots of this lack of integration. To this end, we will now tackle other aspect, namely, the lack of normative and institutional stability. As with the cultural and identity confusion, this other lack is also very easy to confirm. We find modern States with their burocracies, laws and regulations, police and army, and there is also a whole plethora of public and private corporations along with all kinds of organisations. At first sight, this situation does not look very different from the situation in other parts of the world. However, behind this mask, we can see the glaring discrepancies between reality and the ideal model for a modern society. Rules are there, but the authorities on-duty may implement them or not depending on whether they do corrupt practices or not, whether those affected by their decisions have any relations with them or simply depending on the suitability for displaying either genenerosity or severity. The relationship between the rule and its implementation is neither straight nor immediate, but it is influenced by a set of considerations which are external to the functioning of institutions in principle. In contrast with the aforementioned idealised model, in which the institutional relations are perfectly delimited and the only thing that matters is everything relating to its social function, here we find deeply "contaminated" relationships. As a result of this mixture of objectives, these relationships become much more confusing and unpredictable. The distribution of social power is altered in such a way that it has given rise to a 'win-lose' situation, in sharp contrast with what would have happened if rules had been followed literally. Thus, the strength and stability of institutions are lessened and they become more dependent on the social relations around them. The consequences of this process are evident. The most visible is the inefficiency of institutions, something that can be found in facts as diverse as the overspend of resources or the military incompetence. It should not be forgotten that the efficiency of institutions comes firstly from a clear and precise delimitation of objectives and the selection of

the appropriate means to achieve them. Both processes are clearly enhanced by a distinction of the different spheres of activity and by their specialisation. They are, therefore, both feature and result of that process of modernisation. One of the most important aspects of this selection of appropriate means to achieve specific objectives, without paying attention to other considerations, lies in the strenghtening of the meritocratic criterion. This is based on the recruitment of the most appropriate people to carry out specific tasks with independence of personal bonds or their ascription to certain social categories. That is why the theoretical scope of implementation of this criterion is greatly reduced when these personal bonds and social ascriptions seem to be very important, as is the case here. All this insitutional precariousness ultimately results in a widespread loss of efficiency that also retards modernisation and therefore, a greater social integration. Additionally, we must also point out the direct damage that this institutional precariousness and fluidity entail to any attempt of coordination between institutions and, of course, to any attempt of social integration.

What may be causing all this institutional and normative instability? With no doubt, the lack of cultural and identity consistency makes it sharper, as it was mentioned above. When society is clearly divided into opposing groups, with very different and marked identities, it seems probable that there is a tendency to favour one's own group at the expense of others, in defiance of what is established by the official regulations. Similarly, when dealing with different cultural codes, it is easy that custom does not always fit in with the rule and the latter may be overshadowed or adapted to that custom. It is hardly surprising that the discretionary power held by those who implement the rule can be increased in this world of ambiguities and contradictions. If all this is true, it is equally true the fact that normative instability seems to enhance, in turn, the same fragmentation. In particular, it encourages a corporate spirit, an exclusionary group spirit that presents different variations such as tribalism, confessionalism, or family and regional solidarity in their comprehensive meaning. Although we will return to this issue later on, it is worth noting that this communalism fits in perfectly with a situation of legal laxity since only the support provided by those who share the same identity is effective against the abuses of authorities or when trying to get these authorities to take sides with them. In so doing, it contributes, albeit indirectly, to a weak social integration. All these analyses which have been outlined lead to the same conclusion: the various causal factors are intertwined with each other and they all form a sort of skein. Hence the relative blockage suffered by Arab societies in their process of modernisation is indeed the result of a multiplicity of determinants and this is why it is so difficult to resolve. Anyway, before figuring out possible solutions it is appropriate to study how this state of affairs has come about. In fact, our analyses have a static bias and show a series of processes that mutually reinforce each other thus acting as a brake on modernisation. Our interest now is to explain how this particular configuration of factors took shape or, in other words, to find out why this configuration is more powerful in this region than it is in others. To this end, we will work in two directions: on the one hand, we will further look into the economic and material foundations of the modernisation process. On the other hand, we will go back in time a few centuries as we think it is necessary to find out to what extent the history of Arab societies is hosting the key elements that allow to understand their current blockage. By

combining these two lines of thought, we will wonder if the peculiarities of the economic history of these societies can help us to resolve the questions that have been raised above.

IV. Hyphotesis on the economic foundations of social modernisation

The process of modernisation is inextricably linked with the development of productive forces. It is due to this development that an increasingly more sophisticated and specialised social life is possible, which is also framed in a series of institutions that become more and more complex and solid. At the same time, the progress of these productive forces is clearly fostered by the increase of rationalisation, institutionalisation and structural integration since they are particular strands of the process of modernisation. We are faced with a two-way relationship able to form a virtuous circle, but also a vicious one. However, from a theoretical materialist perspective and although both general processes are mutually influenced, they do not necessarily need to have the same intensity. We can give the dynamics of productive forces more explicative weight and focus on those social relations more directly linked to them. In this sense, we are going to examine some of the forms that these specific relations can take and consider if this may help us to understand the variable degree of difficulty with which different societies have been incorporated to this global process.

As we have already pointed out, the formation of an economy which becomes more and more articulated, seems to favour and also demands the development of an increasingly solid institutional machinery. Institutions will become more stable and the coordination among them will grow. From the moment they have more human and material resources, they will have greater capacity to model social life but they will also become more dependent on the state of the society as a whole. This also means that it will be more difficult to reshape them arbitrarily. Given the fact that the existence of all these institutions requires a normative system with some stability, coherence and accuracy, this institutional development will stimulate a concomitant normative development. The codes of conduct which have been generated along with the more abstract values on which they rest, will be implemented outside the strict institutional framework. The result will be a sort of standardisation of many aspects of everyday existence. Thus, large institutions are going to operate as a kind of education agencies, whose primary purpose is to organise and homogenise population. This long-term social process becomes extremely visible when western history is examined, in which State institutions, Churches and corporations have acted this way. They have all been established and used to widely spread rules of conduct. In doing so, they have substantially contributed to the creation of a more coordinated and integrated society (Elias, 1990). We may now wonder what might happen with a less articulated economy, whose administration of productive forces no longer requires intensive internal coordination. According to our hypothesis, a society which is based on this type of economy would undergo a lower institutional and normative development in the long run, and this would decisively affect any further capacity to modernise itself. In our opinion, this is what happened in Arab societies historically.

The understanding of this chain of events takes us back to the distant past, up to the pre-modern Arab economy. This economy was characterised by a pronounced dualism between the rural world, which was greatly tribal and had very rudimentary techniques, and a culturally sophisticated urban world which was ruled by oligarchies formed by warriors and traders. From an economic perspective, these two spheres were more juxtaposed than articulated. The main sources of income for these oligarchies which ruled the towns, were the caravan trade and the spoils of war. This type of trade was mainly focused on a few products such as gold, handicraft and slaves, and its role was greatly limited to act as a mediator between distant regions. Both sources had the same external nature since they were not originated by society itself, and they both created a dependency with long-term contradictory effects. They undoubtedly allowed these societies to develop beyond the level of social and cultural complexity which was granted by their own productive forces, and helped them to build great political groupings and to progress in the fields of arts and sciences. However, as a counterbalance, they also condemned the States that began to form to rely on extremely uncertain factors. Trading routes might be diverted and the success in the battle might change sides suddenly, thus condemning any State-building to chronic instability. Yet, at the same time, the fact of having some military success or controlling some section of any trade route was quite an accessible opportunity. The formation of coalitions with strong tribal and rural components was frequent and those who achieved the aforementioned control could have enough resources to subsist autonomously for some time. Thus, the existence of these trading routes exerted both a centripetal and a centrifugal force. Those organisations which held power began to proliferate very quickly. Although it was possible that some rulers might become the masters of huge swathes of land, their degree of effective control upon this land was very low since they constantly had to deal with local tycoons. Another important consequence derived from this state of affairs was the frequent weakness affecting the articulation between rural and urban areas. The main concern for the ruling oligarchies was to wage war and trade rather than having to organise those issues concerning the lands, which moreover, were quite difficult to organise. Much of these lands were arid, mountainous or both, thus turning the whole issue into a time-consuming process, not very interesting from an economic point of view. At the same time, the little control which was exerted on it, allowed the survival of tribal and warlike groups very difficult to subdue, which had the capacity to control trading routes and towns as well as establishing new dynasties on this basis (cf. Amin, 1986; Ayubi, 1996; Castien Maestro, 2009b; Hourani, 1991). Following from this draft, we could perhaps begin to understand some historical developments. Conventional Arab societies were characterised by a weak internal articulation, in the absence of local productive forces not powerful enough, at least in most cases. The greatness of their civilisation had a weak economic base, but precisely for this reason, a poor structural integration was achieved. The institutional fluency was extreme. The ruling coalitions were formed and broken up very easily since they had no need to stay together. Of course, this institutional fluency ended up hampering the long-term development of productive forces and fell into a vicious circle (Castien Maestro, 2009b: 82-84). The differences between this historical trajectory and the one from Europe are manifest. Medieval Europe was characterised by a stronger articulation

between the city and the countryside. It lacked the urban brilliance of the Arab world for a long time, but in compensation, its cities were a much more effective economic operators. These economic foundations, less dependent on the strokes of luck, might have favoured a deeper institutional development. Thus, Europe was able to experience a progressive process of structural integration, the formation of broader and more articulated political units and the creation of more solid institutions. This greater institutional stability resulted in greater normative stability, with the development of an increasingly rich and complex law. All this seems to have fostered greater social and cultural integration, especially with the emergence of modern nation-States, more highly developed productive forces and, on a more general level, a progressively heterogeneous and specialised social life and therefore, more secularised. If this line of thought is in the right direction, we would find out that much of the discussion about Islam and its compatibility or incompatibility with secularisation has been badly handled. Islam, just like Christianity or any other religion, could be under its internal constitution or the nature of the institutional apparatus on which it is based, more or less resistant to secularisation, although history tells that this resistance has been very strong in almost all religions. However, the heart of the problem would be a completely different one. It is therefore appropriate not to worry so much about the ideology of Islam and focus on the social structure of historical Muslim societies, a structure which has been greatly influenced by Islam but which cannot be exclusively explained in terms of religion.

V. Lax sociality

It seems then, that institutional weakness has serious implications in the long run. It is necessary to look closely into the nature of those social spheres in which this lack of clarity and stability on the normative framework can be found. In such environment, the different social players – either individual or collective – that operate at its core, are only subject to a small set of collective rules. One of the features of these rules, along with the stability and predictability that they insert into the behaviour of human beings, is the capacitiy that ensures that this kind of behaviour is able to partially trascend those immediate and particular interests of social players, thus allowing it to be oriented towards wider and long-term purposes (Thibaut y Kelley, 1984). This means that when regulations are weak, the agents involved are mainly guided by their own particular interests. On the basis of the interests and the capacities held by each participant, certain power balances will follow. These balances might be altered if those variables are also changed. As a result, this social environment will be characterised by its competitiveness and its instability. It will be the consequence of a particular social model that can be called 'lax sociality' and it may occur at different levels, ranging from the field of inter-State relations to the field of small daily interactions. While requiring a much more thorough elaboration along with a breakdown into several specific variables, this theoretical model seems to provide us with some interesting clues that will allow to understand the reality of old and modern Arab societies. It helps to understand their turbulent political life and the existence of their ordinary people, and it also applies to both their classic past and their current situation.

These claims collide head-on with a widely spread conception by which these societies are still

subject to the dictates of shar'ia, the Islamic law. However, the reality is much more complex. Although many Muslims still hold this aspiration towards the universal, the truth is that historically, shar'ia has only governed some aspects of their lives and has done it this way because of two reasons: firstly because this code of law only regulates some aspects of human existence accurately, but significantly, it is extraordinary frugal regarding the organisation and the functioning of the State. Secondly, because in many cases Muslims have only obeyed the commandments of their religion to some extent, just like the followers of any other religion. This deviation not only comes from the harshness of some of its commandments or the difficulty to implement them under specific circumstances, but also from the existence of rival codes of conduct which are deeply rooted, like tribal costumes. In more recent times, westernisation and modernisation have further increased the disparities between theory and practice (Castien Maestro, 2003a: 253-264 y 2009a: 151-155). The weakness of classic public-sector institutions made it very difficult to impose this legislation in many places. Frequently, the revealed norm has adapted with difficulty to social circumstances which have been very diverse and changeable. This incapacity cannot be exclusively explained by the severity of Islam; it has also much to do with the nature of ulemas. Their lax and decentralised structure has often put them in a state of relative defencelessness against the ruling oligarchies and this has prevented them from regulating the functioning of institutions and people's life effectively. This has forced them to withdraw with respect to questions such as decorum and marriage law (Castien Maestro, 2009b: 83; Charfi, 2001: 204).

An undeniable secularity has taken place, but it lacked legitimacy from the point of view of Islamic ideology regarding the global orientation of most of its versions. It has been a de facto secularity instead of being established by right. This is why it has also been a precarious one, at permanent risk of being denounced (Castien Maestro, 2009a: 154-155). Its own lack of legitimacy has favoured a strong tendency towards a fake Islamisation until the present day. It has been sought to legitimise what has been done on the basis of its correspondence with those behavioural models included in the sacred texts and subsequently restated in later statutes elaborated by jurists. Consequently, rather than organising the functioning of specific social fields, the task undertaken by Islamic legislation has been to confirm in hindsight what was happening at its core, including those actions more closely linked with political wrangling. The many fatwas or legal opinions, that so many ulemas have delivered throughout history for the benefit of the actual ruler, may be a good example of this. This kind of manoeuvres have been favoured by a set of relevant facts such as the possibility of interpreting the old texts in very different ways, or the existence of different opinions among the most prominent wise men. The result has been a sharp normative ambiguity along with a concomitant confusion and instability. The regulative capacity of Islam has been proved quite limited, not being able to guarantee the normative and institutional stability which is required by modernisation. At the same time, the historical predominance of specific versions of Islam with universal aspirations has hampered the elaboration of more secular regulations for all these spheres of social life that are not much affected by shar'ia. The global orientation of this predominant version of Islam has basically operated in a negative sense and it has blocked the development of other possible alternatives.

VI. The centrality of clientelism

Lax sociality is, therefore, a fundamental feature of these societies, in view of the enormous difficulties they encounter in achieving their standardisation and institutionalisation on the basis of an Islam which is considered to be almost the only legitimate code. In the context of this partial regulatory vacuum, social life has been greatly organised by means of different proceedings. They are relatively simple and also generate their own regulations, although these are mostly limited to confirm the results of the stiff competition between the parties involved. The most important among them are clientelism and communalism. Despite all their differences, these two organisational mechanisms have some basic similarities which allow us to perceive them as two different specific forms of the same lax sociality. If we focus on clientelism, this could be defined as a specific system of exchange of goods and services among eihter individuals or collectives. Those goods and services are exchanged under the form of "favours" or "perks" and they may cover material aid, security, privileged information, resolution of legal problems and access to certain working positions. There is a permanent exchange of favours even in the long term. This system is different in several respects from sheer commercial exchange. To start with, it often lacks a measuring instrument, like money for instance, and because of this, the criteria to establish the "prices" become lax. The same goes for the deadlines to carry out compensations. As for "supply" and "demand", these are characterised by a restricted and oligopolistic nature, primarily because there is not just one single clientelistic system but a myriad of circuits of exchange which are partially connected. All this pushes those engaged in these circuits to preserve their most beneficial relationships, in the face of the difficulty to find alternatives. This is something that leads them to focus on the long-term global benefits obtained by a given relationship instead of worrying about the benefits provided by each particular "transaction". In the short term, therefore, numerous examples of generous and deceptively altruistic behaviours will develop, and the "economic calculation" of both costs and profit shares, in the manner of neoclassical economists, can only be applied on an approximate basis (cf. Blau, 1982; Bourdieu, 1991; Castien Maestro, 2011: 210-213). This is why clientelism, frequently conceived as "corruption", constitutes one of the main obstacles to economic rationalisation and modernisation. In order to tackle the issue of clientelism, and not only "informal" exchanges, another fundamental characteristic is necessary: those exchanges that shape clientelism ought to be unequal. In these exchanges, one of the parties involved will get more benefits than the other. There is therefore exploitation. The unequal nature of these exchanges is the result of an unequal "balance of power", a basic inequality with respect to the global capacity for negotiation which is determined by the difference between what is offered and what is needed. Consequently, there is an inequality affecting the degree of social power, which is later reproduced and increased by subsequent exchanges. When the weak exchanges with the strong, the former is usually left with no choice but to correspond with different services in exchange for the more specific favours that the latter has provided. Thus, the weak is subject to the will of the strong, in a broad sense, thereby constituting a relationship of dominance.

Clientelistic relationships enjoy a well known presence in Arab societies. Favour exchange networks are the essential structure of a large part of social life that crosses boundaries between classes, families and both private and public institutions whose functioning is greatly distorted by them. The power of the rulers rests on them, and the exercise of their government mainly consists on their intelligent administration. But it is also true that this clientelism also affects the life of ordinary people since they constantly reproduce clientelistic relationships in their daily activities. Clientelism constitutes the foundation of a specific form of lax sociality, and it therefore contributes to a certain social integration since it involves the establishment of minimum social links in places where there would probaby have been none. Clientelism also establishes a certain social order, some ground rules, avoiding pure anomia. Nevertheless, its problem is that it cannot go beyond a certain point and this is the reason why organised social environments which are based on clientelism are necessarily poorly structured orders. It is mainly based on the search of personal benefit and when the individual stops being satisfied with it, the relationship may come to an end. Thus, clientelistic coalitions built around a powerful master, provider of goods, used to suffer from a strange fragility. If things go wrong, the leader is at risk of being abandoned by his followers very quickly. Precisely to ensure that this does not happen, and in order to avoid that these followers may end up looking for a competitor, this leader has to take care of them by means of some acts of generosity which temporarily reverse the overall exploitative nature of this relationship. Similarly, it may also be of assistance to show some other qualities such as eloquence, self-control and courageousness. It is therefore very important to prove that this individual is still a leader able to preserve the coalition although he ought to be occasionally tough, or very tough, with respect to some unruly subordinates or certain rivals. In any case, what is essential here is the individual interest of the follower, who is controlled through punishment and reward. Because of this, clientelism is in correspondence with a sharp individualism. The important thing is personal interest, but the followers are willing to subject themselves to the most appropriate leader. Hence the frequent fluctuation between submission and rebellion. As for the overall system, depending on how strong the leadership is, the fluctuation will be between despotism and anarchy, something which is often found at macro and micro levels. In both cases, this despotism is the reverse side of the visible fragility that affects this kind of relationships. It is either the result or the consequence of weakness instead of strength. Perhaps these simple considerations should shed some light on the turbulent political life of this region of the world (Castien Maestro, 2011; Hammoudi, 2001).

VII. Communalism

This kind of clientelism does not seem to show itself in its pure state in most cases since it often appears intertwined with other type of social relations. In the specific case of Arab societies, clientelism has been combined with the aforementioned communalism. The latter can be defined as a kind of relation which is based on differential solidarity among the members of the same group against those who are external to this group. It is a restricted solidarity whose purpose is helping others even if this support results in damage for those who offer this help.

Therefore, we are talking about solidarity after all. Its contrast with respect to the main concern of clientelism, individual interest, is quite clear. Thanks to its participation, sociality becomes less lax. Just like clientelism, communalism also acts simultaneously as an agent for both social integration and disintegration. It involves social integration since it encourages cooperation relationships among the members of a given group, but on the other hand, it also involves disintegration because this collaboration is exclusively restricted to the very members of this group. In many occasions, those who do not belong to the group, although corporately organised, may be treated with hostility and this will foster a rivalry between groups that may become extremely acrimonious. The whole society might constitute a battle field in which several communal formations fight for the control of their resources. The same applies to its radical contradiction regarding meritocratic criteria which seems to hamper the process of institutionalisation very much. Beyond its occasional positive or negative contributions to the structural integration of a specific society, the presence of communalism, at least in its more extreme forms, is a clear sign that shows an incomplete social integration. It is an integration that proves to be lower than it would be if solidarity were not confined solely to one given group. However, it is important to point out that this social integration would be higher than that observed in a situation of deep lawless individualism.

This ambivalence also affects those relations maintained with clientelism. Both communalism and clientelism can be easily articulated. Clientelistic relationships can be forged preferably among the members of the same group just like the formation of those cliques whose members are related to one another. This privileged engagement limits the scope of possible opposing parties, something which helps to stay on the safe side. If it becomes widespread, we will then have a tight superposition of the existing limits among clientelistic coalitions and those that divide the several corporate groups. In this case, we will be facing a communally enclosed clientelism (Castien Maestro, 2011: 215). Additionally, someone who does not belong to the group may get involved in this kind of network by means of marriages, religious conversions or genealogical manipulations, depending on the circumstances. The benefits of this articulation are clear. A new bond based on solidarity is now added to that based on personal interest which is characteristic of clientelistic relationships. The former constitutes a link that is oriented towards collective interest, typical of communalism. This reinforcement will provide clientelistic relationships with greater strength. They shall not be disbanded promptly if they lose their momentary usefulness. It may also happen that resorting to communalism may lead to savings in both time and efforts when weaving a clientelistic network. It will not be necessary to multiply the exchanges in order to cover all members of the coalition which is taking shape. It will be enough to establish contacts with certain leading figures who will later deal with the task of mobilising their next of kin by means of an already existing communal bonds. At present, for example, Arab political elites often make use of this combination between clientelism and tribalism by exclusively incorporating the tribal leaders into the clientelistic network.

Nevertheless, clientelism itself can also make a contribution. It is usual that clientelistic relationships have a more elective aspect which gretaly depends on the specific strategies of each

individual. These relationships are going to be much more influenced by personal similarities and enmities as well as by some interests which are situationally determined. Clientelism allows to establish more flexible relationships and therefore more adaptable to changing circumstances. It also provides human relationships with more precision. After all, communalism is often vague; the bigger the community, the more vague communalism becomes. Reciprocal rights and duties among its members will have a very generic nature. By contrast, it is possible to build much richer relationships focused on those benefits and services which are of interest for each participant, by means of informal terms of trade that are not necessarily unequal or strictly clientelistic. The traditional articulation between clientelism and tribalism in this part of the world is a good example of this. Patrilineal filiation determines some general rights and duties which will be later adjusted in accordance with the degree of genealogical proximity between the people involved. But this only refers to a general framework which seems to narrow the possibility of developing more personalised relationships. Further exchanges of all kinds, such as those related to work, supplies, pasturelands or wives, allow to build more definite relationships. Additionally, clientelistic relationships can activate other type of relationships, corporately determined, whose existence would be merely potential. Thus, the belonging to a great unity of filiation like tribes, may become relevant only if so decided by those other relationships which are more specific. But also, the initial relationship of social exchange may end up stabilising by turning itself into the foundation of a corporate relation as is the case with kinship ties generated by marital exchange. If we go a little further, many of these corporate groups are only real insofar as they can be structured by a clientelistic net that acts within it, thus absorbing part of its members. Therefore, the common tribal belonging will be only remembered wherever there is a tribal leader (Bonte et al., 1991; Bourdieu, 2008; Peters, 1990).

In the same way as both forms of sociality can reinforce each other, they also can be in contradicition, under specific circumstances. Sometimes, the communal delimitation of possible informal exchanges hampers the establishment of profitable relationships for all those involved. This may end up blocking the free development of clientelism. And the same goes for those requirements of corporate solidarity since these may absorb time and resources which can be used in more free elected counterpart relationships. In doing so, communalism operates as a powerful obstacle for the integration capacities of clientelism. This is why sometimes, these clientelistic relationships turn out to be not very beneficial for social integration, especially when they trascend certain corporate limits by recruiting people with different confessional and family ascriptions.

VIII. Intermittent fundamentalism

For nearly one and half thousand years, Islam has functioned as an effective palliative remedy against all that social laxity. It has introduced a remarkable indentity, cultural and mormative homogeneity which has contributed to partially neutralise the solvent effects of clientelism and communalism. It has mitigated   internal conflicts and favoured the formation of broad social

coalitions, especially in war situations. It has promoted common norms and identities which have additionally favoured trade, journeys and the bustle of different cultural elements that have acted in favour of a greater structural integration. However, its role as a key vector in relation to this integration should not be magnified. We have to take into account the aforementioned defficiencies affecting a normative integration based on this ideology, and the same is true at the identity level. Islamic identity has often proved too general regarding the specific existence of people if compared with other identities derived from communalism or some types of clientelism which have had greater practical significance. Even Islam itself, since it constitutes both an ideology and an organisational framework, has frequently been affected by the social fragmentation of the context in which it has been operating. This is what its many examples of doctrinal divisions and differences of opinion among its most prominent scholars prove on the basis of wordly concerns. Nevertheless, its aspiration to organise the whole human existence has survived. It has always believed that it would be able to bring order to the rampant situation of chaos that went on around it by means of the rigorous implementation of the Islamic legislation. Therein lies the recurring appeal of fundamentalist versions of Islam. They are characterised for maximising this all-embracing zeal, for trying to subdue the whole social life to the guidelines derived from a number of absolute principles (Castien Maestro, 2007: 77-78). This has turned this fundamentalism into a headlong rush, an unnatural simplification of reality that proved too complex to be properly handled. But the reluctance to deal with it in all its complexity has prevented from effectively addressing this reality. At different historical moments, fudamentalist movements have operated as powerful agents of social integration by imposing order wherever there was only chaos and by establishing more solid institutions and broader political units. The most recent example of this was perhaps the building of the Saudi State by the Wahhabi movement (Castien Maestro, 2007). However, these successes have proved to be limited in the long run. Regardless of the serious cultural impoverishment and the drastic reduction of individual freedom which are often associated with any doctrinal fundamentalism, its integrating effects have been fragile. Along with new sources of conflict, now regarding those followers of deviationist ideologies, the persistence of both clientelism and communalism must also be added. The fact that even the fundamentalist movement itself has been affected by them is noteworthy. The Saudi case is here again quite instructive. All this involves an increase of a de facto secularity. Thus, the stages of fundamentalist fervour are followed by others of greater relaxation until the ills of a society marked by a lax sociality become too visible and predict a new rigoristic reaction. These cyclic oscillations between a fundamentalism which is always unable to meet its final objectives and a precarious secularity, have marked the history of this region to a greater extent than in Europe. According with our general approach, this is understandable when based on the higher degree of social integration achieved by the latter throughout the centuries. With this last assertion we believe that we have established some classic features of Arab social formations. The next step is to examine how they have been affected by the process of modernisation.

IX. The contradictory effects of modernisation

The modernisation process in Arab societies has been characterised by a deep instability. There have been far-reaching changes but they have been distributed unevenly among the different spheres of activity, so that those emblematic institutions and ways of life of modern societies coexist alongside with the more traditional ones. But this is not only about a difference in the speed of the undergoing changes. It is also necessary to take the direction they are heading in into consideration. Sometimes, there has been a tendency towards a genuine modernisation and some other times towards a reproduction, with some adjustments, of the traditional elements. On certain occasions, some of these elements have been incorporated into the new social and cultural structures and have come to play new functions, very different from the initial ones. Sometimes, what has happened is exactly the opposite and certain modern elements, even those imported from the West, have reinforced a renewed tradition. In both cases, the mismatch between "function" and "organ" has been frequent and intense and has hampered a greater structural integration. In the absence thereof, the old lax sociality has partially survived taking with it the old clientelism and communalism and those classic fundamentalist tendencies. All this process cannot be entirely understood without that permanent interaction with the outside world, which has brought about significant changes. This fascinating "unequal and combined development" (Amin, 1986; Trotsky, 1971: 9) has resulted in social formations whose similarity with modern western societies is only partial.

One of the mismatches stemming from this peculiar modernisation and which has drawn increasing attention is the sharp imbalance of power between the State and civil society. The State apparatus has become much stronger than the rest of social institutions. Undoubtedly, its modernisation was an issue of first importance in order to win respect within and beyond its borders. But the end result has been a State which is far stronger than civil society and as a consequence, the latter is now ruled despotically by the former (Ayubi, 1996: 270; Castien Maestro, 2009b: 85-87). This despotic power has been legitimated by a previous cultural tradition that considered it to be the only effective instrument for preserving order in an environment which had proved to be extremely unstable and competitive. This initial imbalance has been later perpetuated because of a number of reasons, including the establishment of a rentier economy in most of these countries. This is an economy based on incomes provided by natural resources, especially oil income, but also by foreign aid which is offered in exchange for supporting certain policies (Martín Muñoz, 2004). Consequently, there is a dependency on a few sources of income which are closely linked to international fluctuations but poorly connected to other economic sectors and this is precisely a particular feature of this outside inducement which is characteristic of this process of modernisation. It is also a continuation, under new forms, of the old distorted and heterocentric economy with its intense solvent effects which hampers the emergence of a more cohesive society which can be capable of dealing with the authoritarianism of its rulers. Simultaneously, the substantial revenues collected by these rulers allow them not only to build up an efficient repressive apparatus, but also to incorporate a large part of the population into the clientelistic network by means of the distribution of sinecures

(Meyahdi, 2008). In conclusion, the prevailing model of development has allowed the old clientelism to reproduce itself on a new scale. This was also due to the fact that the existence of huge resources, which are relatively easy to obtain, has usually discouraged the search for a greater productive efficiency by way of the corresponding rationalisation. More precisely, it has led to a strong marginalisation of the meritocratic criterion when compared to both clientelistic and corporate ascriptions. Something similar happend with the frequent tendency to squander by means of major investments. This tendency is not only derived from the fredom enjoyed with respect to any control mechanism or the suitability of these investments in order to sustain clientelistic networks. It also responds to that fever to display the whole might, which constitutes a curious update of those classic habits associated with clientelistic policies.

A higher administrative rationality would take some space from all these managements and this might erode the power held by the rulers. This is the reason why these leaders have always tried to weaken bureaucratic apparatuses by dividing them up or remodeling them in an arbitrary manner. At the same time, they also avoid their occasional conversion into subordinate domains, some of which might challenge their leadership one day. The previous Libyan regime was particularly notable for implementing this kind of manoeuvres (Castien Maestro, 2012), although it has not been the only one. For all these reasons, the dictatorial regimes in this region of the world have had a highly ambivalent relationship with the process of modernisation. Sometimes, they have played a very effective role as authoritarian modernisers by creating institutions and building up a State, but they have also played the opposite role very often. Their behaviour has been caught in that unresolved contradiction between the pursuit of a greater social structure and the search for the opposite purpose. They need to organise both the State and society in order to strengthen their own power base, but at the same time they must be careful not to overdo it since a more rationalised State and society which feel freer from both clientelism and communalism, might progressively escape their control (Castien Maestro, 2009b: 87). Recruited staff educated by firmer meritocratic criteria should consider the privileges enjoyed by just a few citizens as a scourge that becomes increasingly unacceptable. Similarly, a more complex society would be more difficult to repress or co-opt. To the extent that these latter processes have been developed in several countries, the ruling oligarchies began to be perceived as a brake on the modernisation process. The disparity between their particular interests and the long-term interests of most of the population has become more and more evident. We believe that the most profound, underlying reason for all those revolutions still in progress lies precisely in this disparity.

However, it would be unfair to put all the blame for the current situation on the government. Along with their political strategies, there are other factors that have also contributed to this partial reproduction of some traditional structures. The whole society has largely implemented its old cultural patterns when engaging with the new forms of organisation for which it was not prepared. These new forms have been adopted and adapted by society in accordance with its previous framework. But in the end, it has been this way mainly because those patterns of thinking and behaviour continued to be operational in a context which was deeply conditioned

by the survival of a lax sociality. The problems of everyday life can be solved by way of a permanent updating of clientelistic and communalist practices. Similarly, the feeling of alienation involved in modernisation as consequence of the dissolution of old communal bonds along with the weakness of public institutions and markets, left many people in a defenceless situation. Thus, they try to escape this situation by means of these strategies, what means that in some aspects, sociality has become more relaxed. In addition to all this, we must take into account the new needs arising from an imperfect modernisation. From now on, it will be necessary to study, find a job, move up the job ladder, get permits to start a business and deal with the different administrative procedures. Therefore, it is more urgent than ever to have good "contacts" by means of the appropriate combination between clientelism and communalism, and the new material resources favour the establishment of these relationships. New technologies in transports and communication will now make it possible to contact all those who are geographically far away. A convenient e-mail or just a call to the mobile phone may reactivate the relationship with a distant relative whose participation in some kind of management would be very appropriate. As we already pointed out, all this communalist clientelism has a contradictory influence with respect to the structural integration of society. This is often the case for the configuration of civil society in the modern sense. On the one hand, it provides resources and social base to some organisations such as political parties, trade unions and other type of associations, but on the other hand, it distorts all these modern organisations. This results in a deviation from their natural development according to their own internal logic, like for example the fact of holding onto voluntary membership and common interests, which may be different from those determined by communal belonging. Some other times, these modern organisations also rest on ideological commitments as a result of personal choice, and are linked to a project for society which is far away from the simple defence of narrow corporate interests. By virtue of this distorting action, they may act as a means to "deideologise" and "depoliticise". However, they have to do not so much with the generic sense of the removal of any ideology or political activity, as with that other sense by which their activity does not imply different projects for society which are necessarily linked with global ideologies. Thus, all these communities operate as substitutes for an authentic civil society, and partially fill the gap that its complete absence would leave, but at the same time, they also hamper a development which would be more in agreement with its ideal model.

It seems natural, therefore, that such a state of affairs raises strong dissatisfaction among wide sectors of society. The underdevelopment suffered by these societies in comparison with other parts of the world, along with their situation of neo-colonial dependency, provoke a strong feeling of discontent. But the influence of emerging values promoted by modernisation must also be taken into account, because through them other things apart from the individual's own welfare or collective pride are appreciated. This is often the case for the reward on the basis of personal achievement or the individual autonomy which now become more important, as it can be no other way within a much more dynamic and changeable society. These more modernist attitudes contribute to fuel a desire for change and especially, a strong hostility against the ruling oligarchies. Therefore, the current revolutionary process is marked by an anti-oligarchy

and pro-democracy character. Since it fights the most serious consequences of clientelism, it can be stated that this process has got a more or less explicit anticlientelistic orientation. However, despite the significant successes obtained in only a year and a half the challenges are still huge. If sharp social inequalities are not corrected promptly, it is highly probable that these objectives may fall by the wayside. Only a greater distribution of wealth can be able to generate a more cohesive society. Without this, it is impossible to conceive a society in which people have no choice but to resort to small fiddles for their daily subsistence, thus recreating both the old clientelism and communalism. Additionally, this implies a deep change in regard to the economic model and redirects the economy towards a greater internal articulation and a more pronounced self-development (Amin, 1986). It remains to be seen if those broad social coalitions which have been formed over the last period will carry out these critical reforms. A strong reason to doubt about it lies in the fact that modernist attitudes are not the only ones encouraging the current revolutions. Without taking into account the action undertaken by communalism, clearly evident in some places, there is certainly another one with a pronounced fundamentalist aspect that seems to operate along with the former. The latter aspires to solve the existing problems by resorting to a simplified version of Islam. Its survival should come as no surprise, given the continuity of its deepest social foundations. In the case of the current Islamist movements, this fundamentalist tendency is combined with radically different interpretations of Islam in a rather confusing and contradictory way. These other interpretations are aimed at combining the fundamentalist tendency with the basic aspects of any modern society (Castien Maestro, 2003a: 385-390). Thus, Islam represents on the one hand, a dangerous continuation of a range of approaches that never could find the solution for the problems of traditional society. It would then be even less useful for dealing succesfully with much more complex problems which are characteristic of a modern society. On the other hand, Islam contains very valuable elements for the development of a cultural and identity synthesis which can be accepted by the majority of the population, something that is essential in order to achieve a greater social integration. This is the same duality shown by its mobilising and organisational capacity. It may contribute to improve the structure of civil society but it may also spread extremely authoritarian and sectarian social models if compared with other ideological trends. For both these reasons, these movements are often two-sided: they can simultaneously be harmful and can help bolster modernisation (Castien Maestro, 2009b: 92-97). This is the ultimate reason for some of the actual uncertainties.

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