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*The Construction of the Concepts “Democracy”
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Wael Abu-‘Uksa

While political concepts such as “constitutionalism” and “liberalism” have attracted interest among scholars of nineteenth-century eastern and southern Mediterranean Ottoman intellectual history, the concepts of “democracy” and “republic” have gained scant attention.¹ Some early works addressed these two ideas from the perspective of historical semantics. For example, a short article by Bernard Lewis traces the linguistic origins of “republic” in Turkish and Arabic. Lewis concludes that “the first Muslim republic to be established outside the Russian Empire seems to have been the Tripolitanian Republic, proclaimed in November 1918”

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¹ Bernard Lewis, “Ḥurriyya: The Ottoman Empire and After,” *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 589–94; Lewis, *The Political Language of Islam* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Heidemarie Doganalp-Votzi and Claudia Römer, *Herrschaft and staat: Politische terminologie des Osmanischen reiches der Tanzimatzeit* (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2008).

in North Africa (Libya).² Ami Ayalon presents a more detailed discussion on “republic” that extends into the twentieth century, with similar methodology and conclusions.³ In these two short works, there is very little emphasis on the concept of democracy. Furthermore, despite their importance in presenting the historical semantics of “republic,” they scarcely focus on comparative semantics in relation to European languages, on the conceptual dimensions of these two political ideas, or on their relation to theories of governance. The state of scholarship is different, however, when it comes to countries in western Europe, North America, and even those areas along the shores of the northern and western Mediterranean. In these places, “democracy” and “republic” have attracted more interest and broader inquiry.⁴

This article is an attempt to expand the efforts of conceptual historians examining the construction of the concepts “democracy” and “republic” in the Arabic-speaking regions of the eastern and southern Mediterranean. Furthermore, it endeavors to overcome what Jörn Leonhard calls “the trap of semantic nominalism” in the use of these two concepts in the historiography of the region, particularly the extensive use of Western political concepts without considering how different historical contexts and linguistic spheres influence their meanings.⁵ The investigation of “democracy” and “republic” in this regard aims to reveal their meanings in the particular context of the Arabic language and to refine their historical content in relation to other political concepts between the beginning of the French expedition to Egypt in 1798 and the end of the Tanzimat period and the disbandment of the Ottoman parliament in 1878.

Benefiting from the “linguistic turn” in this field of study, I probe these ideas through both synchronic analysis that explores semantic fields of concepts in particular time units and diachronic analysis that follows changes in concepts over time. This article focuses on the following questions: When

² Lewis, *Political Words and Ideas in Islam* (Princeton, NJ: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2008), 132.

³ Ami Ayalon, “Semantics and the Modern History of Non-European Societies: Arab ‘Republics’ as a Case Study,” *The Historical Journal* 28, no. 4 (1985): 821–34.

⁴ Joanna Innes and Mark Philp, eds., *Re-Imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions: America, France, Britain, Ireland, 1750–1850* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013); Robert Roswell Palmer, *The Age of the Democratic Revolution: The Challenge* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014), 5–21.

⁵ Jörn Leonhard, “The Longue Durée of Empire: Toward a Comparative Semantics of a Key Concept in Modern European History,” *Contributions to the History of Concepts* 8, no. 1 (2013): 12; Wael Abu-Uksa, *Freedom in the Arab World: Concepts and Ideologies in Arabic Thought in the Nineteenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 4–17.

were the concepts "democracy" and "republic" re-imagined to acquire modern content that is detached from their classical and medieval meanings? When were these two concepts perceived as relevant to local circumstances between 1798 and 1878? The discussion is based on historical analysis of the language that contemporaries used during this period to articulate these two ideas. I scrutinize the relation between language and ideas by examining original sources—documents, dictionaries, letters, and books—that were written during these years in Arabic and that contributed to the contemporary meanings of "democracy" and "republic." Thus, works by all scholars—clerics, journalists, chroniclers, and others who discussed these concepts in Arabic—are part of this inquiry.

Compared to the impact of French on the Arabic language during the first half of the nineteenth century, English had a minor influence. During this period there was very little information in Arabic on significant events that took place in the English-speaking world, such as the American Revolution and its republican tradition. Owing to the central importance of the French language to modern ideas in Arabic, I highlight some comparative reflection on turning points in the semantic history of these ideas, especially those points related to procedures of governance. The article focuses on the emergence of composite principles that had, by the end of the nineteenth century, become fully or partly identified with "democracy" or "republic," such as popular involvement in politics, representatives and an elective system, political and social equality for all subjects, sovereignty of the people, and universal suffrage.

CONSTRUCTING THE LANGUAGE OF "REPUBLIC" AND "DEMOCRACY"

In the eighteenth century there was no discourse in Arabic on the concepts "democracy" and "republic," and contemporary language almost completely lacked particular terms with meanings equivalent to the original Greek word *demokratia* or the Latin phrase *res publica* (matter or things of the people), the origin of the modern "republic."⁶ Medieval Arabic political terms that denoted "democracy," such as *madīna jamā'iyya* (literally, collective polity), and that in a broad sense indicated "republic," such as

⁶ Cary J. Nederman, "Republicanism," in *New Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. Maryanne Cline Horowitz (Detroit, MI: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2005), 2098–103; Ayalon, "Semantics and the Modern History of Non-European Societies," 825.

madīna (*politeia*, city-state), were not common in the eighteenth century.⁷ These terms, which were coined and used by medieval *falāsifa* (Arabic-speaking philosophers), apparently fell out of use because interest in the broader tradition of philosophy was rare, and philosophy was dismissed by many medieval and contemporary Sunni scholars as being associated with naturalism and materialism (*ṭabāʿiyya*, *dabriyya*).⁸ Similarly, contemporary Turkish rarely used any terms that depicted forms of government other than monarchy.⁹ Instead, Ottoman Turkish- and Arabic-speaking scholars who strove to depict forms of governance with which they were not terribly familiar invented their own language. Based on the acquaintance that Ottoman Arabic-speaking scholars had with the historical developments of early modernity and the later experience that some of them had with French rule after Napoleon's expedition to Egypt and Greater Syria between 1798 and 1801, Arabic developed its particular terminology, initially by extending the semantic fields of existing Arabic expressions and by borrowing words.

Unlike Arabic, French of the mid-eighteenth century acknowledged the two words "republic" and "democracy." But while France became a self-proclaimed "republic" after the fall of the monarchy in 1792, "democracy" had an ambiguous and archaic meaning that was predominantly associated with the historical legacy of ancient Greece. "Democracy" was scarcely known among the common people, and its use by the educated was rarely related to contemporary circumstances. In the contemporary French context, "democracy" above all indicated the political power of the people, as direct sovereign and as legislator, without indicating any particular arrangements related to how that governance operated. The common understanding of the concept, which prevailed prior to the French Revolution, was similar to that of many ancient and medieval historians and philosophers around the Mediterranean, including Herodotus, Plato, Aristotle, and Ibn Rushd, who conceived of democracy as being an unstable and dangerous system that could eventually lead to tyranny. These negative perceptions of democracy could

⁷ Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya* (Beirut: al-Maṭbaʿa al-Kāthūlikiyya, 1998), 99–101; Abū al-Walīd Muḥammad Ibn Rushd, *Al-Ḍarūrī fī al-siyāsa: mukhtaṣar kitāb al-siyāsa li-Aflāṭān*, trans. Aḥmad Shaʿlān (Beirut: Markaz Dirāsāt al-Waḥda al-ʿArabiyya, 1998), 174–76.

⁸ Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī, "Al-Munqidh min al-ḍalāl," in *Majmūʿat rasāʾil al-ʿimām al-Ghazālī*, ed. Aḥmad Shams al-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub, 1988), 34–47; ʿAbd Allah al-Sharqāwī, *Tuḥfat al-nāzirīn fī-man waliya Miṣr min al-mulūk wa-l-salāṭīn* (Cairo: Madbūli, 1996), 122; ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *ʿAjāʾib al-āthār fī-l-tarājīm wa-l-akbbār* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1998), 3:191; Ḥaydar al-Shihābī, *Qīṣat Aḥmad bāshā al-Jazzār* (Cairo: Madbūli, 2008), 143–51.

⁹ Marinos Sariyannis, "Ottoman Ideas on Monarchy before the Tanzimat Reforms: Toward a Conceptual History of Ottoman Political Notions," *Turcica* 47 (2016): 45.

explain, at least partly, why in the French Revolution of 1789 "democracy" was not used in political slogans and why use of the term was infrequent. The concept of democracy was, however, re-imagined, and its content was reassessed, repeatedly experimented with, and reconceptualized in Europe and around the Mediterranean after the French Revolution.¹⁰

At the end of the eighteenth century, France invaded Egypt. During this period, the tumultuous French Revolution led to the despotic rule of Napoleon in 1799. With this experience in the background, democracy was not a dominant concept in France, and the French rule in Egypt was predominantly portrayed to Arabic-speaking scholars as well organized, rationally institutionalized, and entirely detached from monotheistic traditions.¹¹ Arabic, like Turkish, had not at this time developed "democracy" or "republic" as distinct or separate concepts; rather, Arabic employed the term *jumbūr* to depict the French model (equivalently, Turkish used the term *cumhur*). *Jumbūr* was most commonly used to mean simply "crowd" or "public," and the adjective *jumbūrī* denoted popular wine or cooked juice used by the common people. But the word became increasingly politicized during the early modern period.¹² Stressing the role of the people in establishing and defining the nature of the polity, *jumbūr* was used in Arabic sources and translated in Western European dictionaries as "republic."¹³

Some political aspects of this word were, however, not new: rather than the common eighteenth-century use of the word *ra'iyya* (subjects), which emphasized the subordinate and nonpolitical function of individuals in the state, medieval philosophical traditions in Arabic used words such as *jumbūr*, *ahl al-madīna*, and *madanī* (pl. *madaniyyīn*) to denote the sociopolitical nature of individuals composing a political society (*ijtimā' madanī*).¹⁴

¹⁰ Benedetto Fontana, "Democracy," in Horowitz, *New Dictionary*, 551–52; Ibn Rushd, *Al-Ḍarūrī*, 194–95; Ruth Scurr, "Varieties of Democracy in the French Revolution," in Innes and Philp, *Re-Imagining Democracy*, 57–62.

¹¹ Niqūlā al-Turk, *Dhikr tamalluk jumbūr al-Faransāwiyya al-aqtār al-Miṣriyya wa-l-bilād al-Shāmiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Fārābī, 1990), 28; al-Sharqāwī, *Tuḥfat al-nāzirīn*, 122; al-Jabartī, *'Ajā'ib al-āthār*, 3:191.

¹² Muḥammad Murtaḍā al-Zubaydī, "J.m.h.r.," in *Tāj al-'arūs* (Kuwait: Maṭba'at Hukūmat al-Kuwayt, 1972), 474.

¹³ Francis Meninski, "Jumhūr," *Lexicon Arabico-Persico-Trucicum* (Viennae: Nunc secundis curis recognitum et auctum, 1780), 393–94; John Richardson, "Jamāhīr," in *A Dictionary, Persian, Arabic, and English* (London: William Bulmer, 1806), 346; al-Jabartī, *'Ajā'ib al-āthār*, 3:101; al-Turk, *Dhikr tamalluk*, 21.

¹⁴ Al-Fārābī, *Fuṣūl al-Madanī: Aphorisms of the Statesman*, trans. D. M. Dunlop (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961), 37, 117, 131; al-Fārābī, *Kitāb al-siyāsa al-madaniyya*, 84, 86, 87–101, 107.

Furthermore, an early politicization of the term appeared in Turkish, the diplomatic and the formal language of the empire. In 1703 the Janissary rebel Calik Ahmed suggested discarding the Ottoman dynasty and replacing it with *cumhur cem'iyet*, an ambiguous phrase that apparently denoted “popular assembly,” as in the case of “Algiers or Tunis.”¹⁵ Use of this Turkish term to indicate a military oligarchy in Algiers and Tunis came to emphasize above all the nonhereditary nature of the regimes in these places. The system that was developed there by Janissary militias was depicted in Arabic by the word *dāy*, a title given to the military officer-rulers. In addition to this designation, residents of Algiers used the phrase “Turkish kings” (*mulūk al-Atrāk*, *mulūk al-Turk*) to depict the political system that lasted until the French invasion in 1830.¹⁶ In Algiers the Ottoman military caste (*awjāq*), which preserved its Turkish-ethnic character and interests, established a political system in which one of the officers ruled the country in the name of the Ottoman sultan. Contemporary historians wrote that the transition of power in this regime took place in one of the following ways: assassination, a choice made by the military council, or a choice made by the former ruler (inheritance).¹⁷ Turkish-speaking historians extended the contemporary semantic field of *cumhur* by applying it to European and ancient Greek forms of governance (indicating commonwealth and city-state).¹⁸

Whether by Turkish, French, or medieval Arabic influences, *jumbūr* became increasingly employed in Arabic to denote the idea of popular involvement in politics. The contemporary concept of *jumbūr*—uniting the meanings of “public” and “republic” in one word—did not differ much from the equivalent concept in French. Although French (and English) used the terms “republic” and “democracy” separately, the contemporary use of “republic” in these languages was not entirely clear with regard to this conceptual distinction, implying that republics might also be democratic.¹⁹

¹⁵ Cemal Kafadar, “Janissaries and Other Riffraff of Ottoman Istanbul: Rebels without a Cause?,” *Turkish Studies* 13, no. 1 and 2 (2007): 113–34; Sariyannis, “Ottoman Ideas on Monarchy before the Tanzimat Reforms,” 46–47.

¹⁶ Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Zahhār, *Mudhakkarāt al-hājj Aḥmad al-Sharīf al-Zahhār, naqīb ashrāf al-Jazā’ir 1754–1830*, ed. Aḥmad Tawfiq al-Madanī (Algiers: al-Sharika al-Waṭaniyya lil-Nashshr, 1974), 65, 176.

¹⁷ Aḥmad Ibn Saḥnūn, *Al-Thaḡr al-jummānī fī ibtisām al-thaḡr al-wabrānī* (Algiers: ‘Ālam al-Ma’rifa, 2013), 459–60.

¹⁸ Sariyannis, “Ottoman Ideas on Monarchy before the Tanzimat Reforms,” 47; Roger Le Tourneau, “Dayi,” in *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1991), 188–89; Jamil M. Abun-Nasr, *A History of the Maghrib in the Islamic Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 151–86, xvi.

¹⁹ Innes and Philp, introduction to *Re-Imagining Democracy*, 1.

In addition to the increased frequency in the political use of the term *jumbūr* and the emphasis on the principle of popular engagement in governance, there were discussions in Arabic about the struggle of the French people against their king, the nobles, and clergy.²⁰ The term was infused with revolutionary connotations when used to conceptualize "the people" as a homogenous mass in contrast to the elite. For example, the term *jumbūr al-firinsī/al-faransāwiyya* depicted the French political order after the Revolution. Moreover, the early use of *jumbūr* had further implications related to institutional arrangements; for instance, the term *majma' al-jumbūr* indicated the national assembly that functioned as a powerful representative body after the Revolution.²¹ Around the end of the eighteenth century, these conceptual transitions led to the creation of new Arabic terms that were underlain by the principle of the power of the people: *madhhab al-jumbūr* (laws of the republic/people), *qiyām al-jumbūr* (popular uprising), and many others.²²

The instability and ambiguity of politicizing "the people," and thus the use of this principle as a foundation for creating a form of governance, was manifested in the use of an additional signifier. More frequently than *jumbūr*, Arabic employed the word *mashyakha*, which was derived from *shaykh* (equivalent to the Latin *senex*, elder, the source of *senates*, senate), a title of honor that could refer to an elder, a Muslim cleric, the head of a tribe, or a notable or feudal lord (in Mount Lebanon).²³ It was used during the French expedition to Egypt and Syria to indicate the form of the French regime. *Mashyakha*, which before 1798 denoted the tribal political system that was based on powerful families or clans (as in *Mashyakhat al-Jabal* in Hawran, Greater Syria), was now used to denominate the rule of the leaders of society.²⁴

²⁰ Al-Turk, *Dhikr tamalluk*, 18–27; Ḥananiya al-Munayyir, *Al-Durr al-marṣūf fī tārtkh al-Shūf* (Lebanon: Jrus press, n.d.), 96; al-Shihābī, *Qīṣat Aḥmad bāshā*, 143–45.

²¹ Al-Turk, *Dhikr tamalluk*, 20.

²² Ismā'īl al-Khashāb, *Al-Tārīkh al-musalsal fī ḥawādīth al-zamān wa-waqayī' al-dūwān, 1800–1801* (Cairo: al-Ma'had al-'Ilmī al-Faransī, 2003), 11–13, 16–17, 32, 34; al-Jabartī, *'Ajā'ib al-āthār*, 3:27.

²³ Richardson, "Mashyakha," in *A Dictionary, Persian, Arabic, and English*, 939; *Kitāb majmū' ḥawādīth al-ḥarb al-wāqī' bayna al-Faransāwiyya wa-l-Namsāwiyya* (Paris, 1807), 2–3; Reinhart Pieter Anne Dozy, "Mashyakha," *Takmilat al-ma'ājim al-'Arabiyya* (Baghdad: Dār al-Shu'un al-Thaqāfiyya, 1997), 395; Fāris al-Shidyāq, *Al-Wasiṭa ilā ma'rifat aḥwāl Mālta wa-kashf al-mukhabbā' 'an funūn Ūrābba* (Beirut: Kutub, 2002), 247; *Al-Nazẓārāt al-miṣriyya*, 16 September 1879, 16.

²⁴ Kais M. Firro, "The Ottoman Reforms and Jabal al-Duruz, 1860–1914," in *Ottoman Reform and Muslim Regeneration: Studies in Honour of Butrus Abu-Manneh*, ed. Itzchak Weismann and Fruma Zachs (New York: IB Tauris, 2005), 151–52.

Against the background of the *Directoire*, the body that governed France between 1795 and 1799, contemporary Arabic-speaking chroniclers identified the French political system with the rule of shaykhs. In that sense Napoleon was perceived as “one of the leaders of the French republic.”²⁵ The administrative council (*dūwān*) that the French established in Egypt influenced the meaning of *mashyakha*. ‘Abd Allah al-Sharqāwī, the shaykh of al-Azhar at the time of the French expedition and one of the members of the *dūwān*, described the French mode of governance and legislation. He indicated that the French used philosophy to legislate and to establish institutions that relied on their rational, irreligious way of thinking. In Egypt the French gathered shaykhs (*mashāyikh*) and appointed them to the *dūwān* to manage Egyptian affairs. In that sense, the *mashāyikh*, or in this case the Muslim ulama, filled a political function in which they were assigned by the French to take part in civil governance and to replace the Mamluk military elite.²⁶ Literally meaning the rule of elders, leaders, or ulama, *mashyakha* was used in the French context to indicate nonmonarchic rule,²⁷ a form of governance in which power is retained by the leaders of the public as opposed to the king and, according to some sources, the nobles (*ashraf*).²⁸

Prior to the French Revolution, Arabic also, though less frequently, employed the borrowed terms *ribublika* and *bublika* (republic). These words were used in the Moroccan monarch’s correspondence with the city of Dubrovnik during the 1780s and 1790s to depict that city’s system of governance. There the political system consisted of a ruling city council that was elected from among the local powerful families.²⁹ Following the same logic that applied in *jumbūr* and *mashyakha*, the relation between the *dūwān* and the republican aspect of governance was emphasized in contemporary terms such as *dūwān al-ribublika*, which was perceived as the highest political authority in the city.³⁰

Unlike the rarely used borrowed words, *jumbūr* and *mashyakha* were

²⁵ “Wakāna hadhā [Bonaparte] min ba‘ḍ kibār al-mashyakha al-Faransāwiyya,” Al-Turk, *Dhikr tamalluk*, 18, 25; Ayalon, “Semantics and the Modern History of Non-European Societies,” 826.

²⁶ Juan Cole, *Napoleon’s Egypt: Invading the Middle East* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 75.

²⁷ *Kitāb al-kanz al-mukhtār fī kashf al-araḍī wa-l-biḥār* (Malta, 1836), 62.

²⁸ Al-Jabartī, ‘*Ajā’ib al-āthār*, 3:101; al-Turk, *Dhikr tamalluk*, 18, 21, 25; Jamāl al-Dīn al-Shayyāl, *Tārīkh al-tarjama wa-l-ḥaraka al-thaqāfiyya fī ‘aṣr Muḥammad ‘Alī* (Cairo: Dār al-Fikr, 1951), 216; al-Khashāb, *Al-Tārīkh al-musalsal*, 3, 9, 11, 17; al-Sharqāwī, *Tuḥfat al-nāzīrīn*, 122.

²⁹ Besim Korkut, *Al-Wathā’iq al-‘Arabiyya fī dār al-mahfaẓāt bi-madīnat Dubraṇik* (Sarajevo: Orijentalni Institut u Sarajevu, 1960), 10–12, 50, 58, 72, 74, 84.

³⁰ Korkut, 50, 74.

used extensively in Arabic by the 1870s, emphasizing two main aspects of governance:³¹ while *jumhūr* indicated the principle of the power of the people, *masbyakha* implied the principles of a representative body and collective governance. It is important to stress that *jumhūr* was ambiguous regarding the actual procedure of governance, and *masbyakha* implied no particular method for choosing representatives. In that sense, the idea of elections was not necessarily contained within the semantic scope of these two words, at least not at this early stage. (This conceptual ambiguity correlates to a large extent with the contemporary meaning of the French concept of democracy at the end of the eighteenth century.)³²

The French model posed a challenge to contemporary Arabic conceptions of governance and became controversial with the first years of the French Revolution and the French invasion of Egypt that followed. In an implied criticism of the nonmonarchic system of governance, Aḥmad ibn Saḥnūn, a North African chronicler in the court of the bey of Oran, Muḥammad al-Kabīr, wrote in a 1794 description of the French Revolution that the French people “killed their king and took their people into anarchy [*fawḍā*], with no king and no clergy, acting as they desire in religious and worldly matters.”³³ Similarly, ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, the most prominent historian of Egypt during the French expedition, contended that the French Revolution and the republican order that followed were a *bid‘a* (a negative innovation that had no precedent in the time of the Prophet), which they invented, after killing their king, by ignoring all the laws of the monotheistic religions.³⁴ In his reaction al-Jabartī presented a political doctrine that elaborated three possible modes of securing governance: first, when it is acquired by inheritance from masters, as in Mamluk Egypt; second, when it is transferred from ancestors; and third, when it is obtained by suppression and subjugation (“*al-ghalaba wa-l-qahr*”).³⁵ Another contemporary, Muḥammad Ibn ‘Abd al-Wahhāb

³¹ “Al-Hawādith al-Dakhiliyya,” *Al-Abrām*, 19 January 1877; Rizqallah Ḥassūn, *Mir‘at al-aḥwāl*, 17 May 1877.

³² Scurr, “Varieties of Democracy in the French Revolution,” 57–68; Malcolm Crook, “Elections and Democracy in France, 1789–1848,” in Innes and Philp, *Re-Imagining Democracy*, 83–87.

³³ Ibn Saḥnūn, *Al-Thagr al-jummānī*, 231–32; Benjamin Claude Brower, “Just War and Jihad in the French Conquest of Algeria,” in *Just Wars, Holy Wars, and Jihads*, ed. Sohail Hashmi (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 234–35; Tayeb Chenntouf, “La Révolution Française: L’évènement vue d’Algérie,” in *La Révolution Française et Le monde Arabo-Musulman* (Tunis: Editions de la Méditerranée, 1989), 61–70.

³⁴ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Jabartī, *Mazhar al-ttaqdīs bi-zawāl dawlat al-Faranīs* (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya, 1998), 52.

³⁵ Al-Jabartī, 28.

(d. 1792), the founder of the Wahhabiyya religious movement, elaborated more on these three modes of governance by associating them with theological doctrine. According to the common perception advocated by ‘Abd al-Wahhāb, a Muslim ruler, even one who captures political power by force must be obeyed as both a ruler and as a religious leader (imām) of Islam.³⁶

It is important to stress that this political doctrine—known as the doctrine of *al-hākīm al-mutaghalib*, a ruler who takes power by force and turns to religious leaders of the community—was not invented by contemporary scholars. It appeared earlier in the Middle Ages among Sunni jurists who wrote about the theory of governance in Islam. Thus, while ‘Alī Ibn Muḥammad al-Māwardī (d. 1031) limited his justification of the usurpation of power by force to state positions such as provincial rulers, Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā‘a (d. 1333) extended this justification to the highest positions—the political and religious leadership of the Muslim community (the imamate).³⁷

Contemporary Turkish possessed similar ideas: Marinos Sariyannis argues that prior to the Tanzimat reforms, Turkish-speaking authors “accepted as given the fact that absolute monarchy is the natural state of mankind.”³⁸ However, this common perception of a single authority that combines religious and political leadership was challenged by the French model. Republicanism, as a doctrine that embeds a concept of legitimacy derived from “the people” or “the nation,” and as a system of governance that is comprised of representative collective bodies, was criticized as being derived from naturalism (naturalism here denotes a category that is antonymous to the monotheistic belief in a single God).³⁹

The clear relationship between *jumhūr* and “democracy” was documented in the second decade of the nineteenth century. Ellious Boctor (Ilyās Buqṭur al-Asyūṭī), an Egyptian Copt who fled with the French after their evacuation of Egypt in 1801, translated—in his dictionary, which was published a few years after his death—*démocrate* (democrat) as *tābi‘ al-ḥukm al-jumhūr* (follower of the rule of the people), and *démocratie*

³⁶ ‘Abd al-Raḥmān Ibn Qāsim, ed., *Al-Durarr al-suniyya fī al-ajwiba al-Najdiyya* (Riyadh, 1995), 9:5–6.

³⁷ Badr al-Dīn Ibn Jamā‘a, *Taḥrīr al-aḥkām fī tadbīr ahl al-Islām* (Qatar: Ri‘āsat al-Mahākīm al-Shar‘iyya, 1985), 55; ‘Alī Ibn Muḥammad al-Māwardī, *Al-Aḥkām al-sultāniyya* (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1996), 56–58.

³⁸ Sariyannis, “Ottoman Ideas on Monarchy before the Tanzimat Reforms,” 42.

³⁹ Al-Shihābī, *Qiṣat Aḥmad bāshā*, 143–51; al-Turk, *Dhikr tamalluk*, 28; al-Sharqāwī, *Tuḥfat al-nāẓir*, 122; al-Jabartī, *‘Ajā‘ib al-āthār*, 3:191.

(democracy) as *qiyām al-jumhūr bil-ḥukm* (rule of the people).⁴⁰ He used the same word, *jumhūr*, to mean "republic."⁴¹

Bothor, who in his later career in Paris was a teacher of Arabic at the *École des langues orientales*, was one of the early Arabic-speaking scholars who were enchanted with the ideals of the French Revolution.⁴² His status as a refugee in France was due to his service under the French and his devotion to the project of an "independent Egypt," which was connected to his uncle, the leader of the refugees, General Ya'qūb Ḥanna, the first non-French general in the French army.⁴³

Despite the alleged influence of ideals of the French Revolution on the members of the group advocating the liberation of Egypt from the Ottomans with the help of the French and the British, the idea of *jumhūr* played a marginal role in their plans. Correspondence in 1801 between a member of this group (the "Egyptian Legation") and the French and British describes the group's theoretical plans for governing Egypt after its future liberation: "[Our system of government] will not be in this case a revolution made by the spirit of enlightenment or by the fermentation of opposing philosophical principles. . . . Let the new government be just, severe and national."⁴⁴ This group of Oriental refugees did not find in ideas derived from the principle of popular involvement any relevance to their future plans: Egypt needed to be ruled merely by a native and just government.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the use of "national" implies some impact of republican ideals on the group's vision. The aspect of "republicanism" that developed after the French Revolution in contrast with the rule of cosmopolitan dynasties in Europe was perceived by this group as relevant to their case, in which the Turco-Circassian military elites continued to struggle for political power in the southern and eastern Mediterranean regions. This national aspect of republicanism, which implied native governance, would be acknowledged a few years later by Egyptian scholar Rifā'a al-Ṭaḥṭāwī in his definition of "republic" in a glossary

⁴⁰ Ellious Bothor, "Démocrate," in *Dictionnaire Français-Arabe* (Paris: Chez Firmin Didot Freres, 1828), 1:248.

⁴¹ Bothor, "Républicain," in *Dictionnaire Français-Arabe* (Paris: Chez Firmin Didot Freres, 1829), 2:269.

⁴² Ian Coller, *Arab France: Islam and the Making of Modern Europe, 1798–1831* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 103–5; Anwar Louca, "Ilyas Buqtur," *The Coptic Encyclopedia* (New York: Macmillan, 1991), 1284–85.

⁴³ Louca, "Ilyas Buqtur," 2349–53; Coller, *Arab France*, 21, 38–39.

⁴⁴ George A. Haddad, "A Project for the Independence of Egypt, 1801," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 90, no. 2 (1970): 181.

⁴⁵ Haddad.

appended to one of his books.⁴⁶ Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī was apparently also the first to use the Arabic word *al-anwār* (light) to indicate the sociocultural content of the French Enlightenment (in modern Arabic *tanwīr*, *anwār*).⁴⁷

During the rule of Muḥammad ‘Alī, who took control in 1805, two political principles were institutionalized: representation and, less dominantly, elections, which had been practiced in simpler form in the early days of the Ottoman Empire (the tribal method of electing the Ottoman monarch in the early days of the empire).⁴⁸ Both principles integrated the concept of political legitimacy and gained limited importance as essential principles for governance. The *dīwān* established by the French in Egypt was a manifestation of unelected representation. Although the common people did not have any direct influence in this institution, and the French military governor appointed its members by decree, it expressed a limited notion of civil governance. Furthermore, the members of the council elected (*qur‘a*, *intikhāb*) their president from among themselves.⁴⁹ A similar concept existed in Mount Lebanon, Algiers, and Tunis: In Mount Lebanon, local notables on occasion elected the ruler of the area from the Ma‘n dynasty and later, from the house of Shihāb. In Algiers, rulers were sometimes elected, initially by the company of corsair masters (*tāʿifa*) and after 1689 by officers of the militia. In Tunis the officers periodically elected their rulers until 1705, when the Husaynids took power.⁵⁰ In Muḥammad ‘Alī’s Egypt, a limited conception of civil representation continued to be applied through the founding of a Council of State and a Private Council. The implementation of this model of representation was extended under the Egyptian rule of Greater Syria and Crete during the 1830s with the reforming of existing local councils and the establishment of others; the aim of these changes was to involve local communities in administration.⁵¹

A linguistic turning point in the history of the concepts “democracy” and “republic” was reached between 1820 and 1860. Internally, the inauguration of the Egyptian state’s translation project, and externally, the outbreak of the July Revolution, the second wave of the French Revolution,

⁴⁶ Rifā‘a al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, trans., *Al-Taʿrībāt al-shāfiya* (Būlāq: Dār al-Ṭibā‘a, 1834), app. 72–73.

⁴⁷ Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibriz ilā talkhīṣ Bārīz* (Būlāq: Dār al-Ṭibā‘a, 1834), 119, 124, 157.

⁴⁸ Sariyannis, “Ottoman Ideas on Monarchy before the Tanzimat Reforms,” 36–37.

⁴⁹ Al-Khashāb, *Al-Tārīkh al-musalsal*, 4, 38, 96; Panayiotis J. Vatikiotis, *The Modern History of Egypt* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1969), 38.

⁵⁰ Ḥaydar al-Shihābī, *Lubnān fī ‘abd al-umarā’ al-Shihābiyyīn* (Beirut: al-Maṭba‘a al-Kāthūlikiyya, 1933), 1:3; Anṭūn Ḍāhir ‘Aqīqī, *Thawra wa-fitna fī Lubnān* (Beirut: al-Ittihād, 1939), 68; Le Tourneau, “Dayi,” 188–89.

⁵¹ Roderic Davison, *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History, 1774–1923: The Impact of*

stimulated further conceptual transitions in Arabic. The latter event inspired attempts to refine political ideas and to coin political expressions in Arabic. Rifā'ā al-Ṭaḥṭāwī witnessed the overthrow of Bourbon King Charles X and his replacement by Louis Philippe of the Orleanist dynasty and documented the substitution of the principle of popular sovereignty for that of hereditary right. Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's description of the July Revolution attracted the attention of modern historians.⁵² Albert Hourani distinguishes between the political message conveyed in this description and al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's political perception. Hourani argues that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's view of the state was not "liberal" and that despite this description, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī believed in the absolute power of rulers, which should be limited only by respect for divine law. Therefore, the idea that "government should be in the hands of 'the people' . . . was not, he [al-Ṭaḥṭāwī] thought, an idea which was relevant to the problems of Egypt."⁵³ Alain Roussillon criticizes the idea that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī passively described this event. He argues that what al-Ṭaḥṭāwī hoped to achieve in this text was not the adoption of these revolutionary ideas into the Egyptian context; rather, he was looking for the political formula for the power of the French state, in which he observed the idea of the autonomy of the political sphere. Roussillon contends that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī acknowledged the importance of redefining the function of the state, reorganizing it and making it more effective without questioning the foundation of the state in Islam.⁵⁴ Following this line of thought, Peter Gran argues that al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's documentation of the revolutionary ideas could be better understood as advice to Muḥammad 'Alī. His documentation, in that sense, includes advice with a warning or threatening dimension, and Gran suggests understanding it as part of the genre of "mirror for princes."⁵⁵ Daniel Newman emphasizes the power of this text over al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's fate and his relations with the Egyptian monarch after Muḥammad 'Alī. He argues that the description of parliamentary and political life in France might have "left a less than favorable impression on the Khedive [ʿAbbās]."⁵⁶

the West (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990), 98–101; Vatikiotis, *The Modern History of Egypt*, 67.

⁵² Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, *Takbliṣ al-ibriz*, 157–58, 161, 165–66.

⁵³ Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798–1939* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970), 73.

⁵⁴ Alain Roussillon, "Ce Qu'ils Nomment "Liberté" . . . Rifā'ā Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, Ou L'invention (Avortée) D'une Modernité Politique Ottomané," *Arabica* 48, no. 2 (2001): 143–85.

⁵⁵ Peter Gran, "Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī's Trip to Paris in Light of Recent Historical Analysis: Travel Literature or a Mirror for Princes?," in *Mirror for the Muslim Prince: Islam and the Theory of Statecraft*, ed. Mehrzad Boroujerdi (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 2013), 190–217.

⁵⁶ Daniel L. Newman, introduction to *An Imam in Paris: Account of a Stay in France by*

However, with the July Revolution in the background, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī made the first attempt to rethink the concepts “republic” and “democracy” by coining separate terms for the two concepts: “republic” was denoted by *jumbūriyya* and “democracy” by *dimuqrāṭiyyā*. The distinction al-Ṭaḥṭāwī made between the archaic *jumbūr* and “republic” or “democracy” did not render *jumbūr* obsolete. Some contemporaries followed al-Ṭaḥṭāwī and used *jumbūr* as equivalent to *mashāyikh*, *wukalāʾ*, and *nuwāb*, indicating representatives of the people,⁵⁷ while others continued to use the word to denote “republic” and “democracy” in general.⁵⁸ The linguistic distinctions led to conceptual distinctions. In 1834 al-Ṭaḥṭāwī dedicated an entry in a glossary to *jumbūriyya* (republic), defining it as a system of governance that is based on the “rule of a number of natives,” emphasizing the influence of nationalism on the understanding of a “republic” as a self-governance system based on the collective rule of native leaders.⁵⁹ This association between native rule, ethnic independence, and republicanism is articulated in al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s works. In one of his translations in the 1840s, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī argued that the Druze were an *umma jumbūriyya* (literally, a republican community, commonwealth), emphasizing its tendency toward communal sovereignty, independence, and collective governance.⁶⁰

During this period there was growing interest in political philosophy, which manifested in the translation of works related to Greek and French politicians and philosophers. Under the influence of Montesquieu, who had a significant impact on nineteenth-century Arabic-speaking scholars (al-Ṭaḥṭāwī presented Montesquieu to his Arabic readers in 1833), the republican system was perceived during these years as a general concept defined against the background of monarchy and indicating all the models of governance that place sovereignty in the hands of a group—without distinguishing between democracy and aristocracy.⁶¹ Nevertheless, al-Ṭaḥṭāwī’s use

an Egyptian Cleric (1826–1831) [Takhliṣ al-ibriz ft talkhiṣ Bārtz aw al-diwān al-naḥs bi-ḥwān Bārīs], trans. Newman (London: Saqi Books, 2011), 54–55.

⁵⁷ Al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, *Takhliṣ al-ibriz*, 68; *Kitāb al-kanz al-mukhtār*, 13; Luwīs Kalivāris, *Kitāb sīrat al-muʿaẓam al-murafaʾ al-kabīr Nabulyūn al-awwal* (Paris, 1856), 223; Fāris al-Shidyāq, *Kanz al-raghāʾib fī muntakhabāt al-jawāʾib*, ed. Salīm al-Shidyāq (Istanbul: Maḥbaʾat al-Jawāʾib, 1877), 5:20–23, 60; ʿAqīqī, *Thawra wa-fitna*, 84–86.

⁵⁸ *Kitāb tawārīkh mukhtaṣar yanbī ʿan mamālik wa-bilād ʿadīda wa-mā hdatha fihā min qadīm al-zamān ilā ʿaṣrinā hadhā* (Malta, 1833), 22.

⁵⁹ “Ḥukum ʿidda min uṣūl ahl bilād wilāyya,” al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, *Al-Taʾribāt al-shāfiya*, app. 72–73; al-Ṭaḥṭāwī, *Takhliṣ al-ibriz*, 157; *Kitāb al-kanz al-mukhtār*, 4, 13, 53–54; Henry Markham, *Hadhā kitāb siyāḥat Amriqa*, trans. Saʿd Naʿam (Būlāq: Dār al-Ṭibaʿa, 1846), 64.

⁶⁰ Conrad Malte-Brun, *Al-Jughbrāfiyyā al-ʿumūmiyya*, trans. Rifāʿa al-Ṭaḥṭāwī (Būlāq: [1840?]), 3:20, 66, 70.

⁶¹ Georges-Bernard Depping, *Kitāb qalāʾid al-mafākhir fī gharīb ʿawāʾid al-awāʾil wa-l-*

of the borrowed *dimuqrāṭīyā* (democracy) or *ḥukm dimuqrāṭī* (democratic governance) marked another step in the construction of the independent meaning of "democracy." He indicated in a glossary entry focused on democracy that this idea means the rule of people (*ra'īyya*) through representatives derived from the ordinary people or from the notables (*a'yān*), exemplifying this concept using the "failed" experience of the French republic after the revolution.⁶² The word *dimuqrāṭīyā* (democracy), however, was rarely used between 1830 and 1860, and it was listed in 1856 in one of the glossaries under the title "foreign words."⁶³ Nonetheless, sources published during this period reveal a tendency to conceptualize "republic" and "democracy" as independent ideas. "Democracy" was indicated by a variety of coinages: *maḥkūma bil-ʿamma* (governed by the public)⁶⁴ and *dāmūkrāṭī* and *dāmūkrāsiyyā* (democratic and democracy).⁶⁵ Despite the intertwined meanings, some sources indicated greater distinctions between the two concepts. While *jumhūr*, *jumhūriyya*, *mashyakha*, and *ribublika* were used to indicate a defined method of governance that is not a monarchy in general, *dāmūkrāsiyyā* was used to stress the principle of equality in particular. Napoleon was presented in an Arabic biography as the greatest *dāmūkrātū* (democrat) in Europe because he demolished the privilege system (*ikhtiṣāṣāt al-mabghūda*) of the ancien régime.⁶⁶ In the same volume, the word *ribūblikānī* was also employed to mean republican rather than democrat, as a separate political designation.⁶⁷

Around the middle of the nineteenth century, the intertwined concepts of republic and democracy broadened to encompass societal spheres and values such as social equality and equal distribution of public wealth, revocation of discrimination, and human rights.⁶⁸ With the inauguration of the Arabic private press, from the mid-1850s onward, and with the significant impact of the Paris Commune of 1871 on European socialism and anarchism,⁶⁹ "democracy" became strongly identified with left-wing ideologies and with radical forms of republicanism. In the work of journalists who

awākhir, trans. Rifāʿa al-Taḥṭāwī (Bulāq: Dār al-Ṭibāʿa, 1833), app. 91; Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 21–29.

⁶² Al-Taḥṭāwī, *Al-Taʿrībāt al-shāfiya*, app. 76.

⁶³ Kalivāris, *Kitāb sīrat al-muʿāzam*, 224, 550.

⁶⁴ Diogenes Laertius, *Mukhtaṣar tarjamat mashābir qudamāʾ al-falāsifa*, trans. Husatn al-Miṣrī (Bulāq: Dār al-Ṭibāʿa, 1836), 21, 24.

⁶⁵ Bocthor, "Démocrate," in *Dictionnaire Français-Arabe*, 1:248; Kalivāris, *Kitāb strat al-muʿāzam*, 9, 224, 550.

⁶⁶ Kalivāris, *Kitāb sīrat al-muʿāzam*, 27, 224–25.

⁶⁷ Kalivāris, 88.

⁶⁸ ʿAqīqī, *Thawra wa-fitna*, 259–60.

⁶⁹ Al-Shidyāq, *Kanz al-raghāʾib*, 5:198–99.

covered leftist activism during the 1870s, use of phrases like “the democratic workers” (*al-dīmuqrāṭiyyīn min al-‘amala*)⁷⁰ or “social democrats” (*al-ijtimā‘iyyīn wal-dīmuqrāṭiyyīn*)⁷¹ increased in frequency. These phrases associated social values with democracy, including ideals such as the right to form labor unions, universal suffrage, and free and equal education for all social strata.

By the end of 1870s, Arabic had developed a relatively stable concept of democracy, associating it with two forms: the first was related to liberal politics, and the second was influenced by leftist and radical perceptions. In 1882 Buṭruṣ al-Bustānī published an entry in his encyclopedia dedicated to “democracy” (*dīmuqrāṭiyya*). In it he introduced Arabic readers to a concept that was close to the modern perception of liberal democracy by associating “democracy” and “representation” with the principle of “sovereignty of the people,” as practiced by elected bodies, and with parliament and a constitution that limit the power of the elected executive—a system exemplified by the United States, Belgium, and France. To this layer of the concept, he added another utopian aspect that presented democracy as an idealistic form of governance. Al-Bustānī argued that democracy also means the rule of all the people, without any mediators. This model, which was apparently influenced by anarchist and radical ideals, had never existed, according to al-Bustānī—neither in ancient Greece nor in Europe.⁷²

In a parallel development, the meaning of *jumbūriyya* stabilized considerably during the 1860s. In 1867, a few years before he was appointed to the post of grand vizier of the Ottoman Empire (December 1878–July 1879), Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī defined “republic” thus: “*Jumbūriyya* [republic], in their [the European] tradition, is a designation for a form of government where the nation elects its ruler to manage the state according to the laws. The ruler rules for life or for a limited period that is followed by electing a different one.”⁷³ This definition acknowledged both the early national connotations and the association with the principles of elected representation.

It is important to stress that coining words denoting “republic” and “democracy” did not generate a clear separation between the concepts, and

⁷⁰ “Jam‘iyyat al-Sushialist al-Jirmāniyya,” *al-Jawā‘ib*, 23 June 1875, 3–4.

⁷¹ Adīb Ishāq, *Adīb Ishāq*, ed. Najī ‘Alūsh (Beirut: Dār al-Ṭalī‘a, 1978), 270–74.

⁷² Buṭruṣ al-Bustānī, “Dīmuqrāṭiyya,” in *Kitāb dā‘irat al-ma‘ārif* (Beirut: Maṭba‘at al-Ma‘ārif, 1882), 8:232–33.

⁷³ Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī, *Aqwam al-masālik fi ma‘rifat aḥwāl al-mamālik* (Tunis: Maṭba‘at al-Dawla bi-Haḍrat Tūnis, 1867), 58.

in the second half of the nineteenth century, the language often used *jumhūriyya* to mean a democratic form of governance.⁷⁴ In 1882 al-Bustānī published an entry about "republic" in his encyclopedia, in which he distinguished between four varieties of republics: those ruled by the aristocracy (*aristuqrāṭiyya*) or by shaykhs (*mashyakhīyya*, *mashyakha*); those ruled by a distinguished group (*khawāṣ*) or some of the people; democracies that are ruled by the majority of the people (*dimuqrāṭiyya*); and united political entities ruled by one regime (confederation, *ittiḥādīyya*).⁷⁵

During the 1860s and 1870s, democracy became identified with indirect rule of the people, in which the people bestow sovereignty on a small group of representatives. In addition, the procedure of elections was recognized as the most important principle of representation. Despite all this, democracy continued to be associated with republic, and both terms were used to contrast against the common form of government that centralized political authority in the hands of one person. This perception was dominant in political theory in Arabic until late in the nineteenth century.⁷⁶

THE DISCOURSE AND PRACTICE OF "DEMOCRACY" AND "REPUBLIC"

Modern systematic political thought in Arabic appears around the middle of the nineteenth century against the background of the political and social transitions of the Tanzimat reforms. During this period, principles later identified as democratic gained formal recognition. Representation, equality before law, universal suffrage, popular involvement in government, and (though to a lesser extent) social equality became integral values of the Ottoman political system that evolved after 1839. In some non-Arabic-speaking provinces, and under the influence of the Greek war of independence, reforms were initiated earlier than 1839. In Cyprus the reorganization began in 1830 and continued thereafter.⁷⁷ In the 1830s the idea of local community involvement in administration through representative councils gained central importance under the Egyptian rule of Greater Syria and in

⁷⁴ Laertius, *Mukhtaṣar tarjamat*, 22–26; Jurjī Sursuq, *Tārikh al-Yūnān* (Beirut, 1876), 87.

⁷⁵ Buṭruṣ al-Bustānī, "Jumhūriyya," in *Kitāb dā'irat al-ma'ārif*, 6:534.

⁷⁶ Salīm al-Bustānī, "al-Ḥukūma," *al-Jinān* 7, no. 16 (1883): 125–216; al-Tūnisī, *Aqḥam al-masālik*, 58, 195.

⁷⁷ Marc Aymes, "Reform Talks: Applying the Tanzimat to Cyprus," in *Ottoman Cyprus: A Collection of Studies on History and Culture*, ed. Michalis Michael, Matthias Kappler, and Eftihios Gavriel (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2009), 107–16.

the reforms that followed. The first Tanzimat edict—the Gülhane decree, promulgated in November 1839—neither addressed the idea of representative government nor explicitly used the word “equality.” However, it addressed all subjects “without exception,” which constituted an attempt to establish a civil foundation for the Ottoman community (Ottomanism) and thus opened the door for wider changes in administration.⁷⁸ The January 1840 edict issued to provincial officials—which required the establishment of administrative councils in the provinces—began a tradition of representation at higher levels (though not in the central government in Istanbul): this introduced the principle of elections as one of the elements of political legitimacy. It is important to note, however, that representative assemblies already existed in some provinces of the empire—such as Moldavia, Wallachia, and the island of Samos (from 1834 on)—that were not under the direct control of the capital. The imperial edict Hattı-i Humayun of February 1856 emphasized the representative principle in the lower administrative levels, including the provinces, and the millet system (completed in 1864).⁷⁹ Furthermore, it explicitly stressed the principle of equality of all subjects before the law.⁸⁰ The connection between the idea of representation in higher administrative levels and universal suffrage was made in the 1860s: in Egypt this began with the establishment of the first Assembly of Delegates in 1866, which was elected indirectly, and continued afterward with the election held for the first Ottoman parliament in 1876.⁸¹

Butrus Abu-Manneh discusses the sociocultural and political roots of the reform movement. He argues that the members of the Ottoman elite who formulated the Gülhane decree were motivated by Sunni Islamic religious ideas, especially those that were common among the members of the Naqshabandi-Mujaddidi order. The idea of a just ruler, as prescribed in the works of prominent theologians and in the “mirrors for princes” literature, became quite prominent at that time; there was a conviction among the Ottoman elite that implementing justice would restore prosperity to the Ottoman community.⁸²

⁷⁸ Jacob Coleman Hurewitz, *Diplomacy in the Near and Middle East* (New York: Octagon Books, 1972), 113–16; Na'm Allah Nawfal, trans., *Al-Dustūr* (Beirut: Naẓarat al-Ma'ārif, 1883), 1–4.

⁷⁹ Davison, *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History*, 102–3; Ebubekir Ceylan, *The Ottoman Origins of Modern Iraq* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2011), 109–10.

⁸⁰ Al-Shidyāq, *Kanz al-rahbā'ib*, 5:6–15.

⁸¹ Davison, *Essays in Ottoman and Turkish History*, 96–108.

⁸² Butrus Abu-Manneh, “The Islamic Roots of the Gülhane Rescript,” *Die Welt Des Islams* 34, no. 2 (1994): 173–203.

These massive transitions in policies and language were formally initiated under the title of “progress toward a higher state of civilization” (*taqaddum, tamaddun*), “reforms,” “parliament,” and “constitution,” but not “democracy.”⁸³ Ideas derived from broad concepts of republicanism had a deep impact on peripheral regions and, to a lesser extent, on the center of the empire. What appears to be the earliest connection in Arabic between “revolution” (*ʿammīyya*) and *jumbūriyya* was implemented in the region of Mount Lebanon.⁸⁴ There this association was manifested in Ṭānyūs Shāhīn’s revolt and seizure of Keserwan in 1858. The uprising against the local feudal notables was described by an eyewitness as a popular revolt demanding that feudal property be shared with the people. The same eyewitness indicated that Ṭānyūs Shāhīn acquired some of these properties via the “power of the people” (*biquwwat al-jumbūr*) and by the power of the public authority or the republican government (*ḥukūma jumbūriyya*).⁸⁵ This brief experience occasioned a significant change in both language and politics: the government of this political entity not only spoke in the name of the public interest (*maṣāliḥ al-jumbūr*) but also established a system that was managed by public representatives.⁸⁶ It must be stressed that this revolt came less than two years after the edict of 1856 that promised to secure equality between all Ottoman subjects, and it preceded the violence against the Christian population in Mount Lebanon and Damascus. The historical significance of this event was manifested by the way in which the concept of “sovereignty” was claimed in the name of “the people” and used in contrast with the local political and socioeconomic order (though it was not a rebellion against the Ottoman sultan).⁸⁷

The employment of *jumbūr* and *jumbūriyya* as a mode of governance and a call for popular sovereignty was less relevant to the formal state and scholarly urban discourse. Contemporary Arabic-speaking scholars writing at the end of the 1870s treated republicanism and democracy with deep suspicion. The criticism of these ideas stemmed from different perspectives, and some of these antirepublican and antidemocratic positions relied on Islamic argumentation. Early theological perceptions that ascribed a single structure to governance and infused it with political and religious functions

⁸³ Rizqallah Ḥassūn, “Al-Siyāsa al-Miʿwajja,” *Mirʾāt al-aḥwāl*, 22 March 1877.

⁸⁴ *Uṭārid*, 2 July 1859, 1; ʿAqīqī, *Thawra wa-fitna*, 40.

⁸⁵ ʿAqīqī, *Thawra wa-fitna*, 86–87.

⁸⁶ ʿAqīqī, 40, 159–60, 164, 168, 181, 200.

⁸⁷ Ussama Makdisi, “Corrupting the Sublime Sultanate: The Revolt of Ṭānyūs Shāhīn in Nineteenth-Century Ottoman Lebanon,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 42, no. 1 (2000): 180–208.

had been implemented in the 1820s and 1830s. During these decades Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār (d. 1835), who had written some introductory remarks to al-Ṭahṭāwī's famous journey account and had been one of his teachers,⁸⁸ published an essay on the subject of *al-imāma al-kubrā* (the caliphate), regarding the Ottoman sultans as caliphs and equating disobeying the imam with disobeying religion and God.⁸⁹ The topic of an imamate and its relation to “republic” and “democracy” was theorized by Tanzimat proponent Aḥmad ibn Abī al-Ḍiyāf (known as Bin Ḍiyāf), a Tunisian bureaucrat who between 1862 and 1872 composed a voluminous history of Tunis. In his introduction, which discusses the best theories of governance, he rejects two models, absolute monarchy and republican governance, instead advocating a constitutional monarchy. He argues that republican governance ignores the Islamic principle of religious leadership (*imāma sharʿiyya*) in favor of the collective mechanism and neglects the principle of *bayʿa* (oath of alliance), thus contradicting Islamic law and the tradition of the prophet Muḥammad. Bin Ḍiyāf defended the idea that political authority should be related only to a single ruler and not to collective bodies.⁹⁰ It is worth indicating that the arguments initiated by these two previously mentioned scholars were attempts to rethink the theory of governance by relying on the vast number of political writings by medieval Sunni jurists. The Islamic legitimacy of a single monarch in relation to other illegitimate forms of governance had already appeared in the works of prominent medieval Islamic constitutional jurists such as al-Māwardī, Ibn Jamāʿa, and others.⁹¹

The relation between an imamate and political authority was not, however, used as the only argument against a collective form of governance. Khayr al-Dīn al-Tūnisī, considered a great reformer both in and outside of Tunis and the Ottoman Empire, defended his position of exempting the masses from any involvement in politics by using al-Māwardī's claim that changing what is wrong (*al-munkar*) according to the Islamic law is a communal obligation (*farḍ kifāya*) for Muslims; therefore, if enough of them are engaged in this activity, the rest of the people are exempt from participation.⁹² Al-Tūnisī, much like Bin Ḍiyāf, defended the traditional idea of consultation (*shūrā*) in making political decisions, referring to a ruler who

⁸⁸ Al-Ṭahṭāwī, *Takhlīṣ al-ibriz*, introductory remarks.

⁸⁹ Ḥasan al-ʿAṭṭār, *Al-Khilāfa al-Islāmiyya wa-manāqib al-khilāfa al-ʿUthmāniyya* (Cairo: Dār al-Hidāyya, 2006), 29–31, 55–61.

⁹⁰ Aḥmad Ibn Abī al-Ḍiyāf, *Ithāf abl al-zamān bi-akbbār muluk Tūnis wa-ʿabd al-Amān* (Tunis: al-Dār al-Tūnisīyya lil-Nashshr, 1989), 1:37–41.

⁹¹ Al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-sultāniyya*, 19–27; Ibn Jamāʿa, *Tahṛīr al-aḥkām*, 56–57.

⁹² Al-Tūnisī, *Aqṣam al-masālik*, 74–75; al-Māwardī, *al-Aḥkām al-sultāniyya*, 13–14.

does not execute this principle as a *mustabidd* (autocrat). Following the same logic, Egyptian Rifā'ā al-Ṭaḥṭawī entirely ignored the idea of sovereignty of the people as a principle for governance. He defined "political freedom" as the state's obligation to protect the individual's natural freedom, including the right to and noninterference with property. In his theorization he ignores the right of citizens to political involvement, participation, or legislation.⁹³

Contemporary Arabic-speaking Christian scholars had similar, though much more ambiguous, positions regarding the idea of popular sovereignty. Rashīd al-Daḥḍāḥ, a devout Catholic who wrote from monarchical France, followed the logic of some of the earlier scholars and emphasized the negative perception of republicanism by translating the word "republic" into Arabic as *fawḍā*, anarchy.⁹⁴ In one of the influential texts written between 1860 and 1861 against the background of the religious clashes in Syria, Buṭruṣ al-Bustānī recommended a political program for ending the violence and for progress. In his articles he entirely ignored ideas derived from political rights; instead, he advocated values such as tolerance, unity, civic identity, and equality.⁹⁵ In an encyclopedia entry that he subsequently published in 1882, he considers the republican form of governance to be "the first stage," the most basic of political developments, and in some cases a reason for anarchy.⁹⁶

Different voices existed outside the borders of the empire. Khalīl Ghānim, a Maronite living in France and a former member of the disbanded Ottoman parliament, who was deeply disappointed by the failure of the Ottoman reforms, advocated ideas derived from the principle of sovereignty of the people.⁹⁷ Ghānim argued that elections are a precondition for a peaceful society because they avoid internal conflicts by giving all social components the right to choose the regime that suits their needs. He was among the earliest of the Arabic-speaking scholars to ascribe central significance to the idea of "public opinion" (*ra'ī' ām*) and "power of the people" (*sulṭat al-shsha'b*)⁹⁸ Khalīl Ghānim spoke as a French republican (he

⁹³ Rifā'ā al-Ṭaḥṭawī, "Kitāb al-Murshid al-Amīn li-l-Banāt wa-l-Banīn," in *Al-A'māl al-kāmila li-Rifā'a Rāfi' al-Ṭaḥṭawī*, ed. Muḥammad 'Imāra (Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 2010), 2:505–7.

⁹⁴ Rashīd al-Daḥḍāḥ, "Faṣl 4," *Birjīs bāris*, 26 October 1859; Rashīd al-Daḥḍāḥ, *Birjīs bāris*, 18 January 1860.

⁹⁵ Buṭruṣ al-Bustānī, *Nafīr suriyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1990), 5–70.

⁹⁶ Buṭruṣ al-Bustānī, "Jumhūriyya," in *Kitāb da'irat al-ma'ārif*, 6:534.

⁹⁷ *Al-Baṣṣīr*, 7 July 1881; "Al-Jarā'id al-Turkiyya," *Al-Baṣṣīr*, 25 August 1881; "Al-Baṣṣīr wa-l-Jawā'ib," *Al-Baṣṣīr*, 15 December 1881.

⁹⁸ "Manāfi' al-Ḥurriyya," *Al-Baṣṣīr*, 1 September 1881; "ʿId al-Istiqlāl al-Amrikī," *Al-Baṣṣīr*, 27 October 1881.

become a French citizen) and as a democrat who strongly opposed royalist conservatism.⁹⁹

In Arabic the concept of “democracy” was reconstructed after the French Revolution, acquiring its form and modern characteristics predominantly between the 1820s and 1876 in the context of state reforms. By the end of this period, ideas such as universal suffrage, sovereignty of the people as practiced by representative bodies, and equality had become part of its semantic scope. In a parallel development, *jumbūr* and *jumbūriyya* were put into practice for the first time during a short period in the late 1850s in Mount Lebanon, which was followed by religious clashes and an international crisis. This brief experience of “republic,” however, did not have a major influence on political thought in Arabic during the first Ottoman constitutional period. The theory that democracy is necessarily associated with a republican form of governance dominated the perception of these two ideas in contemporary political thinking. Relating these two concepts to the principle of popular sovereignty made it more difficult for contemporaries to imagine “democracy” and “republic” as relevant to the Ottoman monarchy. Instead, the vast majority of the Ottoman Arabic-speaking scholars perceived these ideas negatively and advocated a political orientation that largely correlated with the formal discourse of reforms. Eventually, the framework of Tanzimat aimed above all at reinforcing sociopolitical solidarity in the empire. From this perspective, popular involvement in politics was perceived as key for resolving internal conflicts and uniting the diverse Ottoman communities through civic loyalty to the sultan and his family (Ottomanism). Based on this, the sociopolitical values that maintained hierarchic order and distinguished between ruler and ruled were to be preserved. The vast majority of the Arabic-speaking scholars remained loyal to these values and assigned scant importance to the subject of political rights in relation to individual rights. Thus, while political concepts such as “reform,” “constitution,” and “progress” turned into key concepts by 1878, “democracy” and with it “republic” remained marginal theories until the unfolding of events that preceded the founding of the modern states in the Arabic-speaking region in the twentieth century.

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⁹⁹ “Al-Şulṭa al-Fardiyya,” *Al-Başşir*, 11 August 1881; “Intişār al-Jumhūriyya,” *Al-Başşir*, 25 August 1881; Khalil Ghānim, *Kitāb al-iqtisād al-siyāsī* (Alexandria: Maṭba‘at Jarīdat Mişr, 1879), 66–69.