7 Modernisation and democratisation in Mediterranean countries

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Preface

In the last quarter of the twentieth century, converging trends in seven areas of the world provided the idea that the political landscape of the world was changing: (1) the fall of right-wing authoritarian regimes in Southern Europe in the mid-1970s; (2) the replacement of military dictatorships with elected civilian governments throughout Latin America from the late 1970s to the late 1980s; (3) the decline of authoritarian governments in parts of the East and Southern Asia from the mid-1980s; (4) the collapse of communist regimes in Eastern Europe in the late 1980s; (5) the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the establishment of 15 post-Soviet republics in 1991; (6) the decline of single-party regimes in many parts of sub-Saharan Africa in the first half of the 1990s and (7) a weak but discernible trend towards liberalisation in some Middle Eastern countries in the 1990s.

The causes, forms and rhythms of these different trends varied widely. But they shared one dominant feature: the simultaneous movement from dictatorial rule to a more liberal and often more democratic government. Although they differed in many ways, these trends influenced and, to a certain extent, built on each other. As a result, they were seen by many observers, especially in the West, as parts of a larger whole, a global democratic trend, which, thanks to Samuel Huntington, became widely known as the 'third wave' of democracy.[1] These events, in fact, led to a new analytical framework, a model of democratic transition, derived mainly from the interpretation of the changes taking place. To some extent, they also linked with the early academic work on 'transitology', especially with the studies of Guillermo O'Donnell and Philippe Schmitter.[2] As the third wave spread, democracy promoters conceived this model as a universal paradigm for understanding processes of democratisation. It became omnipresent in US political circles as a way of talking about, thinking about and designing interventions in processes of political change around the world. This has remained remarkably constant, despite many variations in those models of political change and a stream of increasingly diverse academic views on the course and nature of democratic transitions.[3]

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The paradigm of such transition has been somewhat useful during a period of momentous and often surprising political upheaval in the world. But it is increasingly evident that the reality no longer conforms to this model. Many countries, which policymakers and aid workers continue to call 'transitional', are not in transition to democracy and are not following the model of the democratic transitions underway. Sticking to the paradigm beyond its usefulness can, therefore, be misleading. But, above all, it can be misleading to believe that democracy can be the inevitable end point for all countries, despite the personal, ethical and political attitudes that would wish for it. After all, democracy, although widespread, represents an ideal type and not a real and concrete system of government. There are many contradictions in many countries, even in those considered to be the highest expression of democracy, and they end up representing a wake-up call for the scholar, whose task is to explain the continued presence of non-democratic models, resistance and archaism in democratic systems themselves.

At this point, a reflection on 'democracy' becomes essential. Democracy has increasingly come to mean a method or set of procedural rules for the constitution of government and the formation of political decisions. Democracy is compatible with different doctrines but entails specific values. Primarily, it highlights the main rules of the game: the highest political body must be composed of elected members, other institutions must be composed of elected members, voters must be all adult citizens, who enjoy a vote whose value is equal for all. Voters are free to vote who they want, the majority vote counts, minority rights must be guaranteed and the government must enjoy the confidence of parliament. For all these rules, one must always take into account the possible discrepancy between the utterance and the way they are applied. Certainly, no historical regime has ever fully observed all these rules and, for this reason, it is legitimate to speak of more or less democratic regimes.

> It is not possible to establish how many of these rules must be observed for a regime to be defined as democratic; it can only be said that a regime that observes none of them is certainly not a democratic one, at least as long as the procedural meaning of democracy is held to be true.[4]

In fact, according to Carothers,[5] if one then assesses the real progress towards democracy, of the almost 100 countries considered to be 'in transition' in recent years, only a relatively small number, probably less than 20, are clearly on the road to a successful and well-functioning democracy, or at least have made some democratic progress. There are a few in Central Europe and the Baltic region: Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Estonia and Slovenia and in South America and East Asia, notably Chile, Uruguay and Taiwan. Those that have made somewhat less progress but seem to be advancing include Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Mexico, Brazil, Ghana, the Philippines and South Korea. Most third-wave countries did not achieve the results of a democracy. In a small number of countries, the initial political awakenings have clearly failed and authoritarian regimes have consolidated,

as in Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Belarus and Togo. Most of the 'transition countries', however, can neither be considered dictatorial nor oriented towards democracy. They are in a political grey area. They have some features of democratic political life, including at least limited political space for the opposition, as well as regular elections and democratic constitutions. Yet they suffer from a serious democratic deficit, often including poor representation of citizens' interests, low levels of political participation beyond voting, frequent abuses by government officials, elections of uncertain legitimacy, very low level of public trust in state institutions and persistently poor institutional performance of the state. Corruption, then, seems to be dominant. In some cases, there is criminality that conditions and directs political choice.

Analyses of the ways in which democracy is established are obviously not easy to identify. And the category of democracy itself does not seem to be able to serve as an analytical paradigm, except to restate in research what is already known through the values of democracy. Nor can a useful paradigm use democracy as a reference and yardstick. The transformations of political history are embodied in the civilisation, culture and way of feeling of the countries, regions and territories being studied. I follow here the example of Bernard Crick, who has surprisingly written:

> It is often thought that for this 'master science' [i.e. democratic politics] to function, there must already be in existence some shared idea of a 'common good,' some 'consensus' or consensus juris. But this common good is itself the process of practical reconciliation of the interests of the various . . . aggregates, or groups which compose a state; it is not some external and intangible spiritual adhesive. . . . Diverse groups hold together, firstly, because they have a common interest in sheer survival, and, secondly, because they practise politics-not because they agree about 'fundamentals,' or some such concept too vague, too personal, or too divine ever to do the job of politics for it. The moral consensus of a free state is not something mysteriously prior to or above politics: it is the activity (the civilizing activity) of politics itself.[6]

That is to say, according to the suggestions that we receive from political anthropology and from the many studies on non-European and non-North American countries, an institutional and participatory process cannot be taken for granted and a development model cannot be transferred from one country to another. The formation of certain state and democratic institutions does not always lead to the disappearance of traditional political forms and is not mechanically accompanied by an economic and social transformation. Nor does it necessarily follow that a certain political-institutional level corresponds to a defined articulation of elites and/or a defined articulation between classes and social groups. Finally, the formation of a democracy as well as that of a state is by no means an irreversible process; indeed, history has shown us that previously[7] experienced institutions can always regress.

An element that often seems to prevail in the literature on politics and the many forms that link it to civil society, such as parties, patronage, notables, the organisation of consensus, participation and public opinion, is that everything must be assessed taking into account a very specific standard. This standard links to two Weberian ideal types: traditional-patrimonial power and rational-legal power.[8] This not only underestimates the relationship with the state, but, above all, the possibility that realities may exist, in which forms of power involving rational institutions coexist with informal and particularistic political behaviour.[9] Many researches developed on even very different contexts and chronologies, which include countries in Latin America, the Middle East, Mediterranean Europe, Western Europe, Africa, and some areas of Asia,[10] have shown that not only is this co-presence prevalent but that, above all, empirical cases tend to suggest more elastic categories involving less linear processes. One could speak for many countries of a 'patrimonialisation' of the state, such as to determine 'a kind of hybrid of patrimonialism and bureaucracy'.[11] And this would also apply to more recent years, for which the category of 'neo-patrimonialism' becomes useful,

> a form of organisation in which relationships of a broadly patrimonial type pervade a political and administrative system which is formally constructed on rational-legal lines. Officials hold positions in bureaucratic organisations with powers which are formally defined, while exercising those powers . . . as a form . . . of private property.[12]

In short, for many countries, these are 'hybrid' state forms, in which customs and patrimonialist forms coexist and mix with rational-legal institutions.[13]

This is also the context of Mediterranean areas.[14] Tradition has shown a great capacity to adapt to the new forms of power and, above all, it has shown that 'movement' and 'transformations' can be generated and forge modern institutions. The notable, the *cacique*, the patron, the client and the like, and the clientelistic, clan and family relations, are always alive or reappear in new forms. Hence, while re-proposing models that have long been counted among the 'backward' ones, it is important to analyse actors and institutions that seem to resemble them. In fact, 'traditional' or 'pre-democratic' actors and behaviours adapt to different political and historical moments and adhere to different social and environmental circumstances. And even when they do not reappear in past forms, they take up the substance with which they shape 'modernity'. It is no coincidence, then, that in the new elites of political parties that emerged in the early years of the twentieth century, it is always the largely archaic behaviour that defines their prevailing characteristics. The figure of the notable, the *cacique*, the patron and so on, like informal politics, in order to be fully understood, must, then, be grasped in that cement of social and ethical-political order that completely eludes a linear and progressive vision of the history of politics. Indeed, only in it is it possible to recognise and grasp the reasons for permanence. To this end, it becomes crucial to overcome those

negative aspects associated with them. A power that is often found to be aggregating rather than dissipating within society.[15] In many cases, it is clear that clientelism, particularism, transformism and so on, have determined a chain of social solidarities, psychological and moral bonds, that means conventions of values and principles that have had a broad projective profile; they have generated dynamism and transformation. They have given rise to historical phases of political and civil life characterised by a high level of participation and commitment. And this also goes beyond the profound political and institutional differences that exist between countries, one of which is certainly between those that have reached a good stage of democratisation and those that live in reactionary regimes. But what can encompass and, to some extent, compare them is a political and civil culture that contains precisely formal and informal rules combined and mixed differently in individual contexts. Indeed, the case of North African and Middle Eastern countries makes it possible to broaden the paradigms usually used restrictively for European countries and bring them more in line with a reality that is becoming democratised but retains archaic elements. Elements that adapt to modernity and shape it according to the many requirements of a process that is always of an ethical-political nature, in the Crocean sense of the term.[16]

Politics of the *notables*

A significant figure for understanding the intersections between formal and informal power, particularly in more advanced Mediterranean countries, is that of the 'notable'. The Venetian 'commendatore' of the early 1900s, as described by Antonio Fogazzaro in his novel *Piccolo Mondo Moderno*, was precisely one of these individuals and was considered a 'powerful' man. He enjoyed the spontaneous and interested deference of many of his fellow citizens. He knew how to negotiate, advise and suggest with tact, smiling with his face and deftly managing all the signs he could dispense with his hands and voice. He directed and guided the endless strategies that his acquaintances and their relationships could produce. The former mayor 'inspired a great deal of sympathy in him', and he thus endeavoured to offer him the best advice every Sunday after mass. As a result, he often found himself discussing the typical affairs related to his position. It was therefore a matter of combining public and private interests, personal and familial connections with those of public interest but to do so, it was necessary to know the facts and even the psychologies of all involved. It was essential to understand where it was convenient to intervene, in what manner and with what methods. Often, it was not so much a matter of how much, but how.[17] The intermediation of notables was also linking the local community to the state, a way for the masses to influence administrative decisions that concerned them. This possibility was given in exchange for the electoral support that clients bestowed upon their patrons, who were, in turn, in direct contact with state officials and served as vote brokers to the most important voters. Significant in this

regard is the case of the Greek shepherds of the Epirus Mountains described by Campbell. 'When he cannot reach or influence an official, the shepherd appeals to his "patron" or to the patron of one of his relatives if that person is powerful. This patron, in most cases a lawyer, exercises a political role'. As a member of the liberal professions, the lawyer could recommend his clients' business to the attention of various acquaintances who had the ability to assist him. In return, the lawyer could guarantee his clients' political support for local or national elections.[18] The processes that led to the dissemination of state culture and public institutions in the periphery, therefore, ended up being shaped by a traditional mentality that resisted and adapted to the modernisation of politics. The same processes were taking place in Spain, as Cruz Artacho recounts. Perhaps, in spite of or along with the peculiarities that must be noted in each specific case, the transition process towards democracy in Spain differed from the others only in its lengthy duration, as well as its traumatic character, which was especially pronounced from the mid-1910s. Characteristics or specificities of the Spanish case, in general, have also been explained based on what has been defined as an obvious lack of demand for democratic practices within civil society or as a consequence of the power's failure to offer such practices. Although, in this regard, I would like to add that this has been true for many countries. Specifically, the relationship between peasants and politics during the Restoration period has been contextualised in terms of the lack of demand for democratisation. In general, *caciquismo* (local despotism), often associated with electoral fraud, becomes the guiding axis when attempting to explain the functioning of the political system during the Restoration period. *Caciquismo*, in turn, was the product of a combination of factors, among which some stood out, such as the high degree of illiteracy among the population or the equally evident passivity or the demobilisation of the traditional rural society, which was the majority throughout the national territory at that time. To sum up, on the one hand, *caciquismo* defines and explains the political system and, in particular, its limits, problems and contradictions; on the other hand, it has been explained as the product of the weight exerted by tradition and backwardness, the latter identified with the rural world. Consistent with this, the position and/or attitude of peasants towards electoral events could be summarised in a few lines: as the main culprits, both due to their contempt for politics and their natural apathy, in the generalisation of electoral fraud and abuses that have produced an oligarchy to which they were subordinated through multiple patronage and/or clientelistic relationships. In this way and through this means, the peasants have become passive protagonists of a political reality that they have both endured and consolidated. It is not surprising, in this overall framework of reflections, that the long-standing presence of electoral fraud and *cacique* practices in Spain until the twentieth century is attributed, among other things, to the enormous weight that the rural world continued to hold, which was expanded, if possible, with the introduction of universal male suffrage. As Forner[19] emphasised, referring to the low level of urban concentration

observed in Spain at the end of the nineteenth century compared to what happened in other areas of the European context, the modernisation of political behaviours was associated with the expansion of phenomena, such as industrialisation and/or urbanisation, which were so little widespread in Spain at the time. The low importance of the urban population has generally led to a low degree of political socialisation and, consequently, to the persistence of traditional political behaviours.[20]

The notable has often derived his power from a solid economic and social base which has then often been transferred onto a political plane. Over time, however, notables of such origins have largely been replaced by the middle class. The latter have generally never had the same power as the former notables within civil society. While the political power of the former was thus determined, in many cases, by other powers, the power of middle-class personalities derives either from their specific professional skills or from occupying institutional political positions (local authorities, central government bodies). In the case of notables, social power generated political power, while for middle class personalities, political-administrative power generated socio-economic power. Holding institutional positions allowed for gains on the economic and social levels. In social and economic practice, these new classes, however, have adopted the typical behaviours and language of the notable. Hence their need to show and even flaunt their own wealth. Therefore, while the traditional definition of the notable can be used, the concept of nobility appears equally useful.[21]

The French case is significant in this regard. Médard was already mentioning the strict nature that the use of certain categories was and suggested, considering empirical evidence, not only the mixing of contrasting behaviours in politics but also the need for greater flexibility in identifying and describing them. Thus, even for France, one could not speak of an era of notables, an era of parties and so on. Concrete cases, such as those of Jacques Chaban Delmas and Jacques Chirac, with very different career paths and *cursus honorum*, demonstrated not only the flexibility of clientelistic behaviours that were present in more or less archaic moments of politics and mixed with apparently more modern political forms but also the constant presence of notables in the organisation of consensus. He spoke of three generations of notables in the history of French politics. Notables who in some cases were such by virtue of the traditional attributions given to these social actors, but who in others had become so either through the use of political resources or through the use of the administrative apparatus of the state. In the most recent generations of politicians, he saw the transformation of national resources into local resources and the transformation of politicians who were born as professionals or high officials of the state into mediators and notables. This demonstrated how the social dynamics typical of the notables' world could not be confined to narrow spatial or temporal contexts.[22]

Frédéric Sawicki, building on Médard's work, reaffirmed the impor tance of distinguishing the role of the notable who draws resources from the

socio-economic sphere from that of the holder of an institutional position, as well as from that of one who draws their power from their position in a political party. There is, in fact, a difference between the loyalty that arises from being a landowner or an entrepreneur and that which arises from holding an institutional role (such as a member of parliament, councillor or mayor) or from being the leader of a party or faction. These differences not only allow for the distinction of different types of clientelistic practices according to the properties of the politician who carries them out but also raise questions about the institutional conditions that favour the prevalence of one type or another. However, clientelism performed by notables, institutional clientelism and party clientelism do not represent different historical stages corresponding to economic and social stages. It is therefore easy to find the coexistence of these forms in different historical and social realities.[23] In many cases, a combination and use of clientelistic practices can be found, including the most traditional ones, while still preserving rational logics, leading Grémion and Muller to speak of 'notable managers'.[24] Similar observations, but primarily on a cultural, behavioural and relational level, seem to arise from the Spanish case as well.[25]

The thesis, still associated with Max Weber, that politicians by profession have succeeded the notables, and that the arrival of the former would have marked the end of the latter, needs to be revised.[26] Above all, we need to reconsider the concept of a linear and univocal view of a complex process. The notables have not given way, as if they were actors of a bygone era. On the contrary, in many cases, they have adopted the methods of professionals. The disappearance of some notables, the disappearance of forms of authority associated with land ownership and private assistance, cannot be confused with the disappearance of notable relations as a whole. Professional politicians, on the other hand, have appropriated some of the political actions of notables. They have used the methods of notables, not without combining them with their own methods of mobilisation.[27] In this context, the terms patrimonialism and neo-patrimonialism well express the behaviour of an individual who, having reached a public office, uses their position and prerogatives as if they had inherited them or as if they had long been in their possession.[28]

Italian history itself shows extensively that the change of the political class has never been radical. Very often, the struggle has been between an old minority and a new one, but this has never led to a transformation of the methods, forms and instruments for the preservation of power. It has been, therefore, a circulation of elites. In fact, the process has never occurred as a true replacement but rather as the merging of new elements with the old. Even when a real process had to be faced from one political system to another, the new political class sought to assimilate the ways of the notables within the new methods, such as the party, for example. This is why we can find the notabilary model, especially regarding the gathering of consensus and the management of relations between voters and parliament, even in the political representation forms of the late post-war period. In some ways, even the capitalisation of politics during the 1980s played a functional role for a

political model that had already proven successful within Italian society. A model that finds its reasons in civil culture. A culture that continues, despite the socio-economic reasons for the notable of the late 1800s coming to an end, to consider certain symbols, resources and exchange methods important for power management and, ultimately, to recognise and reinforce power only to those who demonstrate the ability to manage it in the concrete practice of politics and in the representation of themselves. The profound reasons behind why there has been a recurrence of notable behaviour by the ruling political class should be sought in the generally oligarchic nature of all leaderships, whether of liberal, fascist or republican age.

The persistence of such 'notability' features in the actions and behaviours of the political class cannot have but profound reasons. In particular, using Weberian categories, one can say that this phenomenon falls within the configuration of a patrimonial or neo-patrimonial type of State. That is, a State that sees the contradictory and variable combination of patrimonial-traditional domains and legal-rational domains, typical also of countries not fully responding to the development of the Western world. The State of many European countries cannot be fully considered a patrimonial State, according to Weberian categories, but a State in which a patrimonial-type culture has had and still has great weight. Perhaps for this reason, it is better to define it as a neo-patrimonial State. All government authority and resources dependent on it continue to be conceived as possible advantages for private purposes. The idea of neo-patrimonialism encompasses a variety of different but connected practices, such as nepotism, clientelism, patronage, personal ties, corruption and, precisely, notability. Therefore, the history of European states is the history of states that have been strongly influenced by a personalistic culture, which has led to the joint presence of clientelistic-personal forms and forms typical of a modern State, to the failure to distinguish between public and private domains, but also to the failure to respect such a distinction in practice. In short, the personal and private use of public office has always been a distinctive feature. Hence, the origins of widespread corruption, which is not only related to large contracts and phenomena of considerable size but also to the small-scale practice of more peripheral public offices. Rationality has always been understood as a way to legitimise power, but never to shape it.[29]

Familism, clanism, tribalism

The blurring of boundaries between formal and informal has never been more evident than in the privatisation of power, that is, the tendency to favour kinship relationships in the design of dominance, recruitment within dominant circles and entrusting the fate of states or other political institutions in favour of family or clan. This is primarily the case in countries that could be said to be at the extreme end of a characterisation. The return to dynastic practices is an extreme form of this trend, evident in pre-revolutionary Middle Eastern states (Egypt, Libya, Tunisia and Yemen) but not entirely absent in

the European Mediterranean. Ironically, some Arab monarchies have undergone smoother transitions than Arab republics. Anwar Sadat consolidated his succession to Nasser in 1970 by eliminating potential rivals such as Ali Sabri, Sha'rawi Jum'a and Muhammad Fawzi. Nevertheless, it took almost a year before he could be completely secure, with the victory in the October 1973 war against Israel that made him almost a 'pharaoh'. Like Nasser, Sadat never attempted to design a dynastic coup like his successor, Mubarak. Abdullah II of Jordan succeeded his father, flanking his uncle, the old Crown Prince Hassan. Once on the throne, he also quickly removed the choice made by his father of the Crown Prince, his half-brother Hamza. However, the hereditary rule has always been part of Jordan's constitutional framework, despite the absence of clear rules regarding the process. In Syria, following the death of President Hafez al-Assad in 2000, it took several hours to modify the country's constitution and facilitate the hereditary succession of his son Bashar. However, Bashar was not his father's first choice. In Kuwait, the 2006 staged 'coup' demonstrated that Al-Sabah was the true orchestrator. Even Lebanon, often considered to have a higher democratic standard than other Arab states, has not been immune to 'family politics' in recruiting political leadership. Here, confessionalism and family have worked together to reproduce semi-feudal forms of politics.[30]

The Egyptian 'sovereigns' after 1952, starting with Mohammed Nagib, were all military officers. The Camp David Accords of 1979 represented a period of 'civilization' of the military. Mubarak's Minister of Defense, Abd al-Halim Abu Ghazala, followed this process. He engaged the military in economic activities related to the production of goods oriented towards the civilian economy and ambitious military industrial programmes. He became popular in the 1980s and was even considered a likely presidential successor, but he was removed from his post in 1989. Similarly, Amr Moussa was also considered a possible replacement for Mubarak before being 'banished' to head the Arab League in 2001. High-ranking and popular officers retired to become governors, special state advisers or diplomats. No other name was associated with succession until Gamal Mubarak, who seemed to be on track to become Egypt's next president. Therefore, it was necessary for his father to have planned for succession, which was initiated with the constitutional amendments of 2005. Moreover, Gamal became the only aspirant from the Mubarak family. His older brother, 'Alaa, found his way into business.

In Libya, on the other hand, Saif al-Islam, son of Gaddafi, did not have an 'official' status in the political structure of Libya. Moreover, Gaddafi himself continued to assert that he was not the president. Saif obtained hundreds of millions of dollars to finance his charity foundation, which carried out many humanitarian interventions and conflict resolutions. Only the powerful male siblings who held positions in security, namely al-Mu'tasim Billah and Khamis, represented potential rivals for succession. The former was responsible for the military and security apparatus and held the position of National Security Advisor. The latter, most likely under the aegis of Mu'tasim, strengthened a

special force (SF) brigade. The despotic-military matrix, entirely constituted by blood ties, became vital for the consolidation of Gaddafi's power, providing strength in the transfer of future power from father to sons.[31]

Syria offers a more detailed articulation. In the early 1950s, after centuries of sociopolitical marginalisation, the Alawi community in the coastal region of Latakia emerged as one of the most influential factors. The group of Alawi army officers, which had significantly joined the Ba'ath coup in 1963, laid the foundations of a political system based on clan and sectarian membership. Hafez al-Asad, in 1970, managed to seize power, and from then on, the 'Alawi' factor played a crucial role in its maintenance. Quickly, Alawi officers who were members of allied clans with al-Asad or related to the president found themselves at the helm of newly created paramilitary forces, whose sole task was to protect the regime. According to Batatu,[32] Alawi officials constituted 60 per cent of the second level of power in Syria (the closest to Hafez al-Asad). Within this limited context, eight officials were affiliated with the president's clan (Kalbiyya), while four came from his wife's (Haddadin) clan. Of these 12, seven had direct familial relationships (blood ties or acquired through marriage) with the president: Rifaat (his brother), Adnan Makhluf (his wife's cousin) and Shafiq Fayyad (his cousin) became, respectively, the leaders of the defence forces, the Republican Guard (RG) and the third armoured corps.

Sectarian affiliation and, even more importantly, familial ties became crucial factors in the selection of leaders of the RG, SF, Defense Brigades and Presidential Security, led since 1987 by Basil al-Asad, the president's eldest son and designated heir. Basil's political and military ascent began in the second half of the 1980s, when a series of manoeuvres and adaptations within the regime were made by al-Asad Sr. to facilitate succession. In 1994, Basil's premature death forced the president to change his plans. In the same year, the appearance on the scene of the family's second son, Bashar, marked the beginning of a new phase.

Under Bashar al-Assad, a mix of continuity and change came to characterise Syria's power structure. The overlap of hidden informal powers and exposed formal powers remained virtually unchanged, while unlike in the past, the former was no longer dominated by a single absolute leader. The regime remained in the hands of an oligarchy composed of members of the al-Assad family, some of their relatives and allies, a handful of officials in control institutions and a few older men who had survived the purges of the previous regime. At the same time, only members of the president's family remained in charge of the most sensitive positions, while the Sunni element was confined to formal institutions without real decision-making power.[33]

Even Arafat and his collaborators deliberately relied on traditional relationships and appealed to the support of the family/clan in order to consolidate their leadership. The official rhetoric surrounding the Palestinian National Authority focused on the creation of a new Palestinian state through the separation of judicial, legislative and political power and, therefore, the

establishment of an effective and independent administrative state apparatus. However, the new institutions were administered by those who already held power in traditional clan structures. Families close to Fatah, such as Qura'i in Abu Dis, the al-Farra family in Khan Yunis or the Shaka'a family in Nabus, acquired new power or consolidated their traditional local positions. Until 2005, leaders in municipalities and village councils were not elected but appointed by presidential decrees. A similar procedure governed the management of the 16 governmental districts into which the West Bank and Gaza Strip were divided. This system allowed Arafat to control local communities while at the same time empowering his loyalists. This family/faction-based policy continued the previous strategy of the 1970s and 1980s when Fatah gained a prominent position in the Occupied Palestinian Territory by providing economic support to loyal families.[34]

Final thoughts: the idea of 'state'

What has been discussed so far challenges not only the paradigm of transition but also the idea that the process towards democratisation can follow stages and, above all, can constitute a linear and almost inevitable path towards the formation of a modern state. Such an attitude, according to many scholars, was due to the prevailing attention paid to the formal at the expense of the informal, stemming from the 'analytical obsession'[35] centred on the state and that characterised the Western academic world. The issue, as shown by the cases we have previously referred to, is then related precisely to the idea of the state. An idea that needs to be deeply revised. Now, the state is certainly a highly structured reality, with precise borders and spaces, and with internal hierarchies among social strata. This does not detract from the fact that all of these characteristics remain dynamic and are transformed. Even stateness is always active, always in passive and/or active action, and not at all to be considered as an acquired fact forever. The state, moreover, is not just hierarchy, law, force and the like but also internalisation of a shared conception of relational life or, in any case, in conflict with particularisms and resistances. And it is only in the context of a mobile reality, with many lives, that one can understand everything that contrasts with stateness. Crime, bandits, local potentates, feuds and factions, clientelism and everything that a Weberian vision would include in a pre-state world are part of those factors that oppose stateness, but that in the end end up being part of it. The state, therefore, any state, never ends up reaching a point of arrival, fixed borders, a given hierarchical order. This explains why the Western model remains important, but, to understand its deep reasons, the models of recent states, those of the 'third world', those belonging to other cultures cannot be excluded. On the other hand, even what is now being referred to as the 'erosion of the state' cannot be absolutised nor can the internationalisation and globalisation be taken for granted as phenomena tending to overcome the state structure. The construction of a state has always encountered contrasts and resistances on its path.

One cannot think that, once established, the state has found its stability, its fixity. In some way, one could speak of a process, certainly with foundational moments, never finished and in continuous transformation. Each moment has always had a multitude of rivals deposed, such as 'princes, bishops, dukes, bandits',[36] kings, dictators, officials and mayors. The new ruling classes have always had to engage in the work of combining, consolidating, neutralising and manipulating intricate political relationships.

In the formation, reconstruction and construction of the state, within a framework that makes the process of state assertion itself relative, war also plays a significant role. In an essay from many years ago, Charles Tilly explored the relationship between state formation and armed conflict, likening it to organised crime.[37] Both, according to the scholar, are phenomena driven by coercion and entrepreneurial self-promotion. In terms of organised violence, state agents pursue the making of war, the making of the state, protection and taxation, and a central role of the state remains to eliminate or neutralise rivals within its own territory. In the formation of the monopoly of violence, therefore, violence is passed through. If the protection of the racket represents organised crime at its best, making war and building a state, the 'quintessence' of racket protection with the addition of legitimacy, qualify as the best form of 'organised crime'. Tilly has emphasised the analogy to reflect on the fact that, without legitimacy, all generals and statesmen would be considered murderers or thieves. On the other hand, at least in light of the European experience of recent centuries, generals and statesmen appear more similar to oppressors and criminals than to men who have contributed to the somewhat utopian idea of a social contract, the idea of an open market responsive to consumer will, and the idea of a society whose shared norms and expectations elicit a certain type of government. This reminds us of the knowledge value that countries on the path to democratisation can have for us. More generally, it provides us with a new key to interpreting European countries.

Notes

1 Huntington, 1991.
2 O'Donnell and Schmitter, 1986.
3 Berins Collier (1999: 5) argues that a similar transition paradigm has prevailed in the scholarly writing on democratisation. The transitions literature, as this current work has come to be known, has as its best representative the founding essay by O'Donnell and Schmitter (1986), which established a framework that is implicitly or explicitly followed in most other contributions.
4 Bobbio, 2014: 243.
5 Carothers, 2002: 9.
6 Rustow, 1970: 363.
7 Eisenstadt, 1983.
8 Weber, 1980: vol. 1: 212 ff., 226 ff.
9 Relevant references, regarding this topic, that find the gist of Middle Eastern countries' politics in the intermingling of formal and informal power can be seen in Anceschi, Gervasio, and Teti, 2014.

10 Erdmann and Engel, 2006.
11 Médard, 1996: 84.
12 Clapham, 1985: 48.
13 Bratton and van de Walle, 1997: 62.
14 With regards to this point, see Camurri, 2012 and Mastropaolo, 2011. A research that keeps being relevant is Briquet, 1997. More recent research is Mattina's, 2016.
15 For a different point of view on these themes, see Piattoni, 2001, 2005; Briquet and Sawicki, 1998.
16 Promotori di siffatta storia – writes Benedetto Croce – sono i ceti o gruppi che si chiamano dirigenti, e gli individui che si dicono politici o uomini di stato' therefore 'promuovere l'interesse generale e gli ideali politici . . ., è l'ufficio degli uomini di stato e delle classi dirigenti.

    Not a story about an élite, but a story about individuals, social classes and groups that adequately project the spirit of a nation, the level of civilization of such a nation and its ethics. 'La vera storia' – writes again Croce – 'è storia dell'individuo in quanto universale e dell'universale in quanto individuo'. Individual/individuals, thus, through politics exhaustively express the myriad of aspects that the society they live in displays and that they are an expression of (Musella, 1979).
17 Fogazzaro, 1923: 193–261.
18 Campbell, 1964: 64–67.
19 Forner, 1997.
20 Cruz Artacho, 2003: 33–48.
21 On this matter, Grémion, 1976; Lagroye, 1973; Tudesq, 1973; Médard, 1981.
22 J. F. Médard, 1981.
23 Sawicki, 1998: 227.
24 Grémion and Muller, 1990.
25 Cazorla Pérez, 1992. For a review, Moreno Luzón, 1995.
26 Regarding this matter, see the juxtaposition between Harold Lasswell and David Easton embedded in the introduction of Anceschi, Gervasio, and Teti, 2014.
27 Garrigou, 1998: 64–65; Phélippeau, 1997.
28 Dagher, 2002.
29 On neo-patrimonialism and these phenomena, see Eisenstadt, 1973, and Clapham, 1985.
30 Sadiki, 2014: 13–14.
31 Sadiki, 2014: 16.
32 Batatu, 1999.
33 Trombetta, 2014: 29–31.
34 Alone, 2014: 44 ff.
35 Dittmer, Fukui, and Lee, 2000.
36 Tilly, 1984: 27–28.
37 Tilly, 1985.

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