Chapter 7

Atomization,
Centralization and Nationalism

7.1 The End of Localism?

The profound local and regional effects of revolutionary changes in the Mashreq are well captured in the following passage by James Gelvin:

"The Free Officers’ revolt in Egypt (1952) and the successive coups in Syria (1963, 1966) and Iraq (1963, 1968) not only laid the groundwork for a further penetration of society by the governments of those three states, but also redefined the legitimising norms for governments throughout the region- even for the governments of states, such as Lebanon and Jordan, that did not undergo revolutionary change. While many of the programmes (centralised economic planning, Pan-Arabism, etc.) embraced by the revolutionary regimes of the 1950s and 1960s failed ignominiously and were soon abandoned by their successors... these regimes permanently strengthened the authority of the state not only by crushing alternative ‘centres of power’ but by augmenting the welfare policies initiated by their predecessors.”

Gelvin 1999: 84

The drive to centralizing public space took unprecedented dimensions under the nationalist regimes in the Mashreq. One way of explaining this crucial consequence of the change is to ascribe it to the policy actions of the new rulers. Centralizing public—and private—life, however, did not only correspond with the interests of the revolutionary ruling classes, nor was it initiated by them. The rising autonomous potential of the states that underwent revolutionary changes began under the ancien regimes, as we have seen above. This has taken the form of tremendous pressures on governments to take direct measures to rid their societies of poverty, unemployment, and the extremely unequal distribution of wealth. Although the pre-revolutionary regimes did launch some public programs in that direction, they could not go far in this direction, because they were strongly tied to established interests who had a stake in preserving the status quo. And it was here that the revolutionary regimes, benefiting from the waning social and ideological standing of the old dominant classes, came to push the drive to centralization to its end.

As the majority of the urban and newly urbanized populations of the Mashreq were experiencing various kinds of discrimination because of their geographical origins, sectarian or ethnic belonging, they had a stake in doing away with all forms of subnational hierarchization. And it is here, as we will see, that the interests of the new ruling classes in homogenizing the population converged with the longing of the oppressed to be recognized as equal citizens. The homogenization process was seen as the sine qua non for the emergence of true citizenship, and the move towards direct rule, where the state would be in the service of all citizens irrespective of their primordial descent. In this respect, Marx’ description of the processes underlying the French revolution seems very applicable to the Mashreq’s case:

“...the task of the first French revolution was to destroy all separate local,
territorial, urban and provincial powers in order to create the civil unity of the nation. It had to carry further the centralization that the absolute monarchy had begun, but at the same time it had to develop the extent, the attributes and the number of underlings of the governmental power."

Marx, 1977: 71

No where was the process of homogenization/equalization of the population more evident than in the spheres of culture/education and political indoctrination. During the pre-revolutionary periods, the state did have a monopoly over audiovisual means of communication and media: telephone and telegram networks, and radio and TV stations. This monopoly was partly a product of the economic structure of the communication/media production in many parts of the world until around the 1960s. Outside the US, these spheres were either non-profitable or had a very low return on capital. In the Mashreq, as well as in the third world in general, the fixed overhead requirements for establishing private media/communication networks were simply untenable. Yet, this monopoly by the state of audiovisual media/communication means did not have the wide-ranging impact that it exercised following the revolutions. One reason for this lied in the fact that the abject poverty and ignorance of the vast majority of the population kept them insulated from these means. The second reason was that the educated urban masses could rely on the information transmitted by the private written media, foreign broadcasting stations and the information disseminated by the opposition parties and organizations.

During the 'first phase' of the Mashreq's revolutions --when the urban coloring of the leading figures predominated- a semblance of continuity with the practices of the old regimes was preserved. Yet it was during the second phase, when the concept of national unity prevailed over democracy, diversity and pluralism that the earnest drive towards cultural homogenization began. For the first time, the state began to produce and impose its own "politics", i.e. an explicit political ideology which citizens were expected to adopt, and extend it to the remotest regions. Where the revolutionary leadership was not bound by a political party, as in Egypt, a unique political party was established after the triumph of the new leadership and all other parties banned. Where an already existing political party assumed power, as in Syria and Iraq, that party was officially declared a 'leading' party, and all other parties were either banned or put under severe restrictions. As the leadership of the state and society was officially assigned to the 'leading party', any critique of that party was punishable as an attack against the state itself.

But the process of extending the tentacles of the state into all aspects of social life was to go much further. For the first time, the state had its own trade unions, peasant associations, student, women and youth unions and children clubs; all declared the only legal ones. The total rupture with past cultural practices went through a process enabling the state apparatus to gain supremacy over all the other social actors in society. The press and mass media were nationalized, ministries of information were created and a total blackout was forced on the past. History was sharply divided into the pre-revolutionary period, the history of corruption, and that of the post revolutionary periods. Or to put it differently, time and history were stagnant waiting for the revolutions to enshrine the new era.

In the meantime, school curricula were thoroughly revised to indoctrinate students with a new official version of their history. And where allowed, private schools were put under strict supervision to conform to the official narratives. Thus,

1 TV was still a little known invention when the Arab Mashreq revolutions took place. Only Iraq had a public TV station since 1954. Egypt and Syria introduced the TV only in 1960.
several generations of youth, those who entered schools since the late 1950s, were
heavily indoctrinated with official versions of their countries' modern history.

According to these versions, produced by the ministries of culture, information
or education in Egypt, Syria, Iraq, Libya, Algeria and Yemen, the revolutionary era
under which people lived was the product of a relentless struggle waged by the
nationalist (pan-Arab in the first four countries) vanguards against corrupt regimes
that had been installed by the colonial powers in the post WWI epoch. Relying on
their agents and a policy of divide and rule, these colonialists weakened the Nation
and perpetuated its backwardness and dependency. Now that the revolutions have
triunphed, the “natural” course of things, that is unity of the people, must take
absolute precedence over divisive policies, construction over opposition, critique and
destruction, and action should take precedence over academic debates and political
polemics. The state, more precisely: the current ruling regimes, was to become the
embodiment of the nation. Or, as Zubaida aptly observes:

“Once the new states are established, their very existence promotes the genesis
of new ‘imaginaires’ of the nation: common education systems incorporating
the symbols of static power as nation; education feeding into employment
markets for the most part dominated by the state; national networks of
communication and transport; military conscription facilitating the interaction
of youths, mostly from the poorer rural classes, with widely different regional
and cultural backgrounds.”

Zubaida 1989: 148

In tandem with the perfection of the instruments of consent creation, those of
coercion and enforcing conformity were given a tremendous boost by the new
regimes. The once despised job of political police became a prestigious position under
the revolutionary regimes. Extra-judicial persecution, ‘revolutionary’ courts that were
entitled not to abide by the ordinary procedures, and various forms of torture,
kidnapping and assassination of opponents were widely practiced. Thus despite the
widely held impression that the revolutionary regimes in the Mashreq (with the
exception of Iran) were military, the single most influential job in the first two
decades after the revolutions was not that of a careerist military, but of the
intelligence officer. In fact, in a country like Iraq, which built the largest Arab army
during the 1980s, the irony was that the regime was ruled by civilians- mostly drawn
from militant party activists- who perfected a police state machinery run by people
with no military backgrounds. Iran’s much feared security apparatus was similarly
composed of dedicated revolutionary civilians. Although the Egyptian and Syrian
intelligence were mainly drawn from the military, the intelligence ‘community’
eventually differentiated itself from the lower status careerist military and represented
an interest group of its own.

Paradoxical as it may look, these supposedly military regimes were the ones
that had finally put an end to the hitherto recurrent phenomenon of military coups in
the Mashreq. A combination of populist policies of extreme nationalism, the
imposition of direct rule and the subjugation of the armed forces to direct political
control assisted by the long arms of the intelligence have finally put an end to the
coherence of the army institution and to its ability to politically act in unison. The vast
expansion of the armed forces under the revolutionary regimes and drawing its
members from disparate social backgrounds worked in such a way as to undermine its
role as an elite minority that could act ‘on behalf of the nation’.
Table 7.1 -
Coup D'état in the Arab World
1935-1987

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Successful Coup</th>
<th>Foiled Coup</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1935-1940</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1941-1950</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951-1960</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1961-1970</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1971-1980</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981-1987</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Al Naqeeb 1991: 110

The effects of heavy political indoctrination of the armed forces on the efficiency of the Mashreq military have been rightly pointed out by many. However, from a sociological point of view this indoctrination was a powerful means of subjugating the military by the political leaders, military or not. First, it created a semblance of common cause that bound the military and the leading politicians, who stood now to epitomize the 'Nation', thus making any attempt at overthrowing the political regimes an act of betrayal to the nation. Second, they legitimated the incursion of non-military political commissars into the armed forces, thus allowing closer supervision and preemptive strikes against any subversive group or element. Third, they demolished the traditional military hierarchy as political allegiance to the 'revolution' came to replace the military rank as a source of influence within the military. Thus a general or a colonel could no longer rely on his prestigious rank to order his troops to storm the presidential palace without facing the serious risk of disobedience by his politicized subordinates.

But how could the state impose its supremacy and introduce so many novel institutions and practices within a time span of no more than one decade?

Anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist sentiments played an extremely powerful role in cementing a sense of identity among the vast majority of the populations of the Mashreq. In this region, colonialism was not only a legacy of the past, as was the case of say, India. Several parts of the Arab world: Algeria, South Yemen, as well as the Gulf Emirates were still under the formal control of the British and the French by the end of the 1950s. The creation of Israel in 1948 was widely seen as a Western conspiracy to weaken and divide the Arab world. Even in the formally independent states in Iran and the Arab world, western- mainly British- troops and bases were stationed, and Western diktats were obeyed by the ruling regimes. Despite declaring neutrality in WWII, Iran was invaded by the British and Soviet troops. The invading British forces deposed Reza Shah and appointed his son to the throne. No more than eight years after the end of WWII, the US overthrew the elected prime minister, Dr. Mosaddegh, because he nationalized the western oil companies (Ghods, 1989: 132). Egypt and Iraq, which were formally independent monarchies, had British troops stationed on their territory. Hence, it was relatively easy to mobilize the populations of these countries around the theme of combating western influence and domination, which was seen as the main source of the maladies of the Mashreq societies.

While anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism played a crucial role in cementing unity among the populations of the Mashreq, they did not always lead to the dominance of nationalist ideologies among the population, as the cases of multi-ethnic
Iran and the mainly binational Iraq show. In order to understand how statistism prevailed in the Mashreq, we need to distinguish between nationalism as an ideology based on the belief of belonging to a common collective identity of language, culture and history on the one hand and anti-colonialism on the other. The last could be predicated on a nationalist antagonism to the domination of another nation, tribalism based on hostility towards foreigners, Islamism based on animosity with non-believers or followers of another religion, as well as on a host of other ideologies and practices, on the other.

The power of anti-colonialism lay exactly in its ability to articulate all forms of hostility to the colonial and ex-colonial powers and to relegate or postpone the explosion of contradictions between each of these forms of anti-colonialism. Once the anti-colonial struggles succeeded in bringing nationalist regimes to power, statistism prevailed by indoctrinating that the reasons for western dominance were mainly due to the weakness of the states of the region, their military inferiority vis a vis the west, and the presence of pro-western agents among the local populations. All that was needed to overcome backwardness then was to build strong states and armed forces, unify the population around patriotic leaders, and ban and persecute agents of imperialism.

In this respect, the institution of military conscription, already existent since the pre-revolutionary era, was transformed into an additional means to homogenize the male population and cast a semblance of equality among all. Exemption from that service in exchange for monetary payment was either abolished or extremely curtailed. As the idea of full sovereignty and independence of the Mashreq countries occupied center stage in mobilizing the populations of the region, statist ideologies managed to transform the transition to direct rule into a system of ruthless dictatorship by showing the incompatibility of preserving national unity, independence and sovereignty on the one hand, and political democracy on the other. The state was called on to play the exclusive role of the guardian of the nation’s interests. Any call for power sharing and pluralism would be tantamount to splitting the indivisible nation and weakening its guardian, which can only serve the enemies of the nation. This discourse strikingly echoes Alexis de Tocqueville’s description of the major intellectual trends preceding the French revolution:

“[T]he nation was to be composed of individuals almost exactly alike and unconditionally equal: in this undiscriminated mass was to reside, theoretically, the sovereign power, yet it was to be carefully deprived of any means of controlling or even supervising the activities of its own government. For above it was a single authority, its mandatory, which was entitled to do anything and everything in its name without consulting it. This authority could not be controlled by public opinion since public opinion had no means of making itself heard; the State was a law unto itself and nothing short of a revolution could break its tyranny. De jure it was a subordinate agent, de facto, a master.”

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2 The dilemma of nationalism in the Arab world is a vast topic that needs to be dealt with in a separate work. But it may be necessary to mention here that nationalism has almost always been equated with Arab nationalism. This raised a lot of tensions throughout the twentieth century, because one of the basic tenets of Arab nationalist ideology is that all Arab countries are artificial creatures of the colonial powers who planned the partition of the otherwise naturally united nation in order to weaken and control it. In practice, this meant that it was inadmissible, even unpatriotic, to fight for Syria’s or Iraqi independence, for example, under the banner of Syrian or Iraqi nationalism. A country’s independence was seen as a temporary stage towards the fulfillment of the objective of Arab unity. A second, no less intricate dilemma, lay in the fact that this way of maneuvering history excluded beforehand relatively large minorities of non-Arabs from having a say in shaping the destinies of their nations.
However, the pretensions of these regimes to be the embodiments of patriotism, anti-colonialism, and the sole agents for development and strength would not have been feasible without concrete improvement in the standards and conditions of living among the population. And here the revolutionary regimes made significant progress for at least a decade. Between 1960 and 1992, life expectancy rose from 46.2 years to 60.9 years in Egypt, from 48.5 to 65.7 in Iraq, and from 49.8 to 66.4 in Syria. The comparable figures for the whole developing countries were 46.2 and 63.0 years respectively. In the same period real per capita GDP according to the US $ purchasing power went from $ 557 to $ 3600 in Egypt, and from $ 1787 to $ 5220 in Syria, compared with a rise from $ 950 to $ 2730 for the whole developing world. Between 1970 and 1992 literacy rates among adults rose from 35 percent to 50 percent in Egypt, from 34 percent to 62 percent in Iraq and from 40 percent to 67 percent in Syria in comparison to a rise from 46 percent to 69 percent in the developing world (UNDP 1994: 132-7).

Thus, consent could be achieved through the socially ‘democratizing’ measures following the revolutions. Extending social and economic benefits and opportunities to wider sections of the populations of the Mashreq ushered in a two-way process that imposed conformity and reinforced the regimes’ grip on the population on the one hand, while bringing additional benefits for those groups that showed more loyalty and obedience on the other. Building a network of roads and the electrification of the countryside undoubtedly brought huge improvements in the living conditions of the peasants, as could be gauged from the indicators on the drop in infant mortality rates, or the rise in life expectancy. In the meantime, these improvements put even the remotest areas within the reach of the armed forces, the intelligence apparatus, and the government’s political institutions. Public TV, a powerful propaganda machine whose audience was mostly confined to the dwellers of the major cities, became available in coffee shops and local headquarters of the state’s ‘mass organizations’ in the provincial towns and villages.

But perhaps the most socially and economically ‘democratizing’ aspect of the revolutionary regimes lay in the radical change that they introduced in the modes of wealth and power acquisition and distribution. The post-WWII social mobility could not totally undermine the system of inherited class positions. Wealthy classes preserved their dominance over state power. Members of these classes formed almost closed castes through their joint partnerships and ventures, intermarriages, and exclusive social clubs and residential quarters. The Mashreq revolutions threw all that asunder. First, the power of anti-colonialism made it relatively easy for the revolutionary elites to show that national wealth had been appropriated by the western concerns operating within the Mashreq countries, thus depriving nationals from improving their lot. This was not an unfounded claim, given the fact that oil industry,

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2 This statement should not be understood as an evaluation of the revolutionary regimes’ social and economic policies, nor as saying that under different political regimes the outcome would have necessarily been less positive. As we will see later, and as has been shown by the present author, the whole region made positive strides especially since the dramatic rise in oil prices. Given the tremendous revenues that most governments in the region reaped from that rise, their performance was far from optimal. Moreover, many revolutionary regimes fared much worse in the various indicators of human development than their conservative counterparts (al Khafaji 2000 b).

4 This indicator could not be computed for Iraq because of the drastic decline and fluctuations of its income due to the Gulf War. However the spectacular rise in the per capita GDP until 1980, when the Iran-Iraq war began, is widely acknowledged.
the Suez Canal, as well as many other highly profitable sectors were owned by western corporations. The calls for non-renewal of the Canal’s concession and the nationalization of oil had much appeal in the Mashreq’s years before the revolutions (Allawi 1967, Hassan 1968, Davis 1984).

The versions of economic nationalism that began in the 1920s and 1930s as a strategy by the wealthy urban to preserve and extend private market-based, oligopolistic privilege and to acquire more power and wealth turned by the 1950s into a weapon in the hands of newly rising strata that not only opposed foreign exploitation of national wealth, but also the established notables whom they saw as profiting from the dominance of foreign concerns in the economy (Owen 1981b, Davis 1984: 127, Vitalis 1994: 229-30).

Thus nationalizing western controlled concerns was only one aspect of the economic nationalism applied by revolutionary regimes of the Mashreq. The other aspect—which we will deal with in more detail later—had its direct impact on the formation of new affluent strata. Although many wealthy urban preserved their fortunes and may have increased them after the revolutionary changes, they no longer occupied the dominant positions in the economy and society of the Mashreq societies.

Access to wealth and power was no longer contingent on the social origins of individuals, but became a function of their closeness to the state. Loose as the concept of ‘closeness to the state’ may look, it took various forms at various points in time. In the beginning, it meant that the individuals could be rewarded for playing active roles in the struggle to achieve the goals of the revolutions. Later on, closeness was defined as membership of the ruling political party; and naturally the rewards would be proportional to the individual’s rank in the political hierarchy. In a later stage, when membership of the Mashreq’s ruling parties became too large and the cake was too small to feed all members, affiliation with the strategic posts of the regimes: intelligence, senior military, etc. turned to be the criterion for closeness to the state. And throughout these variations, family relations always played a crucial role in the distribution of wealth among the favorites.

As a sufficient ‘gestation period’ passed, a process of lineage reproduction of class positions, similar to the old one where descendants of the revolutionary leaders began to inherit their class positions from their ‘notable families’, could be easily noticed. For despite all their egalitarian and socialist pretensions, the revolutionary regimes created a large class of affluent and super-affluent individuals. After no more than a decade of applying revolutionary economic policies, expressions like “fat cats” and “parasitic bourgeoisie” began to surface in the media. But during the first years of the revolutionary era, access to wealth and power looked like a ‘democratic’ process contingent upon an individual’s attributes. Through their everyday experience, people used to see their humble friends or neighbors swiftly climbing the ladders of wealth and power. These nouveaux- riches may have surpassed the old deposed classes in affluence and the range of luxuries that they enjoy. But it is exactly the fact that these nouveaux- riches descended from social origins ‘resembling ours’ that perpetuated that illusion of the existence of a free-for all social system.

7.2 Bourgeois Transformation and Capitalist Development:
When describing the pattern of changes that took place in the Mashreq, I deliberately inserted quotations describing similar changes which the French society has gone through under the impact of the revolution. These changes are mainly related to the imposition of direct rule and centralizing the state machinery on the one hand, and the redefinition of nationalism and identity on the other. Indeed, the similarity between the transformative processes of the Mashreq and France (and other parts of western Europe) seems striking in some respects. However, to imagine that this pattern was ‘copied’ in a predetermined way would be too simplistic because each of these revolutions took its own course. This course, I have tried to show above, was carried by leaders whose cultural and social backgrounds could not have allowed them to form adequate knowledge of how other revolutions evolved or devolved. Moreover, the Mashreq revolutions— as most other revolutions— progressed in their transformative processes through conflicts, internal feuds that ousted many of their key engineers, and under unforeseen social upheavals. Thus, even if one adopts the highly unrealistic assumption that the revolutionaries had a priori visions of the precise outcome that they were trying to establish, the actual outcome could not have been the actual fulfillment of these visions.

The question then is what accounts for these similarities? In other words, is the passage to modernity associated, in one way or another, with homogenization? Is homogenization associated in one way or another with nationalism? And is nationalism associated, in one way or another, with centralization and the imposition of direct rule?

But first we need to distinguish between two processes: the rise to modernity, or bourgeois transformations on the one hand, and capitalist development on the other. These two processes are so closely interlocked in our minds that an immediate (and seemingly valid) objection may be raised to our attempt at comparison. If we equate the rise to modernity with capitalist transformation, then the diametrically opposed outcomes of revolutionary transformations in Europe and the Mashreq should stand as clear testimony to the futility of any such comparison.

The process of bourgeois transformation, or the passage to modernity, entails the dismantling of institutions based on ‘primordial’ relations, the political structures based on ‘naturally’ appointed leaders on local and/or national levels, the theoretical establishment of equality among individual members of a given society, the prevalence of urban economic activities over the rural ones, and the establishment of the state as the major arbiter among individuals and local groups. According to this definition, bourgeois transformation is more of a ‘destructive’ process than a constructive one. One can even conclude that bourgeois transformation is the legal and political consecration of social and economic processes that had already been in the making before the triumph of the revolutions, and not the initiation of new processes.

Thus land reforms, the rise of a radically new stratum of political leaders, the extension and redefinition of military conscription, etc. are the political consequences of already ongoing social processes, as well as initiators of a new wave of social processes. Obviously, there is nothing in this definition that implies the replacement of ‘naturally’ appointed leaders by democratically elected ones, or that requires the transformation of ‘theoretical’ equality into a real equality. The subsequent perennial struggles to achieve gender inequality and equality between members of ethnic/confessional minorities and the majority in democratic societies are just two examples of the huge gap separating the proclamation of human rights and putting them into practice. This last point is particularly important in underlying the fact that
triggering a bourgeois transformative process does not guarantee its outcome, and certainly not its success.

But what are the criteria for the success in this respect? Two sets come to mind here: one is that the majority of the population of a given society come to embrace the norms defined above as their 'naturally' accepted norms. Thus, after a period of social upheaval following the revolutions, the period in which people lament the passage of the 'good old times' and the replacement of the noble races by laymen and women (the revolutionaries), success follows if and when the rules of modernity are not contested by any major section of society. Forcing these rules, it goes without saying, may be done with the harshest of means, especially during the early transformative periods. But a perpetual reliance on such means signifies that modernity or bourgeois transformation has not taken deep roots and therefore its success is not guaranteed.

A second and more significant criterion for the success of this transformation is closely related to the first and has to do with the capitalist transformation of society. This criterion is satisfied when a society has undergone the initial stages of bourgeois transformation, which only sanctify the basic rights and duties of subjects/would-be citizens. This second criterion is met when institutionalized and organized pressures from powerful sections within society, especially those that have suffered from the cycles of modernization, can no longer mobilize people for the restoration of the illusionary/imagined days of cavalry and knighthood, the days when 'spirituality was more important than material gains'. Neither is this criterion met when an (impossible) satisfaction of all societal sectors by the bourgeois transformations does away with forms of opposition. Rather, successful transformation is achieved when opposition revolves around consolidating the gains that the suffering masses have made and for expanding, extending and deepening these achievements. This is because this form of struggle implies that the oppressed strata have already acknowledged the superiority of the existing social system, the social and material gains that they can make under it, and the opportunities that this system opens for them to expand on their gains.

But as this statement implies, this criterion can only be met when modern organizational structures; that is, individualized institutions, institutions that appeal to the individual and his/ her subjective choice, have taken firm root in a society. And the rise of these institutions was, and is, contingent upon the rise of a new constructive mechanism that provides members of a society with the means to enter into a socio-economic association that these members perceive of as superior to the one that had been demolished by the revolutions.

This constructive and alternative mechanism is nothing but industrialization. And a legitimate question now is 'what is the difference between bourgeois transformation and capitalist industrialization, since the former led to the latter'? The answer is that when the French revolution made its first glorious strides, one could hardly call the French society a capitalist one. But the plebeians, the atomized city dwellers were the major revolutionary force that effected and influenced the change. And why were these called plebeians, sans culottes and citizens? Because no inclusive category could account for them. They were members of a huge -mostly floating and amorphous- mass that was declassed but not yet 'classed'. The French revolution was bourgeois because it expressed and sanctioned the transformative processes that we defined above as bourgeois. But there was nothing in these processes that destined the change to lead to a capitalist transformation of society.
True, the leading revolutionaries, and many intellectuals, politicians and ordinary people had their own ideas about the need for change. Moreover, change was associated with the concepts of progress, welfare and justice. This applies to the west, as well as the Mashreq where “al Nahdha = renaissance” ideas were in the air since the late 1800s (Hourani 1960). But revolt and progress could hardly be identifiable with industrialization and capitalism in eighteenth century Europe or late nineteenth century Mashreq. Suffice it to recall the Physiocrats’ call for revival through the reinvigoration of the ‘only’ productive sector: agriculture.

My contention is that the ‘Western’ bourgeoisie has achieved industrialization, progress and modernization not out of any preconceived plan, since no class in history has ever acted collectively and/or in unison. Interlocked in a specific form of social struggles domestically, regionally and internationally, the western European bourgeoisie’s struggles against merchants, landowners and monar...
objective: putting a country’s wealth under the control of its nationals. This aspect of
nationalism in the third world in general, and the Mashreq in particular, has been
blurred by the cold war atmosphere whereby nationalization of foreign owned assets
outside Europe was identified with socialism.

Yojichi Itagachi defines nationalism as a set of policies and institutions aimed
at forming an integrated and autonomous national economy (Itagachi 1973: 223). The
author specifies that by ‘forming’ a national economy, he means the mobilization and
allocation of social and economic resources for growth and welfare. According to
him, it makes no qualitative difference whether nationalism involves the transfer of
foreign assets into private hands or to the state. For the author, nationalization is a
major step towards the formation of an economy capable of autonomous decision-
making and integration. Hence, the essence of nationalization does not mainly lie in
transforming property to the state but to domestic ownership (Ibid. 219-31).

Historically, the embryos of economic nationalism accompanied the policies
of the enlightened absolutisms of Europe. Mercantilism was the well-known
embodiment of this strategy.

“Mercantilism is usually described as an externally oriented policy through
which states tried to create inflows of bullion (specie or metallic money).”
Schwartz 1994: 11

But before the industrial revolution, and well into it in most parts of the
world, attempts at maximizing a country’s earnings from external trade did not entail
a spur in industrial production, nor the creation of a national market. As late as 1835,
France produced or imported about 173 million tons of goods, of which only 15
million moved by some form of water transport. Of the total, about 127 million tons,
or 75 percent were consumed at the place of production. The remaining 46 million
tons were consumed an average of 37 miles away, indicating that only about 13
percent of production was consumed more than 20 miles from its production site
(Ibid. 13).

This state of affairs meant that achieving the goal of maximizing foreign
earnings would pass through the empowerment of merchants to control prices and
impose various kinds of monopoly over the production of certain items- a situation
that is diametrically opposed to the conditions favoring capitalist take-off. The irony
is that empowering merchants engaged in external trade (and plunder) triggered the
nationalist sentiments against them in most of Europe, because the early merchants
were almost always foreigners. Thus the primary target, the victims and winners from
a policy of nationalism were the merchants, because, as we will see, the long-distance
trade and domestic trade were two entirely different activities involving two entirely
different categories of merchants.

Was the foreignness of merchants incidental, or did it reflect an inherent
characteristic of precapitalist societies? We need to address this issue before
proceeding to an analysis of how this situation was inverted on the eve of the
bourgeois transformation.

In societies whose main source of wealth is the immobile land, identity and
control of land are inseparable. Natives are those who happen to be on the land for
some permanent period of time, or who could lay their hands on land by force and
oust the defenseless inhabitants. Sticking to land and being able to defend it is the
main criterion for defining a ‘native’ in the long run. As for nomads, whose main
source of wealth is mobile, identity is defined by blood kinship. And by implication,
foreigners are those who do not belong to one’s blood line.
Claude Meilassou (1978 a & b) traced the effects of trade on an agricultural community based on a tribal system whose internal differentiation has not gone beyond a distinction between seniors and juniors. He noted that the first contacts made by such a community with ‘foreigners’ take place as the latter are seen to have something of value to offer. These foreigners may be no more than a neighboring tribe producing iron for example. Because iron is so precious, a monopoly on exchanging it is imposed by the seniors who begin to ask for more prestations from the juniors and include an increasing number of previously worthless goods into the category of elite goods. These new goods are the ones demanded by the traders in exchange for their iron. But how does the local community deal with the merchants, or the trading community?

“The introduction of iron into a self-sustaining society set off within it a hostile reaction towards those who introduce it. When the society itself does not exploit the ore, the foreign merchant offering iron will not be trusted. In order to neutralize the disintegrating effects which he bears with him the merchant will be prevented from becoming integrated into the society and particularly from entering into marriage relationships of the conventional types.”

Meilassou 1978: 152 (italics added)

Chiha (1908) described a similar relationship between merchants, chiefs and tribe members in southern Iraq in the early twentieth century, as we noted in the last chapter. Therefore the drive towards controlling the sources of wealth by members of a community is not ‘natural’. In fact, the opposite was true under precapitalism, where trade and usury were despised activities. Customs and religious beliefs were invoked to sanction good people’s aversion to them. However, because it was realized that the community, be it a tribe, a local urban enclave, or a demesne, needed these activities, foreigners or some ‘inferior’ native group must assume them.

This division of labor may seem as providing the members of the non-dominant ethnicities or confessions with the means to participate in the social and economic life of a society. But we should bear in mind that the major, or even the only, source of wealth generation in these societies was land and/or animal breeding. Therefore when trading activities were introduced, it was impossible to foresee the fortunes that the merchants would reap from them.

This process has often led to the initiation of another one; infeudation or proto-forms of it, when seniors or chiefs of tribes were confronted with the opportunities open to them through exchange. A semi-communal system of appropriation, where the chiefs are only slightly distinguishable from the rest of community, is now in midst of struggle to acquire the means for exchange with the foreigners, and thus to acquire the precious foreign goods. Yet the chiefs, who had been earlier entrusted with carrying such transactions, would do their utmost to ensure that more and more exchangeable material is produced by the ordinary subjects and to put their hands on the exchanged goods, first on behalf of the community, then as a private property. The chiefs would introduce new levies, or increase already existing

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1 Many historians have emphasized the role of long-distance trade in the flourishing of the old Islamic empires (for example, Gibb and Bowen 1971, and al Doum 1984) This kind of trade, however, was radically different from domestic trade and it hardly touched the lives of communities outside the major cities which provided the necessary skills for the production of the goods which were demanded by foreign markets.

2 European history, as well as anthropology, provide us with a host of examples on such items that chiefs, lords, and rulers monopolize and put severe restriction on their free circulation among ordinary subjects. Salt, red feathers, iron, sulfur, and naturally gunpowder ranked among the precious tradable goods at different times and places (Godclicier 1966, 1978).
ones (dowries for example) in order to squeeze as much as possible from the ordinary tribesmen, while the latter’s attempts to circumvent the exactions would mark the beginnings of social struggle within the community. It is in this complex historical process that labor acquires value and land is gradually turned into a means of private wealth.

However, even in non-self-sustaining and more complex precapitalist societies, the exclusion of merchants and the depiction of trade as an alien, even despised, profession is a well-known fact, perhaps best exemplified by Shakespeare’s Merchant of Venice. The early merchants in all of the European countries were almost always ‘foreigners’.

“In England the earliest establishment of German traders seems to have been an order of monks, “long engaged alternately in commerce and in warfare” who came in ships to Billingsgate and secured royal patronage”.

G. Walford 1881 quoted by Dobb, 1946: 79

“Norwich owed much of its position to Danish influence, and to the settlement of Scandinavian traders there at an early date and to its position in the path of commercial intercourse with northern Europe. Pirenne’s explanation would seem also to fit the development of London (where it is said that German merchants had establishments in the reign of Ethelred)... The same would largely apply to continental towns such as Paris... and Geneva, to cities on the Rhine like Cologne, which quite early had a colony of alien merchants”.

Dobb, 1946: 76

Balázs and Niederhauser described a similar and broader pattern for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe where the bourgeoisie, and not only the merchants, belonged to some foreign community:

“[T]he bourgeoisie was essentially German, and to a lesser extent Czech, Polish, Hungarian and Italian. ... There existed an urban bourgeoisie that was very heterogeneous, not only as regards its language and religion, but by its relationship with the state, which could not be described along the lines of the French and Belgian relationship... All over the region, this bourgeoisie was characterized by its lack of social homogeneity and integration. What political action would one expect from these citizens who have just changed their homelands and came to take new roots, like the Huguenots in Prussia, the Czechs and Moravians in Vienna, and the Germans in Galicia? This even applies to the Jewish bourgeoisie, which has been there for a long time, but it persisted as a less tolerated element, with a limited and humiliating status, just like all those who had a faith radically different from the official religion. In 1744, they were expelled from the Czech territory, and in 1772 from an already disintegrating Poland.”

Balázs and Niederhauser 1985: 59-61

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7 In the post Meiji Japan, merchants were mostly followers of the distinct brand of Shintu Buddhism. Sec. Ehrlich 1984: 43-6.

8 The authors clearly share the misconception that the bourgeoisie that combated the ancien regimes in Western Europe belonged to the merchants and the established urban strata. This is evident from the way they contrast the passiveness of the Central and Eastern European bourgeoisie with the assumed combative characters of the West European bourgeoisie. “For it did not enter into polemics with the state, nor did it combat it economically or ideologically. It was not a matter of a Third Estate aiming at replacing the feudal class in the government and doing away with the existing regime” (Ibid. 59). This characterization closely echoes the widespread notions regarding the third world bourgeoisie, which we critiqued above. See the chapter on “The Logic of precapitalist Formations”.

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That trade was initially treated as an unethical undertaking, not worthy of 'respected men' in pre-capitalist formations and thus, that merchants were subjected to mechanisms of social exclusion have been well noticed and documented by a variety of authors. But can we draw any unequivocal conclusions from the drive to indigenize trade that transformed it into an ‘internal’ activity?\(^9\)

Although the drive to indigenize trade seems to be a universal trend in those countries that subsequently underwent a process of industrialization, it took place at very different points in the histories of these countries. The mere fact that indigenization preceded industrialization is not sufficient to draw a conclusion. In other words, while most of the industrialized countries had indigenized trade in earlier periods, not all countries that indigenized trade managed to industrialize in a subsequent stage. In England for example, this process took place in the fifteenth century, long before the industrial revolution and more than a century before the Glorious Revolution. In the Habsburg Empire indigenization of trade was carried out in the eighteenth century. Yet even before we can talk about economic nationalism in the strict sense, a proto-nationalism had been at play since at least the twelfth century when cities tried -successfully in many cases - to thwart off competition from merchants of other cities.

To the objection that this is not a comparable case because it did not involve competition between merchants of ‘different nations’, we should keep in mind that there was nothing that could prevent this drive by a given city to end up by encircling its hinterland and turning into a nation at a later stage. One can argue that a city’s annexation of its hinterland, which often occurred in Italy, the Netherlands, and Germany did not lead to the rise of viable nations because of the absence of the conditions for the creation of a protected home market.

“On the Continent the tendency of wealthy burgher republics to dominate and exploit rural hinterland was much more developed. Italian communes, German imperialities and Dutch and Swiss towns growing in this way into small principalities. We find Ulm and Florence, e.g., forcing all the cattle in the neighbouring districts to be brought into the city and Cologne in the twelfth century barring Flemish merchants from access to the upper Rhine. We find Venice in the thirteenth century prohibiting Raguse from dealing direct with the cities of the north Adriatic (unless this was for the purpose of importing foodstuffs to Venice) forcing Ravenna to abandon all direct imports from across the sea and even from north Italy and Ancona, and preventing Aqulaje from exporting goods to the inland territory which Venice considered as her special reserve. Genoa prevented French merchants ... Vienna was powerful enough to prevent merchants from Swabia, Regensburg and Passau from travelling down the Danube with their goods to Hungary and to compel them to offer their merchandise for sale to citizens of Vienna ... in the fourteenth century Cracow sought to prevent merchants of Torun from trading with Hungary...while Lvov tried to monopolize trade with the “Tartar lands” to the east ...Later in the seventeenth century the Russian merchant gilds were powerful enough to prevent English merchants generally from trading further south than Archangel,
and Persian merchants from coming north of Astrakhan. ... Thereby they kept the monopoly of trade between northern Europe and Persia and in particular the highly prized silk trade, in their own hands."

Dobb 1946: 96-7

However, these early measures were not quite identical with mercantilist policies. They did highlight a tendency to prevent the spoils of trade from flowing to ‘foreign lands’; foreign land in this case being a rival city. But those merchants who fiercely fought competition did not attempt at ‘nationalizing’ trade, i.e. putting it in the hands of national merchants, because they themselves were part of a ‘transnational’ network based on family connections. Thanks to these networks immigrant, non-indigenous and Jewish merchants were in a strong position vis-à-vis their potential debtors, and when threatened, could easily move their liquid assets abroad thus causing serious shortages in the host country. But the dominance of these groups of merchants on a country’s finance and trade ran exactly in the opposite direction of the mercantilist policies whose aim was to minimize its imports and maximize its exports as much as possible. These merchant chains, however, had the interests and the capacity to move their bullion, currencies and precious metals from one place to another in pursuit of higher profits.

The above description should make it plain that the adoption of mercantilist policies by absolutist monarchies was not a matter of mere policymaking. No matter how uneasy was the relationship between kings, princes and barons on the one hand, and merchants on the other, both parties were interlocked in a relationship of mutual dependence. Only when an alternative stratum of local merchants or financiers could accumulate sufficient resources, enter into severe competition with the established ‘transnational’ merchants, and afford to offer alternative source of finance to the kings that a mercantilist policy became possible. This possibility was not only a material one, it also meant that an ideological garment, casting the interests of the newly emerging merchants-financiers as a call for curbing the privileges of ‘aliens’ in the interest of the ‘nation’, had become possible.

Nationalist ideologies are all the more required in this context because they are the only means to legitimate the contradictory demands of the rising merchants. On the one hand, these demands were ‘democratic’ because they entailed equal access by ‘all’ to the various trading activities and an end to the political privileges that had enabled the established merchants to impose their monopoly. On the other, they were no less monopolistic as they called upon the state to intervene on behalf of nationals, to the point of committing the national navies to battles to defend the trading interests of national merchants. Thus, in England:

"[W]ith the growing support of the Crown in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries (a support which grew with the ability of English cloth merchants to rival their enemies in loans and bribery) ... the competitive position of the English cloth traders was progressively strengthened while at the same time the privileges of the foreigners in England were terminated.”

Dobb 1963: 113

In 1609 King James I reserved all English fishing grounds to English ships in an effort to displace Dutch fishing fleets. Oliver Cromwell’s Navigation Acts in 1651, which restricted all English trade to English ships, created a demand for new ships (Schwartz 1994: 39).

In the Habsburg empire:

"Under the orders of Marie-Therese, merchants originating from the Balkan, who were subjects of the Ottoman Empire, were ordered either to establish
themselvess permanently in the cities of her monarchy, or leave the country, a policy that served the interests of the bourgeoisie.”

Balázs and Niederhauser: 66

The second problem regarding the relationship between economic nationalism and the rise of capitalism is closely associated with the first one, and may be seen as its direct opposite, namely that the attempts at indigenizing trade were carried by a host of European countries during the late Middle Ages and early modern times. Yet it would be a gross simplification to overlook the fact that not all, in fact not even the majority, of countries that indigenized their trade were able to embark on a successive industrialization path.

The last example from eighteenth century Austro-Hungary is quite revealing, not only because the empire was far from being capitalist or even close to becoming one, but also because it was a typical Absolutist state that never acted on behalf of its bourgeoisie, or cared to satisfy their interests. This is where the third problem that has a direct bearing on the question of capitalism in the Middle East arises, namely that absolutist states, which by no means had the capability of foreseeing capitalism in the horizon, unleashed processes aimed at maximizing the state’s revenues and enhancing their positions vis a vis their competitor states in Europe.

Whether these attempts and policies were conducive to the rise of capitalism or not depended on factors that were far from designed or anticipated by the rulers themselves. One main reason for that lies in the fact that abstract notions like ‘trade’ and ‘indigenization of trade’ can have various connotations and consequences depending on what composes the trade of a country or a region in a given period of time. For it is one thing to indigenize trade and replace foreign merchants with local ones when trade is confined to luxuries, and it is another when merchants cater for the supply of local needs. In the first case, a change in the structure of the merchant class will not alter their socio-economic orientation, while in the other, we are dealing with agents of cementing a domestic market. In the latter case, therefore, by cutting foreign merchants from their channels of transferring wealth across countries, thanks to their kinship relations and trans-territorial alliances, and putting wealth in the hands of local merchants, a precondition is set for industrialists to try and fulfill the demands of a protected market.

Karl Polanyi emphasized this distinction between local trade and long-distance trade as two entirely different types of activity. For him, it was the former that nationalized economic life, while the latter strove to keep it localized. Moreover, it was the mercantilist state that played a decisive role in the creation of the national market.

“Internal trade in Western Europe was actually created by the intervention of the state. Right up to the time of the Commercial Revolution what may appear to us as national trade was not national, but municipal. The Hanse were not German merchants; they were a corporation of trading oligarchs, hailing from a number of North Sea and Baltic towns. Far from ‘nationalizing’ German economic life, the Hanse deliberately cut off the hinterland from trade. The trade of Antwerp or Hamburg, Venice or Lyons, was in no way Dutch or German, Italian or French. London was no exception: it was as little “English” as Luebeck was “German”.”

Polanyi 1944: 63

The last remark applies well to the Mashreq merchants who controlled the region’s long distance trade prior to the revolutionary changes. Describing the merchant community of Baghdad in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Giblar
notes that it was mostly composed of Jews who established an extensive network that covered the Far East, India and the UK by the nineteenth century:

"Trading with countries to the east of Iraq involved the establishment of Jewish merchant communities in the important urban centers in Southeast Asia. The Jewish merchant communities of Bombay and Calcutta, Hong Kong and Shanghai were especially prominent. The Sassoon, Gabbai, Ezra (Bahrain), Yehuda and Benjamin families became renowned for the scale of their business activities and their status in these cities. They controlled a considerable part of the trade in textiles, indigo and opium among Iraq, Iran, India and China. It is not surprising that after the First World War these merchant families transferred their administrative and financial headquarters to London and other business centers in western Europe. At the same time, some of these and other families developed wide-ranging banking activities. In this sphere the Sassoon family and the Khedoury family were the most prominent."

Gilbar 1992: 61

Thus the market that we widely regard as a self-regulating machine is in fact the product of deliberate action. Yet this is not to say that the state acted in an arbitrary fashion. As sufficient social pressures and interests mount, political action follows. It was the interests of the rising capitalist who opposed the monopolistic burgeses, "which forced the territorial state to the fore as the instrument of the 'nationalization' of the market and the creator of internal commerce" (Ibid. 65).

"Deliberate action of the state in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries foisted the mercantile system on the fiercely protectionist towns and principalities. Mercantilism destroyed the outworn particularism of local and intermunicipal trading by breaking down the barriers separating these two types of noncompetitive commerce and thus clearing the way for a national market which increasingly ignored the distinction between town and countryside as well as that between the various towns and provinces."

Polanyi 1944: 65

Such a nuanced comprehension of the role of economic nationalism is almost entirely absent in the dependency/world systems traditions. In defining the specific processes that gave rise to the "core areas", Immanuel Wallerstein singles out the fact that "international and local commerce" was put "in the hands of an indigenous bourgeoisie" (Wallerstein 1979: 34). In the late Middle Ages, England "was a colony of Europe... Her trade was heavily in the hands of Italian and Hanseatic merchants."

But "In the fifteenth century, England undertook with partial success, the indigenization of her commercial network. The Italian and Hanseates were circumscribed, if not yet entirely eliminated."

Wallerstein 1979: 45

Wallerstein's statement suggests that it was not a maturing indigenous merchant class that forced the King to drastically curtail the privileges extended to non-indigenous merchants, but a state bureaucracy that decided that it was in its interests to expel foreign merchants. It suggests that rulers and merchants were thinking in nationalist terms even at such an early time. Yet this is far from specifying why and how did this move strengthen the English state. The ideological discourse is made clearer as Wallerstein contrasts this development with Poland, a classical case for a European country that could not develop a capitalist economy, or was peripheralized, to use a dependency/world systems notion. But when dealing with Poland, instead of using such abstract words like 'England', Wallerstein singles out a
particular social class that was responsible for the predominance of foreign merchants. The Polish aristocrats who needed to trade their products: “needed technical personnel. For this role, they employed non-Poles - Jews, Germans, Armenians... Obviously a non-Polish bourgeoisie offered no political threat to the Polish aristocracy.”

Wallerstein 1979: 40

To sum up. The nationalist moment, if one might call it so, is not a once-and-for all ‘stage’ whose beginning and specific contours can be clearly defined. Competing social groups can always make recourse to demonizing their rivals by showing that they are aliens to their societies. Yet, one would ridicule the appeal of nationalism if it were to be confined to this aspect. A historical moment characterized by the drive of more than one social group, especially groups that are not directly competing with the perceived foreigners, to put the resources of the community in the hands of indigenous elements, arrives when we can talk of nationalism as a mood capturing the feelings of wide sections of a given society. In this way we can distinguish nationalism from, say, the attempts by thirteenth century patricians to impose their monopoly on their respective cities and their hinterlands. But the rise of nationalism is not only a matter of interests or ambitions. Or, more accurately, these interests and ambitions are predicated upon a more powerful precondition: communication and transport technology. Without the ability to link disparate regions, no awareness of common identity can rise, and no agitation, no matter how effective, can bear fruit.

But if communication technology provides a decisive basis for linking regions and communities within one state, the politics of homogenization actively pursued by various ruling groups was the lever that made the ‘formation’ of nations possible. Homogenization emphasized, as is well-known, nationalizing religion by transforming it into a national institution, as well as the imposition of a unified language, or dialect. But the economic aspect of nationalism implied the adoption of a unified system of measures. The perfection of coercive technology in the form of artillery in the case of early modern Europe and airforce in the case of the third world had provided a most powerful means for rulers to subjugate those regions and communities that attempted to preserve their autonomy.

Thus if we hold to our distinction between the passage to modernity and capitalist transformation of a given society, it could be said that the processes of homogenization, nationalism, and imposing supremacy of the state over the particularized agents within society pertain to bourgeois transformation, rather than to capitalist transformation. Bourgeois transformation has always the tendency to relapse if, after a relatively extended period, capitalist transformation does not follow.

The reasons for the above conclusion lie in the basic definitions of the two transformative processes. As the precapitalist structures disintegrate and lose their legitimate functions in the eyes of the majority, or the most articulate sections of a given society, revolutionary regimes do not face organized classes but atomized individuals, who have already shed their past particularistic allegiances and are only bound together by sharing their misery and the high expectations from the new era. And it is this situation that allows the state to assert its supremacy over other social actors by presenting itself as the representative of equal individuals who are expected to put their faith and services at the state’s disposal.

Yet if industrialization does not follow after the revolutionary period and no institutionalized and modern class configurations arise thereof, state institutions themselves would degenerate into hotbeds for breeding deformed modes of
particularism. In the absence of institutional struggles and checks on the state, which raised the hopes of standing at equal distance from all the citizens, various state institutions, leaders and bodies would inevitably recourse to patrimonialism, nepotism and clientalism as means of gaining followers from their regions of descent, or from their ethnic, tribal, confessional or even ideological fellow men and women.

7.4 Nationalism and Modernity:

If the above distinction between the passage to modernity on the one hand, and capitalist industrialization on the other is valid, then we can proceed to show that the similarities in the processes of bourgeois transformation both in the Mashreq and Western Europe are not accidental, nor are they mere models, strategies, or options that some subsequent revolutionaries found attractive and decided to adopt and apply on their societies.

It is now widely acknowledged that states played crucial roles in facilitating the transition to modernity, while they themselves were transformed in the course of this transition. However, this general conclusion can give rise to several interpretations on how exactly does the state do that, and whom exactly do we refer to when talking about the state. The following passage is a typical functionalist approach which simply assumes that state action would be forthcoming as long as it is “needed”, without attempting to investigate the availability of the conditions that make this action possible.

"...state action was obviously necessary when the initial, fundamental task was to create a new nation (as in Italy and Germany), to standardise such basic arrangements as currency, taxes, weights and measures (as in revolutionary France); or to modernise the institutions of an existing traditional society (as in Prussia in the early years of the nineteenth century). And although such activity was not necessarily seen as a means of industrialisation, the consequent effect (in terms of political security, national cohesion, institutional uniformity and predictability) on markets and other economic institutions was, in fact, likely to be favourable to growth.”

Supple 1980: 309

The problem with such abstract phrases as “the task was”, is that they do not specify for whom was that a task, and who had an interest in it. They simply rely on the wisdom of hindsight, in the sense that virtually no one today disputes the importance of getting “advanced”. But at the time of industrialization, as in today’s third world, unification of the market and the creation of solid and centralized state institutions were by no means steps that responded to the interests or the liking of substantial sections of European societies. Calls to preserve “our social fabric”, “our authentic” Hindu, Confucian, Asian or Islamic values, to glorify “our moral superiority”, to denounce “corrupt material civilization”, etc. respond to some interests within various societies, irrespective of the conscious, or unconscious motivations of the ideological proponents.

In the same vein, calls to catch up with the advanced nations, to introduce modern institutions and arrangements would not only reflect “imported” or global effects. Domestic groups, strata, classes and/or communities would try to push their agendas, the success of which depends on the local social structure and configuration. The important point to make here is that the ideological legitimization of a certain agenda may or may not be borrowed, but the main facilitating or hindering factor is
the existence (or absence) of domestic interests that would try to find ideological legitimation to push for their agenda. If a success story is there to be cited from "foreign" cases, then it would be more advantageous to the proponents of a certain call, but the latter is not so much the crucial element, as it is the outcome of social conflict that will decide the winner.

Other authors simply assign high capabilities or farsightedness to rulers or states who discovered that homogenization is a more efficient and cheaper mean of controlling their populations than the precapitalist, hierarchized social structures. The roots of this type of interpretation of mercantilism, as an endeavor by a willing government to promote economic growth and nation-building, can be traced to the classic study of Gustav Schmoller, the founder of the German historical school (Schmoller 1884). A contemporary example of such an interpretation is presented by Charles Tilly:

"In one of their more self-conscious attempts to engineer state power, rulers frequently sought to homogenize their populations in the course of installing direct rule. From a ruler's point of view, a linguistically, religiously, and ideologically homogenous population presented the risk of a common front against royal demands, homogenization made a policy of divide and rule more costly. But homogeneity had many compensating advantages: within a homogenous population, ordinary people were more likely to identify with their rulers, communication could run more efficiently, and an administrative innovation that worked in one segment was likely to work elsewhere as well. People who sensed a common origin, furthermore, were more likely to unite against external threats."

Tilly 1990: 106-7

Both functionalist and voluntaristic approaches overlook three complex sets of conditions that are required for the successful transition to direct rule nationalism homogenization. The first is a technical set that makes it possible. By technical, I mean that the 'microeconomics', and therefore 'micro-communities' hardly had any regular and systematic contacts and interconnections with each other because the available communication/transport techniques made it impossible for them to forge more dynamic relationships with each other even if they wanted to do so. The second set of conditions is the socio-economic one that makes homogenization and direct rule desirable, or more fulfilling to the interests of at least one powerful group that has the potential to impose its hegemony. Finally, a third set is political and consists of a balance of power that makes homogenization functional. This means that it is not sufficient to have a rising dominant class that has an interest in 'nationalizing' the public space. A substantial or influential section of the population must also see such a breakthrough as legitimate.

Even when the modern railway systems were introduced to many areas, many societies based on tribes or castes fiercely resisted attempts by their 'modernizing'

"Although Herman Schwartz's analysis does take the technical and socio-economic conditions into account, some of his statements regarding the roots of mercantilism are no less voluntaristic than those of Tilly. For example:

"Because of the difficulties involved in extracting resources from agriculture, most states pursued a policy known as mercantilism. ...Actually mercantilism's external policy was a means to an end: the creation of a homogenous internal legal space, dominated by central authority." Schwartz 1994: 11

"Mercantilism's internal impulse was the king's effort to remove barriers to the internal movement of goods imposed by nobility ...and to make noble wealth taxable by homogenizing the legal status of all of the king's subjects." Ibid.: 21

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leaders to unify the markets and introduce central and direct rule because the social systems that legitimated inequality were still functional. Conversely, pre-bourgeois ruling classes had no stake in homogenizing their subjects, given the fact that homogenization entails establishing the concepts of equality and citizenship. These concepts run contrary to the legitimating principles of pre-bourgeois social systems and political mechanisms, which are based upon inventing some natural differences among the various components of a given society. Without these differences ruling dynasties, big landowners and wealthy merchants would have no ideological basis to legitimate their privileged positions. This last conclusion should be an additional reminder that ideology and modes of consciousness cannot be automatically derived from/reduced to economic or technical forces.

From the seventeenth and throughout the nineteenth centuries these sets of conditions conducive to the rise of new conceptions of state and society were gradually evolving practically everywhere in west and north Europe. Many regions in central, south and east Europe were strongly influenced by these developments. Thus Prussia/Germany in central Europe, Italy and Greece in the south, and Bulgaria in eastern Europe took shape as modern states by the second half of the nineteenth century. In a schematic way, one can state that the concept of nationalism as a binding tie among members of a society that share a common identity was the first cornerstone in this great transformation.

Yet, nationalism, as is well known, is a very amorphous and slippery concept that an infinitely wide-and sometimes conflicting-variety of schools of thought can fit under it. A recent surge in interest in this subject has produced many valuable contributions (B. Anderson 1991, Gellner 1983, Hobsbawm 1990, Hroch 1993, and Meadwell 1999, among others). Drawing upon these (and other) contributions, the following discussion attempts to explore one particular aspect of nationalism; namely its affinity with the processes of homogenization of the populations of various societies, and therefore with the rise of what we consider today as modern state structures. The affinity between nationalism and homogenization is not quite difficult to discern. Yet, the precise relationship between the latter and the transition to direct rule and democratization becomes a much more complex issue, once the actual practices of such nationalist ideologies as Nazism and Fascism in Europe, and Ba'thism and Nasserism in the Mashreq are (necessarily) introduced to our analysis.

Let’s look for a working definition of homogenization. It is a process that entails the passage from the politics and social structuring based on intrinsic and primordial differences between rulers and ruled, and between the various groups composing a society to that of primordial identity and similarity. A ruler or artisan is no longer expected to be such because of his/her religious, ethnic, regional or tribal affiliation. A common -mainly linguistic, cultural and/or historical- trait is invented/constructed for the majority of communities that live within a single geographical space. All members of that community are proclaimed to have equal rights and privileges in contrast to those who do not share these proclaimed common traits. The mere fact that linguistic, ethnic, and common historical heritage become the elements that cement relationship, or rather that define relationship, means that a great potential for social mobility among the population of a given territory has arisen. Individuals who were coerced to specialize in certain jobs-privileged or not-have from now on the formal ability to choose. We have outlined above the technological, socio-economic and political preconditions needed to redefine the meaning of functions. But exactly how and why could nationalism play that role?
Although mercantilist policies may have contributed to the rise of the sense of nationhood through their protectionist obsession, the structures of the mercantilist 'enlightened absolutisms' did not allow for nationalistic xenophobia, as we shall see below. Therefore, although one can date the beginnings of the modern state to the mercantilist and absolutist era, the same cannot be said about the rise of nationalism as the regulating concept of the jurisdiction and authority of the modern state.

Undoubtedly, the 1714 Treaty of Utrecht, which established for the first time the principle that each country has 'natural frontiers' was a decisive change form the previous practices whereby a state's frontiers could extend to as much territory as it could lay hands on and defend. Yet the newly established natural frontiers had a long way to go before they could turn into ethnic frontiers. By the end of the eighteenth century, a line of fortresses was established, separating France from Germany, and marking the first attempt at creating a linear frontier between the two countries.

"During the French Revolution and the Napoleonic era, two concurrent developments took place: the internal reorganization of France's domestic boundaries (the départements) on rational lines, and the mapping out of France's external frontiers. This was finally followed in 1848, with the emergence of the "ethnic frontier". Whereas prior to the nineteenth century, ethnicity had never been significant in frontier-making, the rise of "linguistic identity" reshaped the European frontiers as nothing else before. Ethnic identity and language became the principles which undergirded the emergence of the nation-state in late nineteenth-century Europe and, for that reason, became the all-consuming passion of the period after the First World War."

Fattah 1997: 17

As can be deduced from the above, and from historical evidence, applying the principle of equality among citizens belonging to the same cultural, linguistic and ethnic group required waging ferocious struggles against the wishes of ruling dynasties. To state, as Charles Tilly does, that rulers found the principle of homogenization and direct rule less costly and more effective in controlling the population is to overlook the fact that during the closing days of the old regimes non-local monarchical dynasties were either viewed with hostility or had to undergo radical changes in their traditions, ceremonies and relationships with their subjects. In the course of these struggles to impose direct rule, homogenization and the supremacy of the state over other societal forms of representation, only a few ruling classes could survive, while the majority were swept away and replaced by new ones.

However, by the mid-nineteenth century, nationalism itself, as well as other ideologies, were undergoing huge changes because Europe was approaching the era of mass politics and (almost) universal suffrage. Politicians who hoped to win votes had to adopt discourses and slogans that could appeal to their wider constituencies. The relationship between the rise of national political structures and homogenization on the one hand, and direct rule and democracy one the other is much more problematic. The question here is whether democracy follows from nationalism, since nationalism lays the ground for formal and legal equality between members of a designed community. But if that was the case, then how could the most atrocius and undemocratic regimes of modernity legitimate their rule by nationalism?

Michael Mann has argued that, far from being an aberration, a 'primitive' practice that constitutes a total rupture with modernity and democratic state structures, ethnic cleansing- even genocide- can be regarded as 'the dark side of democracy' (Mann 1999: 19). First, he argues that "class struggle and its institutionalization- far more than an essentialist respect for individual human rights- have restrained most
liberal democracies from cleansing atrocities ‘within’ their core citizen body. Nonetheless, liberal democracies have committed massive cleansing, sometimes amounting to genocide- in colonial contexts where large social groups were defined as lying outside ‘the people’” (Ibid. 23).

But even regarding ethnic cleansing of ‘the core citizen body’, Mann presents a persuasive argument that liberal democracies did experience some ‘milder’ forms of cleansing. He distinguishes two types of societies and therefore two types of nationalism in the age of modernity. Nationalism in the liberal states, which only dominated in the northwestern parts of Europe, was a stratified one. In these liberal states “though capitalism is not in itself particularly benign, the class resistance it generates tends to produce liberal conciliation” (Ibid. 24). And “until the twentieth century, most dominant ethnic and even religious groups … expected to assimilate the ‘other’. This might involve some institutional coercion, especially to suppress minority languages. But ‘the other’ was not forced out, less butchered. It was allowed to become British, French or German” (Ibid. 25).

In these societies, based on a concept of ‘stratified people’, only ‘moderate’ forms of cleansing were practiced regarding the core citizen body. By contrast, in the center, east and southeast of Europe, several essential differences were the main causes for the dominance of organic rather than liberal conceptions of the nation-state. “These quickly led to a dominant dark side and ultimately led to fascism” (Ibid. 27). Yet in both cases, Mann shows that modern forms of ethnic cleansing are the direct products of the rise of mass politics based on the concept of the nation and national self-rule. The difference lying mainly in who a society comes to define as composing the people and who are the aliens that are not entitled to the same rights and privileges of the people.

I think that Mann’s valuable contribution, especially the distinction between ‘stratified’ and ‘organic’ nationalism, can provide a basis for our understanding of why did the Mashreq nationalisms lead to despotic forms of rule. The particular reasons for the rise of ‘organic’ forms of nationalism in East and Southeast Europe can be put into the wider context of our above-discussed difference between bourgeois transformation and capitalist industrialization.

Where homogenization was carried in an atmosphere of capitalist economic expansion and industrialization, the parties contending for power, as well as the classes and strata engaged in struggles to wrestle as many rights as they could, had a stake in preserving stability and the, more or less, smooth functioning of the social system. By contrast, where transition to direct rule occurred without industrialization or capitalist expansion, the pre-bourgeois forms of social constellation had not yet totally dissolved and struggles for domination took inevitably the form of inter-ethnic, inter-regional, or inter-confessional forms. This is why authoritarian statism, according to Mann, appeared as a result of an organic conception of people and state: a conception stipulating that people was one and indivisible, united, integral and in which class conflict and sectional interests were not to be compromised but transcended through an agent named the state (Mann 1999: 27-8).

Put differently, where a rising social class, in this case the industrial bourgeoisie, has already asserted its dominance in society, an ideological consensus that binds the major social groups defines the limits and scope of their internal struggles. This ideological consensus is nothing but a (mythical) perception of national interest. Homogenization in this case is the process of implicitly asserting the superiority of the culture, language/dialect, or confession of the dominant class without necessarily banning the cultures, languages/dialects, or confessions of the
Examples of this form of homogenization are the stereotyping of the Hackney dialect in England, Italian and African-American cultures in the US, etc.

Organic nationalism, on the other hand, is a form of social struggle to decide who will become the dominant class within a given social formation. Whereas a British or a WASP coloring has already defined the culture and practices of the dominant classes of the UK and the US respectively, and newcomers to the ruling classes had to emulate these practices and cultures in order to fit within them, dominant cultures had to be defined in societies where hegemony has not been established yet. The hegemony of an expanding industrial class has been established through its ability to bring incremental, but steady, increases in the welfare of the population and in the meantime, incorporate individuals from the non-dominant culture into its ranks.

Organic nationalisms appear when the preconditions for a bourgeois transformation are ripe: a crisis of the precapitalist legitimacy and the atomization of the erstwhile primordially bound individuals. But as has been reiterated above, capitalism and capitalist industrialization are not the automatic consequence of the disintegration of pre-bourgeois structures. Hence the struggle for dominance in the emerging social formation is colored by the already existing forms of loyalty and cohesion: family and kinship ties, and/or regional, ethnic or confessional ties. But a second and more important reason for the rise of organic nationalism in this case is that the struggle revolves exactly on the composition of the dominant groups.

While bourgeois transformations open up new opportunities for social mobility, they do not by themselves define who will benefit most from this upward mobility. We have seen above that an infinitely disparate array of discontented and oppressed groups are normally mobilized in the fight to produce these transformations. And that is exactly what makes the particular brand of unitary discourse, which each group adopts and tries to impose, a highly charged and contentious one because each of these discourses implies the prospective dominance of a different group that can implement its claims of unifying society around its particular brand of homogenization.

Hence, while bourgeois revolutions are carried under the banners of equality of citizens, the content of this equality and the definition of who is a citizen are by no means given or are predetermined in an a priori fashion. Settlement of these issues is reached through social struggles that may take bloody and lengthy forms. But it is the outcome of these struggles that will eventually define the specific content of Frenchness, Britishness, etc., as well as defining the terms of acquiescence within a given society.

In this process of defining the cultural traits of the core group, state power has proven to be a most formidable means of asserting and imposing the supremacy of that group. The transition from indirect rule to direct rule, accompanied with the expansion of the state, virtually all over Western Europe in the nineteenth century, produced a wave of changes, not only in the state-society structures, but also in the economy and the ideological perceptions of people of who is a foreigner and who is not, the rights of nationals and the limited rights of foreigners, the responsibilities of the states towards their citizens, but not towards foreigners etc. In sum, “life homogenized within states and heterogenized among states” (Tilly 1990: 116). But how exactly did this process occur, and why?

“As direct rule expanded throughout Europe, the welfare, culture, and daily routines of ordinary Europeans came to depend as never before on which state they happened to reside in. Internally, states undertook to impose
national military service, and much more. Externally, they began to control movements across frontiers... to treat foreigners as distinctive kinds of people deserving limited rights and close surveillance."

Tilly 1990: 106-7, 116-17

However, state power should not be seen as an arbitrary means in the hands of whoever happens to rule. Rather, capturing state power and preserving authority over a reasonable period of time is itself a function of the existing balance of power among the contending social groups. In Western Europe, the unitary and unifying discourse was based upon a peculiar mix of religion and ethnicity. Whether Catholicism or Protestantism prevailed in a given society, the first task of most modernizing European states was to sever the transnational links of members of the same religion and creating a national State Church, normally headed by the state’s sovereign, a process which brought the kings/or princes of England, Scotland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Northern Germany and Bohemia to head their respective national churches and disrupt the links with the Vatican. 11

Although the ethnic issue was not explicitly raised in the context of Europe’s transition to modernity, at least not until the triumph of the French revolution, the imposition of a ‘national’ language in school curricula and in official transactions was one means of marginalizing non-dominant ethnicities and assigning them, at best, subordinate roles in society. In other cases, most notably the British colonization of Ireland, the subjugation of a nation could easily take the form of persecuting the followers of Catholicism.

In the Mashreq, unitary and homogenizing discourses have proven to raise no less explosive issues than their European predecessors. Despite much apparent dissimilarity, Arab nationalist and Islamist (as well as communist) discourses stand on the same basic grounds: a tenacious effort to ‘prove’ that the majority of a given society’s population share the same ‘natural’ traits that must, by definition, become the defining norms and rules that govern that society and determine the composition of its core political leadership. The nationalist variant of homogenization triumphed in Egypt, Syria and Iraq, while the Islamist variant triumphed in Iran.

Whereas the Islamic variant only emphasized the homogenizing aspect of religion, the nationalist one had a composite criterion whereby Arabism and Islam were amalgamated. After several heated debates on whether the constitutions of the nationalist regimes should treat Islam as a major source of legislation or the source of legislation, nationalist regimes opted for the latter and added articles that Islam is the official religion of the state. However, even the Islamist variant of homogenization contained a subtle nationalist element. A strict imposition of Sunni Islam in Afghanistan meant in practice that the Persian speaking Hazara Mongols and the mountain Tajiks community would be persecuted or marginalized because they follow

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11 Contrary to the widely held belief, secularism in France was only imposed during the Third Republic in 1905. The position of the French Revolution was far from being hostile to religion. When the French Republic was proclaimed in 1792, a fierce conflict around the Religion of Reason erupted within the revolutionary camp. The Jacobins, led by Robespierre, called the secular followers of the Religion of Reason “agents” of foreign enemies and “immoralist”, before sending them to the guillotine in 1794. Robespierre’s famous saying was that “atheism is aristocratic” (See. Kieman 1965: 35-6, Strayer 1970: 15-16, Lucas 1973: 84-125, Badie and Birnbaum 1979: chapter 3). Hence, it would be more accurate to describe the French Revolution’s attempt as a continuation of the process, which the fourteenth-seventeenth European wars had launched, namely the unification of religion and nationhood, or more precisely: nationalizing religion.
the Shi‘ite brand of Islam. Similarly, Iranian Kurds, who are mostly Sunni Muslims, would not stand on equal footing with the Persian Shi‘ites (Yousaf 1992 43-7).

Several conclusions can be drawn from this comparative account of the attempt at homogenizing life in Europe and the Mashreq:

1. The transition to modernity has almost always been accompanied by the imposition of some semblance of ideological unity within a given society. Religion, nationalism, culture and language, and ethnicity were among the most influential instruments in imposing unity.

2. This semblance of ideological unity is made possible by the rise of some technical and socio-economic conditions that make the transition to direct rule possible. However, the terms and norms upon which the new ‘national’ formation would be bound are not given a priori. Although the binding nationalist ideology always draws upon elements that have been active in the collective memory of a given people, the concrete form that a nationalist ideology takes is an arena of struggle among various social groups that contend for hegemony over the new formation.

3. Social groups that eventually succeed in their bid for political power will eventually strive to cast their own perceptions as those of the entire society or of the majority. A process of homogenization of the members of society according to these supposedly common traits follows from these attempts. Historically, this has inevitably led to applying varying forms of coercion against non-conforming or resisting communities and individuals.

4. Since homogenization entails emphasizing certain cultural traits: linguistic, religious, or ethnic, by ranking them as the sole or major binding elements of a given social formation and relegating other sub-national binding elements to a secondary position, or even persecuting those who adhere to them, it is inevitable that a particular community or communities would appear as the core group within the newly formed nation. This core group, often the one from which the new leaders hail, is the one whom the unifying ideological criteria apply most.

5. The unifying ideology and its emphasis on particular cultural elements within the given social formation would serve as a legitimating principle for the rise and dominance of a new ruling class. This point is of utmost importance in understanding the interplay between ideological perceptions and socio-economic interests in making modern social classes and will be dealt with in more detail later. However, a few words are due here.

6. The rise of a new socio-economic system means, by definition, the laying of the basis of new modes of wealth formation and appropriation, and by implication, new basis for membership of a given social class. Yet, while the impersonal historical conditions define the range of potential mechanisms for power and wealth appropriation, they do not define who is going to occupy the dominant social and economic positions within a given formation. The outcomes of political struggles around the particular ideological content of nationalism are in the meantime struggles over who of the contending groups will emerge as ‘naturally’ endowed to epitomize national unity and thus play a leading role in the new era.

7. The embryos of the dominant modern classes therefore are no less primordially formed than their predecessors, in the sense that their
coherence draws upon collegial, regional, family, religious, cultural, ideological or ethnic ties. Obviously, the embryo of a dominant modern class does not comprise all the members of the core cultural group, but is mainly drawn from its ranks. This means that it tends to incorporate individuals from outside that core group.

8. The contradiction which the national state embodies lies in the fact that this state arises from the declared aim of putting an end to the inherited privileges upon which the ancien regimes were based, while in the meantime it confines power and wealth to those individuals who are defined as members of the nation. However, even at this primitive stage, national states represent a huge step forwards. Theoretically at least, the concepts of equal citizenship, and the consecration of the individual lay the grounds for further struggles that would ensure that unlike the pre-bourgeois dominant classes, modern dominant classes, as well as other social positions, are not closed castes. Gramsci put this point quite succinctly:

"The revolution which the bourgeois class has brought into the conception of law, and hence into the function of the State, consists especially in the will to conform... The previous ruling classes were essentially conservative in the sense that they did not tend to construct an organic passage from the other classes into their own, i.e. to enlarge their class sphere “technically” and ideologically: their conception was that of a closed caste. The bourgeois class poses itself as an organism in continuous movement, capable of absorbing the entire society, assimilating it to its own cultural and economic level. The entire function of the State has been transformed, the State has become an “educator”, etc.”

Gramsci 1971:260

9. The contradiction between the national state as yet another historical category that has the potential to develop into a system of primordially based hierarchy, and the national state as a system that preaches the freedom of the individual citizen to move along the social ladder according to his (and later her) ability is resolved through the mechanisms of capitalist expansion on the one hand, and the social struggles that are engendered by this expansion on the other. The tension between Michael Mann’s ‘organic vs stratified nationalism’ might be explained by these processes too.

10. Where capitalist expansion and its concomitant social stratification succeed, the dominant class from within the core group of the nation acquires additional legitimacy in the eyes of the population because of its perceived ability to bring additional welfare to society. Rising welfare and expansion pose thus the double possibility of non-core group members joining the dominant class on the one hand, and incorporating them within the dominant cultural discourse of the hegemonic class on the other. But this is far from a mere manipulative policy by the dominant group. Capitalist expansion empowers the dominated classes because of their necessary role in ensuring the harmonious working of the system. These classes will strive to acquire privileges and rights commensurate with their roles. And among the most valued rights is recognizing their cultures as equal to those of the dominant groups.
11. Hence, organic nationalism and stratified nationalism are not two diametrically opposed historical options or traits of different societies. In the meantime, they are not necessarily consecutive ‘stages’, where one form of nationalism is destined to give way to another. They are not diametrically opposed versions in that they reflect the different historical instances when national state structures are established. Nationalism preceding industrialization inevitably tends to show symptoms of organic trends, i.e. emphasis on the collective rather than the individual interests and a tendency to physically persecute non-conformers with the ‘national principles’. The classical examples for stratified nationalism that are supposed to produce mainly assimilating, rather than physically coercive, homogenizing effects are very telling in this respect. Western European societies that are taken to be typical examples of liberal nationalisms are, as is well known, Britain and Holland.

During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, when Protestant countries were persecuting Roman Catholics, the Amsterdam authorities allowed the Catholics to worship in peace—provided that their churches weren’t identifiable as such from the street. Shulkerken (hidden churches) were built all over town (Kieman 1965, Strayer 1970). England’s ‘mild’ nationalism was comparable to Holland’s. The eastern part of Ireland that became a Norman (British) colony in 1175 was subjected to a wave of Protestant invaders, who came as colonizers, only following Britain’s bourgeois transformation during the seventeenth century (Overy 2001: 118). A Catholic revolt was brutally crushed under Cromwell. Intolerance towards Scottish nationalism reached its height in 1745 when the Jacobites revolted for a second time. The British parliament retaliated by banning the kilt, along with plaid, trews and tartans, which were considered symbols of Scottish traditions (Trevor-Roper)12. The English “Bill of Rights” adopted following the overthrow of King James II (1689) guaranteed freedom of opinion only for the Protestants. John Locke (1632 - 1704) excluded from his call for tolerance Catholics and atheists. England, in fact, only approved religious tolerance towards Catholics in 1829, towards the Jews in 1842 and towards atheists in 188813.

However, the best example of authoritarian bourgeois transformation is revolutionary France. Having preserved its united political structures for centuries, and carrying its revolution under libertarian slogans, France has rarely been studied as a case of extreme attempts by the revolutionary state to homogenize its population. We have noted in the preceding chapters that unlike England, the struggles of French peasants against landlords have left much of the land in the hands of small and free peasantry. This state of affairs contributed to keep French agriculture relatively backward and the majority of the population fragmented and atomized when the revolution erupted. Thus despite the existence of a central state, it was only several decades after the revolution that a national market began to take shape. This can be

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13 In France, the overarching concern of Voltaire and Rousseaux, the two thinkers whose intellectual influence on the course of the French revolution was unparalleled, was homogenizing the nation rather than tolerance. Rousseaux proposed the adoption of a ‘civil religion’ whose papacy would be in the hands of the head of the state. The latter could outlaw other beliefs, because “freedom of the individual can be imposed by force”. Voltaire, on the other hand, did not conceal his admiration of Louis XIV whose homogenizing efforts led him to oppress the Protestants (Furet 1981; Cranston 1984, 1989).
gauged from two indicators pertaining to the regional variations in grain prices and urbanization.

“France built roughly the same number of miles of canals as the smaller Britain during the 1800s. The weakness of the transportation system and the lack of a unified national market can be seen in the regional differences in grain prices. In 1800 wheat prices varied as much as 400 percent in different regions, in 1817 by 200 percent; and as late as 1847 by 70 percent. Without cheap transport to bring food to the cities, urbanization also lagged behind Britain’s. In 1806 only 7 percent of the population lived in towns over 2,000, and by 1846 only 25 percent. In Britain over half the population lived in towns by 1851.”

Schwartz 1994:96

The French political system under the absolutist state reflected the heterogeneous and atomized social structure. An extremely powerful executive could stand above society because of the lack of organized powerful contending classes. Richelieu destroyed the fortified palaces, thus ruling out any attempt for autonomy. In the meantime he established a standing army in 1726, a process that had already begun since mid seventeenth century, when the state nationalized the army and took the responsibility of paying for its members. The armed forces of Louis XIV stood at 300,000 men. By the beginning of the seventeenth century, France collected four more times the taxes that England could collect. And for the first time in European history, the state established in 1761 “La Gazette de France” as its mouthpiece censorship was imposed on private papers (Cole 1939, Gruder 1968, Downing 1992).

A society kept under strict control of the state revolted in 1789, but the revolution only exposed its fragmentation and lack of coherence. Rather than a pan-French bourgeoisie acting in unison against pan-French first and second estates, the revolution was in many respects carried along regional and/or confessional ‘vertical’ lines. In the struggle for the republican cause, cities were tipped against the countryside and western and southern France resisted the revolutionary northern and eastern parts. The Vendée revolt, which represented one of the most dramatic counterrevolutionary episodes, was not an isolated episode. The guerilla resistance to the revolution engulfed wide regions in the western parts of France. In the meantime, the federalist revolt controlled important urban centers such as Caen and Nantes in the west, Bordeaux in the southwest, Toulouse, Toulon, Nimes and Marseilles in the south, and Lyons in the south. The monarchist/republican antagonism pitted Protestants against Catholics in Nimes and elsewhere (Furet and Ouzof 1988, Johnson 1989: 33-40, Overy 2001: 202-4).

Additional evidence on the regional cleavages comes from the data on the number of the revolution’s victims in different regions. Douglas Johnson estimated the number of the Vendée victims at eighty thousand and the total victims in the entire western region of France at 100 hundred thousands (Johnson 1989: 37). Donald Greer compiled a comprehensive list of executions carried under the reign of Terror of the French revolution according to the departments where these executions had been carried. He found that with the exception of two departments (the Seine and Pas-de-Calais), every department that suffered more than two hundred executions was located in the south and southwestern regions of France. The total number of those executed during that period of the revolution alone well surpassed 15,000 (Greer 1935: 147). Such was the regional/confessional cleavage that the respected French historian Secher described the history of the revolution as a history of civil wars.

Thus while the transition to direct rule in general was accompanied with the extension, expansion and deepening of the state’s intervention in everyday life, the
most pervasive (and brutal) intervention occurred where ‘organic’ nationalism was at play. Charles Tilly notes that:

“With the installation of direct rule came the creation of systems of surveillance and reporting that made local and regional administrators responsible for prediction and prevention of movements that would threaten state power or the welfare of its chief clients. National police forces penetrated local communities. Political and criminal police made common cause in preparing dossiers, listening posts, routine reports, and periodic surveys of any persons, organizations, or events that were likely to trouble “public order”. The long disarmament of the civilian population culminated in tight containment of militants and malcontents.”

Tilly 1990: 115, also 110

Although the institution of the political police in France already had a long history when the revolution began, the year 1794 brought noticeable changes in its role. Chernyak quotes Fredrick Engels’ remark that “Frenchmen of the eighteenth century spoke, not of civilized, but of policed nations”, and comments:

“However, contemporaries thought this growth in police powers before 1789 was nothing compared with the weight it gained in the post-revolutionary years. In the bitter clashes of the revolutionary years its role increased many times over.... It was up to the political police to get or, rather, to invent “evidence” of the guilt of the accused. It was its task to arrest people, conduct preliminary investigations together with the Revolutionary Tribunal, and call witnesses (or, rather, false witnesses), it also planted its agents in prison cells and did a lot of similar “dirty work”.”

Chernyak 1990: 72-3

7.5 Conclusion: Stratified Nationalism and Civil Society:

In depicting the profound societal changes brought about by the passage to modernity, this chapter has emphasized the expansion of oppressive and pervasive functions of the state during this era. Emphasizing these aspects is a reminder that the modern liberal and democratic state structures that we tend to identify with modernity are not necessary products of this transformation. The changes that the Mashreq revolutions have effected in their societies are no exception to this universal trend in the sense that they have legally and politically consecrated the demise of the various forms of pre-bourgeois forms of property relations and forms of association among individuals. If state violence was (and is) carried on a higher level than the levels of violence that other European societies have experienced during their passage to modernity, it is not because of the difference in the nature of these revolutionary changes, but in the abject failure of the Mashreq’s revolution to develop an alternative consensual mechanism that can bind individuals together, or in other words because the transformative processes could not lead to the rise of a civil society.

We may be reproached that throughout this chapter the concept of “civil society” has been conspicuously absent despite the fact that the rise of the individual, the creation of a public sphere and the formation of a new constellation of social forces outside the state are all related to this concept. Why did we choose to analyze the struggles accompanying the passage to modernity in terms of “stratified” versus ‘organic’ nationalism, instead of carrying it in terms of civil society and its ability to effect social changes?
The reason for this is that contrary to the standard and widely popularized definitions of the concept, where civil society is reduced to the non-state associations, we hold to the position that the crucial element in the formation of civil society is the rise of the formal concept of the free individual. Yet the rise of the free individual and the consecration of formal equality among members of a given nation are the products of severe struggles which while precede and prepare the ground for the bourgeois transformation of societies, will only materialize over longer periods. A collective ‘private’ association which subjects, not individuals, have to join because of their birth marks —religious, ethnic, or tribal— belongs thus to a radically different form of social organization, because the concept of free choice of an individual is absent here.

The historical conditions for the rise of the formally free associations of individuals are only met after the atomized individuals have entered into new social interdependent relations, and these relations are nothing but the capitalist relations. Hegel traced the origins of this social setting in a capturing paragraph of his Philosophy of Rights:

“In the course of the actual attainment of selfish ends... there is formed a system of complete interdependence, wherein the livelihood, happiness and legal status of one man is interwoven with the livelihood, happiness and rights of all.”

Hegel 1942: paragraph 183

For the first time in history individualization and socialization go hand in hand, in the sense that the need for a wider scope of interaction between humans, the rise of the technical potential for effecting this wider interaction is not accompanied by the unwilling association of communities via their notables or chiefs, but by the willing individual.

But how is this ‘actual attainment of selfish needs’ formed? It is through the atomization of the population turned into individuals, who then, and only then, can choose to become members of associations. This individual member, according to Hegel:

“needs no external marks beyond his own membership as evidence of his skill and his regular income and subsistence, i.e. as evidence that he is somebody. It is also recognized that he belongs to a whole which is itself an organ of the entire society and that he is actively concerned in promoting the comparatively disinterested end of this whole.”

Hegel 1942: paragraph 253

Like Hegel, Marx traced the historical development of civil society to the bourgeois revolutions which tore asunder the social bonds that previously forced individuals, and he makes the frequent metaphor of individuals cutting the ‘umbilical chord’ which tied them to a primordial group (Marx 1973: 83-4). However, he added to this his well-known analysis the conditions of alienation of individuals under capitalism.

In this sense, civil society is not an ahistorical product. It only develops following the rise of a new independent and specialized sphere of politics practiced by the state on the one hand, and a new specialized sphere of economics carried via the

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14 Another reason for this deliberate omission lies partially in the popularized fashion with which this concept is being currently used in much of the literature. Its forceful resurgence since the 1980s has locked it in an ideologically charged context that tends to erode much of its analytical value.

15 Obviously people do go to church today because their parents tell them to do so, but at least the formal right to renounce this is granted to an individual in a fully bourgeois society.
market. This process is only perfected when capitalism dominates over a social formation and produces its mystificatory ideological representations.

Under the penalty of schematizing a complex series of social processes, one can state that revolutions, just like economic crises under capitalism, are *a posteriori* destructive signals that tend to rectify deeply disturbed social balances. However, while the destructive functions of these signals could be achieved relatively easily, the constructive functions are much more difficult to achieve. This is because the latter functions are contingent upon the existence of a particular constellation of class relations, which can allow for the rise of a capitalist socio-economic system. And it is here that Michael Mann’s distinction between organic nationalism and stratified nationalism gains particular value.

Revolutions occur in the aftermath of social crises which sap the legitimacy of the existing social relations: the subjected classes, as well as others, openly question their validity and propose concrete alternatives. However, the specific forms that the disintegration of precapitalist structures take are never given in advance. They are the product of the social struggles that led to their disintegration. Hence, social struggles that ended up with the preponderance of small peasant property in agriculture, produce a radically different variant of passage to modernity from those where a class of gentry, or capitalist farmers have taken the lead in the new social configuration. In the first case, France and the Mashreq notably, a non-differentiated mass of individuals is the unseen force behind the rulers’ attempts at modernization. It is unseen because it is non-differentiated and therefore its influence is not direct or institutionalized. In the second case, as in Britain, not only Cromwell’s ‘model army’ was composed mainly of members of the gentry, thus making their interests directly felt, but also a history of relative balance between the upper classes since the 1215 Magna Carta has driven its ‘bourgeois’ revolution in the direction of constitutionalism.

While these differences in the constellation of social power play a decisive role in the subsequent passage to modernity, they further shape state-society relationship, or at least the relationship between the state and the dominant classes, because they define the limits and extent of state autonomy, the power of the state to tax its citizens and state intervention in socio-economic affairs. The state in the

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16 In a highly militant article, Ellen Meiksins Wood rightly attacks liberal scholarship on civil society, which views history as a process of progressive individuation generally associated with the evolution of private property and the state responding by creating new political institutions. However, her argument turns into an unfounded piece of ideological polemic when she claims that the 1688 English revolution and the establishment of constitutional rule were “advances in the power of landed aristocracy” (Wood, 1990: 68). And that “it was the disintegration and anarchy of Western Europe that produced civil society”.

Such views take social struggles and concessions as a one-track path that is engineered by a particular class who always succeeds in producing the planned results, without taking account of the fact that new constitutional arrangements establish rules that open new arenas for the struggle of laboring classes. In the meantime, disintegration and anarchy have, more often than not, tended to produce fascism and banditry rather than civil society.

Unfortunately, many left-wing scholars in their attempt to discredit capitalism, criticize what Marx considered its revolutionizing role, rather than pointing the way to its inherent reactionary, oppressive and exploitative mechanisms.

Neera Chandhoke, for example, turns Marx’s conception of civil society as a deplorable process, when she claims that the bourgeois revolution, according to Marx, “has deprived the individual of access to the means of production; it has made man dependent upon those who do possess such access” (Chandhoke 1995: 140). Such a statement, and others about the bourgeois revolution cutting men from “the bonds of natural community,” fails to show that under precapitalist relations, and thanks to the “bonds of natural community”, man himself was either a slave or a serf.
atomized case tends to produce organic forms of nationalism because it is the sole, or major, actor on behalf of an undifferentiated and unorganized 'nation'. Building a consensus, a discourse around which the majority and/or major actors unite passes through suppressing discontent and opposition. However, the organic discourse cannot perpetuate a social system in the long run. It is here that the socio-economic mechanisms come into play. If the passage to modernity ushers in a passage to successful capitalist development, which spreads the benefits of expansion to an expanding array of the population, then stratification will follow and with it, a revised version of the legitimating principle of nationalism will evolve. By contrast, the failure to reach such an outcome, as in the Mashreq, could delegitimize modernity all together. A highly autonomous state can act as a patron for longer periods of time, but in the absence of an operational capitalist mechanism, society will eventually lapse into atomization once the strains on the state force it to withdraw from the economic scene, as will be shown in the next chapters.

17 This statement should not be confused with the liberal glorification of capitalism as a teleological process that inevitably evolves through a gradual individuation to some final historical moment of ultimate liberty and equality - according to Francis Fukuyama’s famous thesis (Fukuyama 1989 and 1991). My point is that a successful industrialization implies the creation of a circuit of interrelated social interests which has the potential of empowering the working classes, who through their struggles can force concessions on the dominant classes. However, this may not apply to all phases of capitalist expansion. As long as labor is a scarce commodity - normally through the first expansive phases of capitalism - its social power can be immense. However, as capitalism moves towards less labor-intensive processes (the case of the advanced capitalist societies of today) the social power of traditional labor unions and working class parties no longer play a crucial role.

A second, and more important, objection, to the liberal thesis is that it confuses two distinct issues. The first is that one can rightly state from a purely historical and comparative point view, that capitalism has provided more political and social rights to the individual than any preceding social system, once again not out of innate logic within the capitalist system, but because of the particular forms that social struggles take under it. But one needs an entirely different argument in order to prove the second distinct issue: namely, that humanity will not be able to move into superior forms of social and political organization. Only by proving that capitalism is the ideal form can one make the illogical claim that what has not happened yet will not/cannot happen in the future.

18 One may object to the above on the grounds that the state in the Mashreq has acquired its autonomy mainly because of its control over oil revenues. While this is undoubtedly true, let’s remember that oil revenues only give the state its autonomy because the size of the economy is relatively small. In a more sophisticated economy, the existence of a vibrant and large-scale private activity and the higher standards of living would curtail the autonomy of a state whose annual oil revenue is about US $20 billions.

Note in passing that even the state’s ownership of oil fields is not divorced from the specific class structure of a given society. The power of the British nobility was behind the adoption of the res ferae naturae principle in the English common law, which stipulates that the owner of an estate can take a beast that crosses into his land. The power of private estate owners in eighteenth and nineteenth century US translated this into the ‘rule of capture’ in American Law. According to this rule, not only “immobile” minerals lying beneath the surface of one’s land are his/her property, but also whatever strays onto one’s property from a neighbor’s land. This applies naturally to oil. On this point, see: O’Connor 1955: 45.