

THE DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE OF THE YOUTH "UNIVERSITY YOUTH SAMPLE "

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1- An introduction to the study and its theoretical background

Introduction:

The question of democracy is crucially important in political and social life. It assumes an important role amongst the big problems facing modern human society. The question of democracy has caused strong intellectual argument amongst many thinkers and researchers working on societal issues. These arguments and differences were the base for many social theories dealing with the issue of democracy and its nature. The this question comes at the forefront of all societal questions, especially in modern societies. Supporting this vision is the fact that the history of human societies is that of conflict over power, authority, wealth and money. This comes as no surprise as the history of human societies is full of wars which were waged under many pretexts: some to establish right and justice, others for the sake of religion and morality, and others for racial superiority. And needless to say that the majority of these wars, if not all, were waged to establish hegemony and power and to control the will of others and their right to live. Thus we can say that humanity has witnessed two main types of behaviour which embody human existence and its history as a whole. The first type is represented by those who greedily search for authority, power and hegemony, and who spare no effort to control others using all available means; starting from physical strength, the stick, the sword, gunpowder and then the weapons of mass destruction, which were indeed used during the second world war in 1945 to kill about half a million people in the name of freedom, liberalism, democracy ... etc. These concepts have actually been deformed and used in intellectual systems completely opposed to the essence of these concepts, where horrible crimes have been committed in a way diametrically opposed to the concept of the system; "which is a set of units arranged in a specific order and which connect in coordination with each other, in order to achieve a specific objective or perform a certain function"¹. Those who followed the first type of behaviour have deformed over history the humanity of man and have extremely abused it. They, however, appear to have a good argument when trying to prove that they were right in what they did and what they will do; they do not lack historical legitimacy because history is written by the victorious.

"The second type of behaviour is represented by those who struggled for justice, right and freedom for humanity. History teems with such names and its pages may not be able to accommodate all of them. If we examine human history as whole, we will see two sides of the picture: joy and grief. And in this two-sided picture for conflict, man can be either victorious or defeated. There are those who gain victory for freedom through epics, and those who establish their existence based on the principle of power and dominance driving a large number of people to the circle of defeat, submission, slavery and oppression".²

"Dominance has always been the root cause of all horrific wars and human tragedies. This dominance is still causing at every minute of old and modern human existence a lot of pain and human suffering resulting from the acts of killing and destruction".³
We are in front a wretched and sad human history, although it claims that it is the history during which man achieved victory for his mind and will by understanding

nature and explaining and changing its phenomena leading up to inhabiting space. Is it a prerequisite for this evolution to exclude the other and torture him? Or is it that man can not feel his real existence or mental progress except through the action of movement and change, and part of that action is his aggression towards his fellow human beings in order to feel the real existence and the power of action, and to avoid inactivity and inaction? Did nature put such thing inherently in the human being so he would not lead a passive life governed by desire and comfort?

At any rate, and amongst these bitter questions which avoid the truth, the sense of inevitable hope awakens and we can see the words of Hegel, the German philosopher, "the owl does not fly except at dusk", which means that wisdom can be learned in the most difficult and tragic times.

Our world today lives a real crisis on the global level. This crisis manifests itself through actual practices on the global level and the attempt by one single force to impose its will, way of thinking and lifestyle on the whole world. This one force is the authority that makes laws and tries people according to them; so if you are not with you are against us. And as third world and Arab countries, may be we are the most affected by this policy and its practices. The most painful thing is that these practices are being carried out in the name of democracy, freedom, justice and liberating the people. A lot of precious blood is shed everyday with no one saying implicitly or explicitly that such things are inconsistent with the values of right, justice and freedom, and are contradictory to all forms of democracy. Ever since the freedom of man was robbed and he started to defend it carrying the sword of right, may be the mouths of people and countries were not the same as they are today. We are the defendants of right, justice and dignity, but such task is a very grueling one. So how can we defend our freedom, existence and dignity, and by which means? The only solution is to provide more freedom and democratic practice, because only through this can we be inside the human history and not outside it. And he who does not practice his freedom is outside history, not inside it, and consequently, he is dead, and rather he is defeated and dead at the same time. Based on this, our study is going to address the following questions:

1. How can we establish a firm foundation for democracy?
2. Is democracy inconsistent with our society and values?
3. How can we practice democratic life, and what are the boundaries of this practice?

The research question:

What does man do when he finds out that values have become worthless, after they were live and effective in the times of the ancestors? And how can he react when he sees his troubled civilization dying and being eaten by the ants and mites which dig deep in its roots, and the locusts that eat up the green leaves and branches, forcing the birds to abandon their nests and resort in despair to its silence and grief? And when man, who has become a true witness of his time and people, looks around and feels shocked by the chaos and disorder in everything and by the fact that everything has been left to the scorpions of meanness and treachery, the dogs of stealing and robbing, and the monkeys of opportunism... is not he then forced to scream and warn, or to fall into the abyss in which he loses the will to live and the ability to choose, take the initiative and act freely? And is it surprising then to find him drowning in despair and

pessimism, or sadistic in futility and sarcasm, or opening his arms to death in which he seeks the last meaning after everything has lost its meaning."³²

After this saddening text, received from old Babel and interpreted by the person who reported it, we ask the question: Does not this text truly reflect the sorrows, pains and tragedies of the Mesopotamians before and after Christ, along with what is going on right now? And the fear is that this may spill over to affect the civilization of Greater Syria, the Nile Valley and the Arabian Peninsula. That is because the crows are still hovering in the sky of the east and are not satisfied yet with the bodies of tens of thousands of victims in Iraq. Moreover, they are inviting the bats of the night to suck the blood of the rest who are still alive, and they are also instigating their monkeys in the region to shout loudly with panic and fear over the project of democracy in the broader Middle East. And because such a democracy can not be but pregnant with thousands of labours, bleeding the lives of the people of this region, and because the midwife wants a baby without a mother, the mother has already been sentenced to death so that the baby will be exactly as the guardian wishes. Hence the baby was called creative chaos; the fornicator has changed his baby's name from democracy to creative chaos, and when new babies come, they will carry such names as civil war, sectarian war, ethnic war and ethnic cleansing...

Based on this, we have the right to be fearful, angry and skeptical about everything going on around us. This, however, should stimulate us to seriously think about the response to the schemes of death and obliteration. In my opinion, we have only one choice, namely the need to activate democratic life in our society, social system, establishments, families, schools and universities in order to build the free and creative man who does not accept to be a crow, a bat, a monkey, a thief or an incestuous fornicator, and who can be entrusted with himself, his family and society. Moreover, the humanity of man can not be achieved except in the shadows of freedom without which it is impossible for this man to have a creative mind. That is because if you are defeated at home you can not go out to achieve victory. That is why we have to think very seriously if we were to build a free society. Such a society can be built by the free and not by slaves. And to achieve that, we depend on our youth and on enhancing the values of equality, freedom, democracy and justice in the most important establishment, namely the family. A good family means a good society and vice versa. In the second place comes the role of the school, the teacher, and the curriculum which should solely aims at building and boosting the personality of the student in a way that makes him balanced and dynamic in the direction that enhances his positive role in his society. Utmost attention should also be paid to universities and academic establishments. The overriding objective of these establishments should be science and how to convey it to the youth so that the university will become a beacon for culture, civilization, thought and democracy for other establishments in society. If the university did not assume the responsibility of democracy, who would then assume the responsibility of such a rich human knowledge? If the university youth did not try democracy and freedom, then who would do?

Literature review:

There is a huge amount of studies that approached democracy as a problematic human phenomenon whose final formula has not been determined yet, although some theories have unequivocally stated that there are certain formulas that can be suitable

to all people, as it is the case with social development theories. A large number of these studies, on the other hand, agree that Arab societies have not known democracy yet, and have never tried it before. This is what Fahmi Jad'aan affirmed in his study "*We and Democracy: an Enlightening Perspective*" when he said:

The twentieth century in the Arab world did not know but misleading lights and fake promises. The calls for democracy did not find a hospitable environment in the Arab circles... . And most dangerous of all is the fact that there was no one who could clearly express the meanings of the concept of democracy.

The second study, entitled "*The March of Democracy*" by Imam Abdulfattah Imam, concluded that in order to have real democracy in a society it is not enough to have a collection of democratic principles and important thoughts in the constitution of that society, but rather it is the actual practice by the people of these thoughts, principles and rights that really constitutes democracy.

The third study was issued by the centre of Arab unity studies under the title "*Democracy and Democratic Progress in the Arab Land*". The study, which was prepared by a number of researchers, dealt with the issue of democracy in the Arab region as a thought and as a political experience. The study analyzed the process which boosts or hinders the establishment of democracy. Such analysis was conducted in a practical way that avoided generalizations and conclusions which are not based on sample studies.

The fourth study by a number of researches was also issued by the centre of Arab unity studies with the title "*Democracy Inside Parties in the Arab Countries*". The study dealt with the democratic practice inside Arab political parties. There was also a special study issued by the Kuwaiti A'alam Alma'arifah under the title "*The Importance of Democracy*". The study was prepared by Lamar Biadh and translated by Shawki Jalal. All these studies concluded that democracy cannot be achieved under poverty, hunger, deprivation and the absence of social justice, for political democracy cannot be separated from social democracy. In short, there are many studies about democracy, the majority of which agree that democracy for Arab countries is no more than empty slogans.

Objective of the study:

The study aims at affirming the problematic aspect of democracy as a human and social phenomenon which may deviate from its course at any stage of its development. The study also aims at substantiating these claims with the suitable proofs. On the other hand, the study points out that the seeds of democracy are not available yet in Arab societies, and that waffling about something does not mean it exists, but rather it may express fear towards its existence. The study finally tries to analyse the practical aspect of democracy as practiced by the youth, who are supposed to be the most prepared and the most willing to practice democracy.

Significance of the study:

The youth represent the most important age group in our Arab societies, which are considered young because the youth constitute the largest section of them in comparison with other age groups. That is why it is important to focus our attention on this group as a way to ensure the development of society. Development in a society

cannot be achieved without its youth. And the youth cannot be the pioneers of such development unless they were able and allowed to practice freedom and democracy and to be creative in their lives through the main societal roles they perform as a rational force, as parents and as sources of knowledge. In other words, the youth represent the wealth of the society, and that wealth can either be productive and invested properly or wasted and unproductive. In a nutshell, I believe that democracy is needed now more than ever, especially for the youth.

Questions raised by the study:

1. Can democracy be described as a fully-grown phenomenon with defined dimensions?
2. When a certain society achieves democracy, does this mean that democracy has been firmly established and cemented in this society?
3. Will the democracy intended to import for Arab societies be the democracy that the people of this region need?
4. What is the relation between the family, school and university on the one hand, and the democratic practice of the youth on the other hand?

Limits of the study:

The study was limited to a sample of university students from all specialties including scientific and theoretical ones.

Research methodology :

The study sample included 300 male and female students. The sample was taken randomly and adopted the following variables: specialty, gender, social upbringing, and education, in order to identify the relation between these variables and the democratic practice.

Table (1)
The youth and the democratic practice
Sample taken from the Syrian university youth

1- Gender:

Gender	Number	Percentage %
Male	165	55
Female	135	45
Total	300	100

The study adopts the analytical descriptive method to study the reality and precisely describe it quantitatively and qualitatively with a view to uncover this reality and the nature of the relations inside the studied phenomenon.

The adopted methodology belongs to the applied field research methodology as far as the premise is concerned, and to the descriptive survey methodology as far as the approach is concerned. The study uses the questionnaire technique. The research society is the society of Damascus University with a random sample from different specialties.

The aim of distributing the questionnaire on different faculties was to assess the response of the students and their cooperation with such field studies. Based on the statements of those who distributed the questionnaires, we noticed that students from different faculties were very cooperative, even excited to answer the questions. Even

more, some of the polled students asked for the questionnaire to be developed so that it can address deeper issues related to the reality of the students, what they aspire to achieve and the obstacles in their way.

Tools of the study:

A questionnaire was designed for the university students with 27 questions. The questions were about general knowledge related to the research and the information which can help identify the limits of the democratic practice of the youth and the experiences they went through in the family, school and university, and the way they view this university.

The theoretical framework of the study:

The theoretical framework of the study includes the definition of the historical origins of democracy along with the theoretical patterns explaining them. It also presents some previous studies about democracy in the Arab society.

Historical origins of democracy:

"Democracy is a Greek term made up of two words: "Demos" which means people, and "Kratos" which means authority. So democracy means authority of the people, i.e. a governing system that is derived from the people as opposed to the individual and oligarchic governing systems. The word was transferred from Greek to all other languages whether old or new" ⁴. This democracy was not a Greek luxury, but rather it was born from the womb of social conflict and violence during the feudal Greek age. That conflict became so tense that the conflicting parties agreed on some kind of a social contract whereby they selected someone they all trust to put the regulations for the relations between members of the society. Everybody should know these regulations which clearly identify the rights and responsibilities of every member of the society. They also identify the parties responsible for giving orders which everybody should adhere to. Moreover, they are responsible for resolving private conflicts and punishing criminals and felons. It is the birth of laws which everybody has participated in making. These laws enabled the Greek to defeat the Berbers in a way that Herodotus believed to be the victory of the warrior citizens who had no master but law over the warriors of the Persian Empire who were governed by one man, and whose only motives were interest and fear.

Democracy then is a system based on law, which constitutes the foundation of political and social organization. This law is considered as a text written by a group of people who are guided by rational thinking, and is to be taken for granted by those who will be subject to it. Law should be respected and may undergo some adjustments which should be monitored carefully. And it may be the most important political invention of Classic Greece. It is law that gives spirit to the civilization, be it a democratic civilization or a monarchy. ⁵

The Greek philosopher Aristotle described the Greek civilization as a natural place for human concentration when he said "the objective and meaning of civilization for the human being is to live as he should do" ⁶. But this kind of living is only possible to achieve in a civilization as an organization which is not based merely on force or on temporary interests. It is useful here to point out that the Greek regarded humanity as a species, "but it is considered the most refined amongst animals, for it has the sensation of animals and the mental capacity of gods. Within this species, nature may

produce some beings without any godly characteristics who, of course, will be enslaved. It is thoughtful for the human being to wish to be a god, while it is completely wrong to wish to be an animal. But the basis to achieve virtue is justice which is based on the rule of law. In other words, the humanity of man cannot be achieved except within a just system.

Athens has known and freely chosen democracy, so it achieved the law-guaranteed citizenship for everyone. But Tosidid believed that the democratic system is on its way towards disintegrating and being unable to manage wars and handle internal affairs. However, Tosidid and his successors realized that democracy is the best governing system because it guarantees equality in front of law and it also guarantees personal freedom. Democracy requires constant attention from all citizens because it cannot last unless the chosen leaders keep assessing and considering their decisions. It is a freedom system which can lead to big projects, and it collapses when these projects/establishments are no longer guided by reason. It is a system that should be based on a considering mind that not only plans for wise strategies, but also intends no harm or discrimination against any group in society." ⁷

However, not everybody in Athens had the same attitude towards democracy. Some were strongly opposed to it, like Plato, who called for the individual governing system of the philosopher. But this attitude was met with strong criticism from Aristotle's students. Aristotle, who was then the spokesman of the Greek civil heritage, stressed that it was wrong to fully attribute unlimited power to one part of the social system. He considered the idea of dividing citizens to three classes one of which has absolute authority over the others to be diametrically opposed to the meaning of civilization. Law is the only master for citizens. And the role of law is to ensure freedom for everyone, to establish justice by punishing the criminal according to his/her crime and to return to everyone what was illegally taken from them. ⁸

Democracy was developed by the time it was transferred from Athens to Rome, which knew how to put the ideas into reality... and how to establish effective and undoubted establishments. After the great progress which the Roman Empire witnessed, it became a unique political mixture in human history, for it was a mixture of monarchy, republic and empire. And the great political issues were:

1. The constitution and the question of succession in the empire.
2. The structure of the authority of the empire itself.
3. Expansion of the empire and the fragility of the Roman peace.

The Roman Empire finally collapsed despite all the diversity it has known in its political and economic options, and despite its legal excellence. This collapse was largely attributed to the emergence of Christianity and then Islam. These two monotheistic religions will have a great impact on human history till now. The thing that can constitute the basis and the foundation for democratic relations in Christianity and Islam is their call for justice and equality among people. And if we consider some Islamic teachings, we will notice that Islam has mostly stressed the importance of democracy, as was mentioned in the Holy Koran "consult them in all matters, and when you decide something rely on God", and also in "They make decisions after consulting each other". Democracy was also stressed in the Prophet tradition, as in the Hadith "When anyone of you come across an immoral action, he must change it by his hand (i.e. by force), and if he could not then he must change it by his tongue, and

if he could not then he must change it by his heart, and that is the least possible". The Prophet (peace be upon him) has also said "The best kind of Jihad is a word of truth to be said to an unjust prince". He also said " When you see my nation afraid to say to the unjust that he is unjust, then it is the end for them". These Islamic teachings had an effective role in spreading Islam as ethics, culture and as a political system.

To the same effect, Abo Baker Alseddiq said "I have been chosen to be your leader, though I am not the best among you. So when you believe that I am in the right, support me. And when you believe that I am in the wrong, correct me. Obey me as long as I obey God's orders, and when I disobey God then you are not to obey me". A member of the public told Omar once "When we see you diverting from the right path, we will correct you by our swords. Omar then thanked God that he found among his people someone who is ready to correct Omar by his sword".

"These democratic principles and premises in Christianity and Islam were the cause behind their victory, spread and supremacy. This, however, did not last for long as the principle of fraternity had changed to the that of dominance, and this was the cause for the fragmentation and division which our countries are still suffering from"⁹.

Democracy was born in Europe from the womb of injustice, tyranny, anarchy and the burning of people alive. It was achieved by returning to the Greek classical and philosophical literature and to the Roman political literature, and by believing that the individual is the criterion for all names.

It is not possible, of course, in such a brief research to go into further details. What is important to stress, however, is that after achieving victory for democracy, this victory must be protected, otherwise it would be very easy to defeat it and even abolish it, and turn it into a mantle to warm the dictators in their cold winter, and then they get rid of it as soon as they achieve victory. Democracy, therefore, is something to be taken and not given. It is the outcome of long-term processes, and it has exceeded all political forms the world has known before getting to the point where governance was put under the supervision and the control of citizens"¹⁰.

Democracy is a human experience which has proved its efficiency and its right to survive. It was accompanied by many other systems, all of which have disappeared or are about to. This confirms the notion of the English philosopher Herbert Spencer (1820- 1903), who said that the conflict for survival is not a law to applied only on living creatures or in the field of biology; but rather it is also applicable to the field of political and social systems. In other words, many of the political experiences in human history which did not prove their efficiency have become unfit to survive, and even if they survived, they had to wrap themselves with the name of democracy.

Democracy then is the experience of man for being a man, and not for being Greek, western. Arab or Indian... etc.

Democracy in the European western thought:

"Human societies have known many systems, the most violent and unjust amongst them was the slavery system, which has abused man horribly. Slavery was a real obstacle in the way of democracy because they are two contradicting systems"¹¹. While democracy has respect for human rights, slavery does not respect but masters

and those in higher positions. And if we consider all religious and social movements, we will find that all of them have achieved victory in the name of freedom and democracy. A strong intellectual movement at the beginning of the eighteenth century came to liberate people from injustice and tyranny. The first proponents of this movement were Montesquieu (1689- 1755), Voltaire (1694- 1778) and J. J. Rousseau. In his book "*The Spirit of Laws*", Montesquieu lashed out at all the aspects of slavery, refuting the three principles through which Roman legislators had established the slavery system, namely war, selling and birth."¹²

The transition from one social political system to another was not easy, but it took a long time to achieve a full understanding of the current system and the consequences of its practices on people. This transition was often realized through a violent, bloody conflict as in the case of France, England, Russia and probably in all parts of Europe. People were of two different opinions regarding the issue of absolute monarchy which is based on ideology, and in which worldly powers are derived from heavenly powers, i.e. the king is accountable to God and not to his people. The first opinion advocated absolute governance and praised it, as did Thomas Hobbes in England and Jacques Bossuet in France. The second opinion called for revolution against tyranny, as did John Locke and then John Stuart in England, and Montesquieu and Rousseau in France. The most important notion in the second opinion was that of the social contract, which was the basis on which the state was built in defense of individualism against absolutism. It is the tool that theorists behind the notion of the social contract have developed in order to reject the allegations of the religious notion that gave the ruler a holy stature. It also posited that all people were born equal in front of God and natural law, which governs all people starting from the king to ordinary people.

The problem of freedom and democracy has stirred violent argument within European circles. Many European intellectuals explained freedom in its positive and negative meanings. The French intellectual Helvetius (1715- 1777) explained his understanding of freedom by saying "A freeman is someone who does not suffer from shackles or fetters, and is not locked in a prison, and unlike a slave, he is not to be intimidated by the fear from punishment. But your inability to fly as a falcon, or to swim as a whale does not mean that your freedom is incomplete".¹³

John Locke was also interested in the subject of freedom. And he was the one who achieved victory for the people in their conflict with the king, for human freedom was his first preoccupation. "I believe man has lived completely free during his natural life, and people were totally equal. Locke and others established the second opinion in European thought which included the two main principles for democracy, namely freedom and equality"¹⁴. Jean Jacques Rousseau (1712- 1778) was the first one to point out the positive meaning of freedom. He quoted Locke's notion that all people were free, and it was the first sentence in his famous book "*The Social Contract*", in which he said "man was born free, but still we see him chained in shackles everywhere".

After John Locke, Jean Jacques Rousseau came to give freedom more splendor and beauty by asserting that freedom, according to him, had no negative meaning. To this effect he said "Freedom for the individual means being able to choose by his own free will, and not to be subject to the will of another person. And it depends to a greater extent on not subjecting others to my own will. With general freedom, nobody has the

right to do anything that the freedom of others prohibited. True freedom never destroys itself. That is why freedom cannot be achieved without justice. And it cannot be achieved without laws.... A free people does not obey but laws, and by virtue of laws, they do not obey other people..... Real freedom is the obedience to the law which we commit ourselves to.¹⁵ "The German philosopher Kant believed that freedom is an essential part of man which he cannot give up. And when he loses it, he loses his humanity".¹⁶

Kant has identified the positive meaning of freedom more precisely than his predecessors, and that was through his moral philosophy which depended on three rules:

1. The rule of generalization: which demanded from the individual while behaving in a certain way to keep in mind the possibility of generalizing this behaviour so that it will become a general law for all people.
2. The rule of teleology which treats humanity inside him..... and that is the basis of human dignity.
3. The rule of freedom which is drawn from the previous two rules..... This rule is the most important among these three rules as it will directly lead us to the notion of freedom, for we are subject to law only because it is the necessary expression of our nature and because we are rational creatures. Law does not come out of a whim or inclination.... The ideal society, according to Kant, is a group of free men, each one of them works as end himself.¹⁷ According to John Stuart Mill "Development cannot be achieved except through freedom, which is the basis for happiness, progress and democratic governance"¹⁸. Freedom for John Stuart Mill, becomes all the important when he said "If all people agree on one opinion, with the exception of one man, then the people do not have the right to ignore the opinion of this man, in the same manner that this man has no right to ignore humanity if he was able to, even when this opinion has no value except to the person who believes in it".¹⁹

There is no doubt that the western heritage of freedom and democracy is very rich and diverse. But the question worth asking here is: has western democracy been reduced to human heritage only that can be referred to in important books and theories, and which is on its way to be replaced by another system which is similar to what Alan Tourin said in reply to a question "what is democracy?". He said democracy is a new idea..... However, no matter how reassuring this idea may be for westerners, it should worry them too. That is because the competitive and open political market does not see its identity in democracy more than the market economy constitutes an industrial society itself. Therefore, it is possible to say in both cases that an open system, political or economic, is the necessary condition, but not enough on its own, to achieve democracy or democratic development"²⁰. The question put by Allan Tourin is very important, objective and problematic, too. The question, which comes from inside the western experience, is full of justifications and internal questions which deserve to be answered in order to be honest with one's self, to awaken the conscience and to be faithful to the western heritage which has identified freedom and drawn its steps for it to bring great modernization accompanied by bitter human suffering because of the deviation of democracy and the absence of freedom, and because some people wanted freedom and life for themselves only and not for others. So where is the western democracy, which I believe is on its way to disappear and change. Allan Tourin did not miss this idea when he said "there is no democracy in the reality of the

other without the ability to freely choose the rulers and without a multiparty political system. However, it is not possible to talk about democracy if the only choice for voters was the oligarchy, the army or the government candidates".²¹

Allan Tourin's book "*What Is Democracy*" gives the impression that there is real fear for democracy which can be seen when he says "The democracy that has been weakened in this way can be destroyed either by an enslaving upper force, or by chaos and violence and civil war from within, or by itself through the monitoring practiced over the authority by the oligarchy or the parties which accumulate economic and political tools to impose its choice on the citizens who have turned into mere voters"²². Democracy is simply the system in which the majority recognizes the rights of the minorities, because it accepts that the majority of today could become a minority tomorrow.... It is the recognition of the rights of individuals and groups to be the actors of their history.

Practicing democracy:

I would like to start with an important notion for the German philosopher Hegel about his definition of freedom as self-determination. It is the same notion that depended itself on Kant's notion about autonomy of the will which puts a rule for itself to follow so that freedom for man will be to obey himself or his whole will. So man obeys the law which he participated in making, he will be actually obeying himself. And when he disobeys the law, with possible punishment, he will be asking for punishment for himself. In this way, the behaviour of the individual becomes a miniature of democracy, i.e. the ability to rule one's self by one's self. Political democracy can be achieved when the people rule itself by itself, only then will it be free.

Democratic culture is necessary and extremely important to enhance the values and practice of democracy. Therefore, there are three related and overlapping levels for democracy. The first one is democracy as system for values, with democratic values including freedom, justice, participation, equality, political and intellectual tolerance, accepting difference and pluralism, peaceful change of power based on the will of the people, respect for human rights and rule of law.

The second level is democracy as a method to practice power and organize the relation between the state and the society. The practice of democracy is organized by a number of legal frameworks, political and establishment structures and procedural rules. And here appear many elements in the structure of the democratic system related to the organizing of the relation between powers and the nature of the political system, the voting system and the structure of the parliament...

The third level considers democracy as a way of life for society. And the focus here is on the availability of the values and practices of democracy in the society, as in the family, school, university, party, union, ...²⁴.

Researchers agreed that the democratic practice has the following important characteristics:

- Social participation and equality in this participation.
- Working hard to understand the feelings and interests of others.
- The individual should accept the others to be equal to him,
- If a conflict occurred between two individuals, it must not turn into violence.

- The individual must accept conflict which may be inevitable in some cases.²⁵

The commitment by the individual to these characteristics or some of them indicates the acceptance of democracy and applying it to himself and to others. And since the formation of the personality of the individual is affected by the social upbringing, and since this character is what directs the behaviour of adults in different situations, and given the fact that democratic behaviour is one aspect of the behaviour of the personality, it is then impossible to separate democratic behaviour from other aspects of behaviour. Democratic and authoritative behaviour, therefore, grows up with the individual since its childhood and during the different stages of his growing in the process of social upbringing, and it becomes part of the personality during adulthood.

The role of the family in creating and forming the democratic behaviour:

A number of researchers agree that the family has a very important role in teaching the children this kind of behaviour. Stressing the importance of the family's role is not a new trend, it goes back to the time of the Greek, who focused on the family when they wanted to build a society of free people. They constructed an educational system which they called the system of child inspectors within families. Penalties were given to parents who utter immoral words in front of their children. And even in old China, Confucius attributed the corruption of the government to that of the family and its inability to teach the values of virtue, love and mutual good".²⁶

Education and its effect in forming the democratic practice:

The school is a social institution that society chooses to take his role in bringing up the children and preparing them to be productive members in the society, and to contribute to its stability. A good number of researches studied the relation between the components of the educational process and the democratic behaviour. Educational establishments, especially the school, come in the second place after the family in bringing up the children, for school is a second father for the student. The behaviour of students inside the class plays an important role in forming the democratic or authoritative behaviour of these students. The taught material as well can determine the democratic behaviour or other types of behaviour for the students. A study conducted by Muu- Wore found out that the democratic behaviour of the teacher prepares the individual to have satisfaction, creativity, independence, emotional stability and social tendencies. Authoritative behaviour of the teacher, on the other hand, will lead to demotivation on the part of the students, a decrease in the ability to focus, an increase in their internal tension, and a tendency towards anger and revolution."²⁷

It is possible to say, based on this, that democracy cannot be achieved with illiteracy and ignorance, for democratic behaviour is a refined and creative human behaviour, and that is opposed to illiteracy and ignorance.

Why choosing university youth as a sample²⁸:

Human societies and their researchers, especially in the field of social upbringing, have disagreed on the issue of the youth as an age group in terms of the conception and its meanings. The question asked was: at what age does youth start and finish? The international year for the youth in 1985 considered the youth, especially the university youth, to be the age group of 15-25 years. And it is clear that European standards have been used in this classification as it is rare for the youth in our society

to go to university at the age of fifteen. In his book "*The Science of Language*", Altha'aliby has identified the youth stage to be between thirty to forty years old. And French social scientist Bourdieu believes that there is a general tendency within society to consider the limits between age groups as arbitrary. We do not know when the youth ends in order for old age to start, because the criteria used to characterize each age group are affected by social, biological, psychological factors....etc. These factors indicate that it is society that identifies the youth stage according to its circumstances. For example, societies which are at war tend to set a low age for the youth in order to recruit people and send them to war fronts. And societies suffering from population increase will do the opposite. There is no doubt that there are many social, biological and psychological factors which have different effects on that age group which is under huge social, psychological and biological pressures. Therefore, if the youth do not get enough attention and care, their future will be vulnerable to danger and confusion, especially that they are affected by rapid changes in attitudes and trends.... . What is important here is the youth not as an individual case but as a social one and how their social belonging could affect them and vice versa. The role played by the youth is a very important one, and if it was not, then the substitute would be the unnatural case or the sickly one. That is because the youth and the generation cycle are what stimulates static social life and revives the social body, especially the university youth, who are supposed to be greatly affected by internal and external factors, or what is called the historical problem, in a way that gives them more awareness besides self and social responsibility.

The reason that precipitated student revolutions in many parts of the world was the democracy that was lost from universities, parties and states everywhere. It is the democracy that was lost from great monopolistic capitalism, vassal intrusive capitalism, and lost utopian socialism; the democracy that was lost from the house, the field, the factory and the school. Democracy, which was the reason to fight Nazism and fascism, was lost over two generations; it is the murdered dream under victory...²⁹

Ghali Shukri insisted on the fact that democracy had been lost on the world level. I also believe that it is still lost, and perhaps this is more certain now than before. Furthermore, we can say that democracy is sick on the world level to the point of a clinical death. And if cloning scientists do not perform an operation to clone the remains of the cells which are not affected by the chronic disease of democracy worldwide, then it is inevitable that democracy will die and will be buried by her children, in particular by the market economy, globalization and multinational corporations in which there is no place for human values and conceptions.

Based on this, we wanted to perform a humble attempt to study our university youth with a focus on the concept of democracy and its meanings. The presence of democracy is a healthy case, whereas it is a sickly case when it is absent, and each case has its causes and consequences.

**THE YOUTH AND THE DEMOCRATIC PRACTICE
SAMPLE OF SYRIAN UNIVERSITY YOUTH**

1- General Characteristics For Sample Members:

• **Gender:**

Table (1) shows the distribution of the sample members according to gender:

Gender	Number	Percentage %
Male	165	55
Female	135	45
Total	300	100

Table (1) shows the distribution of the 300- member sample on the basis of gender. The sample included 165 males with a percentage of 55%, and 135 females with a percentage of 45%. The 5% difference between the males and the females is meager and insignificant.

• **Place of residence:**

Table (2) shows the distribution of the sample members according to the place of residence:

Place of Residence	In Damascus		Out of Damascus		Total
	Countryside	City	Countryside	City	
Number	68	106	46	80	300
Percentage					100

The table shows that members of the studied sample, who are students at Damascus University, came from Damascus itself and from outside too. Those who live in the countryside constituted 39.1% of the specimen, while those who live in the city constituted 60.9%. Those who live in the countryside in Syrian governorates other than Damascus were 36.5%, and the percentage of those who live in the city all over the country was 63.5%. This means that the majority of university students come from the city. The percentages of those who live in the countryside inside and outside Damascus were very close; 39.1% for Damascus countryside and 36.5% for the countryside of other Syrian cities.

• **Age:**

Table (3) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their ages:

Age	Number	Percentage %
Less than 18	0	0
18-20	139	46.3
21-23	152	50.7
24 and above	9	3
Total	300	100

Table (3) shows the distribution of the sample members in different age groups. It shows that none of the sample members is under 18 years old. It also shows that the age group 18-20 constitutes 46.3% of the sample; and the age group 21-23 constitutes 50.7%. The percentage of those aged 24 and above was 3% only. This, in fact, is a positive sign, meaning that students are finishing their studies within reasonable time, for the percentage of those aged 24 and above was very small and has statistical significance.

- **Faculty:**

Table (4) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their faculties:

Faculty	Number	Percentage %
Faculty of Letters	173	57.7
Law	32	10.7
Medicine	27	9
Pharmacy	18	6
Engineering	27	9
Economics	23	7.7
Total	300	100

- **Department:**

Table (5) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their departments:

Department	Number	Percentage %
English literature	29	9.7
French literature	22	7.3
Arabic literature	18	6
History	14	4.7
Geography	21	7
Philosophy	11	3.7
Sociology	33	11
Media	16	5.3
Librarianship	9	3
Economics	23	7.7
Medicine	27	9
Law	32	10.7
Engineering	27	9
Pharmacy	18	6
Total	300	100

- **Academic year:**

Table (6) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their academic year:

Academic year	Number	Percentage %
First year	35	11.7
Second year	96	32
Third year	118	39.3
Fourth year	49	16.3
Master	2	0.7
PhD	0	0
Total	300	100

Table (4) shows the distribution of the sample members on different faculties. It also shows that students of the faculty of letters constitute the biggest part of the 300-member sample. Table (5) shows the different faculties included in the sample, namely faculty of letters with its different departments, faculty of economics, faculty of medicine, engineering, pharmacy and law. The sample also included different academic years as shown in table (6).

- **The educational level of the parents:**

Table (7) shows the distribution of the sample members according to the educational level of the parents.

Educational level of the parents	Number	Total
Low	129	43
Medium	106	35.3
High	65	21.7
Total	300	100

The table shows that 129 members of the sample come from a family with a low educational level for the parents, and these members form 43% of the sample; a very high percentage if we agree that the majority of the sample member parents should have a medium level of education as they are supposed to come from the generation which the government has provided with good chances of education and schooling. But it seems that reality on the ground is not a reflection of external conceptions.

- **Number of family members:**

Table (8) shows the distribution of the sample members according to the number of family members:

Number of family members	Number	Percentage %
Only child	29	9.7
1-3	117	39
4-7	113	44.3
7 or more	21	7
Total	300	100

Table (8) can be read in relation to family planning and the inclination of sample member parents to have a small nuclear family. For example, the percentage of families with an only child was about 10% with 29 cases. This shows that modern generations are moving towards family planning which in turn signifies a shift in thinking in our society from traditional to modern thinking. This is also proved by the fact that small families (with 1-3 members) constituted 39% of the sample with 117 members of the sample. Those who belonged to medium-size families were 133 with a percentage of 44.3%. Moreover, figures of table (8) are connected with those of table (2), which shows the place of residence whether in the city or in the countryside. Families in the countryside are still big and not affected by family planning, whereas in the city families tend to be smaller and planned.

- **Place of residence during study:**

Table (9) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their current place of residence:

Current residence	Number	Percentage %
With parents	145	48.3
With father's relatives	27	9
With mother's relative	0	0
Halls of residence	94	31.3
Renting a house with friends	32	10.7
Other	2	0.7
Total	300	100

Most of the sample members live with their parents with a percentage of 48.3%. None of them live with relatives of the mother. And 31.3% live in halls of residence while 10.7% rent a house with friends.

The figures of this table is a true representation of the social and economic reality of the society, and a reflection of the different capabilities and incomes. It also shows the continuity of some traditional social connections for the percentage of those who live with relatives of their fathers was 9% with 27 cases of the sample. The fact that none of the sample members live with relatives of the mother means that our society is still dominated by connections of the father rather than by those of the mother, a telling comment on the reality of social change.

What is remarkable is that 94 male and female students of the sample live in halls of residence with a percentage of 31.3%. This is significant as the government works to provide halls of residence for students, which makes it easier for them to get into university.

- **Marital status:**

Table (10) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their marital status.

Marital status	Number	Percentage %
Single	298	99.3
Married	2	0.7
Total	300	100

The table shows that 99.3% of the sample members are single, and they belong to the age group 18-24. The positive side to this is that the age for marriage has increased, and that getting married at an early age is no longer preferable especially for females, at least for university youth.

2- **Data About the Democratic Practice Inside Educational Establishments:**

Table (11) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their views on pre-university democracy:

pre-university democracy	number	Percentage
Yes	198	66
No	102	34
Total	300	100

Table (11) shows to what extent democracy is practiced in pre-university establishments, especially in primary and secondary schools. 198 members of the sample replied with "yes", with a percentage of 66% of the sample; while 102 members replied with "no", with a percentage of 34%. I believe that these numbers reflect the reality, as methods of practicing democratic life differ from one educational establishment to the other despite the fact that the absolute majority of these schools are run by the government.

Table (12) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their practice for democracy during pre-university life:

Electing the following students	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage	Total
Leader of group (Pioneers)	210	70	90	30	300
Head of class	77	25.7	223	74.3	300
Head of school	77	25.7	223	74.3	300
leaders of Revolution Youth	57	19	243	81	300

The table shows that 70% of the sample used to participate in the democratic electing of the leader of their group, while 30% did not perform such role. 74.3% of the sample said that they did not get the chance to practice democracy in electing the head of the class. The same percentage said that students had no say in electing the head of the school. Furthermore, the percentage of those who did not take part in electing leaders of the revolution youth was 81%, while 57 members of the sample said they did take part in that process with a

percentage of 19%. These numbers are significant as the Pioneer Organisation is supposed to have an educational and organizational role in shaping the personality of the pupil, with its most important role being to enlighten students about the practice of democracy. The same thing applies to the Revolution Youth, where the numbers were disappointing in this most vital stage of life for teaching democratic practice.

Table (13) shows the distribution of the sample members according to the view that university is an oasis for freedom:

University is an oasis for freedom	Number	Percentage
Yes	191	63.7
No	109	36.3
Total	300	100

When asked if the university was an oasis for freedom, 191 members of the sample replied "yes" with a percentage of 63.7%, which is a very good one. On the other hand, 109 of the sample members replied "no" with a percentage of 36.3% of the sample; which proves the existence of contradicting views towards the university. The university is also the best among other establishments of society, especially that the youth who come from different social environments will see the university as the freest place.

Table (14) shows the distribution of the sample members according to certain choices:

Choosing the following freely	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage	Total
University	210	70	90	30	300
College	269	89.7	31	10.3	300
Department	197	65.7	103	34.3	300

The table shows that the majority of the students (210 students, 70% of the sample) have chosen the university of their free wills. As for choosing the faculty (theoretical or practical), the percentage was even higher (89%). And 65.7% of the sample have freely chosen their departments, which proves the credibility of the students when they said they had chosen the university and the faculty of their own free wills. However, the percentage for the departments was less than that of the university or the faculty, and this is related to the capacity of the faculties which may not allow students to achieve their ambitions in choosing the specialty they prefer. That is why the percentage of those who said they had not chosen their departments freely was 34.3%, which is a very reasonable one given the fact that such selection is made by the computer and based on many factors such as GPA, the desired specialty...etc.

Table (15) shows the distribution of the sample members based on the view that regulations of the university are democratic:

University regulations are democratic	Number	Percentage%
Yes	241	80.3
No	59	19.7
Total	300	100

The table shows that 80.3% of the sample believe that university regulations are democratic, which is a very high percentage and a positive indicator.

Table (16) shows the distribution of the sample members based on the view that they feel free inside lecture rooms:

Feeling free inside lecture rooms	Number	Percentage%
Yes	195	65
No	105	35
Total	300	100

Table (16) shows that 195 members of the sample (a percentage of 65%) believe they feel free in lectures, while the percentage of those who do not feel this freedom was 35%, which is a significant percentage and needs further investigating.

Table (17) shows the distribution of the sample members based on how free they feel inside exam rooms:

Feel free inside exam rooms	Number	Percentage%
Yes	69	33
No	231	77
Total	300	100

The table shows that 77% of the students do not feel free inside exam rooms due to many disturbances that occur during the exam such as the bad conduct of some domineering invigilators. This is a serious indication as the absence of psychological security during the exam will badly affect the performance of students and it may be behind the failure of a hard-working student. A careful look at the matter shows that the managerial staff of the faculty is inadequate and cannot cope with the increasing number of students, which force the faculty to resort to janitors to help with invigilating. These janitors, however, may have developed inferiority complex because of the nature of their jobs, and may be tempted to make up for that inferiority when they take up a role inconsistent with their abilities and qualifications. That is why they may ask some students to change their positions, for instance, or take their papers away or they may favour the girls, as some members of the sample have said. It may even get worse if the invigilator starts using offensive language towards a student as that may disturb the whole room. On the other hand, 33% of the sample said they do feel free inside exam rooms, and the topic still needs further investigating.

Table (18) shows the distribution of the sample members based on how afraid they are of talking to their university teachers:

Afraid of talking to teachers	Number	Percentage %
Yes	197	65.7
No	93	34.3
Total	300	100

The table shows that 197 members of the sample are afraid of talking to their university teachers (a percentage of 65.7). Those who are not afraid were 34%. It is worth mentioning here that the figures of this table contradict those of table (16), which necessitates the need to study the reasons behind the students' fear of their teachers. It may be the result of some undemocratic practice of the teacher that makes the students afraid of talking to him, especially that democracy means freedom, equality and justice.

Table (19) shows the distribution of the sample members based on how satisfied they are with their curriculum:

Satisfied with the curriculum	Number	Percentage
Yes	183	61
No	117	39
Total	300	100

The table shows that 61% of the sample are satisfied with their curriculum, while 39% are not. Such percentages are credible when taken according to their real values and the distribution of students based on them.

Table (20) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their participation in electing student committees:

Electing student committees	Number	Percentage
Yes	179	59.7
No	121	40.3
Total	300	100

The table shows that 179 members of the sample have taken part in electing student committees with a percentage of 59.7%, while the percentage of those who have not participated was 40.3% which makes necessary to investigate the reasons behind their inability to elect the student committees which are supposed to support students psychologically and be on their side.

Table (21) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their participation in electing party leaders:

Electing party leaders	Number	Percentage
Yes	151	50.3
No	149	49.7
Total	300	100

The table shows that members of the sample are almost equally divided between those who participated in electing political party leaders and those who did not.

Table (22) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their participation in the parliamentary elections:

Participation in the parliamentary elections	Number	Percentage
Yes	111	37
No	189	63
Total	300	100

The table shows a low rate of participation in the parliamentary elections on the part of the university youth. 189 members of the sample said they did not take part in these elections, with a percentage of 63% which is a high percentage that poses questions about this passive attitude towards the parliament. Each citizen should take part in electing his representatives to the parliament as these representatives will be working for the good of these citizens.

Table (23) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their participation in municipal elections:

Participation in the municipal elections	Number	Percentage
Yes	77	25.7
No	223	74.3
Total	300	100

Figures of table (23) were even more disappointing where the percentage of those who do not practice this voting right was 74.3% which is a very high percentage and has its social and political significance.

Table (24) shows the distribution of the sample members according to the democracy of their institutions:

Are the following institutions democratic	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage	total
University	198	66	102	34	300
College	202	67.3	98	32.7	300
Department	220	73.3	80	26.7	300

The table shows that 198 members of the sample believe that there is democracy in the university, with a very good percentage of 66%, while 34% did not agree with that. The percentage of those who believe in the democracy of the college was close to that of the university at 67%. The same percentage

for the departments goes up to 73% which is a very positive sign that can be related to the fact that the close interaction between the students and their management creates positive relations between them. Other negative percentages were similar (34, 32.7, 26%) which proves the credibility of the data.

Table (25) shows the distribution of the sample members according to their sense of equality with other students:

Feel equality with other students	Number	Percentage
Yes	209	69.6
No	91	30.3
Total	300	100

The table shows that equality is widely felt amongst university students (69.6%), which is a very positive indicator that can be build upon.

Table (26) shows the distribution of the sample members based on their ability to criticize the following institutions:

Can criticize the following	Yes	Percentage	No	Percentage
Student Organisation	79	26.3	221	73.7
Faculty management	79	26.3	221	73.7
Department management	181	60.3	119	39.7
Teacher	73	24.3	227	75.7
Exam department	7	2.3	293	97.7

The table shows that the polled students believe that it is almost impossible to criticize the student Organisation, university management or the teacher. Worst of all was the fear to criticize the exam department where the percentage was as high as 97.7%. This is extremely significant as it shows that criticism is not allowed for student. On the other hand, 60.3% of the students said it was possible to criticize their departments, and that is consistent with what we said before about the democratic relation between students and their departments.

Table (27) shows the distribution of the sample members based on their ability to give their opinions regarding the curriculum:

Able to give opinion about curriculum	Number	Percentage
Yes	109	36.3
No	191	63.7
Total	300	100

The table shows that 63.7% of the sample said they did not participate in choosing their curricula – one of the three prerequisites of the educational process: the student, the university management and the contents of the curricula. There is no doubt that forcing educational material on the student

that does not satisfy his needs runs against his basic freedom. On the other hand, 36.3% of the sample replied with "yes", which is a reasonable percentage that denotes the diverse opinions of the students regarding their understanding of the content of academic freedom as one essential component of the democratic practice.

Table (28) shows the distribution of the sample members according to the practice of democracy within their families:

A democratic family	Number	Percentage
Yes	227	75.7
No	73	24.3
Total	300	100

The table shows that 75.7% of the sample believe that they have democratic families – a very high percentage that puts into question the honesty of the answers of the sample members. It is possible, therefore, that these answers are given to conceal other things – one of the general characteristics of the individual in our society – for it may be considered for a family to be described as lacking democracy. This is an epistemological problem that requires time in order to overcome it and learn how to distinguish between what is scientific and what is personal. However, it has to be said that the studied sample comes from enlightened circles if we are to distinguish between those who allow their sons and daughters to go to university and those who totally refuse that. Moreover, most of the university youth come from young families with reasonable educational level for the parents which may pave the way for a type of conduct different from the traditional one, and hence the above-mentioned percentage may have a lot of credibility. The other percentage, on the other hand, is also very plausible as it represents some traditional social groups which tend to dictate their wills on their children because they believe they are right.

Conclusions of the research:

1. Democracy is facing a crisis on the world level.
2. Democracy has never been absent from human societies as it is today.
3. Democracy has deviated in its fortress from the right path to become mostly dictatorships on a world level.
4. The Arab transition to democracy is still very slow and may take long time, especially that democracy is retreating worldwide.
5. There has been a lot of talk about democracy in Arab societies as if there is fear towards it.
6. Practicing democracy requires belief in its values such as justice, equality, education, health, culture awareness....
7. Democracy requires intellectual societies dominated by scientific thinking as it is a conception that requires practice – something that the East never tried before.

8. Education is a supplement to democracy, and the university youth aspires to it but needs some guidance.
9. The modern establishments of the society represent the womb for creating democracy within some internal and external conditions.

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