BURCAUCRACY AND ITS IMPACT ON SOCIAL INTEGRATION IN THE ARAB WORLD:

A DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS

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It has become a habit to think of bureaucracy in developing countries as an instrument for the implementation of policies designed by political leaders. But in reality and in the eyes of many people, bureaucrats are not merely agents of policy makers, and their authority and influence are not limited to executing instructions as they come down from their superiors. Furthermore, a large percentage of civil servants in developing societies are viewed by the masses as capricious referees who are supposed to assume their responsibilities according to formal rules but, in reality, have discretion and ability to interpret rules and give legitimacy to any decision taken by them.

This means that it is in the interest of every citizen to keep in mind two realities. The first one is the structure of the organizational system, which is based on formal rules, legal procedures, and the second reality is the individual who is in charge of implementing established laws according to his personal beliefs and style. In this sense, the weakness of institutions has increased the authority of individuals and allowed bureaucrats to assume the functions of intermediary between political leaders and simple citizens.

It is the imbalance between policy makers and policy executers in the Arab World, then, which created the unfavorable conditions for work. Once the state functionaries, in any Arab country, start to work in obscurity, lack of clarity, and vague strategies, it is very hard for them to overcome daily crises and meet the needs of their fellow citizens. What very often happens in such circumstances is that pressing problems determine the action to be taken without any prepared strategy. At that moment when becomes evident to the public that the state civil servants are forced to take hasty actions and they are involved in management by crises and not management by objectives, the citizens start to explore new avenues and informal ways of getting things done. This tendency goes along with the general trend of rendering services to citizens in exchange for other services and reciprocity.

This issue of connection and utilization of institutions by bureaucrats to achieve personal gains, brings us, undoubtedly, to the question of latency and subjectivity. It is obvious that state regulations, which are the basis for broad social actions, are not necessarily sufficient for solving many
complicated problems. Such deficiencies and flaws in the political systems make it necessary for Arab civil servants to establish good relations with their fellow citizens which could enable them to reduce pressures on the institutions of Arab states. If there is anything to be feared most and has a negative effect on the interests of state official and citizens, as well, it is the problem of stagnation.

What we are saying, in essence, is that the Arab civil servants are doing all that they can do to overcome the problems of immobilism and prove to the citizen and their superiors that they have been useful to everybody. The lack of conformity to state laws is general, and nobody in the hierarchy, from the top to the bottom, can claim that he has not misused his authority and influence. For this reason, it is very hard for anybody to judge the others and punish them for violating state laws, because that person who considers himself to be a judge has already abused his authority and, consequently, he is subject to a trial.

What we have just mentioned, indicates to us that the goals of Arab society are not clear and the methods of work do not correspond to the Arab realities. In this context, the poor performance of bureaucracy in the Arab world and its limited role in modernizing the Arab society are the natural results of the inability of Arab states to develop efficient mechanisms by which all Arab citizens would be mobilized to serve their national cause.

If we take a quick look at the crucial problems which have slowed the process of modernization and consolidation of Arab unity, we will notice that those anomalies stem mainly from:

- centralized authority
- lack of control and verification
- poor communication and coordination
- absence of training schools.
- failure to provide sufficient funds and talented individuals to achieve huge programs
- dependence on imported technology
- foreign interference and pressure from outside
- unwillingness to work and succeed as a team
- distrust
- fear of criticism and potential competitors
- sticking to narrow interests instead of defending broad interests
- nepotism
- lack of enthusiasm for initiative
- waste of time and energy
- resistance to change
All those malpractices show the negative aspect of bureaucracy in the Arab world. But such flaws can be found in any society at different stages of state building and, like their colleagues in developed countries, the Arab functionaries can upgrade their systems and get rid of the negative aspects of the public sector.

However, the dilemma of bureaucrats is that they have just discretionary powers. They do not have free hands in matters related to any radical change. It is in the name of public interests and loyalty to the Arab regimes, rationality, and credibility that they can influence the daily lives of the people and change the course of events. While it is true that bureaucrats may influence politicians and succeed in convincing them to accept their recommendations in all eventualities, the civil servants must consider themselves subordinates to the political leaders.

What is very important here is the fact that the Arab bureaucrats can exert pressure on the Arab leaders and participate with them in the process of policy making. In this sense, unlike academicians who are extremely busy with teaching and contributing to the knowledge of their students and unlike the military officers who are constantly concerned with questions of national security, the civil servants, with their managerial ability, are participants in the daily governmental operations. They are "insiders" who are familiar with the operations of the entire system and not "outsiders". They are also responsible for the manner in which the decisions taken by political leaders are implemented.

It seems quite evident that the effectiveness of policy making and the quality of performance depend, to a large extent, on the information available to the political leaders. Without accurate information, public opinion may be misinformed, misled and eventually deceived and confused by wrong doings and contradictory acts. Being the source of information, the bureaucrats find themselves to be the store-house of state secrets. Thus, the Arab rulers have no choice but to count on the credibility, honesty and efficiency of the Arab civil servants.

From the technical point of view, then, the civil servants in the Arab state are in command of policy articulation and implementation of decisions made by ministers. By those actions, they can channel social forces in any direction they want. Furthermore, it can be said that most ministers do decide on major policies, but they have no time and knowledge to work out details. They are the bureaucrats who put their technical competence at the service of their nation and bring benefit to all mankind.

The question which should be raised here is the following: if bureaucracy is a store-house of state secrets and political leaders are dependent on its technical knowledge, support and loyalty, why haven't the Arab states
shown, up to now, a distinct ideology of public service or created unified organization, which could promote and help in:

1. Achieving security and insuring internal order.
2. Establishing and maintaining consensus.
3. Integrating diverse ethnic, religious communal and regional elements into a national political community.
4. Organizing and distributing formal power and functions among organs of central, regional and local governments and between public authority and the private sector.
5. Displacement of vested traditional social and economic interest.
6. Development of modernized skills and institutions.
7. Fostering of psychological and material security.
8. Mobilization of savings and of current financial resources.
10. Efficient management of facilities and services.
11. Activating participation in modernizing activities, especially in decision making roles.
12. Achieving a secure position in the international community.

I suppose there are many answers and explanations for such setbacks in the Arab nation. But it seems to me obvious that the inconsistencies stem mainly from conflicting values and strange attitudes of individuals. Values are supposed to help the Arab citizens, as a whole, to build a productive human relationship. While it is a fact that values differ from one person to another and from one culture to another, their impact and effect on the people’s behavior and action cannot be denied. They are the ones which inspire citizens at work and determine their attitudes toward any vital issue.

What is wrong with the values of Arab civil servants? They tend to be unreceptive to others values. Generally speaking, they have the impression that their views are very sound, reasonable and indispensible. Such self-esteem does have an adverse effect on any action aimed at bringing the Arabs together.

Perhaps it is evident that the Arab states possess natural resources and human energies which are not available to many developed nations. But the unproductive individuals in the Arab world make the difference. It is the backward mentality of some people which make things complicated either by giving no importance to the role of subordinates, or underestimating the contributions of other persons to the organizational system.

There is no doubt that the loyalty of the civil servants to their superiors is

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vital for establishing good personal relationships and carrying out official policies, but it should not be transformed automatically to build up a network of personal influence and ambitions. Purely self-interested officials consider power, income and prestige as nearly all important in their values structures. 2

Such behavior results in breaking formalized rules, disorder and discontinuity if the self-imposed individual died or removed from office.

Undoubtedly, the behavior of individuals reflects the prevailing values, cultures and qualities of educational systems in families, schools and universities. Precisely, it is in the family where the young generations are taught how to be obedient without discussion, and force the future employees of the Arab states to become submissive. The suppression of personality at home is aggravated by the necessity to learn and memorize by heart what is offered by authoritative persons. The same process takes place in the universities where students listen to lectures and their teachers evaluate them.

However, those critical comments on the anomalies which have resulted in the slow process of modernization and unification in the Arab world, should not lower our morale or push us to abandon our original goals. If the Arab civil servants and their fellow citizens have not succeeded yet in developing an accurate formula which could enable them to overcome current crises, they are not alone in this case. Each society in this world has its own particular problems of mobilizing its energies and resources for the purpose of achieving prosperity and national unity.

It is my conviction that the Arabs have the determination, the means and talented people who could set up strategies and create favorable conditions for an effective central authority in the Arab nation. What is lacking, at the moment, is the consensus on policies or the agreement on the forms and style of mobilizing the Arab energies and resources for the purpose of promoting the interests of all the citizens of the Arab world.

If I have stressed the role to be played by the Arab civil servants in the process of integration, it is because I am persuaded that the new generation in the Arab world has a tremendous capacity and ability to bridge gaps and change the course of events in favor of Arab unity.

Although there are many factors which induce us to count on them in the tasks of upgrading the institutional systems, it seems to me that the following factors will work for their advantage and facilitate the drive to meet the aspirations of all Arabs. They are going to be helped by their:

1. Elevated social status
2. Understanding and familiarity with technical problems
3. Ability to function as a control tower for the flow of information arising from daily operations
4. Close association with political leaders who rely on them either for decision-making or for implementing policies
5. Capacity to act as a recorder of interests of the people and determine the measures to be taken
6. Daily contacts with all citizens which enable the technocrats to sense the mood of all groups and make necessary rectifications and adjustments
7. Recruitment from all classes and representing all segments of society
8. Intellectual resources which help Arab governments to expand services and meet challenges inside and outside the Arab countries

These advantages of bureaucracy, taken as a whole, may be considered the key to social integration in the Arab world. But I do want to put a particular emphasis on the fact that the success of the Arab civil servants in the arena of social integration will depend on the participation of the society. If the members of the Arab society do not commit themselves to their national cause and act accordingly, all efforts to unite them will be in vain.

It goes without saying that whenever the process of integration picks up momentum, generates enthusiasm and achieves concrete results, the civil servants will be better off in the sense that expansion of activities will attract more capable persons and increase their prestige, income and political power. It will be also beneficial to the Arab technocrats as a result of adding supplementary services and new positions to be filled. Once the services are expanded and qualified bureaucrats are promoted, there will be a great opportunity for the Arab civil servant to improve the quality of performance and specialized departments.

Likewise, the participation of citizens in the process of decision making and policy implementation as well as voting for suitable candidates, has to be considered the key to any move aimed at improving the image of authorities and institutions. If there is any big problem which deserves to be elaborated on it, as fully as possible, it must be the gap between citizens and authorities in the Arab world. It is very strange that the official holders of power take it for granted that whatever action they take or decisions they make is bound to be satisfactory to the people at large. Such assumptions seem to be misleading and hard to substantiate since the people who are concerned have not been consulted in advance and their opinions are ignored.

What all this means is that the decisions, which are taken without popular
consultation, may not generate any popular support for the authorities
and consequently, will have a little impact on the consensus and general
agreement on policies acceptable to authorities and their citizens.

In essence, one can not motivate the people and induce them to comply
with official rules as well as to appreciate the performance of individuals
recruited to render services to them, if what is done has nothing to do with
what the people really want. Furthermore, the indifference to citizens and
un-willingness to listen to their grievances and find solutions to the
problems which hurt them most, give us an idea how the bureaucrats
misunderstand their functions, and complicate the life of their fellow
citizens and overload the institutions.

Naturally, the busy politicians have not time to judge the bureaucrats and
make an assessment of their cultural performance. As is known to
everybody, the state functionaries know very well that their superiors are
preoccupied by continuous meetings, long reports to read or to write,
important missions to go to, and crucial crises to think of. Being aware of
the heavy pressures on them, the bureaucrats capitalize on the pre-
occupation of their superiors with marginal problems, and impose their
views on their clients.

While it is true in theory that, in many cases the bureaucrats hesitate to
take action and solve big problems because the final decisions have to be
approved by top officials. In reality, the delays in meeting the needs of the
population are due to the fact that the Arab citizens do not have the means
by which they can put pressures on the bureaucrats and oblige them to
respond to their requests very quickly. Once the bureaucrats know that the
citizens do not constitute a threat to their administrative positions since
they are chosen by their superiors, either because they trust them or have
mutual interests in protecting each other, they, naturally, do not see any
need to pressure or over work themselves. Thus, the state laws are used as
tools for controlling the population. But there is a great deal of flexibility
in dealing with the civil servants who are originally recruited for the
purpose of rendering services to the population.

Thus, it seems evident that, contrary to the official claims, bureaucracy
does not stick to the principles and origins of its existence, mainly, serving
the public and meeting the needs of human beings, but it seeks, rather, to
keep things under control through the use of power. If one wants to make
things very clear, it has to be said that the bureaucrats are interested,
mainly, in completing forms, seeking new methods of control and
reactivating dormant rules more than rendering services. The essential thing
for them is that “action within bureaucracy must not only be action, it must
also be subject to control. If it is not subject to control, it is not action. Or,
rather, it may be action, but bureaucracy itself can not take official notice of it” 3.

As a result of this tendency and mentality, the bureaucrats are alienated from their society and have been detached from their people. Once they pre-occupy themselves with their reputations, credibility and the determination to withhold power, the question of rendering services to clients becomes irrelevant and it may be considered merely a routine matter.

It is exactly this sort of apathy which makes people resent and deplore the negative attitudes of the Arab civil servants. The disappointed citizens feel that their functionaries do not understand their individual needs and consider them to be merely robots and not human beings.

If one looks at the problems from the point of view of bureaucrats, it would seem that they are, indeed, the most powerful instrument of control in any society and they have to be so in order to preserve their authority and even their raison d’être. What the people ought to know is the fact that “The bureaucrat is not concerned with the individual in the flesh before him but with his “life”. Thus, this bureaucracy is an autonomous world of "papers in motion" or at least is so in principle”. 4

In short, the bureaucrats who are the natural product of their society are detached from the people and have their own distinct interests which motivate them to learn how to improve their technical skills and keep everything under control. Without such managerial control, anarchy would prevail and the credibility and reputation of bureaucrats would be in jeopardy.

However, the question of separate interest should not be considered by itself as the only major obstacle to the process of integration in the Arab world. Perhaps it is quite evident that a conflict of interests is normal in any society. What is abnormal, however, is the artificial barriers between the people and their civil servants.

I am referring, naturally, to the question of social alienation, and in particular, man’s social relations which are converted into control relations.(5)
It is in the name of efficiency, impersonalization, rationalization and objectivity that bureaucracy loses its touch with realities and follow the path of dehumanization. In order to achieve its goals, bureaucracy has failed to assert the dominance of substantive needs of the people over the procedural techniques.

While it is true that the tools of bureaucratic control are essential for co-ordinating human activities, achieving rationality and discipline, there is no need to manipulate human beings and tame them so that they get accustomed to lowering their heads when they ask for services and remain dependent on bureaucracy, since the latter, in itself, depends on the mood of its political leaders or superiors.

The new spirit of bureaucracy is based, mainly, on action which is separated from the belief of actors, and the detachment of effect from action is like the detachment of the speaker from what is spoken.(6)

This amounts to reducing the role of bureaucracy to a letter box. In other words, its main concern is not the fate of the people and their problems, but it is rather occupied by receiving instructions from superiors and applying them in the most strict manners.

The apathy of Arab civil servants is derived from their focus on relevant matters to them and ignoring relevant matters which could have a positive impact on the life of all Arab citizens. The effects of such practices can be seen at different levels.(7)

The first one is on the social level where bureaucrats engage themselves in the process of transforming social action into rationally organized action. Being indispensable and specialized in everything in life, the bureaucrats have always attempted to keep everything under control and reduce conflicts to manageable levels. Their dilemma is that they often look upward to their superiors and render services to the citizens only in the case that their “files” are absolutely complete. Furthermore, they have access to “confidential” information and know all the details about their clients. It is natural that the availability of data makes every citizen vulnerable to assaults and intimidation. In exceptional cases the bureaucrats, however, can become normal human beings, listen carefully and reason, but only
with their close friends. In addition to preferential treatments, wasting a great deal of time in quarrels, killing time by reading newspapers in office and attending meetings instead of devoting all their energies to rendering services to the public, the bureaucrats in general, and especially in the Arab states which do not have any oil revenue, seem to be dissatisfied with their monthly fixed salaries which appear to be insufficient for meeting the growing needs and inflation. In this sense, the bureaucrats seem to look for ways of improving their financial income, more than anything else, even that which comes at the expense of state institutions and leads, eventually, to the spread of corruption and distrust of state civil servants.

In the second place comes the cultural level where each citizen can see, for himself, that there were many functionaries who think of themselves highly and never hesitate to impose their values on other citizens whenever the question of rendering services comes up in any discussion. This tendency stems from the prevailing culture in Arab society which allows individuals, and especially men, to dominate and direct others to do what they want without any argument or delay. This phenomenon takes place initially in families, then schools, or universities and, eventually, on the level of state institutions. Ostensibly, the supremacy of such strong men in the civil service of the state is to ensure that the work is done in the framework of law and discipline. It is in the interests of citizens not to question the work of experts because the people have not elected or selected them for the positions they occupy.

Furthermore, there is another cultural barrier to rendering services to the Arab masses, that is the bad habit of personalizing any remark to be made about clumsy work. That unwillingness of a large percentage of Arab bureaucrats to let others evaluate and judge their work and eventually, rectify anomalies and make the necessary adjustments. If an observer tries to analyze the behavior and performance of some Arab bureaucrats, he has to come to the conclusion that a large percentage of the Arab civil servants in the Arab world has no desire or willingness to serve the others, learn from the experience of colleagues and use their gifted skills to accomplish the fixed objectives (as the codes of ethics and public service require) but rather the main concern is how to fulfill personal ambitions, remain honorable men and admirable persons.

On the third level comes the psychological gap which separates citizens from their civil servants in public administration. Perhaps the most important point to be mentioned here is the institutionalization of bureaucracy and its aims to act as a technical instrument for mobilizing human energies and resources and directing them toward fixed goals. Once the civil servants possess power, money, legal means to control, and assume their new responsibilities, they are, in fact, new types of human
beings who are indispensable to dependent individuals. They become a powerful force, capable of organizing the social life and directing the human beings toward set aims. Slowly but surely, the individuals find themselves powerless and subject to manipulation by outsiders who are authorized to investigate them and ask for any supplementary information if necessary, before any service can be rendered to them. It is in their capacity as legal advisers, technical experts and authoritative officials that they find themselves in advantageous positions when compared with powerless citizens. Thus, the individuals are no longer master of their own fate, and the new patterns of behavior make it easy for technocrats to destroy the integrity of individuals. This tendency seems to confirm what a scholar has suggested once, that modernization must be viewed “as a process that is simultaneously creative and destructive, providing new opportunities and prospects at a high price in human dislocation and suffering”. 8

In the fourth place comes the barrier of language which is the main tool for communicating with the people and receiving instructions from above. Undoubtedly, the civil servants rely on the use of impersonal language, which is embodied in structures of institutions. In order to get things done, the Arab masses have no choice but to understand, accurately, the substance of instructions and directions and comply with them because state structures do not work on a personal basis or possess brains to think and study individual cases on their merits. As is the case in every administration in the world, strict instructions from superiors are not subject to mutual agreement and endorsement by the people. After all, the bureaucrats, unlike the political leaders who are normally elected by the voters, are accountable only to the superior in the hierarchy. Thus, the bureaucrats use their special terminology to hide any thing from the public, preserve the secrets of their profession and determine the types of information to be diffused or classified. In this sense, the bureaucracy has proved that, as it differs from society in many ways, it differs also from society in the use of language. 9

In the fifth place comes the big dilemma of politics, which intervenes everywhere in public life. On this level it can be easily detected that competitive pressure groups dominate the political arena, create frictions and put pressure on public officials to yield to their demands. Unlike influential personalities and well organized pressure groups, the public is incapable of establishing a uniform value premise on which to consolidate collective actions and create a public consensus on vital policies of common interests. As organized pressure groups, in addition to bureaucracy itself which constitute a group of professional experts, they are capable of obstructing governmental policies whenever they learn for sure that the political leaders are reluctant to make concessions and take
decisions favorable to them.

There is no question about the fact that the bureaucrats do not only follow orders from officials and implement policies as they come from the top, they also make them. In fact, the survival of both groups depends on their abilities to co-operate with each other and utilize their strength to preserve their mutual interests and control over the masses. The rulers are undoubtedly, aware of the fact that their civil servants know very well their files, private life, what they want and what they dislike. They count on their technocrats to provide them with accurate information so that they can take wise decisions, avoid the problems of being mislead or deceived and eventually conserve their positions.

In conclusion, we are living in an era of rapid social changes and fast expansion of public services. Each government in the Arab world is involved in the process of determining the types of functions to be undertaken and alternatives to be selected. Such multidimensional tasks require the valuable support of governments and leaders who supply the energy and sustain co-operative activities undertaken by civil servants.

It is the theme of this essay that the rulers in the Arab world rely very heavily on the technocrats who provide them with ways and means to act and generate sufficient powers to cope with multidimensional problems. This means, in reality, that the Arab bureaucrats are engaged, not only planning and implementing policies but also in policy making.

What is very fantastic about bureaucracy in the Arab world is its ability to act as a bridge which links the people to the ruling elite. It is up to the bureaucrats to promote public interests, provide continuity in public policy and direct public opinion or mislead, discredit the public sector and undermine the people’s confidence in their government.

Unlike other social forces which possess limited strength in a specific sphere of influence, the bureaucrats are present at all levels of state hierarchy, hold the key to all projects of national development and have a great impact on changing social values and goals. They are in a position to channel social forces in any direction they want.

Thus, the fate of rulers and citizens is tied closely to the performance of bureaucrats.

What we are saying, in essence, is that the future of the Arab nation, as a whole, is in the hands of the Arab civil servants. While it is true, in theory, that the will of the people and the leadership are the two supreme authorities in the area of decision making and bureaucrats are merely tools of implementing these decisions in reality, neither the political leaders nor citizens have the time, technical skills and knowledge for proposing
concrete policies. They are the civil servants who are closely identified with a political leader, and act as surveyors of public needs. It is the hope of the Arab masses that their civil servants will capitalize on these factors of strength and utilize their technical competence to promote Arab unity and mobilize the wealth of their nation to achieve the aspiration of 120 million Arabs. There is no question in the mind of any Arab, that they are in a position to influence change at all directions, if they want to, because they are the fountain of ideas about what ought to be done to redress conditions. By functioning as a storehouse of state secrets, they can always withhold from policy makers any information considered to be detrimental to the Arab cause and provide them with fundamental ideas which reinforce the Arab cause.

FOOTNOTES

7) For further details on each level see: Ibid; P.3 an P.20
البيروقراطية وأثرها على الاندماج الاجتماعي في العالم العربي

د. عمار يوحوش

تتعرض هذه الدراسة إلى ظاهرة التضارب الذي يحمل بالمجتمعات النامية حيث يتم إعداد الخطط النظرية الهائلة لحل المشاكل الإدارية وفق طرق قانونية، لكن قيم الافراد الشخصية وتنوعية العلاقات التي تقام بينهم هي التي تتميز القواعد الأساسية لتطبيق أي قانون على المواطنين. وإذا طبقنا هذه النظرية على الواقع العربي، نجد أن ضعف المؤسسات قد زاد في أهمية العمل الفردي إلى درجة أن البيروقراطيين الذين لم ينتخبهم الشعب لكي يتحكموا في مصيره قد أصبحوا في الواقع هم الفئة التي تصنع القرار السياسي وذلك نظراً للتخصصهم وعزارة معلوماتهم الفنية في أي ميدان.

ويهدف هذا البحث إلى تجسيم فكرة أساسية وهي أن الموظفين العرب الذين يساهمون بصفة مباشرة في تغيير مجرى الأمور، هم الذين يشكلون التأثير في القيادة العربية، عن طريق الاحتكاك بهم، وتقييم النصائح لهم، وتحديد معالم الطريق العربي. وأكد الكاتب في بحثه بإطارات الأمم العربية ينتمي إلى جميع القطاعات الاجتماعية وتعرف اسار حكوماتها واتخاذها في داخل اجتهاداتها السياسية والإدارية. وبناء عليه، فإن مخلوقاتهم للرجال السياسة، وتمثيلهم بمؤسسات علمية هائلة، وتحكمهم في المعلومات الأساسية التي تعتبر ضرورة لكل قرار تتخذه أية قيادة سياسية. قد فعل من الآثار العربية القوية الأساسية لأحداث نهضة اجتماعية شاملة وذلك إذا عرفوا كيف يستغلوا هذه الفرص المتوفرة لهم.