Interrogating the European Union's Democracy Promotion Agenda: Discursive Configurations of 'Democracy' from the Middle East

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Abstract

Following the electoral victory of *Hamas* in the Palestinian elections of January 2006, the international community reacted by suspending aid to the democratically elected *Hamas* government. Across Middle Eastern societies, this move and the events that followed since, ushered in a complete loss of credibility in the discourse of external actors like the European Union (EU) and their declared quest for promoting democracy in the region. Are we witnessing the demise of the EU's democracy promotion agenda given the perception from the Middle East (ME) in regard to its inconsistent discourse? This article aims to address how a critical engagement with the ways in which the EU constructs itself as a normative power, in its attempts at exporting its model of liberal democracy, might shed light on questions central to contemporary EU-ME relations. In particular, it focuses on how an inquiry into political grammars might illuminate discursive configurations of 'democracy' in the ME. By way of conclusion, the article holds that the EU's discourse on democracy promotion in the ME can be reframed and this process of reframing need not negate its principles.

Keywords: democracy, democracy promotion, EU, Middle East, discursive principles

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Exporting the Democracy Package. An Introduction

The European discourse of liberal democracy has been a popular topic in academic as well as policy-making circles. It is often argued that processes of political liberalisation and democratisation have served to bring about peaceful co-existence within Europe and that these successful processes can be emulated elsewhere. Thus, in a democratic context, discursive principles play a crucial justification role in the making of foreign policy. Much of the literature on democracy promotion has thus looked at the European Union (EU)'s normative foundations for exporting democracy. At the same time, however, there remains considerable concern about the apparent lack of effectiveness of EU efforts at promoting democracy in regions like the Middle East (ME).[1]

EU democracy-promotion efforts aimed at this region are often presented as responses to the 'reality' of the ME which is mainly read in terms of instability, conflicts, authoritarian regimes and economic underdevelopment.[2] However, events such as the Palestinian elections of January 2006 reveal that the 'reality' of democratisation in the ME is much more complex than what EU discursive practices imply.[3] While authoritarian regimes respond to EU pressures for democratisation through staged reforms, the real challenge to these regimes' power bases stems from the claims made by their peoples - which are increasingly being represented by Islamist groups.[4]

In particular, since the events of 9/11 and the US led 'war on terror', Islam has become the new securitised object in EU discourse on the ME.[5] One of the main understandings is that Islam is incompatible with democracy, and the EU, amongst other external actors

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[1] This needs a qualification as it is a challenging point in democracy studies. Evaluations of EU efforts at democracy promotion and associated impacts and effectiveness are challenging because the EU is not the sole actor in the field. At the same time both the European Commission and Civil Society Organisations argue that the EU contributes to processes of democratisation, albeit through small, incremental and gradual steps. Observing progress or effectiveness in specific areas such as freedom of expression or freedom of the judiciary may help analysts understand better the challenges at hand.

[2] Saad Eddin Ibrahim, *Egypt, Islam and Democracy*. (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 1996); David Pool, 'The Links between Economic and Political Liberalization', in *Economic and Political Liberalization in the Middle East*, eds. Tim Niblock and Emma Murphy (London: British Academic Press, 1993), 40-54; Commission of the European Communities, *The European Initiative for Democracy and Human Rights* (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2001). See also Nicola Pratt, *Democracy & Authoritarianism in the Arab World* (Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2007).

[3] Raymond Hinnebusch, 'Authoritarian Persistence, Democratization Theory and The Middle East: An Overview and Critique', *Democratization* 13, no.3 (2006): 373-95.

[4] The average person's protest in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region today is against large scale, deeply embedded, corrupt practices (of ruling parties and regimes). Thus, votes for Islamist parties need not necessarily reflect a belief in Islamist politics and political ideology.

[5] Interview with Osama Ghazali Harb, Democratic Front party, Cairo, March 31, 2008; see also Olivier Roy, *The Politics of Chaos in the Middle East* (London: Hurst & Company, 2007). Securitisation refers to a process whereby an issue, such as Islam, is presented as 'posing an existential threat to a designated referent object' which then requires exceptional measures and/or emergency action to deal with it. This securitised issue is thereby removed from the realm of politics to the realm of security. See Barry Buzan, Ole Wæver and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1998): 21.

seeking to promote the liberal kind of democracy in the MENA region,[6] has found itself in a *cul de sac*: how does it export its liberal democratic discourse, which worked so well in the European context, to a region which, in the EU's framing, is not 'ripe' for democratisation?

This dilemma was further accentuated when, first, the Muslim Brotherhood - a key, albeit outlawed, Islamist opposition force, in Egypt - won a fifth of parliamentary seats at the 2005 elections. Second, as mentioned above, in the January 2006 elections, *Hamas*, (*Harakat al-Muqawama al-Islamiyya*), the Palestinian Islamic Resistance Movement, - which is on the EU's list of terrorist organisations - won 74 seats in the 132-seat chamber (56% of the seats). *Fatah*, (a reverse acronym from the Arabic name *Harakat al-Tahrir al-Watani al-Filastini*, literally: Palestinian National Liberation Movement), the Western-backed, secular movement was placed second with 36% of the seats. The position adopted by *Hamas* on the Middle East Peace Process caused concern in Israel and internationally. The movement's charter calls for the destruction of the Jewish state and its paramilitary wing had played a leading role in the second *Intifada*, carrying out numerous suicide bomb attacks and rocket strikes against Israeli civilians. The Israeli Government had said it would not cooperate with a Palestinian administration that includes *Hamas*, while the Middle East Quartet (UN, EU, Russia and United States) called on *Hamas* to renounce violence, to recognise Israel and honour past accords, or face a dramatic cut in aid to the Palestinian Authority. *Hamas* responded by saying that it would seek funding from Arab states and other sources to compensate for any shortfall.[7] The EU, along with the US and Israel, thereafter decided to boycott *Hamas* and refused to officially engage its political leadership.[8]

Across Middle Eastern societies, this move and the events that followed since, ushered in a complete loss of credibility in the discourse of external actors like the EU and their declared quest for promoting democracy in the region, in particular by calling for 'free, fair and transparent elections'. It was, after all, the EU's own 186-member election observation mission that declared these elections to have been largely free and fair.[9]

More pertinently, questions and debates have ensued in regard to the EU's normative position. The EU's stance in particular has strengthened the belief in the region that it is the EU's lack of understanding/misreading of Middle Eastern affairs which dominates its

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[6] As the terms MENA, ME and Arab-Muslim are used throughout this article it is important to clarify that the region under discussion here is the geographic area that is wider that the 'Arab world' and includes Israel, Iran and Turkey (the latter two being non-Arab Muslim countries). However, it is narrower than the 'Muslim world' as it excludes countries like Pakistan, Malaysia and Indonesia.

[7] Michelle Pace, 'A "Modern" Islamist Democracy? Perceptions of Democratisation in Palestine: the case of *Hamas*'. Paper presented at the BRISMES conference, Leeds, July 4-6, 2008.

[8] Thomas Diez and Michelle Pace, 'Normative Power Europe and Conflict Transformation', in *Normative Power Europe: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*, ed. Richard Whitman (London and New York: Palgrave MacMillan, forthcoming).

[9] EU Election Observation Mission West Bank and Gaza, 'Statement of Preliminary Conclusions and Findings: Open and well-run parliamentary elections strengthen Palestinian commitment to democratic institutions ', January 26, 2006. Available at:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/human_rights/eu_election_ass_observ/
westbank/legislative/statement_260106.pdf. Last accessed, October 3, 2008.

agenda – and especially its external relations – and not its normative 'posturing'. The EU is in fact often considered as a hesitant spectator in the unfolding of Middle Eastern events, awaiting the United States to give its green light for any move in this region.[10]

Moreover, the EU's discursive principles on democracy have, in the eyes of its 'targets' in the ME, shown serious signs of inconsistency. Elections are opportunities for accountability in a (democratic) political process. *Fatah* had lost the confidence of the Palestinian people not least due to its corrupt practices. For all the rhetoric about democracy and good governance, the international boycott on *Hamas* has had negative effects, not least in the area of Palestinian institutional reform where the European Commission had started to register some useful progress.[11] The formation of a National Unity Government (NUG) between *Hamas* and *Fatah* in February 2007 had offered the EU an opportunity to build on and renew its reform-oriented, democracy promotion agenda. However, although accountability usually means that the representatives (of the people in a democracy) have to pay for the full consequences for their actions, the EU decided to continue with its support solely for the very representatives (*Fatah*) that the people rejected through their vote. This action is clear evidence of a crisis in the EU's discourse on democracy promotion in the ME.

Adding to the EU's calamity in Palestine, Islamist opposition groups like the MB in Egypt, are becoming increasingly popular elsewhere in the MENA region.[12] So, while the EU continues to support authoritarian regimes who rule over populations mainly unversed in a democratic culture and ethos, the increasing popular voices of Islamist groups induce the EU to react to their situation in new ways which contrast with its embedded and preferred discursive practices. While Islamists increasingly accept democratic procedures, they aim to build a different type of nation-state, which in turn challenges what European policy-makers consider as democratically acceptable.[13]

In order to present an immanent critique of the EU's discourse on democracy promotion in the ME, this article seeks to first, tease out the construction of normative power Europe and unintended consequences of the EU's discourse on democratisation in the MENA - which has thus far been founded on a positive image of the EU as a force for good. When brought under closer scrutiny, what is uncovered is that with democracy being valued as an unquestionable good in and of itself, the EU's discourse actually has an embedded

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[10] Interviews held with: Khalil Shikaki, Palestinian Center for Policy & Survey Research, Ramallah, September 4, 2007; Nasr Al-Din Sha'r, Nablus, September 10, 2007; Diaa Rashwan and Amr al Shobky, both at Al Ahram Centre, Cairo, Egypt, March 26 and 25 respectively, 2008; and with Abou El ElaMady, Al Wasat Party, Cairo, March 24, 2008.

[11] For example, the EU had successfully put pressure on Palestinian good governance mechanisms including a single treasury account.

[12] It is important to clarify that this is not such a recent development. The process actually started back in the 1970s and not only in the Arab world (and has recently received a further boost). See Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God. The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World.* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994).

[13] Michelle Pace, Peter Seeberg and Francesco Cavatorta, 'The EU's Democratization Agenda in the Mediterranean: A Critical Inside-Out Approach', *Democratization*, Special Issue, 2009, forthcoming.

sense of fear, insecurity and threat vis-à-vis the ME.[14] Moreover, by including democracy promotion in its external relations policies towards the MENA, there is an implicit understanding in the EU's discursive practices that political change in the MENA is somehow external to this region.[15] Thus, secondly, this article attempts to map out two broad and main currents in thinking about political change in the MENA today, in an attempt to illustrate the distorted perception of the region in the EU's discourse. Broadly categorised as the secularist and Islamist camps, these categories are used here purely for analytical purposes, to help us understand better the current search for political change in the MENA.[16]

By way of conclusion, and in terms of potential solutions to the current crisis, the article holds that the EU still retains a capacity to recognize emerging voices in the region. For the EU to free itself from the current paradoxical situation, it cannot be intimidated by embedded rules which crush alternative thinking. To reflect upon alternative values need not negate the EU's own discursive principles.

European Union discursive principles

Ian Manners' seminal 2002 article on Normative Power Europe[17] has since triggered a wide and ongoing debate on the EU's role in international relations amongst scholars including those working on EU external relations in regions as diverse as the Balkans, South Caucasus and the ME.[18] Some have focused their attention on how the EU's normative power discourse has become a method and a norm in itself for promoting democracy in other states.[19] In his original conception of the EU as a normative power, Manners argued that the EU may be characterised by a set of common principles shared by its member states which act as a whole to diffuse ideals such as democracy and rule of law in other regions. The EU's international identity is thus marked not by a military posture but by a predisposition to promote its values through its interaction with and the socialization of other actors.[20]

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[14] Peter J Burgess, 'Europe as a community of values: The question of security'. Paper presented at UACES Conference, Edinburgh, 2008.

[15] Michelle Pace, 'Paradoxes and Contradictions in EU Democracy Promotion in the Mediterranean: The Limits of EU Normative Power', *Democratization*, forthcoming, 2009.

[16] Alternative categorisations would include elite liberalist for the secularist camp and populist for the Islamist camp.

[17] Ian Manners, 'Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms?' *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40, no. 2 (2002): 235-58.

[18] Federica Bicchi, 'Our Size Fits All: Normative Power Europe and the Mediterranean', *Journal of European Public Policy* 13 (2006): 286-303; Ana E. Juncos, 'Assessing the effectiveness of the EU as a normative power in the Western Balkans: The case of Bosnia and Herzegovina' and Emma J. Stewart, 'Mind the Normative Gap? The EU in the South Caucasus', in *Normative Power Europe: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives*; Michelle Pace, 'The Construction of EU Normative Power', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 45 (2007): 1041-64, to mention just a few.

[19] Brieg Powel, 'A Clash of Norms: Normative Power and EU Democracy Promotion in Tunisia', *Democratization*, 2009, forthcoming.

[20] Thomas Diez, 'Constructing the Self and Changing Others: Reconsidering "Normative Power Europe"', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* 33, no. 3 (2005): 613-36.

The EU's promotion of democracy in the MENA has primarily focused on encouraging regular elections based on the normative principle that people in the region should be given the political power to vote for those who rule them. Another important element in the EU's democratisation agenda is a logic that supporting economic development in the MENA will lead to transitions to political pluralism.[21] However, it has often been acknowledged that the EU's real drive in the MENA is its strategic interest in a stable and secure neighbourhood rather than democracy per se.[22] Thus, recent debates have been questioning the EU's self-perception as a normative actor in international politics. While some scholars make the case for a more realist understanding of EU policy-making focusing on the EU's real interests,[23] others have convincingly outlined how a combined interests and values' approach is better suited to explain political outcomes in EU external relations, particularly in the context of the wider Mediterranean.[24] This current thinking reflects the view of the EU as an international actor which mixes normative positions with realist policies. It is argued that this is very much the case in the MENA, when it comes to the EU's (flawed) democracy-promotion strategies. A discourse approach can shed further light on this.

Moreover, a normative power is expected to act consistently and stand up for the very norms it seeks to export, even when these collide with interests (a value or norm can be an interest too). Principles serve as a guide for the functioning of international relations[25] and in the practice of international relations, democracy is all too often taken by Western agents like the EU as a necessary and a universal good. Democracy is valued for its intrinsic peaceful implications and not only is its moral goodness undisputed but it is also taken as the solution to economic underdevelopment, instability and insecurity.[26]

But what seems to escape the EU's framing, are the unintended consequences of its discourse on democracy in the ME. Following their surprise victory at the January 2006

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[21] Barbara Allen Roberson, *The Middle East and Europe: The Power Deficit* (London: Routledge, 1998).

[22] Michelle Pace, 'Norm shifting from EMP to ENP: the EU as a norm entrepreneur in the south?' *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 20, no. 4 (2007): 657-73.

[23] Richard Youngs, 'Normative Dynamics and Strategic Interests in the EU's External Identity', *Journal of Common Market Studies* 42, no. 3 (2004): 415–35; Adrian Hyde-Price, 'Normative power Europe: a realist critique', *Journal of European Public Policy* 13, no. 2 (2006): 217-34; Francesco Cavatorta, 'Engaging Authoritarianism. The European Union, Syria and normative power'. Paper presented at the UACES conference, Edinburgh, September 1-3, 2008.

[24] Michelle Pace, *The Politics of Regional Identity. Meddling with the Mediterranean*. (London: Routledge, 2006); Federica Bicchi, *European Foreign Policy Making Toward the Mediterranean*. (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); Andy Storey and Vincent Durac, '"Normative or realist" versus "normative and realist": the case of the European Union and Morocco'. Paper to be presented at the EUSA conference, Los Angeles, 2009.

[25] Syuzanna Vasilyan, 'The EU as a Conflict Dealer in the South Caucasus: Civilian/Normative but Immoral?' Paper presented at the UACES conference, Edinburgh, 2008.

[26] This reasoning is based not least on an eighteenth century European Enlightenment discourse. During earlier times, Europe witnessed revolts, wars and famines. It is thus believed that with man's enlightenment, reasoning and progress, liberalism emerged which, in turn, brought about peaceful relations between European states. And this enlightenment logic is precisely what the EU seeks to export in the MENA, but not until the latter half of the twentieth century. Stefan Zweig, *The World of Yesterday: An Autobiography* (London: Cassell, 1943), 14.

Palestinian elections, *Hamas* bought into external pressures for moderation and embarked on a transitory process by forming a NUG with *Fatah*. Given the EU's normative posture in Palestine, *Hamas* officials thought that such moderate positions would be read by the international community, in particular by the EU, as steps deserving of international recognition.[27] However, the discourse on possible conciliatory steps undertaken between various wings of the Islamist movement failed to ease the international sanctions on the *Hamas* government.[28] From the *Hamas* viewpoint, it seems that its representatives' expectations from the EU's image as a normative power were a serious miscalculation in that they had entered into the NUG thinking that the EU would eventually be more lenient and cooperate with the new government.[29]

So while the EU may genuinely be interested in seeing some developments towards political reform in the region, it is important to challenge the normative assumptions underpinning this approach, particularly as they have unintended consequences for the very 'targets' of its democratising policies. It is, in fact, the perceptions and reactions of its very targets that, in turn, lead us back to the EU's crisis in democracy promotion in the ME, reminding us that EU policy making processes are not unidirectional but influenced by the reading of its 'targets'.[30]

I have argued elsewhere that there is in fact an implicit understanding in the EU's democracy promotion strategies towards the MENA that the grammar of democratic change[31] in the MENA is somehow alien to this region. The lively and ongoing debates within the MENA region about the need for political change attest otherwise. It is thus the task of this article to highlight some of these key debates.

Discursive Configurations of 'Democracy' in the Middle East: Tradition, Reform and Diversity

In his book on *Making Islam Democratic*, Asef Bayat argues that the ideals of democracy have less to do with the *essence* of any religion and more to do with its praxis. He focuses our attention on how democracy is practiced in the MENA region through various forms of political contestation including protests and other social struggles by youth,

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[27] Interviews held with Dr Basim Naim and Dr Ahmed Yousef, September 11, 2007, Gaza.

[28] Are Hovdenak, 'Hamas in transition: the failure of sanctions', *Democratization*, Special Issue, 2009, forthcoming.

[29] Thomas Diez and Michelle Pace, 'Normative Power Europe and Conflict Transformation'. Muslim Brotherhood officials also expected the international community to respond positively to *Hamas*'s moderate positions. Interviews with Mohammed Habib and Esam Elerian, Cairo, March 26 and 27, 2008 respectively.

[30] Michelle Pace, Peter Seeberg and Francesco Cavatorta, 'The EU's Democratizing Agenda'.

[31] Here I borrow Aletta J Norval's concept of political grammar, meaning the vocabularies we use and the practices we engage in. On the grammar of democracy specifically, Norval argues that this should be 'understood as delimiting a horizon of what is sayable and doable at any given point in time, as well as what we may expect from others and what others may expect from us in the articulation of claims upon one another'. See Aletta J Norval, *Aversive Democracy. Inheritance and Originality in the Democratic Tradition*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007): 8. See also Michelle Pace, Paradoxes and Contradictions.

professionals and women's groups. Bayat does not underestimate the highly challenging relationship between religion, politics and everyday life in the region and highlights the demands of the people for political change.[32]

In fact, in the MENA there is a vibrant, albeit diverse, spectrum of thinking about the ideal form of governance for the region. In the typology presented below, I will attempt to cast a very wide net over this debate to give an idea of this diversity. By no means does this typology cover all the diverse opinions within the MENA on this issue. What one has to keep in mind is that what unites these diverse opinions is the imprint left on the region by Western colonial rule in its various manifestations: political, economic, cultural, military. In the post-independence years, MENA rulers attempted to Westernize their societies through the replication of Western norms and practices that they had absorbed. By the end of the twentieth century, cultural imperialism had penetrated most (rural as well as urban) areas and all levels of Muslim societies.[33]

Inspired by Willam Shepard's typology of the diversity of thought in the Muslim world,[34] I distinguish between two broad orientations towards democracy in the MENA; secularist and Islamist.[35] Although these terms are often used loosely without any clear explication of what exactly they are supposed to signify, I map out these two broad orientations on democracy in the ME as purely analytical tools for an academic exercise like this one, to organise and present the material gathered through first and secondary sources. Therefore, I flag out such a typology with caution and am fully aware of the challenges with such an instrument. But, if we are to make sense of the crisis in the EU's discursive framing of democracy promotion in the MENA, we need some clarity about an area as complex and diverse as the Arab-Muslim world. In order to present the various voices calling for political change in the MENA in a manageable format, I further subdivide the main category of Islamist into Islamist-traditionalist and Islamist-reformist in an attempt to provide further clarity of the diversity within the Islamist camp. Such labels are not new. There is a fair amount of scholarly consensus on most of these labels.[36]

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[32] Asef Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic. Social Movements and the Post-Islamist Turn* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2007).

[33] See Akbar S. Ahmed, *Postmodernism and Islam. Predicament and Promise* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992).

[34] William Shepard, 'Islam and Ideology: Towards a Typology', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 19, no. 3 (1987): 307-35.

[35] Shepard expands his typology further. On the one hand, under my label of secularist, he distinguishes between radical secularist (Albania), neutral secularist (Turkey), religious secularist (Indonesia) and Muslim secularist (Syria, Iraq, Egypt). On the other hand, under my category of Islamist, Shepard makes a distinction between Islamic modernist (Pakistan) and radical Islamist (Iran as an example of an in-between radical Islamist and Islamic modernist). Shepard has a further categorisation of traditionalist and neo-traditionalist. Due to space limitations, I have opted for a limited typology. What is important is that one appreciates the richness and variety of opinion and discourses about political change in the Middle East.

[36] Shepard provides an extensive list of the literature relevant to this issue. See note 2, page 327-28. Iliya Harik also provides a similar typology in his *Democratic Theory and Modernity: Western and Islamic Perspectives*. (London and Beirut: Al Saqi Publishers, 2001), in Arabic. For all references in Arabic the author wishes to thank Haya AlFarra for discussions on these sources.

1. Secularist

By secularist I refer to those voices from the MENA region who pursue change in the political sphere without making reference to religion. Fazlur Rahman, for example, defines secularism as 'the acceptance of laws and other social and political institutions *without reference to Islam*, i.e., without their being derived, or organically linked to the principles of the Qur'an and the Sunna (practice) …'.[37] Another Arab thinker who represents this category is Saad Eddin Ibrahim.

Ibrahim is an Egyptian sociologist, prolific author and democracy and human rights activist. He is the founder and director of the Ibn Khaldoun Center for Development Studies in Cairo. In 2001, together with twenty-seven co-defendants, he was charged with accepting foreign funds without authorization and for disseminating false information considered harmful to Egypt's interests by the Supreme State Security Court. Often perceived and criticised by other opposition groups in Egypt as a voice who adopts Western grammar and discourse on democracy,[38] Ibrahim argues that democracy is a continuous process of struggle, contestation and with an ongoing need for renewal. Many perceive him as the founder of the civil society movement in Egypt. While in prison, Ibrahim engaged with Islamists in a protracted dialogue on democracy. It was during this period that the events of 9/11 occurred and the Justice and Development Party (AKP) in Turkey and the Party for Justice and Democracy (PJD) in Morocco won the elections in their respective countries. Ibrahim accepted Turkey's offer for exile (2007/8) precisely to be able to closely observe the AKP's experiment with democratic politics.[39] For Ibrahim, the Turkish model is a clear manifestation of how a constitution in a predominantly Muslim country can explicitly separate the tenets of religion from politics and state affairs.[40] He also insists that in the struggle for democracy in Egypt he is prepared to work with opportunities including those stemming from Islamist voices in the region. It is external actors like the EU who adhere to the politics of fear when engaging with the MENA region.[41]

2. Islamist

The spectrum of politicized Islamist groups is a broad one. A desire for change is what unites Islamists across the MENA region. However, they differ in how they go about

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[37] Fazlur Rahman, 'Islamic Modernism: Its Scope, Method and Alternatives', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 1, no. 4 (1970): 311.

[38] Interview with Refaat Al Said, Tagammu Party headquarters, Cairo, March 22, 2008.

[39] Interview with Dr Saad Eddin Ibrahim, London, March 6, 2008.

[40] Although Turkey was often mentioned by interviewees as a 'model', one needs to keep in mind the special role of Turkey in the Middle East and its completely diverse genesis of state, power and politics since Ataturk. For some analysts the 'Turkish argument' in the Arab democratization debate has already become a non-debate (in policy-making circles and among scholars alike).

[41] Interview with Ibrahim, London. For a further critical analysis on the politics of fear in EU external relations see Jef Huysmans, *The Politics of Insecurity. Fear, Migration and Asylum* in the EU. (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2006). Huysmans explores how fear has become a practice and technique in EU governance of its neighbouring areas. The politics of framing fear through external relations explains how EU-MENA relations are modulated through EU rational choices.

bringing this change: the specific motives vary from religiously grounded altruism to creating political power bases by "winning hearts and minds". But in diverse ways, they are trying to create alternatives to ideas and systems that they believe no longer work. Thus, some commit themselves to a range of welfare activities, providing medical and educational facilities as alternatives to inadequate government institutions or expensive private channels. Some run for political office while others commit acts of violence.

Those who adhere passively to a literal reading of the Koran are referred to as radical Islamists and include the *Wahhabis* in Saudi Arabia. Such Islamists attempt to bring about change in the modern world by using religious doctrines. Other Islamists present a forward-looking, dynamic and innovative stance in bringing about a reconstruction of their social and political order.

2.1 Islamist-traditionalist

By Islamist-traditionalists, I refer to those voices from the region who contend that tradition can be accommodated in a democratic political process. By tradition I do not only refer to religion, Islam more specifically, as a way of life here. Tradition encompasses all human practices that are passed on from one generation to the next and include belief, and more broadly, the common inheritance of a social group.[42] One can therefore speak of tradition*s* as espoused by Rafik Habib: 'the reality on the ground [in Egypt] reflects the true nature of Egyptian society which is shaped by religious tenets and is based on traditions. It is this nature of our society that should be the guiding principle of the Egyptian political system'.[43]

The Islamist-traditionalist orientation, with key advocates like Tarek Al Beshri,[44] maintains that traditional practices are to be adhered to. Its supporters have a hard time understanding changes brought about by the onset of 'modernity': in fact tradition and modernity seem to be in conflict with each other. Al Beshri, a highly respected judge in Egypt, reflects on what he sees as the most challenging aspect in Arab-European relations: the historical conflict between Arab-Islamic values, systems of governance and beliefs on the one hand and Western values, systems and lifestyles on the other. Following Western colonisation of the region, Al Beshri argues that the Arab-Islamic world was left with a practical confusion: which Western prescriptions should the former world imitate/revive, develop or change to, substitute for or reform? He laments how such prescriptions encouraged Arab leaders to select from Western models those elements which could enable them to remain in power. He sees modernity as a Western concept and as a break from the past. In terms of the best form of governance for the MENA region, Al Beshri argues, just like Rafik Habib, that such an assessment requires an awareness of the core characteristics of a society. Thus, tradition in the Arab-Islamic

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[42] Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill and Bryan S Turner, *The Penguin Dictionary of Sociology* (London: Penguin Books, 1994).

[43] Interview with Dr Rafik Habib, a prominent Coptic thinker, Cairo, March 25, 2008. See also Rafik Habib, 'Islamic Sharia for Copts only!' *Almesryoon* newspaper [in Arabic], March 25, 2008. Available at: www.almesryoon.com. Last accessed on April 22, 2008.

[44] Tarek Al Beshri, *What is Modernity?* (Cairo: Dar AlShorouk, 2005), in Arabic.

world is based on an Islamic faith which in turn characterises the Arab-Muslim identity. He moves towards a neo-Islamist-traditionalist orientation when he accepts that such a cultural identity is open for revival and developments.[45] In fact he does not discard the possibility of adopting or emulating certain features of European values and systems and argues that democracy is one of the best means of ending oppression and discrimination and enables people to self-rule.

However, Al Beshri also argues that in order to be part of the 'modern' age, the Arab-Muslim world cannot have imposed universal values and systems imprinted in the region as Arab societies have undergone different historical trajectories.[46] The liberation movements in the Arab-Islamic world against European colonisers in the 1950s were accompanied by a decline in religious authority and religious systems of reference (but not in the religious faith or Islamic beliefs of the people). Thus, since then, there has been a cultural and political conflict between secular, national movements and Islamist, national movements (which conflict dates back also to the early 1920s and 1930s as well as since the 1950s after decolonisation). This conflict extended to the regimes in power (often secular) and those who have been able to mobilise the masses, outside the state's authority (often Islamist movements).

A very good case in point here is the *Fatah* and *Hamas* movements of Palestine.[47] Al Beshri compares the historical trajectory of Arab nationalist movements and European/Western progressive/reformist movements arguing that the latter promoted the separation of religious affairs from state affairs and relied on the slow transformation of social institutions through democratic means. It was the constitutional framework of countries with a parliamentary suffrage that favoured a gradualist approach.[48] Thus, Al Beshri argues that with such a system of reference and with such a framework of political, economic and social rights that movements could observe, progress ensued in Western societies. This has not been the case in the Arab-Islamic world where the system of reference has been a religious, Islamic one.[49] Thus, although the Western model of governance was prescribed and imposed on the Arab world, it has not been accompanied by social and accountable institutions encompassing systems of rights, rules and regulations (which would at the same time allow people to defend, protect and relate to their system of belief). Arab rulers have taken advantage of this gap and as a result have made themselves unaccountable to the people. The legacy of a dual and overlapping system of governance and values is thus what the Arab-Islamic world has been faced

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[45] See also Loren D. Lybarger, *Identity & Religion in Palestine. The Struggle between Islamism & Secularism in the Occupied Territories* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2007) for a thorough investigation of the development and changes in Palestinian political identity over the past decades.

[46] Although this discourse may be read as a species of contextualism which dichotomizes the 'universal' and the 'particular', Al Beshri does not imply that these are mutually exclusive. His point is to highlight the importance of understanding the different historical trajectories in the Middle East and those in Europe.

[47] Interview with Nasr Al-Din Sha'r, Nablus, September 10, 2007.

[48] See W. E. Paterson and I. Campbell, *Social Democracy in Post-War Europe* (London and New York: MacMillan, 1974).

[49] See also Anthony Black, 'The Difference Between Cultures: What Can We Learn From a Comparative History of Political Thought'. Paper delivered at the Social & Political Thought Seminar Series, Department of Sociology, University of Warwick, October 27, 2008.

with: on the one hand, what has been inherited from an Islamic civilisation: on the other, the prescriptions imposed by Western colonial powers. While clearly impressed by the West's capacity to organise syndicates, political parties and social movements, Al Beshri maintains that Islam as a reference point and as a way of life ensures cultural harmony in the Arab world.

2.2 Islamist-reformist

By Islamist-reformists, I refer to contemporary voices in the MENA region who are trying to adapt the tenets of their faith, Islam, to changing times and circumstances.[50] The demands of Muslims across the region today aspire to improvements in their daily lives, be they economic, political and social as well as to having some say in these affairs (political rights). Rather than a passive reading of the Koran, Islamic reformers adopt a flexible and human interpretation and understanding of Islam which can accommodate pluralism. Gamal Al-Banna, an Islamic scholar and younger brother of Hassan Al-Banna, (founder of the Muslim Brotherhood), for example, argues that "there is no contradiction between total freedom of thought and religion" and that "Islam does not pretend to a monopoly of wisdom".[51] This intellectual dissident distances himself from conservative, extremist positions and believes that his faith is compatible with a liberal society.[52] (He is often described as more reformist and more liberal than mainstream Islamist reformers). Reformists thus challenge doctrines which stipulate that Islam and democracy are incompatible but remain with the dilemma of how to reconcile Islam with modernity through the creation of a life view that is attuned to both.[53] But they reiterate the real diversity within Islam and insist that Islam exists as a monolith only in the imagination of the West.[54]

Another Middle Eastern thinker who symbolizes the Islamist reformist category is Sheikh Rachid al-Ghannouchi, the Tunisian political activist and co-founder of the *Hizb al-Nahdah* (Renaissance Party, formerly the *Mouvement de la Tendence Islamique*, Movement of Islamic Tendency or MTI, founded during a brief 'spring' of Tunisian political liberalization in 1981). His movement clearly offered a worrying challenge to the rule of Presidents Bourguiba and Ben Ali. When the *Nahda* party was outlawed, Ghannouchi was granted political asylum in Britain in 1993.[55] Since his exile, and

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[50] See Robin Wright, 'Islam and Liberal Democracy: Two Visions of Reformation', *Journal of Democracy* 7, no. 2 (1996): 64-75.

[51] Interview with Gamal AlBanna, Cairo, March 24, 2008.

[52] Timothy Garton Ash, 'We are making a fatal mistake by ignoring the dissidents within Islam', *The Guardian*, March 15, 2007. Available at:
http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2007/mar/15/religion.comment Last accessed on October 9, 2008.

[53] John Voll, *Islam: Continuity and Change in the Modern World* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1995).

[54] Garton Ash, 'We are making a fatal mistake'. This does not discard the fact that some Islamists also hold a monolithic view of the 'West'.

[55] Christopher, Alexander. 'Opportunities, Organizations and Ideas: Islamists and Workers in Tunisia and Algeria', *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 32 (2000): 465-90; Mohammed Elihachmi Hamdi, *The Politicisation of Islam: Essay on Democratic Governance* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1998).

through his various travels to Europe and the United States, Ghannouchi has been exposed to diverse democratic systems and their workings in practice. Like Al-Banna, he is often labelled as more liberal within the Islamist reformist camp. On the issue of democracy he argues that the role of Islam is to provide the system with moral values and promotes an Islamic system that includes free elections, a free media, protection of minorities, majority rule, equality of all religious and secular parties, and full rights for women.[56] In effect, this implies that these liberal values need to be incorporated more clearly into modern interpretations of Islam.

Often described as another important, liberal, Islamic thinker, the Egyptian (now retired and living under continuous government protection) Chief Judge Muhammad Sa'id Al-'Ashmawy studied Islamic and comparative law and practiced law as a high court judge. In his writings, he strongly opposes the ideology and practice of Islamic extremists in Egypt as well as the idea of an Islamic state. According to Al-'Ashmawy, sovereignty is not vested in God but in the nation or the people. For instance, current secular Egyptian law accommodates Shar'ia law in some respects such as civil affairs and some social practices such as adultery but does not accommodate Shar'ia courts as in Saudi Arabia. He thus argues for the place of Islamic law in contemporary politics and society in Egypt and is convinced that only enlightenment of the Arab masses will bring about a transition to political liberalization, progress and freedom in his country and elsewhere in the MENA region. As a reformist voice his writings attempt to highlight the Islamic faith's abuse by some groups through their irrelevant, unjust and corrupt practices and to encourage believers not to allow their faith to be used against them. [I will hasten to add that Al-'Ashmawy himself is very much against any labels such as secular, modern, or Islamist but for the sake of explicating his views I have taken the liberty to include him under the Islamist-reformist camp].[57]

The above is simply a small sample of the diverse views of how political liberalisation can come about in a predominantly Muslim society. This leaves us with the question: from a discourse approach, which of these views present challenges to the discursive principles of the EU on democracy promotion in the ME? The secularist camp falls neatly into the existing discursive framework of the EU. Looking at the other side of the typology presented above, what Islamists (whether traditionalist or reformist) are seeking to build is a reinterpretation of Islam that sits comfortably with pluralistic political processes, without Muslims having to sacrifice the essentials of their beliefs. This is what David Edgar calls a progressive path, which requires a new reframing of the EU's discourse on democracy promotion.[58]

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[56] Quoted in Robin Wright, *Islam and Liberal Democracy*.
[57] Private interview with Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawy, Cairo, March 31, 2008. See Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban (ed.), *Against Islamic Extremism: The Writings of Muhammad Sa'id al-'Ashmawy*, (Florida: University Press of Florida, 2002).
[58] David Edgar, 'Preachers of pluarlism', *The Guardian*, October 29, 2008: 32.

From aspect-blindness to aspect dawning to aspect change in EU discursive principles

Institutionalizing what Norval calls a democratic ethos[59] in the MENA requires an ongoing struggle to re-enact and re-engage with democratic practices, given that people in the region cannot freely act as democratic subjects in their daily lives. In other words, there is no embedded democratic culture in the MENA because democratic practices are not as entrenched in these societies as in the West. People do not have direct experience of democracy and for the freeing of their subjectivity, democracy has to be conceived as a never-ending process and struggle.[60] As I have attempted to show above, there is already a small group of voices who espouse this perception of democracy in the region. From the EU's point of view, the real diversity of voices in the MENA calling for political liberalism requires an ongoing learning and knowledge seeking process and appreciation of the history of this region and Arab identity and subjectivity. As Osama Al-Ghazali Harb so eloquently explains:

> There is no confusion on what is meant by democracy. Participation by the people in the political process is a very important pillar of democracy. The problem is to what extent is this concept of democracy applicable in this society. I feel it is a very complicated issue because of two main factors: the factors which come from within the country itself, Islamic culture, traditional culture, the way these societies have been ruled …; but there is a second factor: and that is the external factor. Simply, we have not been free to organize our societies in the last two hundred years or so. If you look at the case of Egypt, after we had independence from the British in 1922, we had our first liberal constitution, based on the Belgian model, in 1923. The 1923 Constitution, as it later came to be known, sprang from the 1919 revolution which was itself the culmination of more than half a century's struggle. It established the principle of popular sovereignty as the ultimate restraint on the absolute power of the king. It also enshrined liberal political principles and civil liberties within the framework of a form of government based on the dynastic succession and a system of checks and balances between the executive and a bicameral legislature. Egypt's liberal phase ended in 1952 with the Revolution. To understand this one needs to appreciate the climate that prevailed in the Third World at the time and the Western camp's desire to have strong allies in the MENA region capable of containing the communist threat. The Americans needed powerful, military regimes to serve American interests. And we got Nasser, Sadat and Mubarak: all three military men, dictators, and now we are suffering from the effects of their undemocratic and ineffective rule. *But the people of this country are pressuring for democratization* and we also welcome pressure from external actors for democratization here. *But we understand that the building of democracy is*

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[59] Aletta Norval, *Aversive Democracy.*
[60] Dr Mohamed Kadry Said refers to this democratisation process as a path of continuous negotiations and bargaining for people's rights and freedoms. Interview with Kadry Said, Al Ahram Centre, Cairo, March 23, 2008.

our mission – it is not the mission of the Americans. However, if you ask me about the problems of building democracy, I can tell you that the West is only preoccupied with one factor: the Islamic threat. I think this is nonsense. Our core problem is not Islamist forces, or political Islam. Our core problem is authoritarian, undemocratic rule, dictatorship and corruption. You must take into consideration one important factor: Islamic forces are the product of undemocratic rule.[61]

It therefore appears that what the West needs to recognise is the need to address the problem of how a not-yet democratic people can come to make laws instituting a new democratic order.[62] Central to this process of democratic subjectivity is the power and role of rhetoric and persuasion. It is in this context that a reframing of the EU's discourse on democracy can play a role. Rather than promoting itself as a force for good in the region, EU discursive practices have to play on their persuasive and rhetorical power in the ME. When the European Parliament (EP) issued a critical resolution on the situation of human rights in Egypt, in January 2008, the Egyptian government reacted with a strong response arguing that the EP was interfering in Egypt's domestic affairs. For Saad Eddin Ibrahim, the very fact that the Egyptian government felt obliged to respond to this criticism from the EP, is a sign that the democracy discourse has become pervasive and a burden of responsibility for the governments in the MENA.[63] Thereby, such regular statements from the EP keep the issue of democracy alive and create a stronger awareness amongst the masses of the fruit of freedom of expression. This is what Rosemary Foot sees as the essence of discursive constraints placed on repressive regimes by the democracy discourse. Such regimes have serious concerns about their country's image at the global level and have therefore no interest in openly claiming support for changes in the parameters of international norms and conventions. Although there remains a gap between these countries' legal commitment to international norms and their actual behaviours, the democracy discourse enables and empowers other groups in MENA societies to challenge their governments.[64]

It also follows that, rather than being blinded with preconceived perceptions and mis-readings of the ME, what is needed is for the EU to experience an "aspect dawning" wherein the diversity of views in the MENA is recognised. By recognising alternative values, the EU need not negate its own values. Through such recognition, the EU can possibly emerge from its crisis by way of alternative ways of thinking about democracy

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[61] Interview with Osama Ghazali Harb, Democratic Front party, Cairo, March 31, 2008 (my own emphasis). It is important to mention that Harb used to be a loyal Mubarak supporter and had praised Mubarak's democratic credentials. See his Al Ahram Weekly Online article entitled 'No less than Egypt's due', March 3 – 9, 2005. Available at: http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2005/732/op2.htm. Last accessed on October 15, 2008. Harb changed his opinion after his resignation from the NDP. See Daily News, March 9, 2006, 'Top Reformist In Ruling Party Resigns In Protest Over Lack of Democratic Change'. Available at: http://www.dailystaregypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=863 Last accessed October 15, 2008.

[62] Norval refers to Rousseau's lawgiver in this regard: 135.

[63] Interview with Saad Eddin Ibrahim, March 6, 2008.

[64] Rosemary Foot, 'Human Rights and Global Governance: Efficacy, Power and Legitimacy?' Paper presented at the POLSIS Departmental Seminar Programme, Autumn series, University of Birmingham, October 8, 2008.

and the ME. This is what Norval calls "aspect change". For Norvall, this requires a rethinking of liberal democracy. Drawing upon deliberative (Habermas, Rawls) and post-structuralist (Mouffe and Laclau) approaches to democracy, Norval offers a Wittgenstein-inspired way of understanding global complexities of the formation of a democratic subjectivity through what she terms "aversive democracy": It is through people's ordinary contestations in their political spheres that their democratic freedoms and responsibilities are constituted. Thus, we need

> to think change in a more nuanced manner than is traditionally the case. Most work on change is caught between the horns of revolution and reformism. Wittgenstein's conception of aspect dawning helps [us] to think about quite radical change, which would not be reducible to a revolutionary break, yet which could occur as a result of quite small changes in articulations between elements. I draw a distinction between aspect dawning and change to capture the senses in which we think of change in relation to democracy. Again, much of the literature works with a distinction between "societies in transition" and "well established liberal democracies"… [T]his tends to be a dichotomy that also has teleological overtones. I feel that we need to question the distinction in kind between *change under different conditions*… Finally, Wittgenstein's conception of aspect change requires a shift of/in perspective, which … emphasizes the importance of the subjective dimension.[65]

For the EU this means moving beyond fixed understandings and instead engaging in more active interactions with other actors in the MENA, beyond the region's authoritarian regimes. This engagement must include Islamist thinkers for a reframing of the EU's discourse on democracy which better captures the exact political nature of ME historical trajectories and of these diverse individuals and groups, at the same time as it encapsulates their surrounding institutional environments and how they aim to operate in a more liberal and open, political system.

Conclusion. Reframing the EU's democracy promotion discourse in the Middle East

In the process of reframing the EU's discourse on democracy in the ME, what is at stake is a recognition of democracy as a certain mode of identification, of a particular way of life, in particular contexts. In the case of the ME, this requires a deepening of our understanding of the making of democratic claims and the forging of democratic arguments.[66] In a May 2007 resolution, adopted by the EP on the EU's strategy for reform in the Arab world, there already appears to be a conflation of European and Arab discourses on democracy and political reform:

> [The European Parliament] is convinced that Arab identity is by no means incompatible with the notion of modernity or with the initiation of serious reforms; considers that the feeling of impotence which underlies the "Arab malaise" can be overcome through a *renewed* partnership based on

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[65] Communication between Aletta Norval and the author, (my own emphasis). October 24, 2008.
[66] See Norval, 2007.

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understanding, mutual confidence, respect for social and cultural practices and credibility; recalls that *the westernisation of Arab societies is not the most appropriate route to this end* and that the notions of democracy, human rights and the rule of law are fundamental and universal values which innumerable Muslim authorities and governments have declared to be compatible with Islam.[67]

There is therefore a realization (aspect dawning) in EU discourse that change in perceptions of the Other is needed and in turn this brings us back to Norval's work on the need for a change in our political grammar. In the EP's discourse there is an implicit recognition that there may be other factors that the EU needs to recognise in its quest to promote democracy in the MENA. Most importantly, democracy is never fully achieved by its very nature. In Derrida's terms, we need to think about democracy 'to come'.[68] The strength of such an annunciation from the EP is the acceptance and appreciation of historical trajectories, intended or unintended consequences of EU policies towards the region thus far, and how the EU is perceived by the very targets of its policies in the MENA. The Islamist thinkers covered in this article emphasise that democracy is not a substance apart from the practice verifying it. Thus, their demands point at a wish for a space of shared meaning. As Norval stipulates: 'The accompanying awareness of multiplicity helps to establish the minimum conditions we need in order to get a democratic dialogue underway'.[69]

Therefore, rather than focusing solely on electoral assistance, economic development and mere diplomatic events on, for instance, inter-religious dialogue, what is needed is a new platform where the EU's discourse opens up to critical voices from the ME, such as those outlined in this article. Only through seeing things in a new way (aspect dawning), on the part of the EU, can these voices freely express their thoughts about political change without the supervision of either their regimes' or any religious authorities. This requires revisiting what the EU has been doing so far in terms of democracy promotion and a reframing in the EU's discourse, moving away from any monolithic conceptions about democracy in the ME. By engaging with critical voices from the ME and creating the space for these voices to freely express their views on political change, the EU's discursive framework has the potential to have a direct impact on the people of this region.

Studies on contemporary forces calling for political change in the MENA region suggest that these are emanating from within rather than from without the countries concerned.[70] For external actors like the EU this requires an effort to come closer to the reality and

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[67] European Parliament, 'Resolution of 10 May 2007 on reforms in the Arab world: what strategy should the European Union adopt?' P6_TA(2007)0179, Brussels. (Own emphasis).

[68] Jacues Derrida, *Politics of Friendship*, trans. George Collins (London: Verso, 1997): 306.

[69] Aletta Norval, *Aversive Democracy*, 106.

[70] See for example Michelle Pace and Peter Seeberg (eds.), 'The European Union's Democratization Agenda in the Mediterranean: A Critical Inside-Out Approach'. *Democratization*, Special Issue, February, 2009, forthcoming. See also Stephanie Lawson, 'Democracy and the Problem of Cultural Relativism: Normative Issues for International Politics', in *Democracy and International Relations. Critical Theories/Problematic Practices*, ed. Helen Smith (Basingstoke: MacMillan Press, 2000), 71-89.

diversity within the MENA, if it still wants to be engaged in democracy promotion efforts. So, rather than focusing primarily on the normative power of norms and their universality, the EU needs to move into a new phase whereby each MENA neighbour is understood according to its own specific circumstances. This means that rather than looking outside-in the region, what the EU needs is an aspect change or inside-out approach whereby both regimes and opposition voices are understood in terms of their preferences for political change.[71] This may require the EU to include Islamist thinkers in a new progressive reframing of its democracy promotion discourse.

According to Norval, those seeking their subjectivity as democrats need to become democrats. In Palestine, the political grammar of occupation has to be replaced by Palestinians' identification as democrats. In Egypt, the political grammar of authoritarianism and Mubarak's tight grip on political power has to be replaced by the Egyptian people's identification as democrats. A very good case in point is the sexual harassement case brought forward to the Egyptian courts by Noha Roushdy against Sherief Gomaa Gibrial in October 2008. The Egyptian Center for Women's Rights applauded the court's decision which sentenced Gibrial to a three-year sentence and fined him 5,001 Egyptian pounds. Such a sentence, the ECWR argues, restores confidence in the Egyptian legal system's ability to defend women subject to such crimes in every step of the process and assures women that their rights will be protected.[72]

Such evidence of people's identification as democrats goes hand in hand with the role of persuasion, and rhetoric becomes central to any account of democratic subjectivity. Much contemporary conceptual work highlights, on the one hand, the importance of not limiting our discussion on democratisation in regions like the MENA to deterministic stereotypes about Islamic, traditional societies. On the other hand, we cannot make claims to universal positions which promote a single, liberal democratic model of governance.[73] If external actors like the EU are genuinely interested in promoting freedoms in the MENA, then a closer inspection of the real interests of elites in this region versus the demands of people, grassroots, opposition groups and movements is called for. Through such an aspect dawning, the EU can listen more to diverse voices in the MENA and how they perceive the EU's efforts in the area of democracy-building – its functionality and regional relevance. Thus, the EU can support such processes of identification by encouraging more similar claims to be put forward by people in the ME identifying as free individuals. In other words, the EU can aspect-learn more ways to improve its efforts and move the agenda forwards (to aspect change). This is something for the Czech Republic and Swedish incoming Presidencies (during 2009) to take seriously.

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[71] See Pace, Seeberg and Cavatorta, ''The EU's Democratization Agenda in the Mediterranean'.

[72] Quoted in Abdel-Rahman Hussein, 'Landmark Sexual Harassment Case Ends In Three-Year Sentence', *Daily News Egypt*, October 22, 2008. Available at:
http://www.thedailynewsegypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=17280 Last accessed on October 31, 2008.

[73] See Norval, 2007 and Stephanie Lawson, *Tradition Versus Democracy in the South Pacific. Fiji, Tonga and Western Samoa*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).