# 'Divided they stand, divided they fail'

# Opposition politics in Morocco

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Abstract: The literature on democratization emphasises how authoritarian constraints usually lead genuine opposition parties and movements to form alliances in order to make demands for reform to the authoritarian regime. There is significant empirical evidence to support this theoretical point. While this trend is partly visible in the Middle East and North Africa, such coalitions are usually short-lived and limited to a single-issue, never reaching the stage of formal and organic alliances. This paper, using the case of Morocco, explains this puzzle by focusing on the ideological and strategic differences that exist between the Islamist and the secular/liberal sectors of civil society, where genuine opposition politics occurs. In addition, this paper explains how the pro-democracy strategies of the European Union further strengthen this divide and function as an obstacle to democratic reform

Key words: civil society — European Union – coalition building – Islamic state

1

**Introduction**

The democratization literature on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has recently begun to focus attention on the behaviour and actions of parties and movements operating under authoritarian conditions. Similar analyses were in the past conducted by using the theoretical tools of transitology, whose main assumptions were first set out in the mid-1980s in the work of Schmitter and O'Donnell,[1] and which served as a key theoretical framework to explain processes of democratization. In addition to its academic value, some decision-makers used findings to inform their policies when 'crafting' democracy.[2] However, in recent times, many of the original findings have come under criticism in light of new theoretical contributions and empirical evidence.[3] Perhaps more importantly, many scholars now realize that 'democratization got stuck in many transition countries'[4], requiring different theoretical approaches to analyse existing political systems.

With the controversial exceptions of Israel, Turkey and Lebanon, the MENA stands out for its relative lack of consolidated established democracies, despite various processes of ongoing liberalisation initiated in the late 1980s and 1990s. Given the persistence of authoritarianism,[5] it has become more fruitful to abandon the rigidity of the transition paradigm and concentrate on the examination of opposition dynamics without linking them to the 'teleology of transitology.'[6] As Pripstein-Posusney argues, 'there is a paucity of comparative literature on opposition strategies under pseudo-democratic conditions,'[7] where façade democratic institutions often provide cover for the unaccountability and authoritarianism of the principal decision-makers,[8] and an analysis of opposition dynamics may reveal processes that the literature on democratisation does not appear to capture. The specific focus of such studies is on

cross-ideological co-operation between opposition actors. In this context, there is the theoretical expectation that under authoritarian constraints opposition groups, irrespective of their ideological positions and policy preferences, will pool their resources to try to pressurize the regime into reforming the political system because they all share the common objective of eliminating the authoritarian player to open up the political space. This is to be expected because it is only the removal of authoritarian constraints that will allow genuine opposition actors freely to put forth their visions of a new society. There is substantial empirical evidence from Eastern European and Latin American cases to suggest that such a theoretical assumption carries considerable validity.[9] In addition, it is important to emphasise that international actors play a significant role in generating 'pooling dynamics' among opposition groups. The European Union has been traditionally very active in processes of democratization,[10] by sponsoring opposition groups in order to help them create the circumstances for political pluralism, as the more recent cases of Serbia and Georgia also demonstrate.

This article argues that in the MENA, contrary to some claims, effective unity of the opposition does not occur and it postulates that there is much more competition than cooperation among opposition groups. This is particularly true when one examines the fractious relationships between secular/liberal movements on the one side and Islamist ones on the other. The article attempts to explain why the MENA deviates from the expected behaviour of alliance-building between genuine opposition groups. The analysis concentrates on the Moroccan case and examines the divisions within the opposition not only in the context of ideological differences and tactical considerations, but also in light of the preponderant role that the EU plays in

reinforcing such divisions through its direct policies of democracy promotion and its wider Euro-Mediterranean Partnership framework.

While there are methodological problems in selecting only one case study, the broad similarities that exist between many countries in the region, in terms of the widespread existence of authoritarianism, the presence of similar political opposition dynamics with a dominant Islamist current and a less popular secular-liberal one and the role of the EU as an external promoter of regional policies of democracy promotion and market liberalisation might allow for useful generalisations. Morocco is a good case because of the nature of its political system, based on the controversial concept of *alternance*[11] implemented by the late King Hassan II. It is precisely in such contexts, where the previous exclusionary rules of participation have been relaxed in order to create a shift towards more pluralism, as attested by the inclusion of an Islamist party into the political system and the growth of autonomous social movements and civil society organisations, that we might witness the emergence of a unified opposition demanding significant and meaningful democratic institutional changes, such as the revision of the current constitution.

**Theoretical discussion**

Under pseudo-democratic conditions, where a degree of pluralism is introduced in the hope of re-legitimising the authoritarian system, it is logical to assume that genuine opposition actors, irrespective of their ideological and policy differences, will coalesce, if only temporarily, to put pressure on the regime to accede to their demands for more democratic change. Such an assumption is theoretically sound because opposition groups under an authoritarian regime are likely to suffer from the same

constraints on their political activities and are likely to share the same desire for the authoritarian player to be removed. Thus, it seems legitimate to hypothesize that such circumstances would lead to identifying the regime as the common, principal 'enemy'. This would in turn be expected to lead to the creation of some sort of united front, electoral alliance or umbrella organisation to deal with the ruling elites and negotiate or demand, depending on their strength and resources, political reforms. The creation of a viable alternative to the regime in place is paramount because an authoritarian system can survive without much legitimacy.[12] Thus, in past transitions to democracy, such umbrella organisations were indeed created and alliance-building was a common feature. Acting as rational actors, opposition parties in authoritarian regimes for instance often form electoral alliances to unsettle the predominance of the ruling party and are at times quite successful, through this alliance, in triggering wider political reforms.[13]

Thus, the pooling of resources is expected to take place because there is a common objective to be achieved and differences can be briefly set aside, as the removal of the authoritarian player is the most pressing common goal. Ideological differences and policy disputes are also momentarily set aside because if the authoritarian player remains in control such debates are of only academic interest. It follows that the assumption regarding the inevitability of coalition building among opposition groups carries considerable theoretical weight in the sense that it constitutes rational behaviour for political groups wishing to reform the existing system.[14]

Furthermore, there is a significant amount of empirical evidence to support the claim that coalition-building is likely to occur when one examines the experiences of

Eastern Europe and Latin America. In his examination of the democratization of the then Czechoslovakia, Olson points out that all the opposition groups and leading civil society movements 'were submerged […] in the formation of the Civic Forum of Prague, and the Public Against Violence in Bratislava. Both were amorphous reform groupings, united for the single purpose of removing communists from power. Having quickly achieved their goal, they as quickly lost the source of their cohesion.'[15] The Polish transition showed similar traits as the 'lay left' opposition were joined by Catholic activists within the umbrella group established prior to the arrival of *Solidarnosc* on the scene. *Solidarnosc* itself was a vast collection of groups and individuals with different agendas, but with the common intent of removing the communists from power.[16] The post-transition divisions within the movement, which led to the creation of a number of political parties claiming a *Solidarnosc* legacy, testify to the ideological heterogeneity of the movement. The experience of some Eastern European countries is by no means unique and the Chilean opposition was also able to achieve a considerable degree of unity to remove Pinochet by bringing together a number of different social movements and parties with very little in common in terms of ideology and policy preferences.[17]

Given the strength of both the theoretical assumptions and the extent of supportive empirical evidence, we might expect that similar behaviour would occur in other authoritarian contexts where a certain degree of liberalisation is introduced and where there are a number of active opposition groups. Both these conditions are present in many MENA countries, which, at different times over the last two decades, have experienced some political liberalisation and emergence of opposition actors. It is plausible to argue both that other regions' democratization experiences are applicable

to the MENA as well to contend that the region should not be treated as unique when it comes to social fragmentation, civil society activism and opposition dynamics. [18] Indeed a number of scholars point out that coalition-building has been in place for some time and continues to characterize MENA political systems when these become more open, pointing again to the existence of trends found in other regions. For example, in Jordan the Islamist Islamic Action Front (IAF) participated in the Higher Committee for the Coordination of National Opposition Parties (HCCNOP) with leftist and secular parties.[19] In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has a history of striking electoral alliances with secular opposition parties as it did with the *Wafd* and Labour party[20] in the 1980s, while more recently 'Islamists are part of the pro-democracy *Kifaya* coalition.'[21] In Algeria, the Islamist FIS and a number of secular, leftist movements agreed on a common platform of demands during the civil war, highlighting the proximity of views between ideological rivals on democratic procedures.[22] In Tunisia, secular intellectuals and political parties with an anti-Islamist ethos made a rapprochement towards Islamists in order to highlight the repressive measures of the regime for the international community.[23] More recently, Lebanon experienced the emergence of an unexpected alliance between *Hezbollah* and Michel Aoun's party.[24] In Yemen, the Islamist *Islah* party cooperated with its secular counterparts.[25]

However, alliance-building has not been deep or effective to any significant extent and it can be argued that it has been mainly of a tactical nature. This is indeed the crucial point. Alliances in MENA countries seem to be very tentative and *ad hoc*; opposition movements manage to build coalitions in order to put pressure on the regime on a specific issue, but the short-term nature of their accords never spills over

into more wide-ranging programmes for change. This is particularly evident in the absence of a truly sustained dialogue between opposition Islamists and secular-liberal and leftist movements, whose relationships are fraught with difficulties and suspicions. Thus, rapprochements never seem to go beyond the achievement of limited results, fail to be sustained over time and are consequently generally weak. It is the absence of sustainability of these experiences that characterizes most opposition politics in the MENA and it is therefore important to explore why such coalition-building dynamics fail to be effective when, under similar circumstances, other coalition-building efforts in different areas of the globe consolidated successfully.[26] If the MENA is unique in this respect, then what are the conditions of its uniqueness?

All this presents a significant academic puzzle and, at the same time, poses a challenge for domestic and international actors genuinely interested in and committed to democratic change. The absence of a significant degree of unity among opposition movements partially contributes to explaining how authoritarian regimes in the region have been able to remain in power despite the legitimacy crisis that many suffer from.

There are two, major explanations that focus on the inability of the opposition to have a more central role in the lengthy processes of democratic transition in the region, but they are mostly concerned with the capabilities of the regime rather than the deficiencies of the opposition. Firstly, as Eva Bellin argues, 'authoritarianism has proven exceptionally robust in the Middle East and North Africa because the coercive apparatus in many states has been exceptionally able and willing to crush reform initiatives from below.'[27] This points to the efficiency of the regimes in stifling opposition, which, weakened by constant repression, is therefore unable to make

coherent demands because it is first and foremost preoccupied with its own survival. Albrecht offers a different explanation and focuses his attention on strategies of selective co-optation, which divide opposition groups. Some opposition figures and movements are periodically integrated into the regime, but they are unable to influence policy-making decisions and are almost entirely dependent on the authoritarian leader for survival and for benefits.[28]

The focus on repression and co-optation overemphasizes the material and legitimacy resources necessary for the authoritarian regimes to implement such strategies and overlooks both the strength of opposition actors and the dynamics that often characterize their relationships. It follows that the absence of coalition-building cannot solely be explained by focusing on the regimes' strengths. First of all, a number of authoritarian regimes do not possess the amount of material and legitimacy resources necessary to effectively repress and/or co-opt opposition all of the time.[29] This is evident in the regimes' attempt to recapture legitimacy through the introduction of "façade" democratic changes such as multiparty elections for legislatures that are virtually emptied of any meaningful policy-making power and autonomy. Secondly, the importance of ideology in polarized authoritarian societies should be taken into account. As hinted by Pripstein-Posusney, it is ideological disagreements that are usually to blame for the failure of both electoral and non-electoral coalitions between opposition actors in authoritarian contexts.[30] Thirdly, in order for the co-optation of opposition groups by the ruling elites to be successful, one needs to rely on the willingness of actors to be co-opted through incentives that are greater than the positive inducements of coalition-building.

Following from the previous discussion, this article hypothesizes that coalition-building does not occur because of ideological differences and tactical considerations between opposition actors, which are played out in a context where the international dimension has become a crucial variable in how domestic political and economic arrangements are put in place.[31] The opposition groups in the MENA are considerably more divided than their counterparts in other transitional countries on the type of post-authoritarian society that they would like to construct because their belief systems are often very different, sometimes simply irreconcilable. While it could be argued that such ideological and policy differences often also characterized other societies, the contention of this article is that the strength of Islamist ideological discourse and its potential, practical translation into legislation about, for example, women, minorities or religious schooling, is very much perceived to be inimical to the construction of some form of western-style liberal-democracy, which is the ultimate objective of other sectors of the opposition and of the international community. While the division of the opposition into a secular/liberal/leftist camp and an Islamist one might seem arbitrary, it is analytically useful because, ultimately, the question of the creation of an Islamic state, which all Islamists want, is divisive and the views about it potentially irreconcilable. In this sense, Islamism deserves to be taken seriously as an ideological project. Islamists typically have a rather clear ideological script to which they refer, striving to translate their ideological position into specific policies, as Pace clarifies in her contribution to this Special Issue. It is true that there are a number of competing 'Islamisms' to be accounted for, but divisions within political Islam are tactical rather than ideological, particularly when it comes to the objective of creating the Islamic state, whatever that may mean to different Islamist groups.[32]

During transitions to democracy outside the MENA, opposition parties and movements were significantly divided over issues related to the institutional set-up of the country, to the electoral system to be adopted, and to the type of economic development to be undertaken. In the MENA these issues are equally divisive, but, in addition, there is the very controversial issue of the role of religion in shaping public policy in all domains of political, social, cultural and economic interaction. To some extent, all issues are ultimately informed by the ideological position on the role of religion in politics. This is very problematic for the linkage between liberalism and democratic procedures. Furthermore, Western states are opposed to any role for Islamists in the decision-making process regarding the future of the countries in the region, as Volpi highlights in his contribution. Thus, the opposition of the international community to political Islam has a significant influence on how domestic actors interact with each other because of the resources that external actors can distribute in the domestic political game.

A further issue to deal with is the paradox of a 'democratic discourse' that all MENA opposition groups adopt. What is striking when one examines their public pronouncements is that all opposition movements, Islamists included, utilize very similar discourses when outlining their position. For instance, in Morocco, the discourse of the Islamist Justice and Charity Group is favourable to procedural democracy[33] as the only way for the country to exit the crisis it finds itself in, just like a number of secular and liberal social movements which claim that democratic procedures and protection of human rights are the only solution to the country's ills. Thus, there is a rhetorical consensus on democracy, human rights, justice, accountability and independence, which would indicate that they all strive for the

same objectives and should, therefore, find it easy to come to an accommodation.[34] Such concepts, however, take on very different meanings depending on which group is using them and it illustrates the paradox of all groups who use a democratic discourse without agreeing on basic definitions of its fundamental concepts. This demonstrates how only an ideological understanding of their use can explain why, despite such rhetorical consensus, that there are no practical and concrete measures taken to translate it into coalition-building. This further paradox is at the heart of the political debate in the MENA region where opposition movements regularly accuse each other of 'lying their way to power.' Non-Islamist opposition actors for whom democratic political change equates with the elimination of religion from public life are very sceptical of the pro-democracy stances of Islamist parties and prefer to side with the authoritarian rulers in the hope of obtaining limited advantages rather than choosing full co-operation with a political player they do not trust .[35]

Tactical considerations compound these ideological differences. In transitions elsewhere, it was almost impossible for opposition actors to know *a priori* what their level of popular support was likely to be once free and fair elections were called. This scenario does not exist in the MENA, as past elections in the region have been extremely significant because they have shown that Islamism enjoys much– although variable levels of – support.[36] The same cannot be said for either the ruling parties or, more importantly, for the secular opposition parties. Given the poor performances of secular leftist and liberal parties, it should not come as a surprise that cooperation with Islamists is a very contentious issue for them. Most activists in the secular camp are convinced that Islamist movements would do extremely well in free and fair elections and they are afraid of the potential institutional and legislative changes that

Islamists would introduce, rolling democratic achievements back.[37] Thus, it would not make sense for secular/liberal/leftist groups to coalesce strongly with Islamists against the ruling regime because a genuine process of democratization would not benefit them, but would aid a feared competitor. In this scenario, it is also no surprise that Islamist movements in recent times expressed the wish to cooperate with the secular elements of the opposition in order to secure both acceptance and some form of democratic legitimacy. When it comes to the Islamists' strategy, they seem to consider coalition-building as a welcome development if done on their own terms, but there is no incentive to truly compromise on key issues given that they expect to win free and fair elections, which will give them the opportunity to dominate the new institutions.[38]

The case of Morocco is utilized in order to analyse the validity of such a framework in explaining why effective and long-lasting coalitions do not occur in the country. In order to substantiate the hypothesis that ideology is the main variable explaining the absence of coalition-building, there should be sufficient evidence to demonstrate that ideology and references to very different belief systems are at the heart of the political discourse of the opposition actors. In addition, it should be demonstrated that references to such belief systems are not simply made in order to claim some form of legitimacy, but are a crucial part of policy formation. Finally, there should be evidence that the actions and activities of international actors, specifically the European Union, reinforce such a divide and contribute to the persistence of authoritarianism.

**Opposition politics in Morocco**

Morocco is today categorized as a 'liberalised autocracy',[39] where the ultimate decision-maker, the king, is unelected and unaccountable, but also where a multiparty system exists alongside a degree of individual freedoms. The system as a whole rests on the centrality of the monarchy, but political institutions and society see the activism of a number of different political movements and associations challenging the authoritarianism of the system.

Morocco has always maintained at least some façade of pluralism,[40] but under the new king, Mohammed VI, there has been a relaxation of the most authoritarian aspects of the regime and this has encouraged more openness and more participation in the political process,[41] leading to the emergence of a number of outspoken opposition actors. Looking at the institutional level, there are a number of political parties that are formally independent from the monarchy and argue for changes that would see the introduction of accountability for the principal decision-makers. However political parties, including the Socialist Union and the Islamist Party of Justice and Development (PJD)[42], have largely been co-opted in so far as they have to recognise the primacy of the king if they wish to be integrated into the system.

Thus, it is only by looking at the broader social level that one sees the emergence of movements dedicated to reforming radically all aspects of Moroccan politics and society. It is in the realm of civil society where the confrontational attitudes of different opposition groups are the clearest. As Michael Willis highlights, political parties in North Africa are highly discredited in the eyes of many citizens and do not perform the basic tasks that political parties should be carrying out.[43] Thus, to a significant extent, 'opposition politics' takes place within civil society and, therefore,

opposition dynamics should be examined in this context. In addition, the European

Union, through its policies for the region, has explicitly designed democracy

promotion strategies on strengthening civil society because it believes that it is only

through increased civil society activism that democratic reforms will be introduced

and sustained.[44]

The activism of civil society in Morocco has been examined in some detail

elsewhere,[45] but it is worth reiterating here that there is a strong presence of both

secular/liberal groups (among the most active organisations are women's rights

groups) and Islamist ones, in particular the *al-Adl* led by sheikh Yassine, which is

probably the largest Islamist movement in the country.[46] The level of co-operation

between the two sectors of civil society is quite limited. On issues such as prisoners'

rights, there is some convergence between the two camps as there is on some foreign

policy matters, such as the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. Such convergence is at times

explicit and takes the form of mass demonstrations as the pro-Palestinian march that

took place in July 2006 in Rabat.[47] The potential for convergence on more explicitly

domestic, political issues is there,[48] but it is never fully exploited and divisions tend to

emerge quickly and strongly, reinforcing the separation already in existence. All

alliances are temporary and focused on specific issues without spill-over effects into

more comprehensive coalition-building.

The explanation for the inability and unwillingness of these groups to co-operate more

fully with each other and establish a common platform of minimal demands for

change is largely due to the radically different visions that they have for Morocco.

Such different and, crucially, competing visions are the product of three

interconnected factors. First of all, the respective ideological programmes, positions and values have their roots in two systems of beliefs that seem to contradict one another to the point of conflict. Secondly, such ideological conflicts are reinforced by the activities and beliefs of external actors, specifically the European Union, attempting to promote a particular version of democracy. Finally, there are tactical considerations related to perceived strength of all actors involved.

As in other post-colonial societies, two different ideological poles of reference uneasily co-exist in Morocco: an imported European liberal secularism and an Islamism based on indigenous traditions and interpretations. While this might be a crude differentiation in light of the surge of post-Islamism,[49] it is important to emphasize that the worldviews and sources of legitimacy of these two poles make it extremely complicated to have a workable synthesis along Turkish lines, which, some contend, is in a state of crisis of itself. On matters related to democracy, democratization and human rights, these two poles of reference differ quite substantially. Both ideological referents claim that a 'new', more democratic and more just Morocco can be built if the prescriptions of their respective ideologies are correctly followed.[50] Both desire radical change and wish to construct a more equitable society, where the leadership is accountable to the people. On closer inspection, the language of both is indeed similar, but the 'content' which is to constitute this 'new' country radically differs. The debate mainly centres on the role of religion in the public sphere, on which all other issues, ranging from individual freedoms to economic policy, depend for a resolution.

The focus on Sheikh Yassine's group is valid because of the dominance of the group within the Islamist camp in Morocco, particularly after the snubbing that the PJD, the

main Islamist ideological rival, received from voters in the September 2007

elections.[51] The Justice and Charity Group refuses to engage in what it perceives to be

a rigged political system, which does not take into account the will of Moroccans.

Judging by the low voter turnout at the September 2007 legislative elections, it could

be inferred that many ordinary Moroccans share this view.

If one examines the rhetoric of Sheikh Yassine (the leader of the outlawed Islamist

movement, the Justice and Charity Group), it emerges that he has nothing but

contempt for the modernity the West espouses,[52] which is precisely the type of

modernity that many among the secular and liberal Moroccans (such as Nourredine

Saoudi, a leading civil society activist, who argues that the rise of Islamism is a

danger for Morocco)[53] aspire to. In fact, according to Maddy-Weitzman, 'Yassine

[views] modernity and its globalised culture as superficial and even bestial'.[54] In

particular, he rejects the notion that any political, economic and social system can be

based on absolute rationality because 'a modern notion of progress founded on reason

and committed entirely to efficiency'[55] is bound to lead to disastrous results such as

Nazism and the breakdown of the fabric of society. According to Lauzière, 'Yassine

undertakes what can be called an epistemological and spiritual *dawa*, in which he

attempts to debunk the rational assumptions that have characterised philosophical

modernity since the Enlightenment'.[56] Thus, instead of aping Western modernity,

Yassine wishes for Muslims to revert back to Islam and the notions it provides in

order to construct a society that is certainly rational, but where the spiritual and the

divine also have a place because it is only through spiritual connections that society

can truly be just and well-balanced. Such criticism of current Western modernity does

not represent an exception within the world of Islamism and is the starting point of the

critique that Yassine and other Islamist thinkers put forward when analysing the state of their respective societies. According to them, Muslim polities have been bastardised by 'occidentalising elites' and reduced to spiritual rubble. The solution to the material and spiritual ills of Morocco that Yassine identifies, such as very poor social indicators, a weak position in the international system and widespread corruption, is obviously a return to Islam and, more specifically, the creation of an Islamic state. In his Memorandum to King Mohammed VI, Yassine writes: 'we reject all that risks to make us part way with our very own *raison d'être*: Islam'.[57] It is, therefore, the 'applied' spirituality of Islam that will rescue Morocco with its principles of social justice and moral behaviour. The problem with such language and ideological drive is that they do little to reassure secular opposition groups because they are vague in terms of the crucial aspects of who is to govern society and on what legitimacy one is to govern. Yassine offers dogmatic certainty at a time when 'it is easy to see liberal-democracy not as the crowning achievement of civilisation but as manifestation of a laissez-faire, morally bankrupt modernity'.[58] For this he might be appealing to some, but appears dangerous to others. The appeal of his rhetoric should not be underestimated as he is the leader of an Islamist movement with a large and dedicated following. Despite his Sufi-imbued discourse, Yassine's political Islam is quite representative of mainstream Islamist movements elsewhere, particularly when it comes to condemn what are perceived the most deleterious aspects of Western modernity and offers 'Islam as the solution'.[59]

Yassine's religious discourse does not necessarily make the *al Adl* an enemy of democracy *per se*.[60] In fact, Yassine argues that the only concrete way out of the current crisis is for Morocco to hold genuinely free and fair elections, which would

produce accountable, political representatives. Yassine states 'democracy, understood as the freedom and the right of the people to choose their own government, is for us the only way out of the authoritarian darkness'.[61] However, and this is where secular liberal groups again criticize and fear the *al Adl*, he goes on to argue that there is a distinction between the procedures of democracy and the corollaries to these procedures, such as secularization and indifference to spiritual values, which he strongly rejects. The endpoint of any transition is for Yassine 'a democratic process in which Islam is established [in power],'[62] but it is not specified how this would take into account the positions of those who claim that Islam should be relegated to the private sphere. Furthermore, Yassine seems to leave the door wide open to the possibility that the future leaders of Morocco might also have to invoke religious legitimacy in order to govern, which would, according to his secular critics, defeat the very purpose of democratization. After all, the King already rules because of his religious legitimacy and Zaghal points out how Yassine challenges the monarchy precisely on religious grounds, making political contestation religion-dependent rather than excluding it and focusing on individual rights and full, popular sovereignty.[63] On this point, the divergence between opposition groups with different ideological references is very significant. The *al-Adl* does not yet participate in institutional politics and calls instead for radical reforms that would be initiated with the election of a 'Council of the People of Morocco', a popularly elected constitutional assembly that would discuss the future of the country and the institutional choices to be made.[64] This might in theory be acceptable to other groups, but would not solve the issue of religious legitimacy to rule.

In some respects, the positions and activities of the *al Adl* should not be seen as inherently incompatible with what secular and liberal associations believe and do, such as delivering essential social services, promoting accountability of officials, defending the rights of political prisoners or advocating genuine democratic change. Yassine's critique of the ills of Moroccan society is shared in liberal and leftwing circles, particularly when it comes to discussing the very poor, social indicators of the country. The same United Nations statistics that Yassine uses to make his case for Islamism are also used by secular and liberal associations to highlight the problems of Morocco. In addition, just like the *al Adl*, a number of different organisations are involved in charitable work and are politically active in  their attempt to combat corruption and have human rights protected. However, the ideological references and, hence, the endpoint of a Moroccan, political transformation are so different that any formal coalition-building is prevented.

Leftist liberal secular groups are much smaller in numbers than the Islamist associations connected to Yassine or to the PJD and are generally founded and run by members of the French-educated elite. This is particularly true of women's associations, whose work is highly controversial in Islamist circles. Their values of references, are steeped in the legacy of the Enlightenment and anchored to rational, Western modernity, where religious values might be personally important, but should be categorically excluded from public policy-making. The colonial experience ended in Morocco in 1956, but the intellectual legacy of France is still very much present and while there is certainly a degree of respect for Islam as a system of religious beliefs, there is the conviction that there should not be 'submission' to it in terms of political positions as the Socialist party, for instance, argues.[65] Thus, the endpoint of a

potential transition in Morocco for secular-liberal groups is a secular state where Islam is completely taken out of politics and privatised. The rhetorical question in secular circles is 'if Islam were not excluded, how could it be institutionalised without a return to authoritarianism or the creation of new types of discrimination?' For instance, what status would be adopted for the Moroccan Jews given Yassine's barely concealed anti-Semitism?[66] As Pratt argues, 'many women's rights activists are concerned about cooperation with Islamist groups because they believe that an Islamic state represents one of the greatest obstacles to women in gaining equal rights.'[67] The secularists' fear of political Islam is summed up in the words of a former, leftist, political prisoner now engaged in human rights issues, who stated that 'the vast majority of Islamists do not subscribe to the universal values of democracy and simply want to use the procedures of democracy to come to power and impose a theocratic regime on the rest of society.'[68]

Different ideological references explain the mutual accusations that both sectors of civil society fling at each other. On the one hand, Islamist groups accuse the modernizing elites and the secular liberal and leftists groups of having adopted the former colonialists' lifestyle and values, which allow them to maintain their privileged status, and of attempting to force these values on the rest of Moroccan society. On the other, Islamists are accused of intolerance and lack of sincerity in their pronouncements in favour of democracy and human rights.[69] The tensions that arose between the two camps at the time of the reform of the family code or in the aftermath of the Casablanca bombings of May 2003 testify to these profound divisions. This seems to be the case because such ideological positions are interpreted not simply as rhetorical devices, but are perceived to be true beliefs upon which these movements

would act in terms of legislation if they were permitted to do so, as the legislative changes introduced by other Islamist parties when in power show.[70] Thus, Yassine's insistence on the application of *sharia* law is viewed not simply as consistent with his ideological discourse, but as a concrete, political demand, which other opposition groups find unacceptable because their references are not in Islam, but in liberal, Western thinking.

If we add to this the importance of tactical considerations, it should come as no surprise that effective and sustained co-operation does not occur. The electoral advances of the PJD frightened secular movements, even though the 2007 parliamentary elections saw them gain 'only' second place. In addition, the potential arrival of the *al Adl* on the electoral scene might further polarize things. The secular groups' fear of electoral marginalization is a powerful incentive not to build coalitions.

The democracy promotion measures that the international community and the European Union (EU) in particular set forth are highly problematic in this context because they simply reinforce the divisions between the two sectors of civil society, rather than promoting their rapprochement. The EU implements a double strategy to promote democratization in Morocco.[71] The first pillar is trying to engage the regime in a series of reform processes that would lead it to adopt democratic changes over a number of years because of its interactions with the EU, which provides financial help to key reform sectors of the institutional and economic set up of the country. The second pillar is the fostering of civil society activism, which, building on the experience of Eastern Europe,[72] is believed to be a necessary building bloc of

democracy because of its ability to make demands on the authoritarian regime from

below. So far this strategy has been a comprehensive failure[73] and, paradoxically,

Morocco is probably more authoritarian today than it was five years ago. This new,

authoritarian turn is partly due to international circumstances, which impacted quite

significantly on Morocco with the 'arrival' on the scene of suicide terrorism, but it is

also the product of the failure of the EU as a whole to put significant pressure on the

regime to implement serious changes due to EU preference for securitization over

normative change, which have become even more significant in the context of 'the

war on terror.'

Channelling aid and funds for reform through the regime's institutions is certainly a

mistake because the availability of external resources facilitates the task of blocking

demands for change. However, the negative impact of the EU is much more

significant at the level of civil society because of the fact that its policies are based on

the perception that Islamism poses a problem rather than an opportunity. Islamism as

a whole represents a challenge not only because of its potentially antagonistic stances

*vis à vis* the West, but because it offers a view of democracy and a vision of society

perceived to be at odds with the European experience and interpretation of what

constitutes democracy. The values and the type of democracy that the European

Union exports is inevitably linked to the experience and the ideology upon which

democracy was first established in Europe, how it developed, and how it merged

liberalism with democratic procedures. It is thus quite logical that the European Union

provides funds to those associations that are seemingly ideologically close to its

views, while also supporting similar values on the other side of the Mediterranean. In

the case of Morocco, 11 million dirhams (1.5 million US dollars) were handed out in 2006 to civil society groups: not one was an Islamist organization.[74]

This poses a double problem. Firstly, the secular and liberal groups in Morocco such as Feminine Solidarity, cannot count on as many activists as the Islamist groups and hence the people involved constitute a minority of those who are politically active in opposition. In addition, the accusation of being anti-Islamic for the work they do (caring for single mothers) further puts pressure on them and their operations.[75] Secondly, the EU does not only promote democracy, but pursues other objectives, such as the economic integration of Morocco into a free trade area, which may further impoverish ordinary Moroccans.[76] Thus, the beneficiaries of European support expose themselves to the criticisms of Islamists because they not only import 'un-Islamic' values, but also because by their activism they arguably contribute to the country's continuing poverty. In sum, support of only a certain sector of the opposition and close interaction with the regime make the EU a problematic actor rather than a facilitator of genuine democratic change.

In addition, the European Union refrains from engaging with Islamists. By implication, this labels Islamists as 'undesirable', as if they had nothing to contribute to the pro-democracy debate and were not the potential representatives of the majority of Moroccans. The popularity of Islamism is evident, but the EU ignores it and treats political Islam solely as challenge. Thus, the EU prefers to either cosy up to the regime or only deal with opposition movements that largely share the same values, forgetting that such values, in the eyes of many, ordinary Moroccans, simply represent the continuation of a form of cultural, economic and political colonialism.[77]

The inability and the unwillingness of European policy-makers even to conceive of the possibility that an alternative might exist to liberal democracy such as an Islamic one reinforces the domestic divisions among opposition groups in Morocco and, while the intervention of the international community is welcomed by the secular/liberal groups, it is resented by Islamists. As the spokesperson of the *al Adl* argued, 'there is fundamentalism today in the West',[78] by which he implied that there is a strong bias against Islamists and Islam.

**Conclusion**

During processes of liberalization it might be expected that opposition groups, irrespective of their differences, would coalesce to achieve the one, common objective that stops them from operating freely: the institutional elimination of the authoritarian gate-keeper. The expectation was confirmed in a number of cases in the transitions of Eastern Europe and Latin America, but such sustained co-operation does not seem to characterize the MENA. There is a degree of co-operation on some specific issues, but there is no formalized coalition. The absence of such co-operation in the case of Morocco is all the more surprising because of a tradition of limited, political pluralism and the presence of Islamist movements that have either been institutionalised, the PJD, or have strongly committed themselves to change through peaceful means, the *al Adl*.

The divisions are particularly strong between secular, liberal leftist groups engaged in democratisation and human rights and Islamist associations connected to the *al Adl* and the PJD. The explanation for the absence of formal coalitions between the two

sectors rests on three interconnected factors. First of all, the ideological divide between the two sectors of society is so significant that they fear each other more than they fear the continuation of authoritarian rule. The strength of Islam as an ideological reference frightens secular and liberal groups, just as the attachment of the latter to the values of the Enlightenment and European modernity unsettles Islamists. The ideological divide is so profound that both sectors are aware of the fact that specific, probably unwelcome, policies would flow from such ideological stances and they are not prepared to accept each other's potential victory were the rules of the game modified. Secondly, the democracy promotion strategies of the European Union and of its member states reinforce such a divide because they promote only a very exclusivist understanding of democracy, which is appealing only to one sector of society and not to the other. Funding follows for those who already have accepted and internalised the values of liberal-democracy, thereby excluding Islamism and its representatives. Finally, tactical considerations play a role insofar as the perception of who will benefit from genuine democratisation impedes coalition-building and entrenches positions. The historical experience of Iran, where leftists, liberals and Islamists co-operated to overthrow the Shah, is a precedent that secular groups might not wish to repeat given the final outcome of the revolution.

These divisions suit the authoritarian leader, who is able to play one sector of the opposition against the other depending on the issue and is thereby able to remain the sole and unaccountable arbiter of the political system by carefully managing repression and co-optation. For the international community, this is quite a positive outcome as stability is guaranteed; for the secular, liberal opposition, a degree of influence is also guaranteed as long they ultimately rally to the regime; and for

Islamists, the current situation is akin to the continuation of colonial rule by an indigenous elite, although some sectors of institutionalized Islamism benefit from co-optation.

The Moroccan case is quite paradigmatic of trends that exist elsewhere in the MENA. Divisions within civil society remain prominent in Egypt, Jordan and Algeria, leading authoritarian regimes to successfully implement policies of 'divide and conquer'. Through its policy instruments, the European Union provides the ideal, external support for the continuation of such divisions, leading Islamists to increasingly lose hope that the EU might be different from the United States. Civil society dynamics are an important indication of the nature of political relationships within any polity. When it comes to the MENA, such relations are fraught with difficulties and suspicions, leaving one quite pessimistic about the possibility of civil society being a driving force for democratic transformation.

*NOTES*

[1] O'Donnell and Schmitter, *Tentative Conclusions*.
[2] Di Palma, *To Craft Democracies*.
[3] For a critical analysis of democratisation understood simply through domestic factors see Yilmaz, 'External-Internal Linkages'; Haynes 'Comparative Politics and 'Globalisation'' and Cavatorta, 'Geopolitical Challenges'. For a critical analysis of democratisation as elite-bargaining see Welzel, 'Democratization as an Emancipative Process'.
[4] Dauderstädt, 'Dead Ends of Transition', 9.
[5] Hinnebusch, 'Authoritarian Persistence'.
[6] Carothers, 'The End of the Transition Paradigm'.
[7] Pripstein-Posusney, 'Multi-Party Elections', 47.
[8] Schlumberger, 'The Arab Middle East'.
[9] On Czechoslovakia see Olson, 'Democratization and political participation'; on Poland see Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down* and on Chile see Oxhorn, *Organising Civil Society*.
[10] See Whitehead, 'Democracy by Convergence'; Tovias, 'The International Context of Democratic Transition' and Pridham, 'Democratic Transition'.
[11] For an examination of the policy of *alternance* see Willis, 'After Hassan'.
[12] Przeworski, 'Some Problems in the Study of Transition'.
[13] See Franklin, 'Political party opposition' and Howard and Roessler, 'Liberalizing electoral outcomes'. I am grateful to Hendrik Kraetzschmar for pointing me to this literature.

[14] See endnote above for references to this literature.

[15] Olson, 'Democratization and political participation'.

[16] Stokes, *The Walls Came Tumbling Down*, 30.

[17] Oxhorn, *Organising Civil Society*.

[18] Norton, *Civil Society in the Middle East* and Berman, 'Islamism, Revolution and Civil Society'.

[19] Clark, 'The Conditions of Islamist Moderation'.

[20] Pripstein-Posusney, 'Multi-Party Elections', 50.

[21] Pratt, *Democracy and Authoritarianism*, 134.

[22] Impagliazzo and Giro, *Algeria in Ostaggio*.

[23] Labidi, 'La longue descente'.

[24] I am grateful to Peter Seeberg for pointing this out.

[25] Schwedler, *Faith in Moderation*.

[26] Kraetzschmar, 'The profitability of opposition cooperation'.

[27] Bellin, 'The Robustness of Authoritarianism', 139.

[28] Albrecht, 'How Can Opposition''.

[29] Schlumberger and Albrecht, 'Waiting for Godot'.

[30] Pripstein-Posusney, 'Multi-Party Elections', 50.

[31] See Haynes, 'Comparative Politics and 'Globalisation'' and Cavatorta, 'Constructing an Open Model'.

[32] Cavatorta, 'The Role of Democratization'. Some groups wish to impose it from above; others would prefer to build it from below, while others still would like it to be sanctioned through electoral procedures. While the nature of the Islamic state would be different depending on the way in which it will be built, specific features such as the role of religion in public policy would remain central for all and this is what secular/liberal groups find unacceptable.

[33] See Yassine, *Memorandum*, 2000. The document was accessed on July 22nd 2003 and is available at http://www.yassine.net//lettres/memorandum.htm

[34] For other examples see Cavatorta and Elananza, 'Political opposition in civil society'.

[35] For an overview of how secular groups prefer regime co-optation to alliances with Islamist ones, see Brumberg, 'Islamists and the politics of consensus' and Cook, 'The Right Way'.

[36] The events of the past two decades, ranging from the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's electoral successes in the 1980s to the landslide victory of the Islamic Front in Algeria in 1991 and from the spectacular electoral advances of the Moroccan Party for Justice and Development in 2002 to the victory of Hamas in January 2006 in the Palestinian elections, provide ample evidence of the strength of Islamism at the ballot box.

[37] See Khalil, 'Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood'.

[38] A number of Islamist movements seek recognition to operate as political parties in order to have access to policy-making power. See for instance a report on the Muslim Brotherhood in the Daily News Egypt from January 14th 2007. Available: http://www.dailystaregypt.com/article.aspx?ArticleID=4972. Accessed on July 7th, 2008.

[39] Brumberg, 'The Trap of Liberalised Autocracy'.

[40] Leveau, 'Morocco at the Crossroads'.

[41] Vermeren, *Le Maroc en Transition*.

[42] For an analysis of the PJD, see Mohsen-Finan and Zeghal, 'Opposition Islamiste et Pouvoir Monarchique'.

[43] Willis, 'Political Parties in the Maghrib'.

[44] See the regional strategy paper of the Euro-Med Partnership for 2002-2006 available at http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/euromed/rsp/rsp02_06.pdf and the analysis of EU's democracy promotion strategies by Annette Junemann available at http://www.liv.ac.uk/ewc/docs/Junemann.pdf Both documents were accessed on June 27th, 2008.

[45] See Sater, 'The Dynamics of State and Society' and Chomiak, 'Civil Society in Transition'.

[46] For studies on the movement see Entelis, 'Un Courant Populaire'.

[47] A report on the march is found in *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*, No.264, 15/21 July 2006, 12.

[48] For a detailed study on the level of actual and potential co-operation between Islamists and secular/liberal groups, see Cavatorta, 'Civil Society, Islamism and Democratisation'.

[49] Bayat, *Making Islam Democratic*.

[50] Both Islamism and liberalism are treated as political ideologies, although their proponents would probably claim that they are not ideologies, but only reflect the nature of society.

[51] For an analysis of the elections and their significance see Storm, 'The parliamentary elections in Morocco'.

[52] Yassine, *Winning the Modern World*.

[53] Interview by e-mail with the author. August 13th, 2005.

[54] Maddy-Weitzman, 'Islamism, Moroccan-Style', 46.

[55] Yassine, *Winning the Modern World for Islam*, 7.

[56] Lauzière, 'Post-Islamism and the Religious Discourse', 252.

[57] See Yassine, *Memorandum*, 2000.

[58] Julian Baggini, 'This is what the clash of civilisations is really about', *The Guardian*, April 14th, 2007. Available at http://www.guardian.co.uk/comment/story/0,,2057060,00.html. I am indebted to Michelle Pace for pointing this article out to me.

[59] See the for instance the interview of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's Supreme Guide Mohamed Mahdi Akef in *al Ahram Weekly*, December 15-21, 2005.

[60] Cavatorta, 'Neither Participation nor Revolution'.

[61] Yassine, *Memorandum*.

[62] Maddy-Weitzman, 'Islamism, Moroccan-Style', 48.

[63] Zeghal, *Les Islamistes Marocains*.

[64] Author's interview with F. Arsalane, spokesperson of the *Al Adl*, Rabat, August 2005.

[65] See the party's website at http://www.usfp.ma/. Accessed on June 27th, 2008.

[66] Maddy-Weitzman, 'Islamism, Moroccan-Style'.

[67] Pratt, *Democracy and Authoritarianism*, 138.

[68] Author's interview, Casablanca, August 2005.

[69] See for instance the editorials in the magazine *La Vie Economique* titled 'What do the Islamists want?'. January 24th 2003 and in the editorial by A. Dilami in daily *L'Economiste,* January 17th 2003.

[70] The case of the FIS in Algeria when running local councils in 1990/1991 is a clear example.

[71] See Pace, 'Norm Shifting from EMP to ENP'.

[72] Tempest, 'Myths from Eastern Europe'. Some scholars refute the claim that civil society activism was so important for democratization in Eastern Europe, but policy-makers seem to believe those myths.

[73] Youngs, 'European Approaches to Security'.

[74] See official EU website: http://www.delmar.ec.europa.eu/fr/quoi_de_neuf/20061004.htm. Accessed on July 9th 2007.

[75] For a description of this association see Howe, *Morocco. The Islamist Awakening*.

[76] For an analysis of the dichotomy between Morocco as a middle-income country and its very poor social indicators see Ivan Martin, 'Morocco: the basis for a new development model?' published at http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/analisis/947.asp. Accessed on July 7th, 2008.

[77] See interview with Nadia Yassine at http://www.nadiayassine.net/en/page/10513.htm Accessed on August 19th, 2008.

[78] Author's interview with F. Arsalane, spokesperson of the *Al Adl*, Rabat, August 2005.

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