



Critical Dialogue between Diverse Opposition Groups

A project of Arab Reform Initiative

In collaboration with

Arab Forum for Alternatives

Table of Contents

Foreword.....	4
Introduction.....	7
About the project	8
I. What Can We Learn from Coalition-Building Experiences?	9
Difficulties in forming a coalition.....	9
The experience of the Kifaya movement in Egypt.....	12
Comment: remarks on how to approach the new movements	13
The Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change in Syria	14
The 18 th October Coalition for Rights and Freedoms in Tunisia.....	17
Comment	19
The relationship between the Communist Party and Hezbollah in Lebanon	20
The experience of Morocco.....	21
Comments.....	23
1. The Moroccan Islamists and the left, between enmity and coexistence	23
2. The Islamists and the left in need of dialogue.....	24
3. Rapprochement for the municipal elections?.....	25
Why attempts to form political coalitions have failed and some suggestions	27
II. Islamist movements and the social demands.....	28
The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the social protest movements	28
Morocco: the social question and the Association for Justice and Beneficence	33
The Islamist movement in Tunisia and the social question	37
Lebanon: the main principles of Hezbollah's social vision	38
III. The relationship between religion and politics - secularism as the solution?.....	44
IV. Advancing women's rights – with or without Islamists?	51
The family code – what's new?.....	51
The reform of the family code in Morocco or the rebuilding of the social order	54
Islamic renewal and women's issues: towards citizenship and democracy	57

V. The questions of equal rights for minorities and the danger of the fragmentation of nation-states 65

Political development: a call to leave behind repetitive discourses, inadequate concepts and vague debates..... 65

Minorities and equal rights: the example of Shi'ite citizens in Saudi Arabia..... 69

Sudan... which path to take 74

Yemen: a nation in danger of collapse and fragmentation..... 80

Foreword

In 2008, when Islamists, liberals, leftists and nationalists from Egypt, Yemen, Syria, Tunisia and Morocco first engaged in this dialogue, they all came to this exercise from national contexts where stagnant authoritarian political systems left little or no space for the expression of dissent of any nature.

Authoritarian regimes everywhere had developed effective strategies to neutralize all the opposition forces: repression, often with the most brutal means vis-à-vis the Islamists, co-optation and containment vis-à-vis the others to ensure that they all remained weak and unable to challenge the regime's monopoly over political space.

By initiating this dialogue, the Arab Reform Initiative was opening a safe and ideologically neutral, pan-Arab space for an organized discussion between them structured around the issues that appeared to be most divisive. Many of these groups had already gone through experiences of dialogue and developed coalitions of political forces from diverse ideological and political backgrounds. The Declaration of Damascus in Syria, the Kefaya movement in Egypt, the liqa' el mushtarak in Yemen, the October 18th movement in Tunisia were all promising attempts that were worth taking as starting points to understand the founding principles that guided them, the common ground they had developed and assess their concrete achievements.

Although the coalitions as such had only a marginal role in the revolutions of Egypt and Tunisia, they constituted important precursors to the uprisings in several ways: first, they reflected a new awareness that they had a common objective that took priority over their ideological differences, namely to bring down the authoritarian systems that were suffocating them all equally. Secondly, that political change when it would occur would bring daunting challenges that no single political force could claim to be able to face on its own.

Thirdly, they developed a new understanding of coalition politics focused on the key idea that the struggle for freedom and civil liberties is a shared value that is not related to any specific ideology or doctrine. Hence, the coalitions ended the rupture between nationalist, secular, liberal and Islamist forces and initiated a new mode of practicing politics.

In addition, Islamist groups had as a key incentive to engage in such coalitions, namely the need to dissociate themselves from the more radical Jihadi movements who advocate violence. By joining other opposition movements to form coalitions, they were demonstrating their peaceful intentions and strengthening the voice of the opposition that was pressing for political participation and genuine reforms.

Retrospectively, it is fair to say that they had the right vision and that this contributed to building the ground for the youth groups and social movements to mobilize with the needed energy and new methods.

All these experiences were conducted on the assumption that opposition forces needed to join forces to be able to weigh on the regimes. They all assumed that this would happen through a gradual process of planned reforms in which the regime would remain the most powerful partner in the equation for some time to come.

They all suffered from the same ailments: weak party structures with small or inexistent constituencies incapable of balancing the disproportionate strength of the Islamist movements; lack of trust between the forces and divergences over the definition of strategic objectives. In some contexts as in Syria and Tunisia, the coalition members were aggressively chased, jailed or harassed by the regime.

The dialogue initiated under the umbrella of the Arab Reform Initiative addressed the thorniest issues including the place of Islam in public life and the neutrality of the state vis-à-vis religion, freedom of thought and of expression, the response to social demands and the social agenda, the status of women and the rights of minorities. While there were disagreements between them over some principles such as the role of religion in public life, there was strong convergence and willingness to work together on concrete challenges such as social demands.

When the revolutions erupted in early 2011, opposition groups in most cases were caught unprepared by the mass mobilization and the coalitions were put to the test in a sudden way. The youth groups who organized the movements in Tunisia and Egypt first, then in Yemen and Syria worked together very naturally on the ground to bring down the regimes. But neither the October 18th nor the kefaya movements were able to present formal platforms as coalitions to provide the basis for an alternative political structure. In other cases such as in Yemen, the liqa' el mushtarak has shown to be a more structured player in the opposition with stronger capacity to take on a role in the transition period once it starts.

Now coalition building has been replaced by competition in an open and unregulated political arena where the battle for ideas, audience and seats is wide open. Each force wants to preserve its identity and is showing its commitment to democratic rules but in face of the urgency to deal with the vacuum created by the sudden collapse of the regimes, they understand the urgent need to work together to build credible alternatives.

The issues discussed within the framework of the critical dialogue are now being furiously discussed in the public arena. Youth groups who started the revolutions have clearly shown a stronger capacity to maintain ties across ideological lines. But as political and social groups began to address institutional arrangements and

electoral mechanisms, discussions are becoming more acrimonious and the political scene appears increasingly polarized.

The need to maintain a neutral space for discussion between the various groups has emerged strongly. As they negotiate tactical and procedural short-term arrangements, the different political movements are keen to have a place to discuss ideas, confront diverse visions of society and address key issues such as the place of Islam in state institutions, the sources of legislation, the representation of women in public life or the formal mechanisms needed to safeguard the rights of minorities. This dialogue needs to take place away from the agitated public debate and be separated from the electoral calculations and balance of power between them.

The Arab Reform initiative is starting a new phase of the dialogue bringing in the youth movements as the new and most important participant.

Introduction

Nahla Chahal

All over the Arab world, Islamist, liberal and leftist groups have had the idea of coming together to challenge political oppression and to voice more effectively their demands for reform. This requires them to put aside their ideological differences and focus on those areas in which they are in agreement. Their common objectives are the establishment of true democracy and guaranteed political and civil rights enabling their political participation. This requires the building of a new regime and constitution, with the separation of powers, free and transparent elections, and the limiting of executive powers. Addressing the issues of oppression and corruption leads to questioning the legitimacy of the current regime. However, these opposition groups are keen to distinguish between the current regime and the state as a public and objective institution. They are also keen to stand by the principle of peaceful and non-revolutionary change in their mission to bring about a new democratic order.

There are difficult questions that have yet to be addressed in order to reach a consensus: does everyone want to change the regime? Or do some want to participate in it? What would be the nature of the next regime? How does each group know that it is not used by another group that might monopolize power in the future? Other sources of tension are the disparity in public support for the different ideological groups, which favors the Islamists, the somewhat condescending view taken by leftists and liberals who see the Islamists as oppressive and populist, and the fact that the Islamists are treated differently by the regime to the other opposition groups. The lack of shared ideology, the memory of mutual hostility and conflict in the past and the oppression practiced in present examples of Islamist regimes further undermine confidence in the success of this kind of political alliance. The question of how or whether to integrate the Islamists politically is particularly controversial, with some supporting the model of the complete democracy where the Islamists are entirely integrated, others in favor of a limited democracy, and others entirely opposed to allowing their participation.

Over the course of 2009, the Arab Reform Initiative held four conferences, each one addressing a particular dimension of this project. A selection of researchers from all over the Arab world, distinguished by their expertise in this area and by their political and ideological affiliation, were invited to come together to present and discuss research papers.

About the project

The Arab Reform Initiative (ARI) served as an umbrella for critical dialogue through which thorny issues had been posed regarding these kinds of coalition experiences. To lead this project, ARI has put together a group of 22 researchers who have been selected from a number of countries in the Arab world: from Morocco (Abdel Ali Hamieddin, Omar Ihrishane, Ahmed al-Bouz, and Hameed Bohkak), Tunisia (Rasheed Khashana, Lutfi Hajji, Fathi Belhaj, Rafeeq Abdel Salam), Egypt (Amr Shubaki, Ahmed Bahaedeen Sha'ban, Sameh Fawzi, Hossam Tammam, Hiba Raouf), Syria (Radwan Ziyada and Jamal Barout), Lebanon (Abdel Halim Fadlallah and Sa'adallah Mazra'ani), Saudi Arabia (Ja'afar Al-Shayeb), and Yemen (Mohammed el-Mekhlafi). In addition to their research skills, they all have intellectual and political commitment to the field that reflect the sensitivities of these forces.

Nahla Chahal supervised and coordinated the whole project.

This project was conducted with support from the International Development and Research Centre and the Agencia Espanol de Cooperacion Internacional y de Desarrollo (Spanish Cooperation and Development Agency).

This report summarizes the different papers that were commissioned and discussed within the framework of the project. The full version of all the papers could be found on ARI's website: www.arab-reform.net in the section "ARI Projects" / "Critical Dialogue between Diverse Opposition Groups"

I. What Can We Learn from Coalition-Building Experiences?

Opposition groups in the Arab world might not have anything in common, but one important goal: end the repression they live with. Leftists, liberals and Islamists have come to realise that they can be more effective working together, and several alliances have been formed in the region over the last decade to that effect. However, building alliances across political affiliations is a challenging endeavour and discussions reflected various difficulties: is the common denominator too small, the distrust between them too great, the regimes in power too good at “dividing and ruling”? The Arab Reform Initiative has brought together representatives and leading thinkers of different political opposition groups from eight Arab countries over a period of two years, to analyse the experiences and lessons learned of coalitions in Egypt, Syria, Tunisia, Lebanon, Morocco, and Yemen. Islamists’ perspectives were articulated by Heba Raouf, Rafik Abdel Salam, Radwan Ziyadeh, Abdel Ali Hamieddin, and Omar Ahrashan, and discussed by nationalists, leftists and liberals (Fathi Belhaj, Ahmad Bahaeddin Shaaban, Sa’adallah Mazraani, Hamid Bahkak, Ahmad alBooz, Lotfi Hajji). The discussions took place before the recent uprisings, i.e. before opposition groups - at least in Tunisia and in Egypt - were propelled onto the centre stage of political change.

Difficulties in forming a coalition

Rafik Abdel Salam¹

There are many difficult questions to be answered in order for different political groups to work together: who is to lead such a coalition, and who is to make the important decisions and define its strategy?

There are two successful examples in the Arab world that should be studied. The

first is Yemen, where different political and ideological forces have overcome their considerable differences for the sake of civil political struggle. Perhaps this is due to the influence of the tribal political culture which is founded on bargaining and conciliation, in contrast to the modern experiences of other Arab countries where a culture of social and political polarization has become entrenched. The other example is that of the 18th October coalition in Tunisia, which began modestly with a group of shared demands for the release of political prisoners and the right to form social and political organizations, and which has gradually expanded the common territory of its members.

¹ *Scholar and deputy manager of Al Jazeera for Research, member of the Annahda Party of Tunisia*

There are two possible ways to deal with the question of leadership. The first is through the choice of one leader, trusted by all groups. This was the case for example for the 18th October coalition and its leader Ahmad Nagib Al Shabi.

In the case of the Kifaya movement in Egypt, Abdel Wahab Al Mesiri was able to bring the Muslim Brothers side by side with the nationalists and the leftists. The second way is through rotating the leadership of the alliance between the different groups so that each one has the opportunity to lead the opposition and no group is marginalized. Yemen is an excellent example of this approach.

It is clear that no group can bear the burden of bringing about political change alone, whatever its size or popularity. Working together is essential. Making concessions to political partners is a thousand times better than making concessions to a corrupt and autocratic regime that ultimately offers nothing in return. It is important to emphasize that a shared political program does not exist among the opposition at the outset. The groups may each present their programs and then work towards an agreement, or they may begin with a minimum consensus and gradually expand it through dialogue.

The relationship between the Islamists and the secularists

In addition to the other divisions in society, the Arab world suffers from a polarization between the Islamists and

the secularists. The regimes have capitalized on this by playing the different groups off against each other. The bitter experiences of the political opposition show that the regimes do not stop at persecuting one group but eventually target all their opponents, which is why prisons have become such a good meeting place for them. This is proof that the principles of democracy and freedom may not be partially applied. Either they apply equally to all members of society or they do not exist. All political groups should have the right to be active openly, provided they do not use or threaten to use violence. No group should feel to have greater legitimacy than any other.

Concentrating on specific issues and on democracy and freedom proves more beneficial than focusing on the Islamist-secularist divide. The Islamists and the secularists each have concerns and fears relating to the position of the other. Some of these may be valid, but others are imaginary or exaggerated. These fears may be allayed through widening the sphere of dialogue so that the two sides gain a better understanding of each other's position.

It is more important to find a political formula that will prevent the isolation of any group or any monopolization of power. The central power of the state must be reduced, and an effective civil society must be built, with the neutrality of the state established with regards to moral and cultural choices. This is the

best way to avoid the trap of authoritarianism.

Between *shura* and democracy

Another phenomenon of the political discourse is that some believe the concept of democracy to have a fixed essence: being inseparable from secularism and liberalism in the eyes of some secular groups, and equivalent to the Islamic concept of *shura* according to some of the Islamist groups, continuing from the ideas of Mohammad Abduh. There is no room here for a lengthy discussion of the nature of democracy except to say that there are a number of types. The most important aspects of a democracy are the prevention of power being concentrated in the hands of one person or organization, equality between all citizens, the rule of law, the separation of powers, safeguards for the peaceful rotation of power, a free media and autonomy of civil society vis-à-vis the political society.

Conclusion

Dialogue between the Islamists and the secularists has shown that ideological differences can be surmounted. One of the most dangerous problems faced by the Arab world is the blocking of channels for dialogue and of the coming together of different groups. As a consequence, the mechanics of society and politics cease to function and a culture of denial, psychological barriers and mutual ignorance develops.

There has been a kind of rapprochement in Arab societies, with most Islamists accepting democracy and most leftists and liberals accepting the Arab and Islamic nature of their societies. Maybe even the secular groups feel the desire for religious and cultural identity in the face of foreign pressure and intervention.

There are no easy solutions to the political and cultural divisions in our societies, except to work on bridging these divisions through intellectual dialogue and political compromises. The idea of an Islamic state and the idea of a secular state are each equally frightening to different sections of society. Decisions cannot be imposed by any group but can only be reached through all the groups working together and through a rejection of fanaticism and violence. This also requires the state to remain neutral and to recognize that these choices must be left to society: it is not for the state to impose certain ways of life or beliefs, whether in the name of religious legitimacy or secular enlightenment. Finally, while most of these states have established Islam as the religion of society and Arabic as its language, this does not mean that freedom of expression should be denied to religious and linguistic minorities. The best solution for the region, in the face of oppression, much foreign intervention and many other problems, is political compromise and the establishment of true and competitive democracy.

The experience of the Kifaya movement in Egypt

*Ahmad Bahaeddin Shaaban*²

“The Egyptian movement for change – Kifaya” is the first influential political alliance to emerge in Egypt recently. The movement represents the shared commitment of its members, who hold wide ranging and diverse ideological and political views, to democratic change. Previous temporary alliances had been formed on the Egyptian political scene, usually concerned with nationalist pan-Arab issues, such as solidarity with the Palestinians or with Iraq. Kifaya was a distinct model however, which was formed following talks between Islamist, leftist, nationalist and liberal political groups from November 2003 until September 2004. The basic principles of the movement are:

1. That each of the ideological groups represented in Kifaya has the right to exist and not to be marginalized in Egyptian politics. Mutual efforts must be made for greater cooperation and to overcome what has caused conflict between the groups in the past.
2. That none of these groups are capable, alone, of fighting for democracy in a harshly repressive regime, which keeps the public arena

under constant surveillance and openly violates basic human rights.

3. That, following on from the first two principles, all those committed to democratic change in Egypt must unite to create the right conditions for discussing peaceful change and moving towards a new social contract that defines the basis of citizenship and guarantees the rights of all citizens to participate in the foundation of a free society that is called “justice and freedom” by Kifaya.
4. That in order to be successful, ideological differences between the groups must be left behind in favour of coming together to achieve common goals.

The founding statement of the movement, the “Statement to the people”, published on September 22, 2004 set out the following aims:

1. An end to the monopolization of power, particularly in the form of the hereditary presidential succession.
2. The primacy of the rule of law, more independence for the judiciary and respect for judicial decisions, and equality between all citizens.
3. An end to the monopolization of wealth which has fuelled corruption and social injustice and has led to a rise in unemployment and high living costs.
4. The restoration of Egypt’s position in the region and in the world, which has been lost since its signing of the Camp David agreement and its alliance with the USA.

² *Engineer and founding member of the Kifaya movement*

Two factors helped Kifaya in the initial phase of its development. The first was the agreement of the official political parties to carry out their work in accordance with the limitations set out by the regime. Consequently they were no longer able to connect with the public or voice their demands for justice and reform, hence leaving a gap. The second was the appearance of a group of highly experienced and credible groups drawn from the political, intellectual and public elites, many of whom played a role following the defeat of 1967 and in the war of 1973, and who had made efforts throughout the previous decades to support the Palestinians and the Iraqis.

Initially, the movement was very successful and enjoyed unprecedented popular appeal. The reason for this was the very special relationship and mutual trust between the founding members of the group. They had shared similar historical experiences, and their common desire to make the project succeed overcame their ideological differences. My own involvement consisted of editing the movement's statements, almost daily. Kifaya was broad enough to include members of the Progressive Unionist Party, the Muslim Brothers, the Wafd Party, the Al-Ghad ("Tomorrow") Party and the Nasserist Party, not to mention thousands of others that became interested in Kifaya and were attracted by its vision.

However, this situation was not destined to last. The particular trust that existed between the founding members did not extend to the groups of new members that joined and when the founding members left their positions of leadership to others, the movement began to decline. The instability of the movement's structure was another problem.

The Kifaya experience may be summarized as showing that there is scope for work between different ideological groups for the sake of democracy but that there is a need to build an effective institutional apparatus to maintain the momentum and development of the movement.

Comment: remarks on how to approach the new movements

Heba Raouf³

An observation relating to the theoretical concepts used is that these kinds of coalitions are unlike political parties, which are organized, long-term structures with clear goals. Movements such as Kifaya are characterized by the spontaneity with which they emerge in filling a political vacancy, their

³ *Associate professor of political theory, American University of Cairo, and co-founder of Islamonline*

structural flexibility, the relative obscurity of their goals due to political pragmatism rather than lack of clear vision, and the fact that they are, by nature, temporary organizations.

The Kifaya movement was unaware of the characteristics which gave it its very high degree of influence. The worst thing that it did was to try to choose symbolic figures to direct the movement, all of whom, almost without exception, came from the generation of the sixties. What guarantees the longevity of such a movement is its ability to reach across generations.

The media is extremely important in spreading the movement's message to the public. However, it is difficult to maintain media interest after the initial media frenzy. Had Kifaya realized this it might have been able to make better use of the media attention it did receive.

The fundamental success of Kifaya is that it broke a taboo of Egyptian society and created a spirit of protest. It was able to mobilize the Egyptian people, which is an ingenious achievement. What must now be answered is not how but why Kifaya should go on.

Today, what do we want from Kifaya? That is the question.

The Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change in Syria

*Radwan Ziyadeh*⁴

The Damascus Declaration was announced in October 2004, the culmination of more than ten months of arduous negotiations between the nationalist, Kurdish, Communist and Islamist signatories. It represented an exceptional effort to overcome ideological differences and promote dialogue. Its aim was the creation of a united opposition that could confront the ruling regime more effectively and pressure it to make democratic reforms. The concept of democracy is at the heart of the alliance, as is a belief in political freedom, separation of powers, equal and guaranteed rights for all citizens and peaceful struggle as the means to achieve this goal. The Damascus Declaration brought together various political forces and several society and cultural personalities.

There were two main factors behind the success of the Damascus Declaration:

The first factor was that the political parties that signed the Declaration had much shared political experience. In addition to nine well known opposition personalities, the Damascus Declaration was signed by three political groups.

⁴ *Founder of the Damascus Centre for Human Rights Studies*

One was the National Democratic Rally, an opposition group, which was founded in 1979 consisting of five political parties: the Democratic Arab Socialist Union, the Syrian Democratic People's Party, the Workers' Revolutionary Party, the Movement of Arab Socialists and the Arab Socialists' Democratic Ba'ath Party. The other two groups included the Kurdish alliance and the Kurdish Front, as well as the Committees for Civil Society. The Declaration was later joined by other parties and groups including the Muslim Brothers of Syria, the Democratic Organization, the Democratic Future Party and the Party for Communist Action. These parties all shared a long history of opposition to the Syrian regime. In particular, they had been brought closer together by their experience of the Damascus Spring of 2000. This was a period of relative political freedom initiated by President Bashar al Assad when he succeeded his father that year, intended to improve the image of the Syrian regime abroad and to enable limited reforms. This allowed a social movement to develop, expressing its desire for true reform and with open political activity by opponents of the regime. The arrests of many Syrian intellectuals and activists in September 2001 marked the end of the Damascus Spring and hopes that it would lead to greater political freedom. However, the movement did have a lasting effect in uniting opposition groups and intellectuals and in establishing

democracy as a central concept in the thinking of this elite.

Two very important papers demonstrate this evolution. The first was published by the Syrian Muslim Brothers in May 2001, entitled the "Honorable statement for political action". In this paper, the Muslim Brothers pledged their commitment to democratic political activity, renunciation of violence and equality of all citizens. This marks a clear transformation in the political thinking of the most prominent Syrian Islamist movement, which had committed acts of violence during the 1980s. Similarly, the political programme announced by the Democratic People's Party (formerly the Syrian Communist Party) referred to the failure of the authoritarian state and the need for a democratic constitutional state, asserting that democracy is the final and universal contemporary political order. This was a unique moment in Syria's political history as the concept of democracy became firmly entrenched in the Syrian political consciousness for the first time. The events of the Damascus Spring greatly helped in this development and in the eventual announcement of the Damascus Declaration. The internet was also instrumental in enabling forums for dialogue.

The second factor which helped the Damascus Declaration to succeed was the series of disastrous political errors made by the Syrian regime during the

previous years, which had repercussions both in the region and internationally. Following the events of September 11th, the Syrian opposition movement was subjected to harsh repression. The Bush administration was tough on the Syrian regime because of its links with Palestinian organizations such as Hamas and Jihad al Islami and its relations with Lebanon. US-Syrian relations deteriorated further following the US invasion of Iraq and the Security Council Resolution 1559. The assassination of Rafik Hariri also increased international pressure on Syria. The Syrian opposition movement responded by publishing the Damascus-Beirut Declaration which called for the recognition of the full sovereignty and independence of Lebanon. This resulted in more arrests, the closing of the Atassi conference, the only forum that had remained from the Damascus Spring, and in members of the opposition being placed under surveillance. Opposition activists were also prohibited from leaving the country. Consequently, the opposition tried to forge a new path for political activity by building broad based political alliances that could pressure the government more effectively. This led to the idea of the Damascus Declaration for Democratic Change, a movement which would signal that the weakness of the opposition was due to the tyranny of the ruling regime and its crushing of their demands for reform.

There were however problems in the formation of the Damascus Declaration. The process of dialogue and discussions beforehand was extremely long and complex because those coordinating the Declaration wanted to involve a maximum number of groups but had nothing to bargain with in exchange for their support. Since its publication the Declaration has been criticized, which has led to a certain amount of fragmentation amongst its signatories and undermined its credibility. Certain points are in need of discussion and clarification, especially those relating to the Arabist content of the Declaration, emphasizing Syria's Arab identity and political role.

Another problem was that the Declaration's leadership did not have a clearly defined long-term strategy of phases and goals for the process of reform, particularly for the time after articulating their demand for complete change. For example the Damascus Declaration succeeded in holding a broad national meeting in Syria. But it did not have any ideas or substitute arrangements for what should happen in the event that the leaders of the Declaration would be arrested by the regime. And that is what happened.

The 18th October Coalition for Rights and Freedoms in Tunisia

*Fathi Belhaj*⁵

The Tunisian regime, having allowed relative political freedom from 1987-1990, then reverted to the harsh oppression of its political opponents. Meetings among the different opposition groups did not lead to any kind of organized activity until the 18th October Coalition for Rights and Freedoms was formed. The regime's strike against the Islamist Nahdah movement, in the name of "fighting radicalism," was initially supported by some of the Tunisian leftist factions and by European policy makers who feared a repeat of the Algerian experience. However, this strategy soon became ineffective for a number of reasons. From the mid 1990s there were a great number of protest movements, some of which, such as hunger strikes by prominent Tunisian personalities, helped to win over foreign support for the Tunisian opposition. The experience of other countries also had an influence. The other countries of the Maghreb had witnessed positive developments, with Algeria maintaining relative freedom of expression despite its critical state, and Morocco witnessing something resembling the rotation of power and the licensed political activity of a party with an Islamist background. Meanwhile the

experience of Turkey convinced some Tunisian secularists that they should seek to integrate the Islamists. In addition to these factors, the invitation of the Israeli Prime Minister Sharon by the Tunisian regime caused a public outcry and further weakened the regime in its strategy of crushing the Islamist movement.

The hunger strikes and the formation of the 18th October Coalition

From the 1970s there was open hostility between the Islamists and the left, at times manifested in actual violence in the universities. The regime was able to exploit this to its advantage and to isolate the Islamists. It was the most radical of the leftist parties, the Communist Workers' Party, which finally broke this barrier that had long divided the two groups. A month before the World Summit on the Information Society held in Tunis, eight people representing different political and ideological groups, including the Communist Workers' Party and the Islamists, went on an open hunger strike on October 18, 2005, with the goal of alerting Arab and international public opinion to the lack of true democracy in Tunisia. Though the regime tried to suppress the publicity by strictly controlling the media, the strike meant that the conference, instead of being an opportunity for the regime to restore its reputation, became a historical opportunity for the opposition to voice its demands. The hunger strike paved the

⁵ *Journalist*

way for the forming of a coalition known as the 18th October Coalition for Rights and Freedoms, consisting of twenty-four people representing the most important political and ideological groups and committed to the struggle for democracy and dialogue between the groups. Specifically, the leftist, secularists and liberals wanted written clarifications and guarantees from the Islamists on a number of issues, and the Islamists responded by providing assurances that they were working for a democratic society. There was one leftist group that did not join the coalition because it refused to accommodate the Islamists.

Achievements and challenges

Were the members of the Coalition able to subordinate ideological differences to their political aim? Or was their coming together merely the product of very particular circumstances? The movement certainly had some very notable achievements: it managed to place the demand for democratic reform at the top of the public agenda in Tunisia and for all those interested in Tunisian affairs; it ended the isolation of the Nahdah movement and the division between the Islamist and leftist groups (although this has led to divisions between the moderate and *takfiri* elements within the Islamist movement); and despite the regime's insistence that there were no political problems and its failure to recognize the coalition, the release of all the imprisoned members of the Nahdah

movement was a consequence of the coalition's activity.

The 18th October Coalition faces a number of difficulties, though:

1. From a legal perspective, its activity is unlicensed, meaning that it is in danger of having its meetings banned and its activities placed under surveillance.
2. The difficulty of overcoming ideological differences in order to work together. The Communist Workers' Party is under pressure from a wing that refuses to engage with political Islam, and the Nahdah movement faces similar pressure from members who say that its entry into the 18th October Coalition is a departure from its true values.
3. There is internal disagreement as to how much the coalition should collude with Western countries in its work.
4. There is also disagreement as to how the coalition should organize itself politically. For example before the elections of 2009, some felt that the coalition should be represented in the elections, while others felt that it should boycott the elections entirely.

In conclusion, it does not appear that the coalition will emerge into a political alliance, which would require complete agreement on a political program. The Party for Communist Action explains its cooperation with the Islamists as being purely tactical. Nevertheless the

coalition has performed a highly significant role in its breaking down of communication barriers between the different political groups and in pressuring the regime for dialogue and democratic reform.

Comment

Lotfi Hajji⁶

The deterioration of the political context in Tunisia and the subsequent emergence of the 18th October Coalition cannot be understood without appreciating the villainy of the regime's oppression. In particular, many members of the Nahdah movement were arrested and tortured, sometimes to death. This oppression is the key to understanding the breakdown of the organizational structure of the parties. In this context the hunger strikes represented a scream by the Tunisians for international recognition of their situation.

While some political groups were participating in legislative and presidential elections, these elections were not genuinely competitive. The demands of the 18th October Coalition were for the bare minimum of democracy and basic rights because

there was no genuine political life in existence. The different opposition groups found that their true enemy was not their ideological opponents, but the autocracy of the regime.

The coalition does not represent a united front as there are many issues on which its members are divided. However it represents a significant step in that it has enabled dialogue between different groups in order to agree upon the fundamental points that constitute the basis of citizenship. Such a dialogue was previously impossible.

⁶ *Journalist, founding member of the 18th October coalition and one of the eight activists that took part in the hunger strikes*

The relationship between the Communist Party and Hezbollah in Lebanon

*Sa'ad Allah Mazra'ani*⁷

Initially, the relationship developing between the Communist Party and Hezbollah in the early 1980s was a tentative one. This was due to Iranian influence on Hezbollah's activities and the perception that Hezbollah was acting on behalf of foreign, rather than national interests. There were even some clashes between the two groups, but soon they began to cooperate with each other, and between 1982 and 1986 both parties were committed to resisting the Israeli occupation. However, the Communist Party suffered as a result of the fall of the Soviet Union. In addition the Syrian authorities treated it as a militia group that needed to be crushed rather than as a resistance group like Hezbollah deserving support. Consequently its role in the resistance diminished before finally stopping entirely in 1993. As its leadership was keen to resume the party's role in the resistance, it made contact with Hezbollah who accepted their support. This marked a new relationship based on the shared goal of resisting the Israeli occupier and the American "War on terror", which began in Afghanistan in 2001 and continued

with the invasion of Iraq in 2003. The Communists did not only participate in resisting the Israeli hostility in 2006 on account of the party's political principles but also out of solidarity with Hezbollah.

Since then, two political coalitions have appeared on the Lebanese political scene, the 14th March and 8th March alliances. The Communist Party has not joined either. However it is closer to the 8th March alliance of which Hezbollah is a member. The 14th March alliance is pro-Western, propagates right-wing economic policies, and its government proved to be weak in the face of the Israeli incursion. Prior to the elections of 2009, Hezbollah and the Communist Party effected some negotiations but in the end Hezbollah decided not to see them through, and the Communist Party put forward independent candidates. In the eyes of Hezbollah, the Communist Party goes too far in its comprehensive program for political and socio-economic reform. This includes its claim for the elimination of the confessional regime in order to end sectarianism, which it believes is a threat to Lebanon's stability and sovereignty. Hezbollah and the 8th March alliance do not have clear positions on these issues, meaning that ultimately they decided against closer cooperation with the Communists.

⁷ *Member of the leadership of the Communist party, Lebanon*

The experience of Morocco

*Hamid Bahkak*⁸

Morocco has, like other Arab countries, an Islamist movement comprising a range of ideological and political positions. The two largest and most influential groups are the Party of Justice and Development and the Association for Justice and Beneficence, both of which reject violence and consider Islam to provide a complete social and political framework.

The Party for Justice and Development

In 1992 an Islamist group called the Movement for Reform and Renewal made a request for legal recognition as a party, which was refused by the regime. However, its members were allowed to join the Popular Democratic and Constitutional Movement under the leadership of Doctor Abdel Karim al Khatib. This party gained 14 seats in the legislative elections of 1997 and changed its name to the Party for Justice and Development the following year. For two years it formed part of Abdel Rahman Al Youssefi's coalition government until a disagreement with the government about the national plan to integrate women in development. In 2002 the party gained 42 seats in the

legislative elections. The party has a considerable social and political presence but is still opposed by some groups. The regime for its part refuses on principle to license a religious party, as stated in the Law of Parties of 2005. The Party for National Renewal and the Party of the Ummah were both refused a licence and the Al Badil Al Hadari Party was banned due to its alleged links with a jihadist network. The Party for Justice and Development, on the other hand, was treated as an extension of the Popular Democratic and Constitutional Movement, and its religious frame of reference is viewed in the same way as that of the Christian Democratic Parties in Europe. However, the party is strictly under surveillance and faced a hostile media campaign after the terrorist attacks in Casablanca. The party has been resourceful and highly pragmatic in the face of these setbacks, showing willingness to modify its political discourse and reduce its rate of candidacy for example. It has also maintained a strict, functional division between the party and the Movement for Unity and Reform so as to avoid any overlap between political and missionary activity.

Following the terrorist acts of May 16, 2003 in Casablanca, which killed 42 people, the expression "exterminators" emerged. It referred to those who believed the Islamists should be refused any type of political participation because they represented a danger to freedom and democracy. Those holding

⁸ *Researcher at the Centre des études et recherches en sciences sociales (CERSS)*

this view believed that the Party for Justice and Development should take responsibility for these acts and be dissolved, as had happened in Tunisia and Algeria. The regime has refused to do this, instead following a policy of cautiously integrating the Islamists. This has the effect of isolating the radical Islamist groups and of conferring religious legitimacy upon the regime. It also means that the Islamists gain political experience in the real world, since ideological slogans are one thing and their implementation quite another.

The Association for Justice and Beneficence

The Association for Justice and Beneficence is the second most important Islamist group in Morocco. It was founded in the 1980s by Abdessalam Yassine and is very much centered around his charismatic personality. In 1974 he sent a letter to the King advising him as to the best way out of the political crisis the country was undergoing at the time. As a result he was sent to a mental hospital for three years. The association works outside the framework of political participation through education and spiritual activities and has a significant presence in the universities. It believes that true political participation within the Moroccan system would force the association to compromise its true nature. This has arguably been the case with the Moroccan left, particularly the Party of Socialist Unity for the Popular Forces,

which paid a high political price after its experience in government. As no group is capable of bringing about change alone, the Association rather advocates for the different Moroccan political opposition groups to work together on a program of reform.

This idea has been received warily though, for a number of reasons: some view it as a political maneuver to end the isolation of the movement; many on the left are dubious about the vague religious reference of the association; the continuing hostility of the regime towards the association means that other groups do not want to invite negative attention by joining forces with it; the great public support behind the group makes the other political groups seem weak by comparison; and the association's criticism of the entire regime rather than just the government alienates those political groups that are currently participating in the political process and its institutions.

Prospects for an alliance between Islamists and leftists

The parties of the left have a number of reservations with regards to making an alliance with the Islamists. In general they view the Islamists as their competitors, used by the regime to keep them in check. They are suspicious of the Islamists' agenda since they generally believe that religion is a matter for the individual and fear that once in power the Islamists may impose their moral and religious programs on all

society. For the Islamists that accept democracy, it implies the organization of elections and the rotation of power, applying the Islamic principle of *shura*. For the leftists though, democracy is a secular principle which cannot coexist with religious thought. Another reason for separation between the two groups is that in both groups the interests of the sect prevail over those of the nation. The internal divisions within each of the two groups are another obstacle for an alliance. Differences within political groups are solved not through dialogue but through the splitting off of new parties, which now number thirty-three. Alliances have not been successful with the exception of significant cooperation on the issues of Palestine and Iraq.

Comments

1. The Moroccan Islamists and the left, between enmity and coexistence

*Ahmad alBooz*⁹

The relationship between the Islamists and the leftists in Morocco has been through three phases:

1. The first phase was characterized by mutual hostility. The Islamists appeared to be colluding with the regime against the leftists. This was a phenomenon in many Arab countries, with perhaps Tunisia being the only exception where the leftists collaborated with the regime against the Islamists.
2. The second phase was one of peaceful co-existence, due to several reasons: the emergence of an Islamist “left”; the desire of Islamist organizations to be active in the open; new ideological references among the left influenced by the French secular model; and the opening up of Moroccan political life from the early 1990s, when the King began to be more interested in making the opposition participate in the country’s affairs. This cooperation manifested itself through dialogues in the press

⁹ *Media Professor, member of the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP)*

and other spaces and through calls from both sides for frank talks.

3. In the third phase, the leftists and the Islamists have worked together in certain areas, as shown for example by the Party for Justice and Development's initial support for the government of the socialist Abdel Rahman Al Youssefi, the leftists allowing the Islamist parties to use their headquarters for their conferences when they were banned from using public halls, and the participation of leftists in the committee campaigning for the release of suspected but entirely unproven jihadists.

Whether the two groups can further their cooperation seems unlikely given the internal divisions within each group and the remaining mutual suspicion. In addition, calls for alliances between them tend to be made as a consequence of circumstances rather than due to political convictions.

2. The Islamists and the left in need of dialogue

*Omar Ahrshan*¹⁰

The leftist and Islamist groups are not homogenous. As both sides lack ideological consistency, some have called for a reclassification of Moroccan political actors. On the left, a distinction can be drawn between the "governmental left" and the "non-governmental left", terms which emerged when Abdel Rahman Al Youssefi was appointed as Prime Minister and leftist parties entered government for the first time since 1959. The formation of this government divided the left but was also a positive turning point for its relations with the Islamists.

In the social sphere, which is a priority of both groups, there has been greater cooperation between the two sides in recent years. There have also been calls for an alliance between the Party for Justice and Development and the Socialist Union. This desire has been strengthened as a result of the appearance of the state-sponsored Authenticity and Modernity Party. Cooperation has also been encouraged by the struggle for human rights and reform in Morocco, the activity of trade unions and continuing issues of the

¹⁰ *Scholar and member of the Association for Justice and Beneficence*

ummah, for example Iraq and Palestine. The only hope for true reform to be realized is if these groups are able to overcome their differences and work together.

3. Rapprochement for the municipal elections?

*Abdel Ali Hamieddin*¹¹

Hopes that Youssefi's government would herald a new era of democracy have been disappointed: the parties in government accepted the appointment of Idris Jatto, a businessman who did not belong to any party, and the elections of 2007 and 2009 were not truly fair and competitive. The regime has succeeded in giving the superficial appearance of a democracy, while maintaining a monopoly of power through the organization of its institutions. Although the phase of conflict between the left and the Islamists is over there is still no direct political coordination between them, and further efforts must be made to bridge the divide for the sake of democratic reform.

The Party for Justice and Development is a civil political party with an Islamic frame of reference, which believes in democracy. Its priority is public affairs,

¹¹ *Professor of political science and member of the secretariat general for the party of Justice and Development*

and it is concerned with questions of politics rather than questions of religion. The regime has been able to polarize elements of the opposition, in an attempt to obfuscate what is truly happening in Morocco, which is a demand for change.

The history of elections in Morocco shows that the state has consistently interfered with their results, while maintaining the appearance of being neutral and democratic.

An analysis of the municipal elections of 2009 reveals:

1. These elections were run according to dubious electoral rules and lacked transparency. The regime was "unable" to abolish the current election laws and ensure the automatic recording of voters' ID cards as demanded by the opposition. The elections were also characterized by representational inequalities, as 18% of councillors represented 55% of Moroccans, those living in urban centres, with the remaining 45% of Moroccans living in rural areas being represented by 82% of councillors. Ballot boxes were only used in the 92 largest constituencies, i.e. those with more than 35,000 voters. In the remaining 15,000 electoral districts, voters were very much more susceptible to bribes and tribal influence. The government also refused to raise the election threshold for parties from 6% to 10%, as popularly demanded.

2. The victory of the new Authenticity and Modernity Party, formed in 2008 by Fouad Ali El Himma, was controversial and has prompted real fears that this party represents a danger to the democratic future of Morocco. The party is an alliance of two groups, one an emanation of the state and the other a politically opportunistic faction from the left. The party rejects the characterization as a state party. However there are clear indicators that this is the case. For example the regime remained silent when, in the run-up to the elections, the party exerted great pressure in the name of the King to break up alliances formed by the Party for Justice and Development with other parties.

3. Some rapprochement was made between the Party for Justice and Development and the Socialist Union. Although alliances between the Islamists and the leftists in Morocco are not new, relations between the two parties were tense following calls by a member of the Socialist Party for the dissolution of the Party for Justice and Development after the terrorist acts of May 2003 in Casablanca. However, both sides have expressed willingness for a new phase of cooperation in the struggle for democracy.

There is no way to build a true democracy in this country without reviewing the distribution of power and challenging the autocracy of the regime while strengthening the power of the elected institutions. The electoral system is also in need of reform. Perhaps the rapprochement between the Socialist Union and the Party for Justice and Development could be the beginning of a strategic alliance paving the way for a true democratic transformation.

The interference of the state in these elections has damaged the little confidence people still had in politics.

Why attempts to form political coalitions have failed and some suggestions

Ahmad Bahaeddin Shaaban

Despite numerous attempts to form coalitions, none have been successful in the long term. The positive aspects of these coalitions tend to regress quickly. Analysts tend to blame the authoritarian nature of the regime and its security apparatus for this phenomenon. This is correct; however it does not explain the peaceful acceptance by the opposition of this situation. There must be organic reasons linked to the structure of these groups that prevent the coalitions from “taking off” and truly confronting oppression.

Most of the parties and factions that have participated in these groups, apart from the Muslim Brothers, have been characterized by structural weaknesses. They have no real presence in the street to transform agreements between the groups into a force of real influence. This means that no attempt at forming a coalition is really able to move beyond the level of the “press conference” or “founding statement”. Other factors contributing to this failure are:

1. the great discrepancy in the balance of power in favor of the Islamists, provoking the consternation of the other parties;
2. an absence of trust between the groups and of serious political will to succeed;
3. a lack of well defined priorities;
4. discrepancy in defining strategic goals and,
5. finally, the tendency among some groups to pay closer attention to their image on the Egyptian street and in the media than to the aims of the coalition.

Serious dialogue should take place between all the groups on the subject of their programmes and priorities and on each one’s vision for working together. These groups must leave their comfort zones behind and move into the sphere of social and political confrontation, showing solidarity with the popular protest movements. Efforts should be made to lay down programmes for dialogue on the points of difference and to eradicate the confusion that exists around them, such as the democratic transformation, women’s rights, concerns of minorities, cultural and intellectual freedoms, and citizenship.

In brief, the sphere of dialogue should be widened so that the concepts of cooperation, partnership and coalition are not restricted to a small minority but extended to other groups and parties. Neutral spaces such as the one offered here can serve to expand the scope of this dialogue.

II. Islamist movements and the social demands

The Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the social protest movements

*Hossam Tammam*¹²

The struggle between the political Islamist movements and the ruling regimes is ongoing in most of the Arab world. It has taken a new direction though, of which the most important feature is the retraction of ideology as the basis and defining feature of the conflict. In Egypt, the conflict between the Muslim Brotherhood, the oldest and largest of the Islamist associations in the world, and the ruling regime of the oldest and most important state in the region, is no longer ideological in nature, but extending to the basis of the state and its legitimacy.

To some extent, this transformation was hastened by the integration of the political Islamists or at least their acceptance as part of the current political reality, even as an opposition force. This placed them before new challenges in defining their position within the social and political forces in an emerging context.

Due to the profound changes Egypt has experienced over the past two decades, the social question has escalated in an unprecedented fashion to become the priority of the debate over Egypt's future. The ever-growing social demands have led to a new social and political movement, put in place by the forces that have traditionally monopolized the scene and led by the Islamists. This movement deals with questions going beyond those that used to dominate the opposition's debate and struggle.

Between disregard and rightist positions

The Muslim Brotherhood was traditionally known for being a religious grouping with little interest in the social question or in matters of social justice, which meant that it was close to rightist economic beliefs. The Brotherhood concentrated instead on its missionary activities, preaching and calling for commitment to Islam.

Despite enjoying popularity among workers and among different sections of Egyptian society, the Brotherhood was not associated with the labour movement or its concerns. For a long time, activists of the Brotherhood that took part in the labour movement did so because of missionary objectives. On social and economic issues the Brotherhood took

¹² *Researcher specialising in Islamist movements*

positions close to the right, for instance in 1998 with its agreement to a new law that returned agricultural land rented out to farmers after the Egyptian revolution to its original owners. They also accepted the privatization policies, which were adopted by the regime over the past two decades, with caution only against selling them to foreign investors.

The vision of the Brotherhood was in harmony with the transformation of the Egyptian state into a free market economy which began in the era of President Sadat and continued in the era of President Mubarak. The constitutional amendments of 2006 regarding Egypt's transformation towards a free capitalist economy did not meet any principled opposition from the Brotherhood, making their position a topic of criticism, especially from left wing groups and those concerned with the issue of social justice in general.

A movement for the middle class only?

The roots of the Brotherhood's position on social issues can be traced to the predominant Islamist ideology. It appears to advocate the adoption of a free or market economy, with the expectation that the state should have an assured social role in protecting the interests of the poor classes. The ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood is founded on the idea of a comprehensive Islam suitable for every time and place, thus eliminating the reasons for social conflict. This ideology is capable of

inspiring the deprived and marginalized classes who view in it a way out of their suffering in terms of poverty, marginalization and social injustice. Equally it was able to inspire the middle classes which found in it an answer to their interests, compliant with morality and granting an opportunity for social mobility. The same ideology attracted rebels with revolutionary tendencies that sought a violent confrontation, while equally members of the bourgeoisie joined it who believed in negotiation and harmony. The Brotherhood's position on the social question was very much subject to maintaining the broad appeal of their ideology, and ultimately this subject brought conflict and class struggle into Islam itself.

Another reason for the economic vision of the Brotherhood is that its main base is drawn from the middle class. This has been the case since it was founded by Imam Hassan al Banna, with professionals and students being the most significant social groups that responded to his call. The Brotherhood is accused of avoiding expansion among the poorer classes and of being socially exclusive. Members of the Brotherhood have access to a network of great social protection. The association relies in this on its management of a large number of mosques and charity institutions which continue to play an important role in the absence of social protection from the state. This strategy led to a gradual division between the association and the poor and marginalized classes: having a

charity network at the disposal of its members, social issues were rarely the Brotherhood's political focus.

The importance of the social question

However, fundamental changes have taken place in Egyptian society in recent years and led to the preponderance of the social question for all social and political forces, including the Brotherhood despite their established right wing economic vision. The privatization policies and the economic transformation to a market economy in general have fundamentally changed the structure of Egyptian society, most prominently corroding the middle class in an unprecedented fashion and increasing the poverty rate to nearly 40%. In addition to rising unemployment, some of the professions that until recently provided security and a solid standard of living have declined. This was exacerbated by the rise in prices of food and basic services. Furthermore, cases of corruption in the privatization of public companies occurred that harmed the working classes. In face of these developments, doctors, journalists, university professors and even judges who had never before participated in a protest movement took to the streets. The social situation became the priority.

The Muslim Brotherhood was compelled to deal with these social changes. They gained an important place in the discourse of the Brotherhood, especially issues of corruption and high prices.

This explains the interest the Brotherhood took in professional associations from the mid-eighties to the mid-nineties. At the end of 2006, the Brotherhood put forward a large number of candidates in the workers' elections for the first time ever, marking a change in the relationship between the Brotherhood and the trade unions.

Indicators of change

Where does the Brotherhood's interest in the social question exactly stem from? Is it a response by the association to the social and economic transformations that the country has witnessed in the last two decades, which have placed the social question at the top of the agenda? Or is it an attempt by the brotherhood to extend its influence by embracing the issues of the Egyptian street, to become a principal force in the country, and to reap rewards at the expense of the regime? Will the entry of the Brotherhood into the social domain encourage it to develop an agenda of workers' demands (which would be new) or will it stick to its missionary history?

The Brotherhood and the protest movements

The protest movements in Egypt have escalated in recent years in an unprecedented fashion. Such a development had not been witnessed by the country since the end of the Cairo spring which marked the end of the traditional political forces.

In 2008, the most important strikes were those of April 6th, which were boycotted by the Brotherhood. But the strikes succeeded and became the start of an important protest movement. April 6th even became a yearly festival, “the day of rage” directed especially at the social policies of the regime. The strikes in April 2008 were followed by more strikes on May 4th. This time the Brotherhood announced its participation, but emphasized its rejection of violence. In 2009, the Brotherhood chose again to boycott the strikes, but assured considering them a legal and constitutional right in confronting the injustice of the regime. Shortly before the strikes, however, the Brotherhood reviewed its position again, and announced its peaceful participation in the strikes.

Reasons for the ambiguity of the position

The Brotherhood’s “superiority”

The Brotherhood has traditionally been weak at pursuing frontline action or entering into true alliances. The structure of the organization is founded on the principle of listening and obeying the leadership and on action within a homogenous framework. Building bridges with other forces, whichever they were, became increasingly difficult for the Brotherhood after they had become the strongest political association, the weakness of the other political groups and parties becoming apparent at the same time. Some of its

leaders were very aware of the Brotherhood’s position in comparison to other groups, which led to a spirit of exaltedness over society. Consecutive statements read that the Brotherhood was the greatest of the regime’s political opponents, or that most victims of the regime were members of the organization. The Brotherhood’s arrogance drove it further apart from other political organizations.

In addition, a sectarian spirit has recently enveloped the association, perhaps due to having been persecuted. This makes it closer to a sect than to a public group capable of encompassing the street and the general public.

Speaking to the Ummah and not on particular demands

Another reason for the Brotherhood’s position on the protest movements is the fact that the association still holds to a traditional model of political action working for the sake of comprehensive reform, while the new protest movements make certain particular demands. There is a division within the association between those of the traditional view who demand complete political reform and recognition as a party, and those who see the need to benefit from the wave of protests and strikes which have engulfed Egypt, and to ride this wave as the best way to attract the public. Nevertheless, the Brotherhood generally tends to have less respect for the new mobilization for the sake of certain limited demands as

opposed to a comprehensive political vision. It is accustomed to a more totalitarian model which could speak for all the Ummah.

A different political logic

The Brotherhood has a lack of awareness of the new mechanisms of change in Egyptian society and their hidden power, and how they differ from the traditional forces. The association is still the prisoner of politics in the traditional sense of the word, and does not understand the logic of these new movements that have no united leadership with whom to negotiate and that are closer to the street in their mobilization than to the organized forces.

Finally, it is impossible to ignore the traditional reluctance of the Brotherhood to plunge into the unknown. It is not the habit of the Brotherhood to join in a game without knowing its rules and without agreeing on them in minute detail. This has been shown throughout history, when the monarchy was fading, and again now that the current regime is in its death throes.

The Brotherhood's fear of the unknown greatly influences the movement. There is nothing more ignorant in the eyes of the Brotherhood than going on to the Egyptian street or participating in a general strike with no leadership. In its view this could lead to anything, from the transformation of strikes into civil unrest stultifying the country, or into a

situation of uncontrollable violence. In this atmosphere, some of the traditional religious thinking appears very clearly: "The oppressive power we know is better than the ignorance we cannot predict" and "seventy years of tyrannical authority are better than a day without authority." The Muslim Brothers are close to this heritage, in their rhetoric and political development. This is especially true in the current situation, given what appears to be the deterioration of the modern Egyptian state to the extent that it now stands at the gates of the unknown. No one is confident any longer that the situation will improve without its decisive death.

Morocco: the social question and the Association for Justice and Beneficence

*Omar Hreishan*¹³

What is the position of the social question in the thinking of the Association for Justice and Beneficence? How does the Association deal with it practically? Is there a possibility of the Association coming together with forces that differ from it ideologically and politically except on social issues?

Different approaches to the issue of social justice

Social issues include defending freedoms, working to improve living conditions, and tackling corruption. There is agreement between the different groups on many of these goals, and especially on what concerns defining the adversary and methods of action. They then differ with respect to their suggestions and ideas for alternatives. This is why I would like to examine the manner in which the Islamists have approached the social issue. We could start by the following observations:

- Some social demands have come within the Islamists' general demand for change, that is, the bringing to an

end of the corrupt order. Consequently, the demand for the improvement of social conditions or the struggle on specific issues is absent from their discourse. These groups claim that this would extend the life of the current corrupt regime by giving it new breath of life.

- There is a second approach which treats social issues with a charitable spirit, exonerating the current regime from responsibility. Those groups have founded networks of charity, which is distinct from pursuing complete change. These movements transformed into social associations occupied with a charitable spirit and reform.
- Finally there is an approach that tries to preserve the general goal of change and does not refrain from pointing out the responsibility of the rulers. Its interest in partial reform is twofold: to lighten the difficulties of society and to benefit from this first achievement in order to reach the general goal of change.

The Islamists diverge as to how to deal with the social issue, due to different interests and motivations. Some consider social work only as a missionary activity, of which the goal is to increase the masses in the movement. Some are interested in social issues because of the rivalry with the left known for its interest in this field. Some are interested in these issues from a purely religious and jurisprudential (*fiqhi*) standpoint,

¹³ *Writer and journalist, member of the association*

interested in details particular parts only and not in a comprehensive project. Therefore, the latter group is mainly interested in subjects such as charity and social solidarity and are oblivious to social injustice, class inequalities and the responsibility of the rulers.

As for the Association for Justice and Beneficence, it has chosen to deal with the social question through focal points:

- A focus on the social question: The name “Justice and Beneficence” sums up the slogan and programme of the association. Its leader has written a book with the title “Justice” and others that also deal with this topic. Its social focus is also clear from the demands voiced in a number of letters directed to the King, inter alia asking for the people’s money to be returned to the people and an end to class division. In one of his writings from the beginning of the 1980s, the leader of the Association, Ustaad Abdel Salaam Yassin says: “We emphasise the social issue and make it the core of our path and its basis”. He disapproves the Islamists’ lack of interest in issues of justice: “And as for the issue of justice, they are silent about it if not what we read from the thought of our brothers in Tunisia,” by which he means the movement of the Islamist tendency, which later became the Nahdah movement. He also disapproves of the absence of the Islamists from the social sphere and their leaving it empty to the left:

“Talking about social justice, supporting the weak and striving for the sake of the underclass is a political continent monopolized by the left.”

- The precedence of the social question over missionary activity: This point is also clearly expressed in the leader’s writings: “Poverty is the brother of godlessness, and hungry bellies, and sick bodies, and empty minds will not listen to any call before the call of justice.” He describes the problem of society, focusing on the class inequalities: “In the land of Islam there is a bad distribution of wealth (...) the wealthy classes monopolize the wealth and means of production, and the reins of power.”
- Not being restricted to the charitable domain: with regards to this the leader of the association says that “the justice longed for by the Islamists the day the reins of power are handed over is a justice that stabilizes society. The minimum required is justice and development.” He emphasises that it is “justice that places the possibilities of the state at the disposal of the people” and that it “is the realization of people’s economic, social and political rights.”
- The constant mentioning of the responsibility of the rulers: “It is not right legally and is not correct politically or economically that it should be forgotten what the criminals committed and what the

thieves stole.” He adds: “The two necessary conditions for guaranteeing social stability in a state of the law are justice and guaranteed rights for every individual.” Therefore the association holds firm to the principle of retaliation to injustices and a return of riches stolen from public wealth.

- The balance between the jurisprudential (*fiqhi*) and political starting points.
- The struggle on the social question is a front for cooperation with others: Justice and Beneficence is open to all social and political groups, because it deals with the social question from a human starting point.

What about practical implementation?

From its functional experience of around a decade, Justice and Beneficence has become the biggest social movement, both in terms of numbers and in terms of its geographical spread. According to its leader, the association aspires to “have men and women talking and putting forward the good qualities of Justice and Beneficence and its invisible plan [in every area of Morocco]. We preach to people about justice and inform them that justice must be built on a new foundation, because what the Ummah suffers from in the way of poverty, deterioration, ignorance and sickness has its root in being built without a foundation, the rulers are building on a brittle foundation.” The association is present in different ways:

- Social protests: members of the association form the largest section in the university sphere. They are also found in the protest movement of unemployed holders of degrees, in the movement opposing the soaring living costs, in social protests taking place in some cities (such as the movements of Sidi Ifni in 2008).
- Trade union activity: Since the association has a well-structure syndicalist section that is active and different labour and professional sector. The association’s trade union group works to restore trade union activity.
- Presence at earthquakes, floods and similar occasions: through its organized network of social activity the association is sometimes superior to the state network in terms of effectiveness.

The Justice and Beneficence association has become the main competitor of the regime. There are a number of social undertakings that were embraced by the regime with the aim of strangling the association. Despite the possibilities of the State, its effectiveness is always inferior because it remains subject to events and to a slow mode of action, the opposite of the association which is distinguished by continuity, speed, effectiveness and a huge amount of voluntary activity. This is what makes the regime resort to oppressive measures and clamping down on its members and

on groups that are linked to the association.

The social issue won the association a popular dimension, allowing its members to become involved in daily activities, and increased their readiness for sacrifice and discipline. It also helped improve the association's ability to connect with different sections of the Moroccan people. This is reflected equally through the number and the variety of its adherents.

It would be possible for the results to be better than they are now if the association were working in better conditions, especially as the regime constrains the association and closes the door in its face. Equally it is notable that the association does not make any kind of distinction between the issue of comprehensive change and interest in partial reform, and this sometimes obstructs performance. In addition the association does not reveal a number of its operations in this field because it considers this to be more strategic in its struggle with the regime. Furthermore, the association works based on the principle that it is better where possible not to be active alone on issues of broad concern, therefore seeking combined action. This sometimes impedes performance.

Conditions for joint action

Social issues can constitute a front for joint action between the Association for Justice and Beneficence and other

Moroccan organizations under some conditions, the most important being:

- Avoiding becoming political, that is, looking at the matter with a political background that sees this group as more effective than others, or considers that this group will use the other and then overthrow it later.
- Creating controls and guarantees for shared activity and an agreed upon programme for the struggle.
- Concentrating on partial issues because they can be coordinated easily and are a step towards shared action afterwards.

The Islamist movement in Tunisia and the social question

*Lotfi Hajji*¹⁴

The Islamist movement in Tunisia, first represented in the Islamic Tendency Movement, which came to be nicknamed the Nahdah movement from 1989, gave the social question an important position throughout its history. Concepts such as collective ownership, social justice, and workers' rights were among the issues that were central to its literature. It does not differ in this from the other political groups, including the most radical and left-wing, in their defence of the social question.

The paradox of the last two centuries and the social question as a priority

Before plunging into the Islamic Tendency Movement's position on the social question, it is worth pointing out that the Islamist movement has not had a real presence in Tunisia since 1990, the date when a wave of arrests against its leaders began. It was considered an extermination operation, with most of the movement's leadership either sent to prison or banned from political activity or from the country.

In 1978 there were strikes in many different sectors, and public demonstrations protesting at the lack of workers' rights. The Islamic Tendency

Movement did not support these uprisings. Its position only changed with the uprisings of Gafsa. The movement attacked the regime for its socio-economic policies and proposed that the solution was for the public to reclaim their right to change the social and political climate. With every protest, the movement's interest in social concerns became more entrenched, for example in the populist uprising of January 4th 1984 in which the association, and particularly its student members, played a clear role. The student wing of the movement, which strongly adhered in its rhetoric to the formulas of the masses and the weak and to social justice, was greatly influenced by the Marxist and nationalist discourses that controlled the Tunisian university.

During the uprisings in 2008, which led to three deaths, tens of arrests, and the introduction of new rules, the movement made similar demands and statements to those of the other political and civic groups in Tunisia. It rejected the security policy taken by the regime and called for a comprehensive reform. It imputed responsibility for the worsening of the crisis to the policies that led the price of basic consumer goods to rise and caused many Tunisians, including the middle class, descending into poverty. As a result the anger at unemployment and government policies that increased the advantages of the wealthy and corruption mounted. The oppression of voices of protest caused the region to reach boiling point. The movement

¹⁴ Tunisian journalist and co-founder of the 18th October Movement for Rights and Freedoms

called for open public dialogue on the country's problems and for change of the current political and media climate, which stifles and ignores the calls made by political groups, and announced to stand up for the legitimate rights of the Tunisian people.

It could be said that the Islamist movement in Tunisia, throughout the two phases of its history, employed a radical rhetoric in addressing the social question, making legal demands rather than using aggressive Islamist slogans. However, these socio-political positions which do not differ in their content and formulas from the positions of other parties, whether leftist or liberal, do not prevent the Islamist groups from sometimes expressing a belief in Islam as the solution to a number of social crises. However, the lack of any practical implementation has prevented the Islamist movement from developing its ideas and from being held to account over its accomplishments. A number of political groups have come to regard the Islamist movement in Tunisia as a victim of authoritarian oppression and not as a political group that can be held to account for its words and actions. And this, as is well known, constitutes an obstacle to any objective study of the positions of that movement.

Lebanon: the main principles of Hezbollah's social vision

*Abd Al-Halim Fadlallah*¹⁵

The social question does not occupy a key position in the programmes of most of the Arab parties, including the Islamist groups, the reason for this being that Arab political life is currently dominated by three other factors: 1/ the issue of democracy and the nature of the political regime; 2/ the national factor which is concerned with the struggle against subordination and imperialism, with the priority of resisting Zionism; and 3/ the issue of sectarianism and fanaticism.

The breeding ground for Islamist movements, which are traditionally popular, is marginalization and deprivation. Their political consciousness was characterized by a great sensitivity towards the demands of the lower classes, but this was never expressed in a comprehensive theoretical framework, and they did not devote themselves entirely to a clear social path. As for the universal jihadi movements, their interest was restricted to fighting the unbelievers and applying the *shari'a*, without being concerned at all with the social question.

¹⁵ *Head of the Consultative Centre for Studies and Documentation - Beirut*

Hezbollah views itself as a movement for national struggle, with resistance at the heart of its principles. However, the circle of its activities extends to other issues dictated by the national situation. Although resistance and other political concern were its priority, the social question remained enrooted in its consciousness. In some phases of its development, this concern with social issues regulated its internal relations and its position on the regime. The social rhetoric of Hezbollah is influenced by its structure, identity, and political course based on three principles:

1/ Defense of the weak

Hezbollah is defined as a *jihadi* faith movement engaged in political activity. Despite its hopes and efforts to move beyond the local sphere, with consideration of the particularity of Lebanon, the social goals were strongly present in its rhetoric, as a consequence of its special relationship with its public on the one hand, and also because social questions are very present in its political thought. The party, which learned its founding lessons from the doctrine of Al Khomeini, considers the struggle to be between the oppressors and the weak, not between the forces of good and evil, or between belief and unbelief, or between the lands of Islam and the lands of war, as the traditional classification goes.

Although this understanding of the struggle appears close to the class analysis, it is more varied and extensive.

It draws its content from various religious and moral spheres, since it expresses the *Quranic* concept of the strong demeaning the weak, not only through poverty and deprivation, but also through the stealing of political, ideological, social and economic rights and through preventing the people from enjoying their right of choice.

The party is based both on resistance and social struggle as social emancipation cannot be achieved unless the people's economic situation is improved and they are protected from dawdling on the doors of others. Hezbollah is, as its leader Hassan Nasrallah says, "ideologically an Islamist movement, the basis of its founding being resistance. At the same time it is a popular political movement which takes responsibility for its people and defends them with blood, and it is interested in their future at the political, economic and living level." According to him, the economic policy of Lebanon needed to give priority to the deprived and oppressed and to disadvantaged areas, "those who resist in this country and keep their honour and refuse to leave to live on the doorsteps of the world" Hezbollah's choice for social change was also expressed clearly by the spiritual leader during a press conference. He explained that the official slogan "Islamic revolution in Lebanon" is not an expression of Hezbollah's aim to establish an Islamic state, but that the revolution will be one against occupation, deprivation, corruption, negligence, injustice and so

on. An armed coup will not be needed for it; the revolution can be brought about by peaceful political means.

2/ The resisting society

If Hezbollah is concerned with social demands and the defence of the weak, this is also in the interests of building what is known as a society of resistance (to Israel), and the ability to adapt to the requirements of the struggle against Hezbollah's enemy.

To realize the process of reform, development and progress, society has to have sufficient strength and commitment. Thus the desired social goals are at times ends in themselves, and at other times means for supporting the resistance and enabling it to continue and surpass difficulties.

Hezbollah also sees that the realization of social goals is mainly achieved through power, not through being isolated from power, and within the context of the process of state building, rather than outside it. It has therefore rejected the use of violence, and expressed its support for freedoms.

Hezbollah built a vision with demands aimed at the state, whether Islamic or not Islamic. It refrained from plunging into the founding of a religious state in a diverse society. From the beginning it has demanded a state that would enjoy the favour of all the Lebanese. Even though it said in an open letter that it is an indivisible part of the Islamic *Ummah*, in which all Muslims are

connected by one ideological belief, it added that its goal is to grant "to all individuals [the Lebanese people] self-determination and the right to choose in complete freedom the form of the ruling regime that they want." The party did not hide its belief that the Islamic state embodies the order of living according to the religion, but it never included it in its programme, neither openly nor in secret.

With time this matter has become clearer, since its highest political goal has come to be justice, distinct from the forming of a regime that will realize it. Since it believes in the plurality on which Lebanon must be founded, it focuses its mission on the development of the political regime, starting from a focus on abolishing political sectarianism, and calling for the founding of a just, modern and able state," as the way to gain popular legitimacy." A state such as this is not built except by the rule of law, the principle of accountability, protection of justice, and equality between citizens. Justice is a guarantee for the stability of the state, and strength is the indispensable condition for its existence. Both things require the uprooting of corruption and an end to discrimination and human poverty.

3/ The connection between political and social reform

Hezbollah's idea of a socially just state is represented in a regime that makes a connection between political and

economic reform, and a balanced social arrangement between all the groups. This guarantees economic freedom on the one hand, but balances on the other hand the considerations of growth and development, and the factors of justice and equality. According to Hezbollah's electoral programme of 2009, "in the course of entering true economic reform, the state must develop a new role, from a neutral state with a limited social and economic role to a developmental state" Such a developmental state increases competitiveness of the state, avoids economic chaos, limits the involvement of the exterior in development, strengthens integration in the Arab region, and provides gradual economic flourishing. The able and just state of this vision is not built only through sovereignty and independence, but it also requires the putting in place of balanced social and economic policies, which guarantee "to our sons stability, sufficiency and independence" and help to spread general contentment. These must include numerous measures aiming at supporting the production sectors, lowering the levels of unemployment, and strengthening the programmes for social protection. In its electoral programme of 1996, Hezbollah was one of the first to lay down the expansion of social security to include all Lebanese. Equally, it said there should be no solution to the financial crisis at the expense of Lebanon's economic and financial independence. It also rejected privatization policies and selling the

assets of the public sector in cases where this would have an impact on economic development and social stability.

In practice: programmes and initiatives

Hezbollah asked the state to build and support a society of resistance. Since it did not expect the state to follow this call (and which it did not do), Hezbollah started developing a network of social institutions for aid, construction, education and health, which spread in most areas exposed to the enemy. It carried out extensive and very effective programmes of rebuilding, the most important being the "promise" plan, which worked to rebuild a thousand homes damaged during the July war of 2006.

In addition, the party offered other services to the public, as a substitute for the shortcomings of the regime. Nevertheless it always remained committed to the principle of not taking the place of the state in any of the fields in which it was present. During the civil war, the institutions of the party widened the scope of its services to include what should have been delivered by governmental institutions, such as providing free clean water in areas lacking supplies and protecting certain utilities. After the Ta'if agreement, and in order to gradually prepare the country for its political presence and authority, it began to concentrate on local development, supporting civic institutions and charitable associations.

The local authorities in charge of providing these services were still absent. In the phase that followed the first municipal elections after the war, Hezbollah focused on coordinating local development programmes to support producers in marginalized areas and sectors. Hezbollah helped civic organizations to plan and implement their activities in view of attaining social and developmental goals.

After the first parliamentary elections held in Lebanon after the civil war, Hezbollah achieved a striking win. The legislative system became its main entry point into politics, though Hezbollah's position and its social and economic goals would involve changing the regime. It refrained from participating in any of the governments after the Ta'if peace agreement because of its lack of confidence in the governments preceding the presidency of Emile Lahoud in 1998. This had two reasons according to Sheikh Na'im Qassem: firstly "their economic vision at the domestic level, which focuses on loans and privatization and refuses to support the production sectors", and secondly, "its view of the resistance and lack of suitable support for it".

Hezbollah then had misgivings about the construction plans of the first Rafik Hariri government. It considered this economic project to be dangerous so soon after peace had been made. Sheikh Na'im Qassem considered that the principal dangers in Lebanon were

represented, "after the Zionist threat, by the socio-economic crisis, the limiting of general freedoms, the shrinking of administration, and the spread of corruption" The party criticized the government at that time because its development model neglected the demands of the workers and the teachers. At that time, Hezbollah was the only party that supported the labour union, which was experiencing oppression by the authorities.

The regime under Lahoud changed its position on the resistance, one of Hezbollah's main demands. Hezbollah subsequently also started to improve its relationship with Hariri. Despite this the party continued to reject the economic and financial policies of the government, warning against the consequences of on-going borrowing, especially on the poor. It also called for a cautious attitude to the international institutions, emphasizing that a solution had to come from within, not through reliance on the exterior, be it through foreign debt or through aid from states with a dubious interest in Lebanon.

Hezbollah's opposition to the governmental economic policy also led to disagreement with the March 14th forces that formed the parliamentary majority. Although Hezbollah's opposition did not lead to a change in the general direction of the regime and did not prevent deterioration and corruption, it was able to curb the state's outbreak of neoliberalism after Ta'ef. Hezbollah,

with the cooperation of others, forced the regime to take an interest in social issues. It also played a part in giving a popular thrust to the labour organizations and in slowing the privatization process. For instance, it was able to prevent some projects which it considered to conflict with the interests of the people, such as the project of a real estate company in southern Beirut. Through the pressure of the party, this company was transformed into a public institution. But the party was hindered in its opposition by the fact that its supporters were concentrated in deprived areas, receiving only a small amount of public investment, especially the border areas of Ba'albek al-Hermel.

Hezbollah has not been alone in opposing the socio-economic policies, but it has been the strongest, most effective, and most popular. It has joined forces with other groups on many points, without actually building a united socio-economic agenda. But today Hezbollah forms a common ground for its many allies: it meets with the Amal movement over the need for development, with the Free Patriotic Movement over the fight against corruption and nepotism, and with the left over the need for serious reforms to the economic system. The idea of reform overcomes ideological, intellectual and sometimes political contradictions.

III. The relationship between religion and politics - secularism as the solution?

*Rafik Abdel-Salam*¹⁶

Political obscurity in the Arab-Islamic region, principally the lack of freedoms and democracy, is often attributed to the control of religion over politics. In this context, the solution of secularism has become very important in the eyes of much of the Arab and Islamic elite, even though this is rarely said frankly, to avoid clashing with the broadly Islamic public sensibilities. However there are many factors that should be considered concerning the general relationship between politics and religion, and in particular the link between religion and the state, before plunging into the details of possible solutions.

Liberating religion from attack by the state

Most of the Arab states are characterized by a tendency to authoritarianism, which extends to all areas of society including religion and its institutions. This is true for those countries taking a fundamentally modern direction (Tunisia, Syria and Iraq of the Ba'athists), for those that have founded their legitimacy on a traditional religious

basis (Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states), and those that have moved in a conciliatory direction (Morocco, Lebanon, Egypt, Yemen, and Algeria). Therefore a careful investigation clearly shows that the heart of the problem lies in the control of religion and its institutions by the state, alongside its control over the substantial values and symbols of society. This is rather the case than the control of religion over state institutions and the existence of a religious apparatus seizing authority. Liberating religion from the control of the state is the priority demand, more than freeing the state from religion. The regime is liberated from everything except for its own values and special interests, which it wants to dictate to all. The essence of the problem lies in the existence of an authoritarian state that oppresses the mobilization of society, including its sources of symbolic expression, its institutions and activities, and not in the existence of a religious institution that controls the States or people in power. Most of the Arab and Islamic states, even those that claim to be modern, have a nationalist character that dominates over society and religion. Religion has become merely part of its executive and bureaucratic apparatus, its great leading men have come to resemble employees, their role being

¹⁶ Tunisian political writer and deputy manager of Al Jazeera Centre of Studies

only to legitimize the current state of affairs and clothe it in a religious mantle. One of the amazing distinctions is that most of the Arab secular states that claim to be modern do not accept the separation of the religious domain from the state and its bureaucracy.

The regime holds back society

As a result of the distorted modern experiences that followed independence, the Arab society suffers from worsening confusion and chaos at the cultural and institutional level. The religious, social and cultural polarization that afflicts the Arab societies is only a concentrated expression of this crisis. It continues to pervade the societal structure and shake the general consciousness without having an objective or guidance.

The Arab states are characterized by two features, which are in fact two sides of the same coin: the first is the institutional vacancy as a result of the fragmentation of the traditional social structure and a weakness or inability to build modern institutions in its place. This is in contrast to the expansion of the state's centralizing nucleus and its overpowering of civil society and all the spaces for free and independent expression, including religion and its ruling institutions. So it has not maintained and developed the traditional institutions, without really replacing them with modern and effective institutions. The second concerns the state's social functions and its regular clashing with and hindrance of the rest

of society. It is clear that the state intervenes in things large and small, and politicians have authority in the spheres of religion, culture, art and so on.

Modernization and democracy are not necessarily concomitant

Political control takes different and varied forms, with that supported by religion being only one form. Therefore secularism in itself will not necessarily bring with it democracy and reforms. There are other forms of autocracy in our age, especially in the Arab and Islamic region, which can be more devastating and harmful than a religious autocracy. Unfortunately they have not been sufficiently investigated. These "modern autocracies" are founded on the expedient use of a modern political terminology, its goal being the legitimization of authority and gaining the loyalty of foreign countries. The German sociologist Max Weber points out an important truth: the transition from a traditional society to a modern one does not necessarily mean opening the gates of a promised heaven. Often modernization is linked to the appearance of new and unprecedented types of control, with an expansion of the supervisory tools by bureaucracy and the development of modern techniques used to the most extreme limit possible by the state. For who says for example that Fascism, Nazism, Stalinism, Atatürkism or Bourguiba were traditional or religious. Perhaps this problem appears starker in the Arab

world where the modernization is concentrated in the nucleus of the state, but is nearly absent in society. Most techniques have been taken up by the state, especially in its intelligence and security apparatus, but not in society. It is as if the Arab modern age (and post modern age) is materializing in the ministries of the interior and of security, and has not touched economics, health, education, administration etc.

There is no definitive connection between modernization and democracy and between religion and autocracy. We must leave behind this simple equation that is made between modernization and democracy and between religion and autocracy, and be just as careful of modern autocracy as we are of religious autocracy.

A functional distinction between state and society

These preliminaries were aimed at providing a diagnosis of the Arab-Islamic situation, rather than being carried away by general theoretical thoughts, or a mistaken or imaginary remedy, which does not stand up to the actual situation and its intricate problems. However, far from starting a useless survey of the Islamist and secular states, there really is a need to make a functional distinction between religion and the state. This has become more urgent in the light of the complexity of modern society, the vastness of the modern state, and the sharpness of its teeth and talons. Religion and its

institutions and functions have become a firmly established part of the mobilization of civil society and its real strength, as opposed to being part of the apparatus and functions of the state. So the state, whatever its form or the type of legitimacy upon which it is founded, whether Islamic or secular, modern or traditional, tends to be equally keen to take over the basis of symbolic and spiritual legitimacy as to gain control over wealth and material interests. For if a king tends towards isolation and demanding glory, as the scholar Ibn Khaldun explains, it does not matter whether he is a keen believer in religion or in any other values. The real importance of political thought starting from Ibn Khaldun and passing through Macchiavelli, Hobbes, Montesquieu and to some extent Hegel, lies in their pointing out the truth that politics is not about moral or spiritual virtues so much as it is about struggle over interests, for control and for exclusive power. This shows that it is important to be cautious about authority and the state, instead of blindly trusting in it. The quest for a political remedy, in other words the creation of ways to limit these problems as much as possible, led to the idea of the separation of powers, the independence of civil society from political authority, and institutional checks and balances. Here lies the importance of the democratic procedural remedy.

The 'ulama's response to the authoritarian state

Traditional Islamic political thought developed in the context of what is called an authoritarian culture, or *shari'a* politics, granting a kind of sacred halo to the authority of the caliphate and considering the sultan to be the guardian of religion and faith. However, a historical review clearly shows that the authoritarian State was protected by religion more than it offered its protection to it. Perhaps this is what explains why the 'ulama (Islamic legal scholars) wanted to prevent the rulers from interfering in the domain of religion or transforming it into what resembles an official state ideology. The 'ulama were active in this vein from early on when the Umayyads seized power, and then more obviously with the experience of al Ma'mun later, who tried to impose Mu'tazilism on society by the force of the state. The 'ulama called upon the rulers to stick to the limits of the *shari'a* and to guarantee their neutrality in matters of religious judgement and doctrine, leaving that to the 'ulama alone. This led to the appearance of what the American historian Ira Lapidus called a separation between the spaces of palaces and princes and the spaces of civil society. The regal and princely palaces were the embodiment of the sultan's splendor and the legacy of the Sassanids and the ancient Romans, which were revived in a form that had Islamic legitimacy. In Islamic history, the distinction took

place between religion and authority, or more accurately between the fields of *fiqh* (*shari'a* jurisprudence) and religion, and power and the sultans, or between the people of the sword and the people of the pen. It does not matter much whether this was called secularism, the important thing is that it happened.

There is an important saying in Sunni political thought which can be built upon: it is the frank affirmation that politics is a field of appraisal and endeavor, not a field of coercion and restriction, and a relatively human affair, except in the eyes of its spiritual and moral opponents. There is no monopolizing church in Islam that defines what is lawful and what is not lawful, and there is no divine authority that hovers over the heads of people and their will and over the public elected institutions. Rather, the political field is concerned with reaching a balance of interests and evils defined by rational endeavor and the people's free choice.

The neutrality of the state

The Arab political and cultural spheres have taken blows from a useless struggle that with time has transformed into a sharply polarizing split between the camp for a secular solution and the one for an Islamist solution. It is a split that was formed in the raging atmosphere that accompanied the fragmentation of the Ottoman empire in 1924 and the rise of Ataturkism. Ever since Rashid Rida wrote a series of famous articles in *Al Manar* magazine in 1922, then gathered

them together in a well known book “The great caliphate and imamate”, and was then followed by ‘Abd al Rizq who published “Islam and the foundations of rule” in 1925, the Arab intellectual sphere has begun to be divided between those who call for the Islamization of the state, the return of the caliphate and the application of the *shari’a*, and those who call for secularization and the breaking of the link between the state and religion. Although Ali Abd al Rizq was a Sheikh at Al Azhar and did not in reality depart from the traditional areas of *fiqh* and *kalam* to the subject of politics, a split between his students on the one hand and the students of Rashid Rida and his followers on the other developed afterwards. Perhaps it is possible today to review the relationship between religion, politics and the state, in a more calm and balanced way. It is suitable for practical reasons to get rid of the formula “secularism”, due to its obscure and polarizing character, and to use instead more limited concepts such as democracy, neutrality of the state, freedoms, and suchlike.

There is a real need today to emphasize the neutrality of the state in dealing with issues such as culture, religion, and society, as it is neither the state’s goal nor its right to impose cultural ideological or behavioral models in the name of secularism or Islamism. Its role should be limited to the protection of civil peace, serving the public interest and no more. Although the question of neutrality remains relative, because at

the end of the day there is no state that does not have certain cultural choices and values, there is a clear difference between a state that grants freedom of choice to its individuals and societies, and others that do not grant this margin at all and interfere in their people’s choices, ideas and tastes. It is necessary for radical secularists, and equally for radical Islamists, to refrain from excesses. If we go beyond the theoretical side of the issue, and concentrate on the actual political reality, it could be said that the interfering state model, whether secular or Islamist, is harmful to people’s freedom and to the stability of our societies. This is equally clear from the radically secularist Turkish experience and from the Shi’ite Iranian one.

Models for inspiration

Although a societal model cannot be copied, it is possible to learn from the Anglo Saxon model, while avoiding radical tendencies and interferences in the name of laicism and republicanism. The French saw the public sphere as a space that needed to be cleansed of religions and beliefs, and believed that an atheistic secular culture should take its place. The English, and more clearly the Americans later on, however, saw the public space as being open to the different religions, sects, and beliefs. For them, the mission of the state was restricted to improving the organization of public space so that no religion dominated over the others. While the

French did not tolerate the existence of private expressions and demonstrations of religion, considering them to be contrary to the principle of secularism and republicanism, the English and the Americans considered that to be part of the individual or group's freedom of personal choice. Theoretically the idea of associations is completely rejected by the French Republican thought.

What we need in the present phase is to remove the state as far as possible from many areas which it still considers to have the right to monopolize. Thus, the social and political trends could be allowed to run their natural course, with an overriding spirit of political and ideological compromises and settlements, in the hope of formulating a social model that is acceptable to all. Societal projects are not born complete, and are not born in a single moment, and they are not the product of defined ideological groups but rather they are the result of a long cumulative and complex course of compromises between social, ideological and political groups and between the different elites. It should also be pointed out here that societal projects are not absolute, but are shaped by society with their successes and failures, and in this way respond to needs and demands. There is neither a ready-made pure and secular model nor a complete Islamist model drawn from the past. Neither the idea of the secular state in the way of the French revolution, nor the traditional authoritarian state are appropriate for the current situation in

the Arab world. The secular solution, for example, which appeared in Europe, was not born because of a group of philosophers and thinkers attracted by secularism. It rather became a practical need imposed by the atmosphere of religious wars in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, after which religion became linked to division and strife. It became impossible to found a political society on religion and a church. I am not certain that secularism such as this has become a general demand in our societies, that it has social and political forces mobilized on the ground, or that it is able to form a new political consensus on the rubble of the historical and disintegrated consensus. I am confident in the need for the neutrality of the state, though, and that it can help everyone towards political and ideological maturity.

How to develop a new societal model

Possible solutions are appearing on the horizon, but there is no complete solution within our reach. If modernity means thinking and creating new ideologies far from what the ancients said and what the narrators collected, then we must not fear treading new and unprecedented paths, whether at the level of thought or political society. The traditional consensus was fragmented by the wave of Western colonization and the experience of modernization, but signs of a new consensus to take its place have not crystallized yet. A collective effort and open dialogue

between the Islamists and the secularists and the rest of the social and political groups is required to arrive at the desired social consensus. This could take whole generations until the final conception is formed. The general political and social identity of the regime should not be decided in a brief or authoritarian way by this or that group. There are pressing needs and we are in most urgent need of leaving behind this narrow and stifling discussion. In this regard, three simple and primary thoughts should be emphasized:

- Firstly, the state should be neutral and refrain from oppression, instead giving primacy to civil society and mobilizing its hidden and repressed energies. Most of the Arab states have established Arabic as their official language and Islam as the main source of legislation. These two guarantees should ensure a calm and stable political life. There is no need to go over this subject again, whether by making a demand for the secularization of the state or for its Islamization, as long as the subject of identity remains a domain for public dialogue and discussion.
- Secondly, different groups that make up society should be recognized without discriminating on the basis of religion, descent, color, or sex. This should be done according to the principle of citizenship, emphasizing the supremacy of laws. At the same

time, all political and ideological groups, without preconditions except for the avoidance of violence or exposing civil stability to violence or threat, should be allowed to be active and participate in public life. As for the social and political identity of the regime, or what is described as the societal project, it would need to remain open and subject to discussion by everyone.

- Thirdly, channels for dialogue must be created, with a spirit of compromise and conciliation prevailing over ideological intolerance. The common aim would be to reach conciliatory solutions between the conflicting groups.

In short, we are in urgent need of what the German philosopher Habermas called “communicative rationality” in our societies, that is, extending bridges for dialogue between the elites and the different social and political groups, so that our societies can strike a general agreement on the position of religion, the role of the state and the functions of civil society. There is no magical solution or a clear or complete conception of an “Islamist” or “secular” societal plan, but dialogue and freedom are the guarantors of mature visions and development of all.

IV. Advancing women's rights – with or without Islamists?

The position of women in society and their political participation is among the most sensitive issues when it comes to a possible cooperation with Islamists. The societal role of women and their rights are at the heart of society and closely linked to questions of power. Any changes to the position of women affect the whole of society and this is why change is so difficult to achieve. Morocco with its reform of the code of personal status, now the family code, may have shown a way of modernizing the law with regard to a more equal treatment of women based on a reinterpretation of the *shari'a*. However, the Moroccan reform has its limits: for feminist groups, the reform has not gone far enough and everyone concedes that the implementation is not up to the spirit of the law, leaving (too) much discretion to judges. Women activist from different boards agree on the fact that reform has to go beyond legal changes. Different opinions exist with regard to the strategy to achieve lasting reform also in behavior: Some see the need to engage with Islamists on a reinterpretation of the *shari'a*; others feel that as much as the Islamic nature of Arab societies cannot be ignored, engaging with Islamists and within their framework of thought has proved ineffective. In any case, it emerges from the discussion that it is difficult to isolate the advancement of women's rights from political liberalization in general and from the societal context.

The family code – what's new?

*Khadija Moufid*¹⁷

The legal problems which inundate the courts charged with family issues reflect a stifling social, cultural and economic problem in Moroccan society. This problem is harmful to the values of justice and dignity as the basic foundations for stability. The law being the most important means of protection for the oppressed, the debate on reform

has been fixed around its legislative and legal aspect for a long time. The reality before the courts affirms society's need for legal change. The only initiative that has appeared in society to make demands and proposals in this regard has been from the feminist organizations.

This process has had three phases: The phase of initial demands and negative responses ran from the 1970s until the beginning of the 1990s. During this phase the demands of the feminist movement were for the radical change of the law and especially for equality of inheritance and the abolishment of polygamy and guardianship. The responses to these demands were harsh, especially where articles derived from

¹⁷ *Professor of Islamic thought and philosophy of history, member of the Justice and Development Party, Morocco*

the *shari'a* were concerned, but the demands continued, since no alternatives were proposed by opponents of reform, either by scholars or the Islamist movement. The campaign for a million signatures to change the personal status law induced the king of the country to make the amendments of 1993. This was the incentive for continuing the struggle for complete change. The Islamist movement opposed this campaign but had no alternative modern vision, remaining limited to defense of the old legislation.

The phase of increased impetus and debate began in the phase after the amendments of 1993. This was when the feminist leadership became prominent and active in the ranks of the Islamist movement in the field of social and women's issues. It led to the founding of a feminist organization concerned with women and the family, a centre for family guidance and a centre for listening to female victims of domestic violence. This organization was a pioneer that led intellectual debate on the subject and was the main group representing the feminist movement with a reformist Islamist agenda. Its activity led to the national plan for the integration of women in development.

During the phase of conciliation and consensus the movement reached its objectives as it made all groups of society participate in the family question. Morocco expressed with freedom its dreams and vision for

society and the king of the country responded and formed a consultative committee to review the law.

The social and legislative structure underwent a fundamental development with its new title of "the family code". King Muhammad the Sixth defined the aims of the code as being "for fairness for women, protection of children and preservation of the dignity of men." This is the essence of the Islamic vision, in contrast to the formulaic vagueness which defined the old structure called "the law of personal status." The structure of the family code is modelled on the Islamic legislative structure in its division into chapters, addressing engagement, marriage and the collapse of the marriage covenant or death. Each section uses the Islamic *shari'a* for developing the law.

The issue of the family code stirred discussion and debate in society over a number of issues which led to the dissolving of the connection between revelation and human intellect, between the sacred which may not be discussed, and the legislative which is relative. Similarly the code was intellectually provocative in addressing the difference between universalism and secularism in the family question and how to manage this domestic issue in the face of international pressure. The consultative committee behind the family code was composed of experts with different and complementary specializations and experiences, whether in the field of law,

legal sciences such as *usul* and *fiqh*, in life sciences such as medicine, in social sciences or in religious or public affairs. It considered the points of disagreement and applied the procedures of *ijtihad* (reinterpretation) and discussion in order to arrive at its conclusions and formulate rules. This experience has been a source of pride for Morocco which has enjoyed the world's attention and has been called a pioneering example in the Arab world. It is possible to illustrate this process through some examples of contentious issues that were discussed.

1/ Polygamy: Many associations requested that polygamy should be abolished. However this did not happen. Polygamy is permissible in Islam, determined as law for Islamic society where it is required, though it is not necessary in Morocco according to statistics. Consequently its abolishment would not be in harmony with the legislative choices of the country which stipulate an Islamic reference. The family code therefore preserved polygamy, but it may only be used where it is genuinely needed and is subject to certain requirements.

2/ Guardianship: The schools of law agree that guardianship is a requirement for marriage, with the exception of the Hanafi school, which says that it is not a condition but is an option available to the woman if she wants to use it. The Hanafi interpretation has been followed despite widespread reservations.

The family code and challenges to implementation

The family code, in creating many rules for family relations, also creates many challenges, both in its creation of a new culture and in its implementation. This gives rise to the logistical challenges, since there are not enough judges and courts to deal with the number of cases presented to the courts, especially given the specialized requirements of social cases. There is also a shortage of capable employees in general prosecution. The lack of qualifications is another challenge as the application of the family code requires appropriate expertise regarding family mediation. This is necessary to help take decisions in the interests of the family and society.

The question of marriage between Moroccans living abroad requires national diplomacy to harmonize the law of the family with the laws of the states where they live. The citizens must not have to face legal contradictions while the specificity of Moroccan marriage subject to Islamic law is maintained.

Finally, the family code must be subject to debate to remedy its shortcomings, considering that it is a new legislative experience which arose from legislative needs and a conciliatory vision. An examination of its application in reality reveals many conceptual gaps. Civil society and scholars must engage with these issues to continue the development of legislation that will fulfill the needs of society.

The reform of the family code in Morocco or the rebuilding of the social order

*Souad Chentouf*¹⁸

It might seem at first that the title I have chosen is premature in announcing a new social order in Morocco. However, this choice concerns the dream of a generation of Moroccans, men and women, and dreams do not usually coincide with reality. This was also the case with these efforts which we for a time believed would herald the dawn of a new age in Morocco. The many discussions that took place show the difficulty of realizing a real transformation: disproving the idea that the new family code was imposed by the international order rather than in response to the expectations of the Moroccans, determining the actual goals of the social project behind the reform of the family code and the fact that reform of the family code is subject to negotiations and alliances between different groups.

1 – Changes to the family code

The first text regulating the family was issued in 1957 and was named the code of personal status (Moudawana). Women were socially and economically marginalized at the time and the committee that formulated this law

consisted of religious men who produced a very traditional and conservative code outlining a patriarchal view of the family and placing responsibility and power in the family in the hands of men.

Subsequently, in the 1980s, women came to have a greater presence in the work place and to play a greater role in supporting their families economically; however these important changes were not accompanied by any changes to the law. Democracy was growing at the international level, with the fall of the Berlin wall, and Morocco subscribed to international law through ratifying a number of pledges, agreements and protocols (despite reservations about much of their content). A feminist elite with political roots emerged and discussed the reform of the code of personal status and equal rights for women. In 1992, the feminist associations mobilized support in different sections of society to gather a million signatures in favour of reform of the Moudawana. The king asked that each of the feminist organizations present their demands, which were then studied by a committee led by Abdel Hadi Boutalib. There were some minor reforms but the struggle of the feminist movement continued and came to its height at the end of the life of King Hassan II, when Morocco undertook a number of reforms. These included the release of political prisoners, the founding of a consultative committee for human rights and the ministry of human rights, four women being given

¹⁸ *President of the association “Espaces féminins”, Morocco*

ministerial posts in the government of Abd al Rahman al Youssefi as well as generally improved freedoms.

These were positive achievements of al Youssefi's government, however the political division within this government was its great weakness. The political division was one between the conservative forces of political Islam and the leftist parties. Its failure to implement the national plan for the integration of women in development was considered a failure for the feminist movement, which had considered this government to be its historical opportunity.

A committee appointed by the king in 2001 had no success. In 2003 the king intervened and announced the reform to the law on personal status which became known as the family code. Among the most important changes were the raising of the age of marriage to 18 years, the abolition of repudiation and establishment of legal divorce, the abolition of polygamy unless in exceptional circumstances and with the consent of the first wife and making a marital tutor optional for a girl once she has reached the age of 18.

The new family code showed that because women are a pillar of the social order, any change in their situation affects the standing of men and the nucleus of society, the family. The building of a patriarchal society was possible through a social order that exploited women and discriminated

against them. Some maintain an interest in maintaining men's monopoly of power, justifying it in the name of religious identity or a Moroccan Islamic specificity, and with other numerous excuses which are only given when the matter of reform concerns the status of women. The struggle is therefore not at heart one of religion or values. It is a struggle that uses religion to legitimize injustice and discrimination, a struggle for authority.

2 - Another value system?

Do these reforms and innovations that came in the family code indicate the transition of Moroccan society to another value system, one founded on a rational society and based on the individual with all his or her philosophical and economic aims? The subject of the family code is thorny and complex and discussion over it is dominated by three perspectives: the first which aims for complete emancipation from religion and calls for a state of purely civilian institutions. Those who have expressed this view have generally found themselves excluded from the arena of debate since their discourse does not contain the shared reference point to which Moroccans subscribe.

The second perspective comes from within the religious domain but with a reformist point of view, with the aim of renewing religious thought, believing that religion can be enriched in this way without losing any of its depth. The

majority of the feminist movements recognised the importance of working within the limits of the religious domain, so as not to alienate themselves from society as a whole. In order to prevent their isolation, they even formulated their rhetoric within the frame of reference of their opponents and engaged with their obstacles through *ijtihad* (reinterpretation). The opposition here comes from within the religious field, since the conservative trend has opposed any enlightened reading, considering this to be *bid'a* (innovation). The feminist movements have found themselves without political support because their historical allies do not share their demand for religious reform, considering that this could be harmful to their strategic interests. The gains made by the feminists have therefore been limited and they have subsequently been marginalized. There has been a regression also in that much of the new family code is not being implemented since it leaves much discretion to the judge. He often uses this discretion to thwart its aims, for example by allowing polygamy and the marriage of minors due to “exceptional” circumstances.

The third perspective is that the transition to a different value system concerns a social plan that is built on institutions that do not exceed their roles and powers in accordance with laws agreed upon to manage public affairs. Some defend the amendment of the family code as an indicator that Morocco

has transitioned to another order, and say that what needs to be engaged with now are the stipulations and their implementation.

The issue is sensitive, considering that at its depth it is the essence of the social vision that we are aiming at: What are the values that the family code shares and defends? What is the scope of that commonality? Is it in favour of maintaining the gains that have been realized? Or, conversely, does it erode it in the name of excuses which reject the sharing of power? Perhaps the greatest struggle that awaits us in this field as women and democrats is the struggle for individual freedoms, which the political parties have proved is not among their priorities since their political mission is all absorbing.

How have the different political actors and groups managed this domain? There has been disagreement within the feminist movement over the level of independence that should be maintained from the parties and over how to manage their political course. The level of women emancipation reached has also diminished due to the potent force of the “sacred”. These factors benefit the conservative trend which has become the most influential on the political scene.

Perhaps the social vision that is yet to emerge bears the values of equality, social justice and power rotation, based on a state of institutions. We have to avoid going back to square one and have to maintain the gains we have made.

Islamic renewal and women's issues: towards citizenship and democracy

*Heba Raouf*¹⁹

Before discussing politics and women in the Arab world from a reformist Islamist perspective as against a conservative Islamist perspective, three observations should be made:

First, it is important to be precise about the concepts used in this discussion and their sources, for example, "participation", "empowerment" and "representation", which draw the map of women's rights. Does the existence of an independent nationalist state liberate the issue of women's rights from the vision, allegedly derived from the *shari'a*, which restricts their role? Does Islamic law grant political rights to women or is the concept a secular one?

Second, there can be no political renewal without modernizing the religious law, as it is not possible to create a democratic vision without a religious reference and without consideration of our historical experience. We have to engage with our heritage, understand it and question the basis on which the religious lawyer grants or forbids rights to women or men, since these questions are dynamic rather than fixed. Should

we read about the subject of women's rights in each of the four schools of law, or should we focus instead on the logic behind legal opinions and their sources? The most important thing is to focus on the aims of the *shari'a* and to renew and rebuild it, which is permitted by the legal sciences. This requires open mindedness and a collective effort, and is the mission of the entire *umma*. There is variation between the schools of law and within each school where we often find different and conflicting opinions on the subject of the relationship of women to politics. The question is: where does this confusion come from? What is its internal logic? The *shari'a* is not the *fiqh* and rigid, the *shari'a* has many possible legal, moral and political arrangements. We must build an Islamic vision that is built on the past but that is suitable for modern life, a contemporary vision that starts from the text of the book and the *sunna*. Through *ijtihad* (reinterpretation) it is made to work in the context of its time and place keeping the overall intentions of the *shari'a*. It is known that some of the legal scholars changed their laws when they moved from one place to another, for instance al Shafi'i when moving from Iraq to Egypt. We need to distinguish between the sources of our modern vision: between fixed rules and opinions that reflect a particular historical context and specific situations.

Third, the question of women needs to take into account the context of the central institution of the family, since it is very important in Islamic law.

¹⁹ Associate professor of political theory, American University of Cairo, and co-founder of Islamonline

However the law recognises different situations and rights for women in their extended family before marriage, during the engagement period and in marriage. In addition, women's rights have varied historically between women from different social backgrounds and in cities, tribes and the countryside. All this makes the situation very complex. We need to address the close interconnection of political, economic and social factors in depriving women in their capacity as citizens and to look at how it is possible to renew the religious discourse to guarantee women's rights.

The Islamists and politics: viewpoints and references

The subject of women's rights has gained considerable momentum since the beginning of the 1990s. Following the activity of feminist groups and associations, the state has at times also promoted equality for women and the question has become an important matter of public debate. Although the agenda for women's social rights that was laid down forcefully by the conference of the United Nations for Population and Development in Cairo in 1994 clashed with Arab public opinion, in the end it made political participation in this debate more acceptable. Al Azhar, as an official institution, modified its traditional stance and approved the position of the supporters of women's rights. This was also the position of the Brotherhood, the principal section of the Islamist movement.

It is clear that the different political forces in the Arab sphere do not oppose the rise of women and their political participation in theory, since all the political forces consider the legal and political equality of women to be a given. However, they are responsible for not realizing this vision in practice, since the representation of women in these parties is very weak. The only exception is the Salafi trend, the importance of which is diminishing in many countries, but which remains influential in the Arabian Peninsula. Before analysing the different Islamist positions, we must make some important preliminary observations:

1. Women's issues are not isolated from the overriding contentious issues of the Arab situation. These issues are: the problem of maintaining unity while dealing with divisive questions, the relationship with the exterior and external pressure for reform, the question of traditions and the question of materialism versus spirituality.
2. The positions of political groups and forces are not fixed and do not revolve around ideology alone, but also reflect other pragmatic or strategic concerns.
3. A quantitative and statistical approach to evaluating the position of women and the changes that have taken place is insufficient to understand the situation of the Arab woman. Many surveys are based on

quantitative indicators but do not analyse those indicators, so that, for example, the appointment of a female minister or judge or an increase in the number of female parliamentarians become proof of increased political representation and participation for women or a measure of the attitude of the state and political groups towards female citizenship, when in fact these women have no political effectiveness and are put in place by the ruling elite as a political compromise.

The discourse and visions of the Islamist trends

The Salafist trend and the Muslim Brotherhood differ significantly in their positions on women. The Salafis believe that the woman's position is at home and that her role is to care for the family, making her political participation extremely difficult. At most, she may be permitted to engage in charitable activities in the public sphere. From reading the political thought of the Salafi trend we can observe four fundamental strategies used to justify this position that is contrary to women's citizenship. The first is that the concept of guardianship is used to give absolute authority to men in Islamic society, without any reference to prophetic practice and the concept of sovereignty on which the Islamic vision of nationhood is based.

The second strategy is that of an unfair and imprecise reading of the principles

of law, prescribing that women are not referred to in the Qur'an unless specifically indicated. It also refers to the fact that women did not have political and diplomatic roles in the first age of Islam, ignoring the reasons for this and the development of Qur'anic and prophetic law. So it is not a "fundamentalist" interpretation, but an interpretation of negation if we are to be precise.

The third strategy is one of being cut off both from history and from the present, since they refer to the fact that Islam moved women from their situation of *jahiliyya* or ignorance to the Islamic society, but do not employ *ijtihad* (reinterpretation) to the issue of the position of women and their political rights in modern society. There is also a lack of awareness of the participation of women in reality and the freedom they are granted by other groups, at least from an intellectual perspective if not in practice. This results with the Salafi groups giving women a position that is out of touch with reality, making the Islamic vision, which began as one which favoured the emancipation of women, into one which obstructs their rights and freedoms both by Islamic standards and by the standards of the age. The fact is that the Salafis are reactionary in relation to the issue of women's rights, and when secularists defend the rights of women they accuse them of being Zionists, Crusaders and Freemasons.

Fourth, the women's question is used as part of a political agenda and to fix the principled separation between the Salafi group and other groups. It is curious that those who issued fatwas prohibiting the entry of women into political life also issued fatwas permitting the entry of foreign forces into the Arabian Peninsula, despite the Salafis' strict position on this question. So this severe attitude against women is also the consequence of political considerations.

Two final observations should be made on this point:

1. The influence of the different Salafi forces is not restricted to books. Its more serious influence comes via the medium of cassettes that are circulated and through the internet. This creates a culture which considers women to be inferior and the root of the political crisis being a crisis of morals rather than the lack of democracy and rights and question of distribution of power and wealth.
2. Some female voices within the Salafi trend try to offer a different vision and attack this harsh perspective. Their influence is limited, though, due to the constraints of tradition which prevent them from becoming more prominent and gaining more supporters.

Conversely, we find that the Muslim Brotherhood takes a principled position in support of women's political rights and accepts the interpretations of contemporary scholars from within the

movement and outside it (al Qaradhawi and al Ghazali, for example). In March 1994 the Brotherhood published a document in Cairo before the Resident's Conference entitled "The Muslim woman in Muslim society", which put forward a moderate position, accepting women's political participation. However it is noteworthy that women's representation is very low in the Shura Council of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Lebanon and that the experience of the recurring repression of the Brotherhood has led to its avoiding putting women forward in its front ranks. The Brotherhood in Egypt for example has only ever put forward one female candidate for the elections, in the year 2000 in Alexandria. The movement does not have well known female faces, only "sisters" who are known within Islamist circles but who are not public personalities.

In Syria the association of the Muslim Brotherhood published a "social project for Syria for the future", which emphasised the human equality of men and women. However it also describes the family as the base for women. This project reveals the same tension as is evident in the writings of the Brotherhood since Hassan al Banna: a belief in the fundamental equality of men and women, but fear of the dissolution of the family unit in society if women should become too involved in the public sphere. A sharp division between the public and the private sphere, the family and the political can

be perceived. The Brotherhood is criticised for this, as well as for its tendency to talk sometimes about women alongside the Copts, as if women were another minority. This is a problem of the intellectual and ideological thought patterns rather than a substantive problem since the equality of men and women is recognised. However, most of the times, gender equality is not reflected in the actual policies of the group.

There are some observations to be made here. The first is the discrepancy in how politically active women are among different groups that embrace the Brotherhood's vision. For example, in Morocco, women are prominent in the Justice and Development Party and in 2002 fifteen women were elected onto the party's list, six of whom ended up going into parliament. The Kurdistan Islamic Union has five female members and there are three women from the Kurdistan Islamic Union in the Iraqi parliament. Second, the strength of the Salafi trend in parts of the Arab world, in particular the Arabian Peninsula, compels the Brotherhood to take a harsher stance against women's political rights. Therefore the Salafi vision and its prevailing traditions, which guarantee widespread political support, take precedence over that of the Muslim Brotherhood and the option of implementing *ijtihad* (reinterpretation) to improve women's rights. The desire to avoid *fitna* (division within Islam) is stronger than the concepts of equality

and citizenship. Third, the real problem for women's rights is not connected with the Brotherhood's position and discourse on women. It is linked to the political position of the Islamists which does not reflect the early Islamic vision for participation at all levels and is characterized by a conservative mentality which is averse to the use of *ijtihad* (reinterpretation).

This general political frame of reference has the following characteristics: the centrality of the idea of the state and the weakness of civil law and law-making through consultation, with the predominance instead of a complete legal system or the *shari'a*. The concept of the state was embraced under the influence of the modern Western model, but is derived in Islamic thought from the fear of *fitna* or sedition. The second of the characteristics of the Islamists' ideology is the predominance of the deliberative rhetoric over the concept of innovative dialectical *ijtihad* (reinterpretation). While theoretical *ijtihad* is absent, the Islamist discourse tries to establish Islam's respect for human rights, without establishing the individual-collective and private-public relationship which is central to the ascent of the position of women and to free them from imprisonment in the "private" sphere. It talks about general rights without referring to women's political and civil rights. A negative reading of the course of women's emancipation has predominated, accepting this as a secular phenomenon.

This has resulted in a conceptual confusion, especially in discussions of women and politics. The concept of human equality has been embraced, but the concept of guardianship is exalted over that of citizenship. The family is held to be the woman's domain without consideration of the role played by men in the family or to the role of women in politics. Instead of an Islamic conceptual model that offers a strong and human vision, other conceptual frameworks dominate which preclude any compromise with an alternative model. The Islamist vision is therefore in crisis and unable to renew itself or embrace other ideas, unless to use them for its own benefit. It has shielded itself behind its conceptual framework without bridging the gap between itself and reality.

The perception of the other – basically the West – is one of old colonial powers and Crusaders. Meanwhile we do not learn anything from the “other” of the South and the East who could be our ally. The subject of women evokes fear of Westernization and much of the discourse criticises secularism and the West. There is a lack of self-examination and self-criticism and much emphasis on the idea of an eternal contradiction with the West. Very little attempt is made to review the prevailing attitudes on women and the important economic and social changes affecting modern women are ignored. There has been more development in Shi'ite thought, but this has not received its fair share of

attention and study and is very much less influential due to Sunni predominance in Arab thought. There are many problems, not least ignorance of the fact that modernity is not a geographical phenomenon in the West, but is a situation which we are living in. There is a real need to remedy the intellectual weakness in engaging with the world.

The West is being treated as it was another world instead of a shared human experience: No interest is shown in and no comparison attempted with Western thought and practices that have led to the empowerment or the marginalization of women and with their social and political problems. The general judgement is that Western foreign policy is hostile to Islam that the West is morally corrupted. These two things have been a barrier that has prevented the Islamists from seeking to understand the process of democracy-building and its areas of strength and weakness. The ignorance of democracy and the development of its theories have prevented the Islamist political discourse from connecting with a philosophy of political participation and the foundations for a representative liberal democracy. In addition, strategic political concerns and the desire to defeat secular opponents have predominated over the desire to produce a reformist Islamist vision. This has led to obscurity and confusion and a gap between the ideal and reality.

The boundaries between the state and the *shari'a* and the relationship between the *umma* and the *shari'ah* need to be redrawn and the Islamists' conceptual and political framework needs to be reviewed. The Islamists are preoccupied with intellectual arguments with their competitors rather than with *ijtihad* (reinterpretation), resulting in conceptual vacuums. They have engaged very little with modern issues such as the environment, urban transformation and the relationship of religion with the media, for example. The Islamist political imagination is therefore in crisis, which reflects negatively on its understanding and recognition of the need to deal with the position of women. The solution is not simply to change its position on women, but to renew its thought and develop its ideas of citizenship and democracy, to engage with the difficult issues and to practise *ijtihad* in light of the changes of the current reality. This is the way to improve the position of women.

What is also lacking is a reflection on politics and society. An understanding of the school of thought that has produced the predominant ideological climate is needed. Political, social and theoretical reflection have been absent in conceptions of "politics" and instead historical law has predominated, with the legal discourse being formulated around it. Perhaps this is what has led some to say that the contemporary Islamist discourse has moved politics out of the arena of specialist knowledge and made

it a general affair that anybody can write about, resulting in an abundance of ideological nonsense. There is an increased emphasis on "morality" in the sense of the chastity and modesty of women, while "civil morals", as the necessary context and basis for the Islamic *shari'a*, are completely absent.

Conclusion

There are new perspectives in the study of concepts, perhaps the most prominent of them being the one that is called "the contrasting analysis of the facts", which uses a theoretical philosophy of speculative arguments. It is imagined how the outcomes of a situation would differ in different scenarios in order to gain a better understanding of the relationships between the actors. Such efforts are often made in the field of international relations. It does not use a quantitative or empirical method but forms new conceptual structures in an experimental fashion. This contemporary perspective was preceded by a method formerly used by the legal scholars, whereby they would seek solutions in the law to imaginary legal questions. Through the "contrasting analysis of the facts" that is used today we may be able to avoid repeating past mistakes in future Arab politics, particularly regarding the situation of women.

The difficulty and challenge lies in implementing a new vision which can coexist with different and contrasting contexts. The participation of women in the creation of this model constitutes a

part of their empowerment. A mission such as that of the Muslim Brotherhood will be more easily able to fight for a better and more democratic future and to discuss the true problems of society if it promotes women in the political and civil domains.

The connection between the awakening of the religious consciousness and its future, the future of democracy and the future of the Arab woman must be clear, without any confusion. Leaving behind the Islamist-secular dichotomy is the key to the emancipation of women within the Islamist vision and the way to end the myth that secularism and reform are a threat to our culture and heritage. There are many alternatives and this is a historical moment requiring a new understanding of the state and authority and a new ideological and legal framework with an emphasis on citizenship. Women should not any longer be treated as an “issue”, but share in the creation of the new vision in its entirety.

For the future of women, it is important not to criticize the thinking of the Islamists with regards to the issue of women only, but also to develop the discourse and the positions of the Islamists more generally. To date, the Islamic discourse remains one of the most important sources of collective and cultural identity and has a strong social and political presence, meaning that its development could be one of the paths to reform. However, it is important that this

should not be left to the Islamists alone. What is needed is a broad social dialogue. At the moment the Arab *umma* does not have a shared vision for its future, let alone for its rise as an Arab nation, so how can it be expected to reach a consensus over women’s issues?

That is the real problem.

V. The questions of equal rights for minorities and the danger of the fragmentation of nation-states

Political development: a call to leave behind repetitive discourses, inadequate concepts and vague debates

*Sameh Fawzi*²⁰

Long winded discussions of sectarian problems and research into the issue of minorities will do nothing. This writer and many others have for a long time occupied themselves with these issues, and there is nothing new to be said. We must leave behind the wretched concept of minorities, repetitive discourses on sects, and vague debates that merely create confusion. This is needed in all of Arab society, especially Egyptian society, and it could lead to true political development.

Understanding the background to the crisis: General problematics

1. The first problematic concerns “definitions”, especially since this discussion deals with a very difficult concept, that of “minorities”. This is a term which stirs historical sensitivities, fears for the present and concerns for the future, especially since the strength of

some of the groups with religious or sectarian identities distinct from the Arab Sunni majority has increased. While in the past we used to seek the integration of these groups into the Arab political body, there are now concerns about the future political role that they will play in the Arab region, and discussing “integration” has become insufficient and sometimes meaningless. The dramatic example is that of the sectarian minorities in Iraq, and the tribes in southern Sudan. On the other hand, there is another perspective which tends to overlook the problem of definitions, in the belief that the social researcher can analyse and examine phenomena without defining them.

2. There has been an unprecedented rise in the extent of sectarianism in the Arab region. There are many reasons for this, the most important being the failure of the modern nation- State, the ruling elites' resort to religious or sectarian identity to give them legitimacy and their reliance on unjust policies in managing religious and sectarian differences, and the rise of Islamist trends.

3. The founding of sectarian institutions on an unprecedented scale, helped by the weakness of the Arab state in responding to citizens' demands. These sectarian

²⁰ *Political writer and manager of study programmes in the Alexandria Egypt office*

institutions have been able to gain public influence because they have legitimate leaders, deep rooted institutions, sufficient money to fulfil their aspirations, and because they embrace a religious discourse. They have come to offer a network of social security, identity, a historical narrative, a feeling of existence, and a project for the future which conflicts with the nationalist state itself.

4. The newness of civil society institutions, and their inability to mobilize the masses in the interests of the welfare of society rather than along sectarian lines, and the restrictions and the siege imposed by the Arab regimes on the civil society hindered the latter from creating true social capital, while the sectarian forces have succeeded in creating religious capital. Sometimes, civil society institutions become proxies for religious sectarianism, as is the case with professional syndicates in Egypt.

5. The negative use of the political sciences. There are a huge number of writings that are published by experts and professors that are inimical to the state, and strive for its retrenchment in the interests of propagating sectarianism, and which are hostile to civil society and seek to divide it along religious or sectarian lines.

6. There is an Israeli project, whether or not we admit it, which aims to divide the region via its minorities.

7. On the question of religious groups in the Arab region, it is impossible to

ignore the influence of external agents. “External” refers not only to the West, but to other Arab and non-Arab elements, that exploit the “minority” question for the sake of their particular interests. This does not mean that there is literally a “conspiracy”, but it means that the question of national integration in the Arab region is no longer purely a question for the different religious and sectarian groups of the Arab countries, but is also affected by external factors through the intervention of other agendas and interests.

Understanding the background to the crisis: Particular problems

1. There are a number of deep rooted sectarian problems in Egyptian society, concerning demands by the Copts, and general discussions in society, on problems such as building and restoring churches, the Coptic presence in public positions, the limited Coptic representation in the parliament and the trade union councils, etc. These demands, and others, have formed the “sectarian consciousness” of the Copts, especially with the ruling elite's delay for more than a century in concerning itself with the issue, the dominance of “security concerns”, and the circulation of narrow minded religious discourses spreading fanaticism and hatred among the different religious groups.

2. Muslim – Christian relations in Egypt lack a spokesman or figurehead, and this domain is exploited by fanatics who exploit the communications revolution to

spread hatred and feelings of alienation between the two groups. The religious institutions no longer have a monopoly over the production of religious discourse, but there are sectarian elements with the authority of money and the masses fighting in their place..

3. Those with declining political agendas are turning to religious discourses. Some are from the left and seek a conflict other than “the class conflict”, some are liberals wanting to create divisions, a third group are politicians turning to extremist religious discourses, and a fourth group are those with sectarian agendas. Those who are sincere in the Islamist-Christian dialogue speak only cautiously, as they are aware of the impact of their words, but these people do not exercise that kind of caution.

4. Some say that the media are under pressure to be competitive, and only talk about negative things. This is true, but they go further than that, besieging society with sectarianism, considering Islamist-Christian agendas to be the firebrand agenda that constantly needs to be stoked. If we look at the headlines of the daily newspapers, and listen to debates on well known channels, and look at famous websites, we will find that the discourse on Islamist-Christian relations is sometimes quite shocking. In this context, we have to question the standards of honour in the media and the press, which seem to be lacking by those in this profession.

The background of the crisis: understanding the details

The “religious issue” in Egypt has turned into one of the most controversial and inflammatory issues, sometimes quiet, and at other times rising to the political fore with force through:

- The spreading of fanaticism among the popular classes through religious and media discourses which incite feelings against those of different religions and sects.
- The continuing existence of sectarian problems, and the absence of a political solution, the most prominent of them being the unified law for building houses of worship of the national council for human rights, the law of personal statuses, etc
- The transformation of normal social and economic problems among the citizens into sectarian confrontations, due to religious differences and the desire of some to divert attention from the true roots of social problems, which are economic, social, and political.
- The spreading of religious confrontation to an extent that is unprecedented in Egypt’s historical experience, and which has been helped by the internet and satellite channels.
- Intellectual poverty in dealing with the “sectarian question” as shown by repetition of the same discourses, and an inability to create political and

social structures to maintain national integration.

Two main discourses regarding the sectarian question could be identified:

The first is expressed by some of the Copts, and is supported by Coptic activists abroad, its essence being that the “state” or the “government” is fundamentally responsible for the lack of tolerance in Egyptian society, and the continuing sectarian problems. This is an old-fashioned argument which does not consider the problems in a wider context, and persists in concerning itself with part of the problem instead of considering society’s problems as a whole.

The second argument is made by some Muslims, encouraged by some of the Islamist groups, and it says that the Copts are absolutely responsible for the regression in Islamic-Christian relations, on account of their wish to be separate from society, their feelings of isolation, and their attempt to create a separate political identity to confront the state. This is also an old-fashioned argument, and has been unable to develop an alternative vision to counter the isolation of the Copts, other than to accuse the Copts of something they have not done.

Neither discourse has helped to lighten the intensity of society’s sectarian consciousness, which is present not only among the Copts, but has become widespread among a section of the Muslims too.

In search of a solution: the rehabilitation of political development

A fundamental measure which helps to improve our understanding and analysis of sectarian problems, and to suggest solutions to deal with them is “political development”. This is nothing new in the political sciences, since it is known that political development seeks to solve the problem of national integration, considering it to be one of the most significant obstacles to development in the post-independence nation- State in the developing world. To put it another way, it is difficult to solve “specific” problems in isolation from “general” problems. For example, it is irrational for us to consider a progressive legislation regarding building churches when society is complaining of the lack of respect for the law.

Here are some suggested plans for action:

1. The establishment of a state of the law, meaning not only that its citizens are equal before the law, but that the law in the first place expresses equality, and is effective on the basis of neutrality and transparency, and punishes whoever violates it. Continually resorting to customary compromises to deal with sectarian problems merely inflames them on the long run.
2. Serious social criticism of sectarianism in all its forms, whether among Muslims or Copts.

3. The establishment of a connection between equality and reform, because the realization of equality in its comprehensive form requires in the first place political reform.
4. The use of modern language in discussing the sectarian issue, instead of old concepts and formulas associated with memories of division. New formulas and terminology are needed such as human rights, citizenship, social capitalism, etc
5. The establishment of political and legal machinery to realize political and legal equality between citizens, and serious policies to realize equality in political representation, worship, laws on personal status and political participation.

Minorities and equal rights: the example of Shi'ite citizens in Saudi Arabia

*Ja'afar Muhammad al Shayyab*²¹

The issue of minorities became prominent in the Arab world with the formation of modern States which often fostered the marginalization and polarization and the hegemony of certain social and political groups, in a bid to guarantee stability. The forms and contexts of the minorities vary, as does the degree of discrimination practised against them, and the reactions of the minorities and other social and political groups.

The prevailing stereotype concerning the social and sectarian structure of Saudi Arabia is imprecise, being that Saudi Arabia has a Sunni Salafi majority and Shi'ite, Isma'ili and Sufi minorities. This is the natural result of the power and hegemony of the ideological trend allied with the political authority, a source of legitimacy since the State's founding. This comprehensive hegemony, in which the religious and the political have been mingled to a great extent, has coloured all aspects of the social, political and cultural scene with an image that has removed all the other groups from Saudi

²¹ *Political writer and manager of the association (I was not sure of the exact translation of this association) Qatif*

society, and entrenched a stereotype that does not represent the actual reality.

In addition to the existence of a Shi'ite majority in the eastern area of the Kingdom, there are other sectarian groups, such as the Malikis and the Hanafis with their different religious histories, teachings and characteristics. As for the Hijaz – western – region, followers of other Islamic sects such as the Shafi'is and the Malikis, as well as the Sufis, make up the majority of its residents, and have an important role in managing the religious affairs of the two holy places, the various religious schools, the judiciary, and so on. In the southern regions, The Isma'ilis and the Zaydis make up the absolute majority, since the Isma'ili mission spread historically from there to other Islamic regions. This sectarian variety – seven different Islamic sects – means that the Kingdom has many sectarian minorities, and does not have, as many people say, just one Salafi sect. The followers of the Salafi – Hanbali school are geographically concentrated in the central region (Najd), where the Salafi doctrine spread from when it became the ally of the Saudi State, imposing an official sect for the state over and above the others.

The Shi'ite citizens – a brief history

The Arab Shi'ite presence goes back historically in the Gulf region to the very beginning of the Islamic age. Despite the repeated invasion of the region by different foreign forces on account of its

riches and strategic position, the Shi'ite sect remained prevalent over the others. When the Hasa and Qatif oases, which are inhabited by Shi'ites, became part of the Saudi state founded by King Abdel Aziz Al Sa'ud at the beginning of the last century, sectarian tensions emerged because the nascent State was strengthened by the sectarian factor in its expansion and domination. This resulted in a fundamental tension between the two groups, despite the fact that the state guaranteed the Shi'ites their basic religious freedoms of worship and law in return for their loyalty.

Because the Shi'ites of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf were linked socially and culturally to the rest of the Shi'ites in the Arab and surrounding region, their resistance to the Salafi influence was strengthened.

The reorganization of the modern Saudi State apparatus in the sixties gave a greater role to the religious institution and its overseeing of the management of religion, media, culture and society. From there began the authority of the fundamentalist Salafi trend which worked to obliterate all the other existent ideological and sectarian trends. The discrimination and marginalization experienced by the Shi'ites is not therefore directed only at them, but is more obvious in their case because the sectarian and regional factors are combined.

The current situation: forms of discrimination and marginalization

Since the sixties, forms of discrimination against the Shi'ite citizens have begun to take on a more official dimension. With the formation of the ministries of state, the Shi'ites were disqualified from high official posts. This continues today, since no Shi'ite citizen has been appointed to any high ranking position in the state. Shi'ite citizens have also generally been disqualified from the military and security institutions with the exception of Isma'ilis in the south of the kingdom – and from ministries such as the Foreign Ministry and the Ministry of the Interior. This situation also extends sometimes to the private sector, for example petrol companies, flight companies and other sectors overseen by the state. Even when the consultative and regional councils were formed in 1992, Shi'ite representation in these councils was limited to the minimum, and did not exceed 2% at best, despite the fact that the Shi'ites make up 15% of the population.

With regards to religion, the Shi'ites were deprived of their rights of worship by being forbidden to build mosques and community centres, to publish their books and spread their culture through the media, to teach their children their particular religious customs, and to build religious schools. Until recently these practices were the main reasons for detentions and arrests. Meanwhile the official education curriculum - especially

the religious curriculum, contains subjects which cast doubt and suspicions on the Shi'ite doctrines, practices and worship, and does not refer to shared Islamic concepts which could help towards a rapprochement between the two groups.

Politically, the Shi'ite situation has been dealt with on the basis of security rather than political dialogue, negotiations and mutual concessions. Doubt has been cast on their loyalty and allegiance, and hostile forces have been mobilized to restrict and harass the Shi'ites.

Examples and cases of dialogue

Since the escalation in opposition activity, after the uprising of 1979, a number of efforts were made for dialogue with the king which resulted in a historic meeting in 1993 between the leaders of the Shi'ite opposition and the incumbent Saudi king, Fahd bin Abd al Aziz in the city of Jedda. Among the most significant results of this meeting, which was aimed at the partial resolution of the problem of the Shi'ite residents, were the release of all political prisoners, the returning of travel documents to all those forbidden to travel, permission for all political opponents living abroad to return to the kingdom, cessation of security prosecutions, and permission for the Shi'ites to build places of worship in their areas.

Since 1993, the Shi'ite intelligentsia have made great efforts to strengthen the moderate discourse by publishing a number of public documents and books,

and have tried to remedy the crisis by talking with different officials and leaders of political and religious forces. There are continuing meetings with different religious personalities aimed at reconciliation and in 2003 the Shi'ite intelligentsia published a document entitled "partners in the nation" signed by 450 social, cultural, and religious personalities, demanding an end to discrimination. All these steps have contributed to changing the stereotype of the Shi'ites within Saudi Arabia held by the religious groups, even the fundamentalist ones, and have established the problem of the Shi'ites in the kingdom as a distinct internal crisis. This has led subsequently to the resolution of some issues by the authorities, a lessening of discrimination against the Shi'ites, and their participation in programmes of national dialogue and conferences between followers of different religions.

Because of the government's hesitation in continuing political dialogue on this matter, and the rise of Shi'ism in the region, particularly in Iraq and Lebanon, there have been efforts to make the situation revert to how it was previously, through harsh and open discrimination and through provoking the opinion of the street in different ways. Although the local Shi'ite discourse is generally positive and peaceful and emphasises the principles of national unity, openness between the sects, and national dialogue, there have been events recently that are difficult for them to ignore and which

may gradually lead to the trap of sectarian tension. There are no opportunities to continue positive dialogue, and this situation requires serious political initiatives from the state.

Common demands and ways to realize them

The relationship between the government and its religious and civilian apparatus on the one hand and with the Shi'ite citizens on the other hand is still unsettled, and sometimes tense and conflictual when there are any regional or internal developments. After the events of 2009 in Medina, which resulted in clashes between the religious police and Shi'ite visitors, there was conflict once again.

The Shi'ites seek equality, through the abolition of all kinds of discrimination, whether concerned with religious freedoms or civil rights, and this requires the acknowledgement and recognition of variety and pluralism in Saudi society. Clear political, legal and administrative measures are needed to remedy this problem. For its part, the government still stirs up doubts about the loyalty of the Shi'ite citizens, without giving any evidence, and generally this is something which may only be guaranteed through building mutual trust between the two groups and acceding to the basic demands of this section of society. The following proposals could pave the way for a dialogue which may contribute to equal rights for citizens in the kingdom:

1. Continuing a positive and critical dialogue to achieve mutual understanding. Perhaps the existence of a consultative framework of officials for the Shi'ite question could contribute to a better diagnosis of related issues.
2. Aiming for political resolution of the crisis and leaving behind the security approach to the sectarian issue, which leads to doubts and provocative measures, considerably complicating matters.
3. Concentrating on the internal dimensions of this issue and dealing with it as a national problem, ignoring external issues connected with it.
4. Reviewing objectively the documents and discourses presented by the Shi'ites and studying them with the aim of realizing some of the demands, which would contribute to calming the sectarian tension.
5. Putting in place a clear agenda to correct the current cases of discrimination, especially in the fields of civil rights and religious freedoms.
6. Establishing regulations and legislations to help end all types of discrimination between the citizens on a sectarian basis, and to achieve equality in the distribution of public functions.
7. Increased Shi'ite representation in the legislative and administrative institutions such as the consultative council, the council of ministers, the regional council, and others.
8. Strengthening the culture of tolerance, pluralism, acknowledgement of sectarian and ideological pluralism, emphasis on this in the media and education, and getting rid of everything that provokes or endorses the state of discrimination, marginalization, and polarization.
9. Embracing plans for national integration for all elements of society and strengthening the national identity for all, through allowing the formation of institutions of civil society and rights organizations across the different regions and sects.
10. Support for moderate political and ideological trends in Saudi Arabia, and encouragement of civil initiatives in the area of communication between different groups.

Sudan... which path to take

*Hayder Ibrahim Ali*²²

This is the question directed at us as Sudanese, at a time when experts and mediators say that Sudan is at a crossroads. This means that Sudan must choose, quickly, between unity and collapse. This ultimatum is a true and exact reflection of a political situation which is deteriorating day by day. The country is in a state of complete paralysis and has been plunged into huge problems, while the Sudanese citizen is losing the basic foundation and minimum for a dignified life, and all hope of arriving at a final and permanent solution for the problems of war, peace and national unity. This is accompanied by a lack of political will, and widespread public apathy. The Sudanese youth, who are known for their strong political awareness, are no longer concerned with public issues, and the proof of this is the failure of the Sudanese opposition to produce a popular united demonstration in its name over a period of 20 years (1989-2009). The exception to this was the welcome of John Garang when he returned to Sudan. The problem is the existence of leaderships – ruling and opposition – that are weak and failing, and without a vision, received by the masses who are

²² *Director of the Centre for Sudanese studies*

despairing and confused and have left their affairs to fate.

Each group has their own particular agreement in mind!

The hopes of the Sudanese were revived when the comprehensive peace agreement of 2005 was signed, after negotiations which had continued for around a year and a half. There was unguarded optimism as a result of the international guarantees and momentum and promises of economic aid and political support. The Sudanese thought that they were saying good bye to civil war and armed struggles forever. The Darfur crisis soon dampened this joy, but the important thing was how the partners in government should deal with the agreement in accordance with its stipulations and principles. It quickly became clear that the “final agreement” meant something different to each of the partners. The most important guarantees in any agreement are good intention, trustworthiness and seriousness, before any external guarantee. It seems that in the end international pressures outweighed the need to satisfy the Sudanese. The mediators set a final date for the signing of the agreement, leaving thorny issues to be negotiated later.

The two partners returned to Khartoum and in the mind of each side was a particular agreement, in other words, what it wanted to understand from the agreement, and specifically what would lead to the greatest gains for its party. From the beginning, each party

emphasised that it wanted to renounce war and sought peace. In truth, when the two sides sat at the negotiating table, they were both exhausted and unable to continue the war in the case of failed negotiations. Here began the conflict within the peace agreement, and the ruling regime was more prepared to impose its vision than the popular movement, which soon ran into problems when it lost John Garang. The Islamic regime, which now prefers to be called “the National Congress Party” sought to benefit from the agreement in the international context by acquiring legitimacy for six years, the length of the agreement (2005-2011). The consequence was that the regime was not willing to endorse any reform or concession. As one of its leaders said, it viewed any concession as political suicide. It is to mention that the implementation of the agreement was impossible in a totalitarian context, and that most of the chapters of the agreement stipulated a democratic transformation, meaning that Sudan should be in an interim period during which a referendum could take place in the best democratic conditions.

One would have expect that the signing of the agreement would have had as a direct consequence clear distinction between two histories: before the comprehensive peace agreement, and after. But the National Congress Party, and the Islamist movement generally, viewed the agreement as merely an extension and another period within the

Islamic project. They tried to present themselves as calling for peace. After the agreement it was as if nothing had happened. The laws restricting freedoms remained in place, the powers of the security apparatus were expanded, including the right to arrest without a trial and the censorship of the press, the problem of corruption was not addressed, the monopoly over work continued, and the popular movement was crushed.

This was the first experience to test the popular movement. The National Congress Party withdrew the Ministry of Energy and Petrol from the popular movement as stipulated and the dispute reached a level that threatened the survival of the agreement itself. In the end, the movement accepted a compromise, and received the Foreign Ministry instead of the Ministry of Energy. The dispute quickly reached the compromise ministry – the Foreign Ministry – too. The popular movement accused its minister, Lam Akol, of working on behalf of the Congress party. Although a new minister was appointed, the Congress succeeded in distributing the special functions of the ministry among a number of its own people showing that it understood it's partner's role in power to be completely superficial, because the practice of real power remained in the hands of the National Congress. The Islamists cleansed the government of all elements that were not loyal or sympathetic to them. The high and influential

administrative positions therefore remained in their grasp, a clear breach of the idea of sharing power. The Popular Movement, and the southerners generally, therefore felt that the northerners would not keep their promises.

The failure of unity to appeal

The Peace Agreement therefore quickly lost its spirit, and became redundant. Disagreement and clashes were prevalent, forming the basis of dealings between the two partners, and there was nothing in common between them.

The popular movement made a huge mistake by believing the allegation of the National Congress that it was the sole guarantor of the Peace Agreement. This isolated the movement from the other political parties and groups that opposed it. But in the end it understood this problem and the Juba conference that was held in 2009 was an attempt at a rapprochement with its former allies among the opposition. But the Juba conference showed that the southerners had little trust in the northerners, and that they were dealing with them as one bloc, government or opposition. The Sudanese lost the chance to make the idea of unification attractive, or in other words, the agreement failed.

There was no noticeable development in the south during the four years after the signing of the agreement. The responsibility lay with the national unity government, as it is called, and the

government of southern Sudan.

Sudan is still one of the most susceptible of the world's societies to fragmentation and division, due to its geography, history, and model of development. Throughout its history, Sudan has lacked a unified state, and certainly, a unified society and culture.

The sluggishness of Sudanese society or the slowness of social and economic change has helped to entrench sectarianism and tribalism. The existence of two parties or sects in Sudanese political life has become more a natural phenomenon than a social phenomenon. This dualism has made attempts to lay down a nationalist project to unite all Sudanese useless. The fact that the other political forces did not give the subject of national unity the priority and importance it needed also helped the situation to continue. Almost all the parties across Sudan had concerns and connections beyond Sudan.

Moreover, the Sudanese have lost their priorities from the period after independence, in particular the quest for national unity in this multicultural region. Sudan became independent weighed down by a history of tribal struggles and divisions. After independence the Sudanese were not concerned with building a nation-state, which would need to be democratic, secular, multicultural and civil. Instead Sudan was subjected to a long and complicated process of using religion as a political tool, begun by traditional

sectarian forces, and completed by new conservative forces such as the Muslim Brotherhood, with their different Sudanese names. The spearhead of religion was in politics, and made it a possible basis for any Sudanese state, marginalizing all non-Muslims, considering them to be second class citizens. With this perspective, the idea of establishing a united nation-state faded, and the authority of the Islamists established – intentionally or not – the final fragmentation of the Sudanese state which had been in crisis since independence.

The final preludes to division

The Sudanese lost more than a historical chance to end the movement towards swift deterioration and fragmentation. The announcement of independence might have been an opportunity to agree on a covenant representing the minimum conditions for a Sudanese state. But what happened was completely the opposite, because the first Sudanese government fell through a vote of no confidence and did not complete its first year. Unprincipled changes of party representatives and the buying of votes were some of the characteristics of the first democratic period.

It was therefore unsurprising that the military rose up against the regime after only two years, in 1958. The second chance came after the October revolution of 1964. The Sudanese were united once again until the regime fell to a political blow. They fought after only

four months to bring down the government, in February 1965. During the next period there were harsh conflicts which culminated in the escalation of the civil war, the dissolution of the Communist party, and the expulsion of its representatives from Parliament, and splits in most of the parties. This period ended with another coup d'etat by Al Numeiri in May 1969. The third opportunity was lost after the violation of the Addis Ababa peace agreement of 1972, when Al Numeiri announced in 1983 that there the Islamic Shari'a was to be applied, without any consideration of the non-Muslim citizens. The natural consequence was the formation of a popular movement for the liberation of Sudan, and the resumption of civil war.

We now stand before the final chance for a national solution. But it is clear that this opportunity is being missed through a lack of seriousness and dedication. The period of Islamist rule over the last two decades has witnessed the erosion of national sentiment and loyalty. This is due to the ideology of the Islamists' vision and for reasons relating to political practice and behaviour.

The internationalization of the problems of the south, the east, and Darfur has led to a weakening of national authority and will at the same time. The Islamist regime has excluded the political opposition forces from participating in trying to solve the country's problems and has preferred the intervention of

Americans and Europeans, and all conferences and settlements have been held outside Sudan. The Sudanese have lost the will to solve their problems themselves. This is a deep crisis of confidence which is not helping them to coexist as one nation.

Playing on tribalism was a stupid policy through which the Islamists sought to replace party loyalties with a return to tribal ones, and consequently took away the support for parties from their traditional areas of influence. One of the most dangerous developments is that the federal government has fostered tribalism, meaning that jobs and positions are distributed according to tribal affiliations. The conditions for the activity of parties and movements in the periphery and far areas have rarely been good and this has paved the way for increased tribal loyalties. The ruling authority has also attempted to fill this void by encouraging local organizations. This is a dangerous game, because many of the organizations have turned into armed opposition movements, because the regime has been unable to contain them or answer their demands.

These policies have led to a failed state which is not in control of all its territories, and where there are thousands of foreign soldiers for different reasons. The most important point is that the State has failed to provide its people with primary services and to answer their basic demands. The government is estranged from society, and relies

entirely on oppression and terror.

What lies ahead for Sudan?

It may be said that Sudan may have no future, because it has lost its opportunities to build a civil, secular, multicultural, democratic nation-state, and because history does not repeat itself, especially not for those who cannot learn. It seems inevitable that Sudan will follow the path of splintering and fragmentation. It is clear that the idea of the nation-state is not fundamental to the thinking of the Islamists. Were they to have the choice between a small "pure" Islamic Sudanese emirate, and a rambling entity full of strife, where there was no certainty that they would be able to apply the Shari'a, as is the case now, they would be inclined to choose the former. This explains the existence of an influential group among them calling for the separation of the north from the south prior to the referendum.

The National Congress Party decisively refuses any call for a government of national unity, or a national solution, against the recommendations made in the meeting called "the meeting of the people of Sudan". The regime justifies its position by saying that a government of national unity would be a breach of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which distributed shares of ministerial portfolios.

Even though the running of elections would require an interim government of national unity to oversee that they were

free and fair, the regime has vetoed this proposal. The political-party conflict has led to a sharp polarization between the National Congress Party and the other political groups. The situation in Darfur is no better, because the National Congress Party is insisting on excluding the opposition political forces from playing any part in the Darfur talks.

In summary, it may be said that the Sudanese themselves have led their country to the inevitable separation and division. Any talk of this being a foreign plot or conspiracy is a joke or a mind game. The interferences and conflicts of external interests are the result, not the reason.

Some northern Sudanese state that the south does not possess the fundamental requirements of a state, and that the differences between the southern tribes are greater than their differences with the north. This may prove to be true in the future, but the current reality and facts are that the southerners are passionately heading towards independence. It appears that some of the leaders are aware that this time it is real, and true action for a “Friendly State” on the southern borders. At the same time there is also a great lack of seriousness due to the deeply rooted conviction of the Sudanese that we are different, and what happens to other people will not happen to us! This is a great delusion and yet it is prevalent and influential. Now, time is running out, the polarization is widening, the Sudanese leaders are

absent, and the miracles may be too late, so that the only choice left seems to be to try separation first in the south, and then to await other divisions, in Darfur, in the east, and then whatever happens next!

Yemen: a nation in danger of collapse and fragmentation

*Mohammed Al-Mikhlafti*²³

We are discussing the possible fragmentation of Yemen in order to find the answer to a question, which is: how can we prevent this disintegration and confront this danger? Yemen is heading for collapse, which will lead in the end to the deterioration of the national entity. The true crisis lies in the absence of a state of law which may confront this danger. As for the present regime, it does not have a solution and is incapable of elaborating any policies. Its one ability, since the war of 1994, is the use of violence and sowing dissension, which is a path that has led the country to a complete crisis, politically, socially and economically, to what is in fact an existential crisis.

1-National division and terrorism

Yemen today suffers from severe regional fragmentation, an expression of the complete rejection of the present regime and its policies, and there has been an erosion of the legitimacy and ability of the government to control large parts of the country, and to prevent its collapse. As is shown by the experiences of similar cases, such as Somalia and Afghanistan, this could lead to the

country to turn into independent regions, and this danger is highlighted by the "Southern issue", or the Saada war.

The Southern Issue

This is a consequence of the effects of the war of 1994 and the political, economic, and social policies that accompanied it, which led to the south's exclusion from power and wealth. After the end of military operations, the Yemen Socialist Party stated the need to reverse the effects of the war, and then presented an initiative for this purpose; however, the regime made no response.

The Southern movement began to voice some demands and call for rights, for example employment rights which had been affected by the war. However, the regime's failure to respond pushed the movement further in making political demands. When the regime responded to the movement with violence, the movement in the south turned into a conflict that threatened the existence of the state and national unity. The southern movement today is divided between a peaceful movement and an armed movement led by members of Al Qa'eda. Among the peaceful movement, there are some who call for a return to the division between north and south. The armed movement, however, has only one goal, which is division, not necessarily just into two parts, but division that could split Yemen into many independent regions. Because the

²³ *Professor at the center for Yemeni studies and research, and Head of the Yemeni Observation of Human Rights*

southern issue has wide popular support, it is the greatest danger threatening the national entity with fragmentation, and solving this issue is the main way to confront this danger, reform the situation in Yemen, and prevent it from sliding into chaos.

The Saada War

The Saada war has been ongoing since 2004. After every ceasefire, the war resumes, even more violently than before. The first Saada war was limited to one province of the Saada region, while today this region is witnessing its sixth war which now involves eleven provinces in the region, with the conflict zone stretching to around 12,000 square kilometers, an area greater than Bahrain or Lebanon.

It may appear at first that the Saada issue is different to the Southern issue, with different causes, such as the state of marginalization suffered by those districts, the lack of development projects, the sectarian factor, and the infiltration factor. However, a closer look shows that the causes are the same as for the southern issue, in other words, the consequences of the war of 1994, including the regime's attempt to split the parties through tensions and sectarian conflicts, the absence of a state of law, the failure of the state to carry out its responsibilities of providing services to the society, the monopoly of family rule through the control of the President's family over the army, security, public wealth, public and

private business, and the emergence of hereditary succession. The war is no longer merely a rejection of the legitimacy of the current regime, but it is concrete action to confront the use of force by the regime, through the use of force to replace the legitimacy of the old regime with a new one, but with a geographical and sectarian logic, meaning that the national entity is subject to a plan for fragmentation. This is a real danger and is not merely hypothetical.

Terrorism

The published investigative reports and information, including the American ones that have been observing the jihadi organizations, state that those in power today in Yemen have opened the doors of the country to terrorist organizations, before and after the Yemeni unification. Yemen was the main stopping place for these organizations on their way to Afghanistan. They were also prepared to fight a war against the Yemen Socialist Party, and consequently to exclude the south from power. These organizations played a decisive role in the war of 1994, with the number of their fighters that participated in the war estimated at around sixty thousand. After the war, the regime and its apparatus, meaning the army and security, mixed with these organizations, which believed that they had succeeded in paving the way for the founding of an Islamic emirate in the Arab peninsula. This dream of founding an Islamic emirate continues today in a

situation where the regime is weak, and these organizations are able to infiltrate and gain influence, through the southern issue, the Saada war, and the security vacuum in other areas of Yemen.

2- The failure of the political process

The regime's refusal to accept a plan for political conciliation and reform and to establish a legitimate political process and free elections mechanisms, has led to a loss of faith in the political process and in the possibility of peaceful change. Consequently, opposition parties refused to participate in elections which are not free and fair. This led to the cancelling of elections which had been fixed for the 27th April 2009. There had been an agreement between the ruling party and the Joint Meeting Parties to postpone the elections for two years, until April 2011, in order to prepare the political scene and to reform the elections system. However, the political situation became blocked once again. A year passed following the agreement and the dialogue between the regime and the opposition parties that signed it stopped. The arrival of the date of the elections without the completion of what had been agreed upon meant a complete loss of legitimacy for the government.

3- Economic crisis

There were clear indications in Yemen warning of the inability of the Yemeni people to cope with the consequences of the economic crisis, their loss of earnings and a decent standard of living, increasing the likelihood of war and

violence as an alternative. Perhaps the continuation of the southern movement and the persisting war in Saada for nearly five years, are the consequence of the difficult economic situation experienced by the Yemenis, and specifically, by the young.

Yemen is the poorest of the Arab countries, with more than half of the population living under the poverty line. This is mainly due to the failure of the state, the prevalence of corruption, the lack of justice and equality, the lack of development plans aimed at helping the poorest segments of society, and because the state controls the main wealth of the country. The regime adopted unfair policies which made the great majority of society much poorer, including the middle class, for the benefit of the minority close to the regime. The literacy rate is 50%, and the rate of unemployment is estimated at a minimum of 35%, mostly the young, including graduates.

Yemen is gradually losing its vital essentials. It is one of the world's countries that most suffers from a scarcity of water, and Sana'a will be the world's first capital without water, or with scarce water. There are no measures in place to confront this disaster. The Yemeni economy is dependent on oil, but it is running out, and it is estimated that reserves will run out over the next five years with no alternative sources.

Due to the international financial crisis,

there is a lower rate of emigration and less foreign investment, in addition to the high economic cost of the Saada war and to confront the southern movement. The little resources that remain are being eaten away at by governmental corruption and by the seizure of public wealth by the regime, the ruling party, and their families. If this economic crisis is not solved quickly, it will lead to violence and revolts, in addition to the violence and war in the north and the south, which makes the economic crisis one of the most significant threats to the unity of the nation.

4. Confronting the danger of fragmentation

In light of the new developments that have taken place in recent past years, and which have made the crisis deeper and more dangerous, partial measures are no longer sufficient. Confronting the danger of the fragmentation of the national entity require a new national agreement leading to:

1. A comprehensive and inclusive national settlement that excludes no-one.
2. Reversal of the results and effects of the 1994 war, and the wars and conflicts that followed it, in particular the Saada war.
3. Bringing about change, through constitutional, institutional, political, economic, and social change, the essence of change being the

formation of a state and the reform of the political order, to end the situation in which wealth and power is concentrated in the hands of the President of the state in the capital, and to enable the sharing of all national groups in power and wealth, in particular restoring a share in power to the south. The essence of this change and reform lies in creating a united federal state and forming an elected parliamentary regime.

The possibilities for such solution are laid down in the "plan for a vision of national salvation" which is a document published by "the alliance of political forces for change". Its success requires the acceptance by all the political groups of all the other groups in the conflict, including the Houthis, the southern opposition abroad and the popular leadership of the southern movement. There is no alternative except fragmentation, and this is the danger that must be faced not only by the Yemenis, the Joint Meeting Parties and their allies in the "Preparatory Committee for National Dialogue", but also by all the Arabs and all the world. Because Yemen's slide into fragmentation, civil wars and chaos would have effects everywhere.