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NORTH AFRICA:
NON-ISLAMIC OPPOSITION MOVEMENTS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1 Introduction 1
1.1 The Nature of Opposition 1
1.2 Regime and Opposition 2
1.3 Leadership and Political Culture 3
1.4 The Alternatives 5
1.5 The Future 6
2 Opposition Political Parties in North Africa 7
2.1 Egypt 7
2.2 Libya 10
2.3 Tunisia 14
2.4 Algeria 18
2.5 Morocco 22
3 A Tentative Conclusion 28
4 Bibliography 30

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1 Introduction

The process of political opposition in North Africa bears little resemblance to its counterpart in the Western world. In fully democratic political systems there is an agreed arena for political debate, sanctioned by legislation and legal system independent of government and embodying universally recognized constitutional rights of freedom of association and expression.[1] In such societies political opposition parties openly compete as of right for control of power, but their equivalents elsewhere either operate outside the confines of expression legally permitted by the state or depend on state licence for their existence. This is certainly the case in North Africa, even in Morocco where the evolution towards democratic governance is the most advanced. They also contribute to the types of political processes tolerated by regimes and these, despite their claims of democratic governance, are in reality very different from the democratic ideal.

1.1 The Nature of Opposition

One result of this situation is that the strict demarcation between formal political parties and other political actors within civil society,[2] which operates inside democratic political systems, does not fully apply in North Africa. In such systems parties directly operate the legislative process and, through the electoral process, provide the personnel for government, whilst other political actors tend to be confined to the civil society arena. In North Africa, on the other hand, other actors may also have specific political roles, either directly or indirectly, in influencing the legislative process. The electoral process itself may or may not influence, rather than control, the executive – even when the actual government is subordinate to the hidden control of an unaccountable regime. This is significant because it means that the ostensible purpose of political opposition changes from one of being an aspect of legitimate political competition for power to one of gaining access to established power and authority already enshrined in the structure of the state. Political parties in North Africa, in other words, tend to be co-opted into government or into providing services to government, even when they are in opposition to it, and the distinction between pro-government and opposition parties is difficult to define because it is contingent and flexible.

In more general terms, therefore, political opposition in North Africa, whether or not it manipulates ideological principles that are invoked to justify its political action, is, in reality, forced into a process of competition for co-option – real or potential – unless it is marginalized into extra-legal action and clandestinity. This raises the question of whether there is, or indeed can be, such a category as genuine legitimate "political opposition" in North Africa or, rather, whether such a category has meaning. The short answer is that there is not and cannot be a meaningful category of this type until elements of genuine democratic governance are established there.

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[1] This, of course, applies to the liberal representational democratic model, where the process of political expression is delegated to representatives of political parties through an electoral process, not to direct democracy in which citizens, rather than parties, express democratic choices.

[2] Collectivities that operate to influence the actions of governments and states inside democratic societies without having direct political representation inside democratic institutions – groups which, in other words, occupy the political space between the state and the family. See Hann, C. Introduction: Political Society and Civil Anthropology, in Hann, C. and Dunn, E., (eds), *Civil Society Western Model*, London; New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 26

Two examples from Morocco illustrate this very well. In the early 1970s, elements of Morocco's Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP), led by Mohammed "F'qih" Basri, were implicated in violence directed against the monarchy, even though the USFP was a legitimate opposition political party at the time. The dissident elements – which questioned the legitimacy of Morocco's monarchy as the core of the political system – fled abroad, with F'qih Basri ending up in Algeria as a political exile, whilst the party in Morocco was punished by being denied influence within government. However, once the dissidents did recognize the legitimacy of the monarchical system – and its right to choose and preside over government – they were able to return, and F'qih Baqri himself was "rehabilitated" in the late 1990s. Today, of course, the USFP forms the government in Morocco! In a similar fashion, a member of the extremist clandestine Moroccan Islamist movement, the Sh'babiyya Islamiyya, Mohamed ben Kirane, rallied to the monarchy in the 1980s and was able to form a legitimate Islamist political party as a result.[3] In both cases, the fundamental requirement was the acceptance of the existing political order in order to gain access to the formal political arena, not an agreement to abide by a set of rules that applied equally to all political actors and allowed the political order to be changed, if desired.

1.2 Regime and Opposition

Yet, if political movements in North Africa have little autonomous function, why bother with them at all? After all, the process of rule continues quite separately from their attempts to gain access to power so their utility would seem to be marginal. In fact, this is not the case, for the existence of such movements, however circumscribed their activities, lends a lustre of legitimacy to regime rule, both domestically and as far as foreign audiences are concerned.[4] The existence of "façade democracy" in Algeria, for example, made it possible for NATO to contemplate cooperation with the Algerian armed forces and for Algeria to join NATO's Mediterranean Dialogue in 2001. Secondly, when such movements are tolerated at least their arguments and claims are explicit and formal, rather than clandestine and beyond control. Thirdly, whether such movements are supporters or opponents of government, they provide individuals with pathways to power and reward, as well as providing those in power with mechanisms to influence and direct popular response.

They become, in effect, structures for popular mobilization, as King Hassan demonstrated with spectacular success during the Western Sahara crisis in 1974-1975, in which the parties mobilized popular support in return for access to a formal political arena, admittedly under royal control. In this respect, ironically enough, they fulfil the same function as the classic single political party in socialist countries, a pattern also seen in some developing countries, particularly in the Middle East and Africa. The Ba'ath Party in Iraq and Syria or the Arab Socialist Union in Egypt and Libya are good examples of this kind of party. In fact, the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD) in Tunisia still fulfils this function and, up to 1989, the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) in Algeria did the same – although, between 1990 and 1996 under the leadership of Abdullah Mehri, it became a party of opposition. Yet, even parties in permanent opposition can be mobilized for the same purpose – as with the Moroccan example cited above or President Ben Ali's promulgation of the

[3] This first emerged as the *Tawhid wa'l-Islah* (Unity and Reform) movement, then got a foothold in parliament as part of an established political party, the Mouvement populaire démocratique et constitutionnel (MPDC) – itself created as a royalist split from the pro-Palace Mouvement populaire of Mohamed Aherdane by Abdelkrim Khatib – in 1997, before transforming this into the innocuously-named *Parti de justice et développement*.

[4] Willis, M., Political Parties in the Maghrib: The Illusion of Significance, *Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 7, No 2, (Summer 2002)

Tunisian National Charter in 1988. All legal political parties subscribed to the National Charter and were thus forced into compliance with the policies of the government.

Given the dependence of all political parties on the regime controlling the state, they are open to manipulation in many other ways as well. They are controlled, as has been noted, by laws requiring registration and regulating their programmes and even their names.[5] Thus all the Maghrib states require political parties to avoid explicit reference to religion and language in their political platforms and, in Algeria, such restrictions apply to the names of political parties as well. There are also more covert methods of control, which affect both the political system and the internal affairs of the actual parties themselves. Elections can be controlled to ensure an appropriate outcome, with political parties being elevated to government or excluded at regime whim – a feature of all North African states except, perhaps, Morocco – so that the definition of political parties as being in opposition also resides with the controlling regime. New political parties can be created; in 1996, the Zeroual government presided over the construction of the Rassemblement National Démocratique (RND), as the embodiment of the "revolutionary family" – those organizations that reflected Algeria's revolutionary heritage. Its purpose was to outflank the FLN as a presidential party and, of course, it won the subsequent legislative elections, although in the latest legislative elections its political support collapsed.[6] Alternatively, parties can be encouraged to fragment, or rivalries can be encouraged, to neuter their political import, as has occurred in Algeria with the Berberist parties, the Front des Forces Socialistes (FFS) and the Rassemblement Culturel et Démocratique. Political leaders who resist such initiatives have, on occasion, simply been removed from the political scene.[7]

1.3 Leadership and Political Culture

Indeed, the role of political leaders is crucial to the self-definition of all political parties in North Africa. In many respects, political movements are patronage-clientage organizations, rather than vehicles for achieving ideological ends. In this respect, they differ from the original political movements created during the struggles for independence in the Maghrib, or from the slow development of participatory politics in Egypt before the Nasser period. These movements were genuine ideological vehicles, based on nationalism (the Wafd in Egypt), national liberation (the Neo-Destour, the precursor of the RCD in Tunisia; the FLN in Algeria

[5] In Algeria, for example, registration was refused in late 2000 to WAFA, a movement created by a former education minister, Ahmed Taleb Ibrahimi, on the grounds that it was a recreation of the FIS, the Islamist party that had been banned in 1992. See, *El Watan* [Algiers], 9 November 2000. Similar treatment was meted out to another new political party created by a former premier, Sid Ahmed Ghozali, the Front démocratique, in 2002, thus preventing it from taking part in the legislative elections on 30 May 2002. See, *El Watan* [Algiers], 12 April 2002

[6] In Morocco, such parties are known as "cocotte-minute" because of their sudden appearance and equally sudden disappearance from the political scene. A good example is provided by the history of the Union constitutionnelle (UC) in the 1980s under Ma'ati Bouabid, a veteran politician from the Union Nationale des Forces Populaires (UNFP), the precursor of the USFP (see below).

[7] The cases of Mehdi Ben Barka and Omar Bejelloun of the UNFP in Morocco come to mind. See, Waterbury J., *The Commander of the Faithful: The Moroccan Political Elite, A Study in Segmented Politics*, London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1970, pp 225-7. Mehdi Ben Barka disappeared in Paris in 1965, apparently abducted and killed by rogue elements in the French security services at the behest of the then Moroccan interior minister, General Mohamed Oufkir, and with the knowledge of the king. Omar Benjelloun was assassinated in Casablanca, apparently by a member of the Ikhwan Muslimin, in 1975. His assailant was never caught but most observers believe that the Moroccan security services were involved. See also Moore, C.H., Political Parties, in Zartman, I.W. and Habeeb, W.M. (eds), *Polity and Society in Contemporary North Africa*, Boulder CO: Westview, 1993

or Istiqlal in Morocco) or socialist ideals within the context of national liberation and subsequent national development (the Parti Destourien Socialiste in Tunisia which was also a precursor of the RCD and a successor to the Neo-Destour, or the FLN in Algeria and the UNFP - Union Nationale des Forces Populaires - in Morocco). The dominance of established regimes in independent North Africa – army-backed in Egypt and Algeria, monarchical in Morocco and presidential in Tunisia – transformed all these movements into political supplicants, dependent on regime whim for their survival.

In effect, therefore, political parties came to mirror the prevailing informal political culture inside North Africa, which is essentially consensual and consultative, and in which central authority plays a key role as mediator or as leader. It is for this reason that it is extremely difficult to talk meaningfully of "political opposition" in the region, in terms that would reflect the political experience of democracies in the developed world. It is also for this reason that ideology was replaced by the simple search for power and, as a concomitant of this, that individuals or small elites – the so-called *zaim* phenomenon, dominated the political movements themselves.[8] This, in turn, has two consequences. Firstly, it transforms political movements into patronage-clientage systems, both within the movement and outside it, given its supplicant status.[9] This is true particularly in rural areas – urban areas tend to have more interest and class based networks of supporters and more specifically political agendas. Secondly, the increasing personalization of the leadership and cliental nature of the membership also makes transfer of authority within the movement extremely difficult. The result has been that there has been very little change in leadership over many decades in most political movements. This stagnation in leadership has encouraged the "de-ideologization" of political movements and has meant that most party activities have lost intrinsic political significance.

Inevitably, this political fossilization has had a profound effect on membership, particularly as older generations, linked to the struggle for independence or the great ideological moments of Arab nationalism, have disappeared. Thus a major concern for all political movements, whether pro-regime or oppositional, is to attract new membership. This has proved very difficult to do, particularly amongst youth, as a result of the clientage nature of the political process throughout the region and because of the stagnation in party leadership. The only parties that have been successful at attracting the support of North African youth have been those with a genuine political agenda arising from innate cultural concerns transformed into political ideologies – the Islamist movements and those concerned with ethnic nationalism.[10] Thus Berberist parties, such as the FFS (which claims a wider and genuinely oppositionalist position inside national politics) in Algeria[11] and, in Morocco, the Mouvement Populaire (MP) and the various parties formed from it, such as the Mouvement Nationale Populaire (MNP), have tried the same mechanism to increase support. In fact, in Morocco, it has been a non-party political movement, the Tamaguut, that has really capitalized on the issue in terms

[8] See Tachau, F. (ed), *Political Parties of the Middle East and North Africa*, London: Greenwood Press, 1994. The *zaim* is, traditionally, the strongman in Lebanon who heads a patronage-clientage group which dominates a particular geographic location and may be tribally or confessionally based, and who transforms this into political power within or opposed to government in Beirut.

[9] This is excellently described in Waterbury

[10] Willis, M., Political Parties in the Maghrib: Ideology and Identification – a Suggested Typology, *Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 7, No 3, Autumn 2002

[11] Roberts, H. The Unforeseen Development of the Kabyle Question in Algerian Politics, *Government and Opposition*, Vol. 17, No 3, Summer 1982

of attracting popular support.

1.4 The Alternatives

This raises the issue of the role played by civil society organizations in allowing popular expression of political opposition alongside the formal political party structure. This began, first, in the colonial period, when trades union movements developed, particularly in Tunisia and Morocco, which had an increasingly dominant indigenous membership, although like the political parties that existed then, they reflected *colon*[12] aspirations. The result today is that, in Tunisia, the Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT) has been linked to the RCD and its predecessors, but between 1978 and 1982 effectively acted as the country's main opposition to Bourguibism. In Algeria, the Union Générale des Travailleurs Algeriens was similarly linked to the FLN, alongside the students' and veterans' associations. In the wake of the 1988 crisis, it – like the FLN – moved temporarily into a position of opposition[13] before concentrating on specifically labour issues and now seeking a privileged position with government, once again dominated by the FLN.

The situation in Morocco was somewhat different because the three major trades unions were specifically created as extensions of the major political parties and have retained these links until today. The first, created in 1955 towards the end of the French Protectorate, was the Union Marocaine du Travail (UMT), which was linked to the national liberation movement, the Istiqlal. In 1956, after independence, the union leadership decided to become independent of the Istiqlal – which then created its own trades union in 1960, the Union Générale des Travailleurs Marocains (UGTM) – and eventually aligned itself with a new political party created by a split in the Istiqlal, the UNFP.[14] When the UNFP, in its turn, also split and a new political party, the USFP, was formed in 1974, a new trades union linked to it soon developed, the Conféderation Démocratique des Travailleurs (CDT), which was created in 1978 by eight smaller unions. All these unions essentially back up the political action of their companion political parties and engage in autonomous activities that can extend beyond their formal remit.

With changes in the external political environment, other groups have also become objects of party interest, as a means of bringing a younger element within the influence of the party machine. Most important in this respect, again in the Maghrib rather than in Egypt,[15] have been the many organizations concerned with human rights and other single-issue social and

[12] *Colon* – colonial: North Africa, unlike much of the colonial world, was based on settler colonialism, which was largely urban based and linked to capitalist production. The trades union movements created, therefore, reflected colonialist paradigms but increasingly tolerated an indigenous membership, as the indigenous urban and industrial labour-force expanded. Apart from local communist parties, the same integration process did not apply to formal political parties. Maghribi trades unions, therefore, have a far greater institutional continuity with the colonial period than do political parties.

[13] It was, for instance, associated with the FLN in its support for the Sant' Egidio Accord in January 1995 – an attempt to create an alternative to the civil war then sweeping Algeria, which brought in the major Islamist movement – by then banned in Algeria – the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) and the FFS, as well as two other political parties.

[14] Palazzoli, C., *Le Maroc politique*, Paris: Editions Sinbad, 1974, pp 369-78

[15] An interesting study of what this may mean in Egypt – where there are 16,000 registered political and social associations, 8,000 of which were controlled by the Ikwan Muslimin (Muslim Brotherhood) until the Mubarak regime excluded it from formal political activity at the end of the 1990s – is given in Abdel Rahman, M., The Politics of 'Un-civil' Society in Egypt, *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol. 29, No 91, March 2002, pp. 21-36

political concerns. Governments, too, have taken a similar interest, although for reasons of control rather than influence, and the overall political environment has played an important role in determining to what extent this should occur. Political parties have been far less successful in this respect than they have been in linking up with trades union movements, and in both Tunisia and Algeria it has been government that has actually been able to manipulate the human rights scene, setting up alternatives to genuinely independent non-governmental organizations in Algeria or capturing control of them in Tunisia. In Egypt, bodies such as the Egyptian Organization of Human Rights or the Ibn Khaldun Centre[16] have had to face outright official hostility to their activities, which are perceived as being opposed to government. In Morocco, however, three of the four human rights organizations have party links of one kind or another.

The relative independence of such organizations from the party system underlines another aspect of the political scene in North Africa, which both militates against political parties dominating the formal political arena and highlights their dependence on central authority. This is that the arena formerly monopolized by the political parties is increasingly being occupied by civil society organizations, concerned with cultural and social issues ranging from human rights and ethnicity to regional identities. Governments try to legislate to control the spread of such organizations and, on occasion, seek to transform them into "governmental non-governmental organizations".[17] Interestingly enough, in the past such movements (when they have had an explicitly political agenda) have on occasion transmuted into fully-fledged political parties. This occurred in Algeria in the wake of the April 1980 "Berber Spring" riots, when the Berberist protest movements, the Mouvement des enfants de Chouhada and the Mouvement culturel berbère, eventually became the Rassemblement Culturel et Démocratique, after the October 1988 riots forced the army-backed regime there to accept a multi-party political system.[18]

1.5 The Future

Interestingly enough, this fragmentation of the political scene does not seem likely to have the same consequences as government-inspired fragmentation of the political parties has had

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[16] In 2001, Sa'ad Eddin Ibrahim, the director of the Ibn Khaldun Centre, was imprisoned for electoral fraud and for receiving funds from abroad without official permission. The funds came from the European Commission and the "electoral fraud" consisted of role-playing to educate people in the electoral procedures and process. He was also accused of misrepresenting the situation of Copts in Egypt.

[17] In some respects, this is most advanced in Morocco, where the Royal Palace has long encouraged a series of associations that specialize in civil society activities, usually with a cultural bent. Some of these organizations, particularly in the Rif and the Middle Atlas, have, however, also acquired political overtones, having become enmeshed in the growing movement for *amazighté* – Berber particularism. In Algeria, parallel movements in Kabylia, based on the old tribal councils, the *l-arush* (singular *arsh*) have acquired a specifically political character and have replaced the local Berberist political parties as the vehicle of local opposition to government and of demands for political autonomy. These are enshrined in the El Kseur Platform, adopted in May 2001, in the wake of the death of a Berber youth in mysterious circumstances in a gendarmerie station. The Platform demanded that, *inter alia*, the Algerian government should recognize *tamazight* (the Berber languages of Algeria) as an official language alongside Arabic and should grant Kabylia and other Berber regions autonomy within the Algerian state. The government did concede that *tamazight* should be listed in the constitution as a "national language" and removed the gendarmerie from Kabylia. Autonomy, however, would be a very difficult concession, as it would undermine the very nature of the Algerian state. The two Berberist political parties have been reduced to supporting the *l-arush* – the FFS willingly, the RCD reluctantly, although it was forced to leave the government coalition in protest.

[18] Mezhoud, S., *Glaznost* the Berber Way, in Joffé, E.G.H. (ed), *North Africa: Nation, State and Region*, London: Routledge, 1993, pp. 142-69

in the past, when it became a tool of control. This is largely because the new non-governmental organizations have ideological drivers that extend beyond rhetoric, and do not have the personalized patron-client membership and leadership structures typical of formal political parties. They are also operating in a new environment where governments are less free than in the past to dictate the political agenda. Quite apart from the generalized growth in interest in good governance, Mediterranean states face growing pressures to democratize their political systems and to improve their human rights records as a result of their membership of the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership.

The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership was created as a holistic policy for the Mediterranean basin at the Barcelona Conference in November 1995. Modelled closely on the 1975 Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe, which introduced *détente* into the Cold War, it was ostensibly designed to create a zone of "shared stability, peace and prosperity" in the Mediterranean.[19] The means by which this was to be done was to be primarily economic, but there were also political, social and cultural initiatives. These emphasized issues such as "good governance" and the democratization of political systems, as well as respect for human rights. The European Union also undertook to foster civil society in the region, both financially and through institution building. Of course, much of this remained merely at the level of rhetoric, as more immediate national and even European objectives interfered. Nonetheless, it is quite possible that the very process of intervention will condition the domestic political arenas in North Africa in such a way that, eventually, the political process might recover some autonomy, so that ideological agendas rather than ones merely based on access to power might emerge once again. If this were to occur, then the concept of political opposition would recover meaning, even if it were to be captured by the new non-governmental arena, rather than the established political parties.

2 Opposition Political Parties in North Africa

Until such a development should occur, established opposition parties, dependent on government, will continue to dominate the political scene, alongside pro-government and government parties. Those political movements that seek to escape the embrace of government will find themselves marginalized. The situation in Egypt typifies the general political scene in North Africa and in the Middle East as well.

2.1 Egypt

Party political activity in Egypt goes back to the start of Egyptian independence from British control in 1922 and was enshrined in the Hizb Wafd (Delegation Party), which had been created by a group of leading Egyptians in 1918 under Saad Zaghlul in order to argue for Egyptian self-government.[20] It was to become the first government party under the independent Khedivate. An early split in the movement, caused by Zaghlul's authoritarianism, created the Liberal Constitutional Party (Hizb al-Ahrar al-Dusturiyyun), which became the opposition. Wafd nationalism and the relationship with Britain continued to dominate Egyptian politics, even after Zaghlul's death in 1927, although the party

[19] A more realistic position might be that it was really a European Union attempt at peripheral regionalization along its Southern border region, as a parallel to enlargement to the East. See, Joffé, E.G.H., The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Initiative: Problems and Prospects, *Journal of North African Studies*, Vol. 3, No 2, Spring 1998

[20] Al-Sayyid Marsot, A.L., *A Short History of Modern Egypt*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, pp. 80-93

occasionally had to share power with the Liberal Constitutionalists or gave way to technocratic government at the behest of King Fuad. Its real opposition, which was always denied access to government, was the Ikhwan Muslimin, created in Ismailiyya in 1928. In 1952, in the wake of Egypt's defeat in the Arab war to prevent the creation of Israel, an army-backed coup signalled the end of multiparty government. A single political movement, which was to become the Arab Socialist Union in 1962,[21] was created instead and continued to be the sole legal vehicle of formal political expression through the whole of the Nasserist period, up to 1970.

Political liberalization emerged again, after President Nasser's death, under the new pro-Western dispensation created by President Anwar Sadat alongside economic liberalization, the *infitah* "open door" policy. It was introduced slowly, however, through the initial authorization of political platforms (*manabir*) before fully developed political parties were permitted. Political liberalization, however, was severely hampered by presidential action, for parties that were critical were censored or suspended and, after multiparty elections were reintroduced in 1977,[22] the People's Assembly was coerced and pressured by the presidency. In 1981, it was forced to pass a law, the "Law of Shame", that made it an offence to criticize Egypt when abroad, whilst political hegemony at home was maintained by the pro-presidential party, the National Democratic Party (NDP). In large measure, this political system has continued since President Mubarak came to power in 1981, after his predecessor's assassination. However, there has been rather less direct presidential interference, and political parties have been allowed to apply for registration without restriction (except for Islamist groups) since 1984.[23]

Party legalization, from 1977 onwards, has been in the hands of the Political Parties Committee, a presidential body, which has, to date, authorized only seven political parties and suspended seven others, whilst refusing nine registrations.[24] Even though President Mubarak promised that the 1984 elections would be "free, honest and fair", the NDP has retained its overwhelming political hegemony and, until 1987 when 10% of National Assembly seats were reserved for independent candidates, an 8% electoral threshold excluded most other political parties. Only the New Wafd, which gained 15% of the vote in 1984, was able to obtain effective representation and, in that election, became the vehicle by which Islamist Ikhwan candidates were able to come to power. In the 1987 elections, the Ikhwan Muslimin formed an alliance with the Socialist Liberal Party (SLP) and the Socialist Labour Party (LSP) to become the largest opposition bloc in the parliament, thus forcing the Wafd into third place. The 1990 elections, forced by a court ruling that the electoral law was unconstitutional, saw the 8% threshold swept away and restrictions on independent candidates removed, after the new electoral law was approved by referendum. The National

[21] Al-Sayyd Marsot, p. 122

[22] In June 1977, a limited number of political parties were permitted – basically the ruling National Democratic Party, which replaced the Arab Socialist Union with the President at its head, the official opposition Socialist Workers Party and two other opposition parties, the Liberal Socialist Party and the National Progressive Unionist Party (NPUP). The NPUP, which, before it was officially recognized, had criticized the President's refusal to allow the Wafd to reform, was immediately suspended! See, *The Middle East and North Africa 1998*, London: Europa Publications, 1998, p. 428

[23] This allowed the old political parties to re-register, after a break of 32 years. One of the first to do so, after the Egyptian courts had ruled that it should be allowed, was the New Wafd Party, which had been blocked by the presidency since 1977

[24] *Egypt Focus* [Berkhamstead: Menas Associates], October 2001

Democratic Party retained its hegemony with 78% of the seats and, since four parties – the SLP, the LSP, the Wafd and the Ikhwan Muslimin – had boycotted the elections, the National Progressive Unionist Party (NPUP) became the official opposition with six seats!

What is striking about this brief history is that electoral reform in Egypt has been forced by the court system and that the ability of political parties to significantly influence the political process has been extremely limited, largely because of the autonomy of the presidency.[25] The immediate consequence of this has been that political participation is very low indeed – at 20-30% – a phenomenon intensified by the violence of electoral campaigns as the authorities ensure that NDP hegemony is assured. The political opposition is thus impotent and, since Islamist movements are excluded from formal representation, largely irrelevant in terms of popular concerns. Furthermore, it remains dependent on presidential whim and can only affect the political process through the courts, a process that, in turn, the President can deflect by decree. The result is that, apart from the excluded political currents, the actual political agendas of the opposition parties – and even of the ruling NDP – are of little relevance since the legislative process is essentially dominated by the presidency.

This impotence, of course, was powerfully reflected in the crisis of violence that swept Egypt in the mid 1990s. From 1992 until 1997, interest in politics was diverted towards the confrontation between the Egyptian state and its violent Islamist opponents. One casualty of this process was the Ikhwan Muslimin, which, by the middle of the decade, had become a proscribed political movement and therefore ceased to have electoral relevance, its supporters being forced to stand as independent candidates.[26] Despite the crisis, however, and the continuing state of emergency, legislative elections were held in November 1995, after lengthy arguments as to whether a party list or an individual candidate system should be used for campaigning at constituency level.

In the elections,[27] the NDP won 316 of the 444 seats – 71% of the total. The opposition parties, none of which fielded candidates in more than half the constituencies, gained only thirteen seats, with the Wafd gaining six, the Tagammu (a new name for the NPUP) gaining five and the LSP and a new Nasserist party gaining one each. The striking feature, however, was the role of the independents, who became the second largest group in the Assembly. This was a feature that was repeated in the November 2000 elections, when the NDP suffered a major embarrassment, as many of its members were forced to stand as independents because of pre-electoral mismanagement, returning to the party fold after the elections. As a result, its total of 388 seats in the 454-member Assembly involved 213 former independents![28] The real lesson from the election, however, was the impotence of the official and formal opposition parties, a feature repeated in the June 2001 Shura Council elections[29] and in the most recent local elections in April 2002. In these elections the NDP gained 97% of the vote, while independents, who again were mainly NDP activists who failed to gain the necessary party endorsement, gained 2.6%. This gave the NDP an incredible 99.6% of the vote, while the Wafd gained 0.3%, the socialist-leaning Tagammu 0.05% and the Democratic Arab

[25] The President in Egypt is nominated by the People's Assembly and the nomination is then approved by referendum.

[26] It was proscribed in November 1995, just before legislative elections.

[27] The turnout, to universal amazement and disbelief, was set at 50% in the first round and 46% in the second.

[28] *Egypt Focus*, April 2002

[29] The Shura Council is the upper consultative body of the Egyptian parliamentary system.

Nasserists and the Socialist Liberal Party barely registered. Not surprisingly, only six of Egypt's seventeen political parties bothered to fight the elections, although normally local elections offer opportunities for smaller parties to make an effective showing.[30]

It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Egypt's political opposition has little relevance to a political process that is now under hegemonic presidential control. Not even the clandestine Islamist opposition, after its defeat in 1997, has much of a role to play and it, too, has been blocked from returning to the formal political arena by presidential fiat. In 1999, members of the Ikhwan Muslimin tried to register a new party, the Hizb al-Wasat (Centre Party), together with leading members of the Coptic community,[31] a first example of cooperation across the religious divide. The attempt was refused, as was an attempt in April 1999 by a former Gam'iyat Islamiyya activist to do the same. In September, a group of 80 former Jihad Islamiyya members tried unsuccessfully to register a new Hizb ash-Shar'ia (Religious Law Party). The political process in Egypt cannot, therefore, avoid intense polarization in future, of the kind that created the violence of the mid-1990s. Interestingly enough the President seems to be aware of this, and during 2001 his son Gamal was busy restructuring the NDP to make it more representative and to bring in a younger membership.[32] Whatever the outcome of these reforms, the political opposition in Egypt seems to have been effectively marginalized, as in effect the single political party state of the 1950s and 1960s has been recreated.

2.2 Libya

Since the Great September Revolution on 1 September 1969 Libya has laid claim to a revolutionary, anti-imperialist foreign policy, primarily directed towards Arab unity and since September 1998 towards African unity as well.[33] In domestic terms, there was a brief period of internal organization as a single-party, Arab nationalist state under a Revolutionary Command Council composed of those in the Free Officers Movement who had led the 1969 revolution. In 1976 the country was transformed into a state based on popular sovereignty, in which the "people's authority" was ostensibly the only source of power. In political terms, this power was expressed through the obligatory participation of the Libyan population in a series of basic popular congresses – today there are 830 of them based on 1,500 *mahallat* (communes) – in which all matters of policy (local, national and international) were discussed, with the officers of each congress being mandated to represent the congress at regional and national level congresses. The most senior congress is the national-level General People's Congress which normally meets twice yearly and which is responsible for appointing the General People's Committee – the government. The Committee, through a series of secretariats (ministries) communicates with local Popular Committees, appointed by the basic people's congresses, which handle local day-to-day administration.

In reality, Libyans have long ago lost interest in this complex and burdensome political system, in which Colonel Qadhafi has no formal role, except as "Leader of the Revolution",

[30] *Egypt Focus*, April 2002

[31] Egypt's Copts are represented in the Assembly by delegates appointed by the President, who has ten seats in his gift.

[32] *Egypt Focus*, December 2001

[33] The best sources for modern Libya are: Wright, J., *A Modern History of Libya*, London: Croom Helm, 1981; Arnold, G., *Libya, the Maverick State*, London: Cassell, 1996; Sicker, M., *The Making of a Pariah State*, Westport CT: Westview, 1987; Obeidi, A., *Political Culture in Libya*, Richmond: Curzon, 2001

as *Qa'id*. Political parties are banned, on the grounds that they are divisive within the context of the People's Authority (Law 71 of 1972 which bans all political movements outside the then authorized Arab Socialist Union, which was subsequently disbanded in 1977). There is therefore, in effect, no right of freedom of association, and freedom of expression would seem to be *a priori* severely curtailed. Secondly, the normal formal independence of Islamic institutions from the state – formally, there is no state in Libya for it is a "State of the Masses", a *jamahiriyah* – was vitiated in 1978, when the Qadhafi regime took over religious properties and imposed its own vision of what a state based on Islamic law should be upon the traditional religious authorities. Thirdly, in keeping with its revolutionary traditions and because of popular apathy to the political process, Colonel Qadhafi in 1978 organized the Revolutionary Committee Movement, which he controls directly, to activate the formal political process. This movement has close contacts with the security system, trained by Romania and East Germany up to 1990, and has arrogated to itself authority for "revolutionary justice" – in other words, direct, uncontrolled persecution of perceived opponents to the regime.

Real power in Libya, however, resides in the tribes from which the regime elites have sprung. Chief amongst them is the Qadhadhfa, Colonel Qadhafi's own tribe, which is located around the coastline of the Gulf of Sirte. Linked to it are two other tribes, the Maghraha from the region of Misurata, and the Warfalla, again from the western Sirte region. These tribes have penetrated deep into the administration and the security services, as well as the army command, originally the preserve of Libya's Berber minority. Historically, they were subjugated to the great Cyrenaican *sa'adi* tribes and it is possible to regard the 1969 revolution as, in essence, the overthrow of traditional Cyrenaican dominance. In October 1993, however, a failed coup attempt at the Tripolitanian town of Banu Ulid indicated that their loyalty could not be taken for granted, and the Qadhafi regime has increasingly come to rely on an inner core elite linked to the Revolutionary Committees and, in recent years, to Colonel Qadhafi's own family. Yet, the old revolutionary companions of the early days of the Revolution and its primary political expression, the Revolutionary Command Council (RCC), still play a role and, through them, the Qadhafi regime is able to exploit the loyalties of the Tripoline and Fezzani tribes in the West of the country, despite the growing role of the colonel's family.

His sons, Sa'adi, Saif al-Islam, Mohammed and al-Mu'tassim, now all have positions within the state and most observers consider that one of them will eventually succeed the Colonel as effective, if undeclared, head of Libya's idiosyncratic stateless state. His fifth son, Khamis, will eventually join them and it is in the nature of the Libyan leader not to indicate his preferences, so that they will all struggle against each other in attempting to control power. Equally, in this struggle many of them will transgress against their father's authority and risk his disapproval. This has already happened to Mu'tassim who has been forced to flee from his command post in the Libyan army to avoid his father's wrath and who is now in effective exile in a military academy in Egypt. Sa'adi, who is an avid football player, has been diverted from ambitions for power by the purchase of a commanding number of shares in the Italian football club Juventus. Thus Saif al-Islam is currently the front-runner in the leadership stakes and is in charge of the al-Qadhafi Charitable Foundation. Mohammed, incidentally, as the son of Colonel Qadhafi's first wife, is unlikely to play a role in the struggle and is now studying quietly for a degree in Liverpool.[34]

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[34] Information on contemporary Libya can be obtained from the monthly *Libya Focus* [Berkhamstead: Menas Associates]

In many respects, the Libyan regime is based on the supposition, contained in Colonel Qadhafi's famous *Green Book*, that its political system is a replica of the values contained within Islam – although the term "Islam" never appears in the book itself – involving unity of views within the community through consensus (*ijma*) and consultation over political objectives (*shura*). Those objectives, furthermore, are strategically defined in the *Green Book* itself and through the Third Universal Theory, Colonel Qadhafi's alternative to capitalism or communism. Disagreement with them is thus morally and doctrinally not possible, so that dissidence is treated as if it were apostasy, for it implies separating oneself from a revealed truth – in this case over political structures and values. Thus, dissidents are extremely brutally treated and one of the main objectives of the Revolutionary Committee Movement and the security services is to root out and exterminate such political deviance. The legal justification for this is given by law 71 of 1972, which effectively bans all political parties and movements with a political implication – including, therefore, Islamist movements and their sympathizers.

Political opposition does exist and has always existed to the Qadhafi regime in Libya and outside the country, however. There was considerable opposition to the original coup d'état from irredentist royalist sympathizers, from supporters of the Sanussi movement and from secularist modernizers in Tripolitania, amongst others. The behaviour of the new regime also stimulated opposition, particularly from those threatened by its radical reforms to Libyan society. Finally, the creation of the *jamahiri* system of government, in itself, stimulated considerable opposition, which has continued up to the present day. Regime ill treatment of dissidents has also intensified; the original pro-monarchist opponents were imprisoned but, by 1975 when a member of the Revolutionary Command Council, Captain Mohamed Mehishi, tried to organize an unsuccessful counter-regime coup d'état, those arrested were to be executed. Captain Mehishi himself fled to Morocco and was returned to Libya in 1984, where he was also put to death. The regime also tries to implicate the population in such exemplary punishment; Islamists have been executed in public, as have student dissidents after being condemned by revolutionary tribunals, and the leaders of the Bani Ulid coup – leading members of the Warfalla and the Qadhadhfa – were kept in prison for five years before execution, as the regime vainly tried to persuade members of their tribes to take responsibility for their execution in an implicit gesture of support. Punishment can also be collective; the arrest and subsequent execution of a group seeking to organize armed resistance to the regime in Zuwara in 1984 served as an excuse to sweep up all known sympathizers with the Libyan National Salvation Front (*Inqadh*). More recently, demonstrations in favour of popular religious leaders have allowed for the mass arrest of Islamist sympathizers.

In these circumstances, it is quite easy to see that mere intellectual opposition in private would be treated almost as seriously as active opposition. After all, the thought is the progenitor of the deed, so that removal of those who have dissident intellectual attitudes is a moral imperative. Indeed, it is in this blending of moral and doctrinal orthodoxy with political commitment that the Qadhafi regime is at its most intolerant. In recent years, access to information about the contemporary world has become much easier for Libyans; there are now satellite dishes available and the Internet can also be easily used, either privately or through the Internet cafés that have emerged in the country as part of the new private retail sector. Libyans travel easily, particularly after 1988 when the requirement for exit visa was suppressed, and can thus have contacts abroad. Yet the slightest sign of intellectual or active dissidence is as severely repressed as it was in the darkest days of the 1980s, when the

regime was at its most powerful. In this respect, Libya has begun to emulate countries such as those of Eastern Europe in the last three decades of the Cold War, when access was relatively easy but domestic dissidence was savagely repressed, whether it was a threat to the state or not, for the sake of political orthodoxy and hegemony. At the same time, the regime also seeks to divide its opposition, particularly the growing and vocal opposition abroad. The original secular opposition is subjected to attempts at cooption, but more recent groups are still treated with hostility and exemplary violence.

Opposition to the regime among Libyans abroad generated a number of movements based on different ideological currents amongst the exiles, ranging from Arab nationalist to Islamist. At least seven major, predominantly secular groupings appeared, including the Libyan Constitutional Union, the Libyan National Front and, from 1980, the National Salvation Front of Libya - usually known as al-Inqadh ("Salvation"). This was founded by a former Libyan ambassador to India, Mohammed al-Mugharieff, and received considerable support from Sudan, then under the Nimeiri regime and openly hostile to Libya, as well as from Egypt and, latterly, the United States. All of these movements seek the restoration of constitutional government in Libya with appropriate parliamentary oversight in a multiparty setting – the monarchical movements have all been sidelined and are not important. Latterly, some six Islamist movements have emerged abroad, dedicated to the violent overthrow of the Qadhafi regime, alongside the local variant of the Ikhwan Muslimin*,* the Hizb Islami, whose activists in Libya are regularly arrested and imprisoned.

Up to 1994 al-Inqath was by far the most successful and active opposition to the Qadhafi regime, not least because it also included within its ranks members of Islamist groups opposed to the regime. In 1984, it organized an unsuccessful coup d'état, which involved outside support under Ahmed Ahwas who infiltrated across the Tunisian-Libyan border with a small group of supporters. He and his group were surprised at Zuwara where they were killed by security forces, who were thus alerted to the internally organized coup attempt. The group involved was destroyed in a pitched battle in Tripoli, although it is still unclear whether its members actually attacked the Bab al-Aziziyya Barracks, which were the regime's headquarters, or whether they were surprised in a building close-by before they could attack. After 1987, the movement was active in organizing an armed resistance movement - with American support - from amongst Libyan prisoners-of-war held in Chad. The members of this group were airlifted to safety in the United States after the Habre regime in Chad was overthrown in December 1991 by a group led by Idriss Deby, the current president of Chad, and supported by Libya. The al-Inqath also claimed to be involved in the Beni Ulid coup attempt in October 1993 against the regime, although there is no independent evidence of this.

The Qadhafi regime's response to the activities of al-Inqath was hostile and violent. Immediately after the May 1984 coup attempt, all suspected sympathizers inside Libya (several thousand persons) were rounded up and have since disappeared. Repeated attempts were made to assassinate the leadership abroad. Even though some former opposition members were allowed to return to Libya - either to visit or to reside – in 1989-1990, al-Inqath members were explicitly excluded from such arrangements, and any who did attempt to return and were detected were executed. Even today, suspicion of being involved in the movement's activities - whether or not the person concerned was a formal member - would immediately brand them as traitors in the eyes of the regime. Largely because of its links with the United States but also because of an internal split in the organization in 1996, the movement has now sunk into relative obscurity.

It is clear that a constitutional form of government, involving formal party political opposition, is currently quite impossible in Libya. However, in the past decade, the Libyan authorities have become much more tolerant of dissenting Libyans in exile and have been prepared to allow them to visit the country or even return. In addition, the Libyan leadership is aware that radical change is necessary, not least because of American hostility over the Lockerbie affair, even though the associated United Nations sanctions regime has been suspended since April 1999 and is not now likely to be re-imposed. There are groups within leadership circles that seek democratizing reform in Libya, with its transformation into a republic, perhaps with Colonel Qadhafi as president. Equally, Libya's decision to participate in the European Union's Barcelona Process as a special guest of the president of the European Commission has implications for the birth of democratic governance. Should Libya decide to join the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, of which all its North African neighbours are already members, it will have to accept the Partnership as they find it, with all the principles and legislation already adopted by its neighbours. This includes an obligation towards democratic governance and it remains to be seen how the Qadhafi regime would adapt to that.

2.3 Tunisia

Tunisia is a country characterized by the fact that its political system is quite unnecessarily authoritarian in character and its economic structure adversely affected in consequence. Its foreign relations are governed by an illusory fear of one neighbour (Libya) and an ambivalent reliance on the other (Algeria), whilst its dominant diplomatic partner (the European Union) - which exercises effective control of its economic options - is apparently unable or unwilling to effectively alter its protégé's domestic political behaviour. Yet there is a formally democratic political system in which six parties play a role. In reality, as with Egypt, one party, the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD) has a hegemonic role and has enjoyed such a position since independence. Genuine political opposition is therefore not really possible and it is the non-governmental sector that, in Tunisia, has been the major voice of opposition, apart from the Islamist movements. Furthermore, at least two of the major legal opposition parties are derived from the RCD; a third is the old communist party, first created during the French Protectorate up to 1956 and the other two are of little significance.

According to the Tunisian constitution, as amended in 1988, Tunisia is a republic in which the National Assembly, which is elected by universal suffrage for a five-year term, exercises legislative power. The executive is headed by a president who may serve a maximum of two five-year terms – although the present incumbent, Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali, has already managed to obtain a third term through re-interpreting the constitution and is now attempting to remove this limitation. He has already won approval in the Assembly to permit him a fourth term. Now all he needs is to win a referendum to allow him to do this. The president also selects the government, thus giving him ultimate control over the political process. The government may, however, be forced from office by censure by the National Assembly. The president is assisted in his duties by a council of state, which audits governmental accounts and adjudicates in disputes between individuals and state or public bodies, as well as by an economic and social council, which evaluates planning and social proposals put forward by the Assembly.

In such a structure, the president has massive personal power and if he also controls the make-up of government and Assembly that power is effectively total. The key to such a

situation is his ability to control the membership of the Assembly and, since independence in 1956, Tunisian presidents - there have only been two - have proved adept at achieving this. President Habib Bourguiba exploited the charisma he acquired as paramount leader of Tunisia's independence movement, the neo-Destour, and his control over its successor as a political party, the Parti Socialiste Destourien (PSD), of which the RCD is the subsequent successor. As the *combatant suprême* and as formal head of the PSD, which was effectively the sole permitted political party in Tunisia, Habib Bourguiba was able to dictate government policy and to ensure that no rivals to his paramount political position could appear.

Since political movements may only operate legally in Tunisia once they have undergone a formal registration process and have demonstrated that they comply with Tunisian electoral and party law, the government and administration have always been able to control entry to the political scene. As a result, the only formal political party other than the PSD permitted at independence in 1956 was the Parti Communiste Tunisien (PCT), and all other political movements, such as the federal trades union movement, the Union Générale des Travailleurs Tunisiens (UGTT), were affiliated to the PDS. The PCT was, in any case, banned in 1963, as part of the government's moves against suspected opponents and sympathizers with the ousted leader of the left-wing elements of the neo-Destour, Salah Ben Youssef, who had been condemned to death *in absentia* in 1958.

At the same time, Tunisia engaged in a radical collectivist economic experiment with the support of the President and under the guidance of the finance and planning minister, Ahmed Ben Salah. This, in turn, was abandoned in 1969 and Ahmed Ben Salah himself was imprisoned. He later escaped and his supporters, in exile, formed a new political movement, the Mouvement de l'Unité Populaire (MUP), to carry on his belief in the command economy and socialist ideology. Membership of the new party or sympathy with it became a criminal offence. Meanwhile, the single-party National Assembly in 1974 provided legislation for a lifetime presidency and in 1975 duly approved Habib Bourguiba as president-for-life.

It was only in November 1983 that, under the pressure of growing divergences within the PSD, allied to an improved domestic political environment, the Bourguiba regime permitted three additional legal political parties to emerge. These included the revived PCT under Mohamed Harmel, which changed its name to the Mouvement de la Rénovation, or Harakat Ittihadi, in 1993, and which, under its new leader, Adel Chaouch, has since altered its name to the Harakat al-Tajdid. There was also the Parti de l'Unité Populaire (PUP), a group led by Muhammad Belhadj Amor, which had split off from Ahmed Ben Salah's MUP, and which was prepared to accept the authority of the Bourguiba regime. The third party was the Mouvement des Démocrates Socialistes (MDS), created from within the PSD by a former Bourguiba loyalist, Ahmed Mestiri, and now controlled by the human rights activist Khamis Chamari. The MDS had actually been permitted to participate, alongside the PSD and the UGTT, in the 1981 legislative elections.

The main reason why these parties were now allowed a formal political existence was that they were perceived to offer no threat to the paramountcy of the PSD. For the Bourguiba regime, they were irrelevant to the real issues it faced: economic stagnation, in the wake of its disastrous collectivist experiments in the 1960s; growing tensions with Libya under the radical Qadhafi regime after 1969; and worsening social tensions as the political and economic compact with the UGTT broke down in January 1978. Political movements that were perceived to have serious political potential were given short shrift.

The trades union confederation, the UGTT, for example, tried to break away from its close links to the PSD in the early 1980s, after the debacle of trades union demonstrations in January 1978, when political and social consensus in Tunisia first broke down over questions of salary levels. In the aftermath of severe riots that month, put down with considerable brutality by the security forces, the UGTT under its secretary-general, Habib Achour, tried to defend workers' rights. In short order the secretary-general was imprisoned and then forced from office by a government appointee. By the middle of the decade, the movement's rebellion against the centralist authoritarianism of the Bourguiba regime was effectively over.

It was, however, his conflict with the emerging Islamist movement that eventually led to the downfall of Habib Bourguiba, when he was ousted from office "on medical grounds" by his prime minister, Zine El-Abidine Ben Ali. The new president - for Ben Ali ensured that he took over presidential power on a temporary basis until new presidential elections could be organized - was a very different type of person from his predecessor. Then in his late forties, he had grown up in the dockyard slums of Tunis, where his father had been a dockworker, although the family hailed from the Sahel region, between Sfax and Monastir. His career, after a brief flirtation, it is alleged, with Libyan-style Arab nationalism, was spent entirely in the security services, a factor that was to influence his governmental style as well. Initially, however, he tried to create a new style of politics in Tunisia, away from the charismatic, enforced consensus that had typified the Bourguiba regime and back towards constitutional models which implied accountability in place of the arbitrary cabalism of the later Bourguiba period.

In accordance with the consensual political culture that typifies North Africa (and which was also implicit in the charismatic nature of Bourguibism), the new Tunisian leader sought to develop a national political consensus in which the different currents of Tunisian political life would find their proper places. Quinquennial presidential elections which were to coincide with the legislative electoral round, were re-introduced and, in 1988, new political parties were legalized, including Ahmed Ben Salah's MUP, the left-wing Rassemblement Socialiste Progressiste and the Arab nationalist Union Démocratique Unioniste. At the same time, the old PSD was renamed the Rassemblement Constitutionnel Démocratique (RCD) and a new electoral law introduced. Under the new law, political parties with a political platform referring to religion, language or region were excluded from legal status.

The new law was clearly directed against the still influential Islamist movement - whose imprisoned leadership had been released in the aftermath of the change of regime. The Mouvement de la Tendence Islamique (MTI), however, was anxious to join the new president's attempt at forging political consensus, and therefore changed its name to the Hizb an-Nahda and published a political programme that emphasized its acceptance of political pluralism and a democratic and secular state. Despite these changes, the Hizb an-Nahda, together with several extremist nationalist or left wing parties, continued to be denied legal registration. In short, despite its apparent desire for political inclusiveness, the new regime had as strict limits to its tolerance as its predecessor. As a result, in the elections held in 1989, the Islamists stood as independent candidates, winning 13% of the vote and thus replacing the MDS as the major opposition to the new RCD. The RCD, however, won all 141 seats in the Assembly.

Over the next year popular demonstrations and confrontations with Islamist-influenced groups, particularly in the student movement, increased as a protest against the government's political discrimination. The Islamists and all legal opposition parties boycotted the June

1990 municipal elections on the grounds that they were neither free nor fair, while the government had sought to portray them as the embodiment of its new pluralist political system. By the end of the year, the Ben Ali regime had begun to copy the practices of its predecessor, accusing the Islamist movements of plotting against the state, and in a series of trials notable for their lack of legal precision and acceptability it dismantled the Hizb an-Nahda. At the same time, the regime became increasingly obsessed with security considerations and intolerant of any form of opposition. Tunisia's human rights organization came under attack, with its leaders facing imprisonment and the movement itself being eventually stuffed with government supporters to ensure it was appropriately docile. Elder statesmen, such as the respected former ambassador to the United Nations, Rachid Driss, were persuaded to authenticate the regime's observance of human rights, as foreign criticism began to mount, as did the level of arrests, with thousands of political detainees being identified by organizations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

At the same time, and in the run-up to the 1994 elections, the regime mounted a highly successful and competent public relations exercise to ensure that its own political party, the RCD, would sweep the board - as it duly did. The total opposition vote was reduced to a paltry 2.27%. As a result of a prior constitutional reform, however, the opposition gained its first representation in the Assembly, as a block of 19 seats was reserved for it, the seats being distributed to the various opposition parties in proportion to their percentage of the total vote. This, claimed the president, demonstrated that Tunisia now had a genuine democracy and, as a result, no new opposition parties were needed. The lesson was driven home when a well-known politician who tested the political waters by founding a new movement was immediately imprisoned, and another, who complained about domestic repression in a European newspaper, joined him in his incarceration. The lesson was not lost on the electorate, which voted 99.86% in favour of the RCD in municipal elections in 1995.

The same pattern was repeated in the presidential and legislative elections in late October 1999. President Ben Ali won his third term – his second re-election, according to his interpretation of the constitution – by 99.44% of the vote, itself 91.4% of the electorate. The one variant on past practice is that there were two other candidates – Mohamed Bel Hadj Amor, the head of the Popular Unity Party who won 0.31% of the 3,296,000 strong vote, and Abderrahman Tlili, of the Union Democratic Union movement who won 0.23% of the vote! In the parallel legislative elections, the RCD won outright in all 142 electoral districts but, under a 1998 constitutional amendment, 20% of the parliamentary seats (34 seats) have to be reserved to the opposition. As a result, alongside the RCD's 148 seats, the MDS won 13 seats, the UDU and the PUP seven each, with the remaining seven being shared between two smaller parties. In the municipal elections, held in May 2000, the RCD fielded 4,150 candidates in the 257 electoral districts, with the opposition parties only managing to field candidates in 100 constituencies.

The result today is that Ben Ali's Tunisia, despite its constitutional apparatus designed to nurture multi-party democracy, is an even more repressive society and polity than its predecessor. The regime itself, which bears the heavy personal imprint of the president, is obsessively concerned over security, particularly in view of recent developments in Sudan and Algeria. Its earlier anxieties about Arab nationalist radicalism fostered by Libya have been completely replaced by a psychotic fear of political Islam. As a result, it views virtually any dissent as motivated by disloyalty and religious obsession. Its own obsessions, however, mean that even secularist dissidence cannot be tolerated; the former minister and MDS leader, Mohammed Moada, was sentenced to 11 years in prison on trumped-up charges of

illegal money-dealing and collusion with a foreign power, and those who spoke up for him, such as the respected Khemis Chamari, now party leader, were also imprisoned. Considerable European governmental pressure was necessary to get the sentences cancelled. Mohammed Moada was, however, rearrested in June 2001 and not released again until January 2002.

Even intellectuals travelling abroad on academic business are subject to constraint, for their articles and contributions to academic conferences must be approved by the security services first and to voice any criticism of Tunisia abroad is construed to be treason. Yet the irony is that all this is completely unnecessary; Tunisians are not, generally speaking, profoundly ideologically committed and Tunisia's economic success since 1987 has aided the de-politicization of the population at large. Since 1987, the Tunisian government has followed a policy of economic liberalization and restructuring in accordance with IMF precepts to such an extent that it has earned plaudits from the European Union and multilateral organizations for its economic management. Tragically, though, its hopes of copying the Asian tigers are being vitiated by the apathy that continued political repression generates.

An even greater irony is that, with the renewed introduction of arbitrary power has come the same kind of governmental cronyism that had characterized the latter days of the Bourguiba regime. The President is, once again, surrounded by his own courtiers and clients, some of whom are actually in government. Many, however, are not, but instead populate the upper reaches of the economic system so that the transparency and accountability that should be the essential concomitant to economic liberalization is shrouded in the opaqueness of the new presidential patron-client system. And that, in turn, generates an ever-greater sense of elite isolation and popular mistrust. The Ben Ali regime, in short, is creating the very ogre it fears and, having dismantled all legitimate forms of opposition, will soon face the kinds of violent threat that have become all too familiar in neighbouring states.

2.4 Algeria

During the French occupation of Algeria there were several political movements dedicated to ending the French presence there. Some had a legal existence and others were clandestine. The advent of the FLN in 1954, however, marked the beginning of their disappearance. The FLN was not prepared to share political power during the revolution,[35] and after it, in 1962, first saw itself as the future political hegemon and subsequently was subordinated to the needs of the presidency as Algeria's single political party. This position was substantially maintained up to 1988, although opposition movements were formed abroad and, after 1980, even in Algeria itself.

In 1963, the FFS was formed, as part of the unsuccessful, Kabyle-based rebellion against the Ben Bella presidency. It, however, had to maintain its activities abroad, with clandestine support inside the country, mainly in Kabylia. Adopting a socialist ideology,[36] it was eventually to become Algeria's delegate in the Second Socialist International, alongside European socialist and social-democratic parties. In 1966, the old Algerian Communist Party, originally an offshoot of the French Communist Party, was reformed as an authentically Algerian movement, called the Parti de l'Avant-Garde Socialiste (PAGS). It existed in secret inside Algeria, influencing the left wing of the FLN alongside the few clandestine Ba'ath

[35] See, Harbi, M., *La guerre commence en Algérie*, Brussels: Editions Complexe, 1984, for a history of the pre-1954 period, especially pp.144-51 for the role of the FLN.

[36] See, Front des forces socialistes, L'alternative démocratique révolutionnaire à la catastrophe nationale: avant-project de plate-forme politique, March 1979 [unpublished document]

supporters in the country, and was to play a key role in unleashing the 1988 riots. Finally, in 1982, the by then exiled former president, Ahmad Ben Bella, created the Mouvement pour la démocratie en Algérie (MDA). It had no place inside Algeria, however, until 1988.[37]

There were other movements as well. Some of these derived from the April 1980 riots in Kabylia over linguistic and cultural freedom, which soon became a wider call for freedom of expression throughout the country. The Berber cultural movement soon generated an ostensibly non-political movement, Les Enfants de Chouhada, which acted as a constant reproach to the Algerian presidency for its failure to match the political aspirations of the original revolution and powerfully fed popular discontent from a secular, nationalist point of view. In response, the Algerian authorities encouraged an Islamic movement, based on the old al-Qiyam movement, which was tied to the Arabization of cultural life in Algeria against the Berbers. This, however, escaped their control, yielding both the mass protest movement that was to emerge in major Algerian towns after 1986 and the more violent rejectionist movement of Mustapha Bouyali in the late 1980s. It was this inchoate Islamist movement that was to emerge in an organized fashion after 1988 as the Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) and capture the political scene in the new, multiparty political environment encouraged by the presidency after the October riots.

Indeed, the countrywide riots of October 1988, which represented a massive rejection of government, were apparently instigated by clandestine elements of the extreme left within the ruling FLN party. The riots were linked to the illegal but unofficially tolerated PAGS, which organized strikes in major factories in the Algiers area. The masses of unemployed and under-employed youth in Algiers joined the demonstrations, which then degenerated into riots, and a virtual insurrection then spread throughout the country. The Islamists appeared only in the latter stages of the unrest but, because of vigorous military repression, came to symbolize the sacrifices of the population as a whole and thereby gained massive popular respect. In addition, the Chadli Bendjedid regime, seeking a new mode of maintaining itself in power, decided to begin a more thoroughgoing restructuring of the economy and to revise Algeria’s political structures. A multiparty constitution was introduced in 1989. At that point political parties were allowed to emerge – by the end of 1990 there were over 40 of them – and restrictions on freedom of expression were lifted. The presidency then sought to control a multiparty political system by ensuring that no one party would be powerful enough to obtain a hegemonic control over the political scene and, with this end in mind, encouraged the new Islamist movement against the FLN.

At the same time, another profound change was made in Algeria’s constitutional structure. Ever since independence, the Algerian army, created during the war and based in Morocco and Tunisia because of French measures to keep it out of Algeria itself, had been the essential guarantor both of the country’s revolutionary legacy and of the particular regime in power. Indeed, it actually overthrew the Ben Bella regime in 1965 when Houari Boumediène, then army commander, came to power as president. Following his premature death in December 1978, the army ensured that the next most senior officer, Chadli Bendjedid, should replace him as president. In short, the army continued as the power behind the scenes within the regime and the senior army command acted decisively both in political and in military roles up to 1988. As a result of the 1988 riots, the presidency was able to persuade the army command to withdraw from political life. As part of the new quasi-democratic system it

[37] Garcon, J., La vie politique algérienne: bouleversements après 25 ans d’immobilisme, in Lacoste, C. and Lacoste, Y. (eds), *L’etat du Maghreb*, Casablanca: Editions Le Fennec, 1991, pp. 383-7

wished to create under its own aegis, the presidency itself would provide the guarantees of continuity and control that had originally been the army's prerogative. The presidency was also able to exploit political divisions inside Algeria, which emerged in the wake of the liberalization introduced after the 1988 riots, to try to assure its own dominant role in the developing political process. A key element in this was to be Algeria's long-standing Islamist movement, which divided into three major factions, the FIS movement itself, which was legalized in March 1989, and two other Islamist movements also registered as legal parties.

However, the FIS registered a crushing victory over the FLN in municipal elections in June 1990 and further success in legislative elections 18 months later. The FIS won 188 of the available 232 seats in the National Assembly outright in the first stage of a two-stage election, and was expected to win eventual control of the Assembly, although compared with the municipal elections its share of the votes cast had dropped significantly and its share of the overall available votes had fallen to only 25% of the total. Nonetheless, it was clear that the FIS would be able to form a government and, much to the anxiety of the regime, it threatened, too, to call for an Islamic state in Algeria. As a result, in the aftermath of the first round of the electoral process in December 1991, the army intervened and simply aborted the electoral process, turned out the president and appointed its own collective presidency. The army also turned against the FIS, determined to eradicate it from political and social life. By March 1992, the FIS had been declared illegal and, by the middle of the year, there were isolated outbreaks of violence. Within the year, the violence had become widespread and extended to urban areas, with the Islamist opposition controlling considerable areas of the country.

Violence, in any case, was eventually to become the currency of real political debate in Algeria, both for the governing regime and for the clandestine opposition derived from the FIS. One reason for the rapid spread of violence was simply that the new regime that was imposed by the army on Algeria had little legitimacy in the popular view, particularly after the first head of the collective presidency, Mohamed Boudiaf, was assassinated in June 1992. He had been brought back to Algeria, after living in exile since 1963, as one of the last representatives of the historical leadership of the FLN that had won the war of independence. His death was particularly shocking since there was considerable evidence that elements of the military security service were implicated in it. In fact, the new regime was considered by most Algerians to be illegitimate for a host of reasons. First, not only did its creation breach the most elementary principles of state legitimacy but it also represented a continuity of privilege by a self-replicating elite. Second, that elite was popularly believed to have enriched itself illegally during the 1980s and to have created a shadowy system of informal power to protect its gains, linked to elements within the army. Third, it was also strongly represented in the French-educated and French-speaking elite, which had maintained its links with France during the period of independence and was thus seen as a Francophile fifth column inside Algerian life.

The acquisition of presidential power by Liamine Zeroual in February 1994 did little to resolve this conflict. He sought a negotiated solution to the growing crisis of violence but was constrained by his more radical colleagues such as the army chief-of-staff, General Mohamed Lamari and the ubiquitous Sécurité Militaire. Even the presidential elections in November 1995 did not substantially improve the situation, for, although the President won a handsome majority, his election was generally interpreted as a call for a negotiated solution. Since then the President and the army have excluded the Islamists from any solution, attempting to set up a system of a strong presidential regime whose actions are sanctioned by legislative

assemblies made up of representatives who exercise no power, although they do provide an arena for a significant degree of genuine debate.

Other legal opposition parties have suffered significant hostility from the regime for their combined position of opposition to this project of what is known in Algeria as "façade democracy", because it is designed to create a democratic illusion behind which the power of the army-backed regime will be ever more firmly entrenched. In January 1995, the majority of the other legal political parties met the exiled FIS leadership and drew up a programme to bring the Algerian crisis to an end, under the auspices of the Sant' Egidio community in Rome and with the support of the leadership of the FIS still inside Algeria. The proposed programme of negotiation and a government of national unity was denounced and rejected by the Algerian presidency. Instead, the presidency organized presidential elections and, at the start of June 1997, held elections under a new constitutional political system in which it had the upper hand, in effect destroying any genuinely democratic option. The new system provided for direct parliamentary elections but denied the directly elected chamber of the Algerian National Assembly any substantive legislative power. This was reserved for a new and appointed upper chamber which is controlled by the presidency,[38] so that the apparently multi-party political system merely camouflages what was, in effect, a presidential dictatorship supported by a new political party, the RND or Rassemblement Nationale Démocratique. This was created in a matter of months from former single party organizations originally associated with the FLN and state functionaries. The RND was created specifically to replace the FLN which was then in disarray, split between radicals and conservatives, with the radicals favouring opposition and the conservatives seeking to support the government.

It was the RND that was the major victor in the parliamentary and municipal elections in 1997. This led to claims of vote rigging which the authorities roundly denied, with the tacit support of election monitors who had not, however, been able to police the electoral process adequately. The tensions worsened after the municipal elections in October 1997, in which the regime was accused of widespread electoral fraud and where the Rassemblement Culturel et Démocratique and the FFS were among its most vocal critics. Little has changed in the political situation in Algeria in subsequent years, despite a fraudulent presidential election in April 1999[39] and new legislative elections in May 2002, which were intended to restore the regime's tattered legitimacy. They did little to this end, not least because the FFS and the Rassemblement Culturel et Démocratique boycotted them in protest at official repression in Kabylia a year before and at the government's failure to meet Kabyli demands for political autonomy and the recognition of Berber languages as official languages, alongside Arabic, in the Algerian constitution.

Nevertheless, the elections were held on 30 May 2002 despite the Kabyle boycott, but did little to achieve their ostensible purpose. The electoral turnout only reached 46% – the lowest it has ever been – and in Kabylia it was even lower, at 1.85% of the electorate. Only 20% of

[38] Professional bodies indirectly elect two-thirds of the new chamber and the remaining third is appointed by the presidency. The upper chamber, the Senate, must also pass all legislation proposed to it by the lower house, the Assemblé Populaire Nationale, by a two-thirds majority for it to become law.

[39] President Bouteflika was the preferred candidate of the generals and had been Algerian foreign minister for 14 years, between 1965 and 1979. Although the outgoing president, Liamine Zerouel, had promised that the elections for his successor would be "free and fair", they were marked by massive fraud organized by the army and the regime. As a result, six of the seven presidential candidates stood down the night before the election and only 23% of the electorate turned out to vote. Bouteflika obtained less than half the vote and has thus been elected by less than 10% of the electorate, undermining any claims to popular legitimacy.

Algerians living abroad bothered to vote. The results were also peculiar in that the former presidential party, the RND, failed miserably, only winning 48 seats compared with the 155 seats it had held before, whilst its rival and former single political party, the FLN – now apparently restored to presidential favour – obtained 199 seats in the 389-seat assembly, thus becoming, in effect, the single hegemonic regime party once again. The Islamist parties, some of which had participated in governmental coalitions, also did badly, seeing their total drop by 21 seats, with the HMI obtaining only 38 seats and an-Nahda getting only a single seat. Al-Islah on the other hand, in a personal vote for Shaykh Djaballah, won 43 seats and immediately made it clear that it would move into opposition to the FLN-dominated government. The other surprise was that the Parti Travailliste (PT), a Trotskyite movement led by the charismatic female politician, Louisa Hanoune, obtained 21 seats and also made it clear that it would oppose the government, particularly on issues of economic reform.

There are thus now three genuine opposition parties in Algeria – the FFS, although it now has no seats in parliament, having boycotted the elections, the PT and al-Islah. The Rassemblement Culturel et Démocratique, which had been in the government coalition until the crisis in Kabylia, would dearly like to rejoin it, so that its position within the opposition is uncertain. Yet, in reality, what the political parties and the parliament decide is marginal to the real political process in Algeria, for government, in the end, depends on *le pouvoir* or *les decideurs*, as Algerians say; on presidential favour which in turn depends on army approval. The regime, in short, ultimately depends on the army for its survival and thus rejects any role for an independent political or judicial system. Its power is thus purely arbitrary and, in the atmosphere of continuing crisis inside the country, offers little protection to the population as a whole from the depredations of the clandestine Islamist opposition or the repression controlled by the army command. The security forces themselves are thus a dominant part of the struggle for influence within the regime, as the normal sanctions of the legal and parliamentary system over state action continue to be suspended in the name of the wider struggle.[40]

2.5 Morocco

Morocco's political parties derive, as is the case with Tunisia and Algeria, from the colonial period and the struggle for independence. The first sign of such activity emerged in 1925, in the wake of the Rif War,[41] with the founding of a political society in Fes by Allal al-Fassi and others who had been inspired by the Salafiyya movement.[42] The movement became overtly political during the campaign against the *dahir berbère* – an attempt by the French administration of the Protectorate to provide Berbers with a separate legal status and thus split the nascent Moroccan nation – in 1930. It came to maturity, however, after 1944 with

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[40] An excellent insight into the complexities of Algerian party politics is provided by Quandt, W., *Between Ballots and Bullets: Algeria's Transition from Authoritarianism*, Washington DC: Brookings, 1998, even if the conclusion has not yet been realized!

[41] The Rif War was a crucial event in the French and Spanish Protectorates in Morocco, and alerted the sultanate to the danger of political alternatives, should it not eventually espouse the nascent nationalist movement. See Pennell, C.R., *A Country with a Government and a Flag: The Rif War in Morocco 1921-1926*, Wisbech: Menas Press, 1986

[42] The *Salafiyya* movement, initiated by Jala al-Afghani in the 1860s, was an attempt to respond to modernity by seeking philosophical justification and inspiration from Islam for the institutions – democracy, rule-of-law – that it required. It acted as the major inspiration for all the early nationalists in North Africa. See, for example, Halstead, J.P. *Rebirth of a Nation: The Origins and Rise of Moroccan Nationalism, 1912-1944*, Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 1969, and Rezette, R., *Les parties politiques marocains*, Paris: Armand Colin, 1955

the founding of Istiqlal and the endorsement of the nationalist project for independence by the sultan, Mohammed V. After independence had been negotiated, however, the movement split into nationalist and socialist wings, partly as a result of royal pressure, thus generating the modern Hizb Istiqlal and its leftwing political offshoot, the Union Nationale des Forces Populaires (UNFP). This pattern of fragmentation, accompanied by the creation of pro-royalist political vehicles, was to mark the subsequent development of party politics in Morocco.

In effect, the period of independence has been marked by the problem of finding an appropriate political structure to allow Morocco to evolve towards a modernized economy despite massive demographic pressure. King Muhammad V died unexpectedly in 1961, to be replaced by his son, Hassan II, who had already made his mark by subjugating a rebellion in the Rif in 1958. The new king faced a country of growing political tensions: as mentioned above, Istiqlal, the national liberation movement, had split in 1958; other political currents had begun to emerge; and dissatisfaction with worsening economic conditions fuelled popular discontent, despite the government's commitment to liberal economic policies. In 1965 there were serious riots in Marrakesh which were subdued with considerable brutality, and in 1971 and 1972 attempts, organized by the then defence minister General Oufkir, were made to overthrow the king. In 1973 UNFP was accused of colluding with Algeria and of organizing a bombing campaign and a rural rebellion at Goulmima in the High Atlas. In 1974, there were widespread arrests of members of the clandestine Front Populaire, a left-wing radical organization linked to universities.

The government responded to these developments, first with new constitutional proposals in 1972 for a degree of political participation and then with an attempt to create national unity in 1974 by demanding the return of the Western Sahara, claimed by Spain in 1884 and under Spanish administration since 1934, despite the existence there of an indigenous national liberation movement, the Polisario Front. Popular support for the claim was massive and the political parties were brought on board by a promise of a restored multi-party political system. In November 1975, a mass rally of 350,000 Moroccans paved the way for a joint Moroccan/Mauritanian occupation of the Western Sahara and the start of two decades of strife over the territory.

Although Mauritania was forced out of the region by the Polisario Front, with Algerian backing, in 1979, Morocco recovered from its early reverses at the start of the 1980s and eventually agreed to a cease-fire supervised by the UN in 1991. It was only in October 1997 that, under pressure from the UN special envoy, former US Secretary of State James Baker, the two sides agreed to the terms under which a referendum for self-determination (which Morocco was determined to win or prevent) should be held in 1998. This has, however, still not been held and a new autonomy plan has been proposed instead – the issue is still a political touchstone in Morocco and all political movements are united around the government's policy of retaining control of the region.

Formal multi-party democracy was restored, first through municipal and then through legislative elections, in November 1976 and June 1977 respectively. The unicameral democratic system was, however, maintained under strict royal control and a parallel system of political repression ensured social calm. The dominant opposition parties were Istiqlal and the Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP), a further offshoot of the old UNFP, which, in the mid-1980s, split yet again to generate the pro-royalist Union Constitutionel

(UC).[43] The UC, which under Maati Bouabid became the government party, was partnered by a group of pro-royalist parties including the Rassemblement National des Independents (RNI) under the king's brother-in-law, Ahmed Osman, and the Mouvement Populaire (MP), under Mohamed Aherdane, which was a rural-based and pro-Berberist party. Royal anxieties ensured that the USFP and Istiqlal were excluded from government, although in a typical co-optive move their leaders were incorporated into the king's advisory council.

The next two decades were marked by the effective subordination of party politics to royal control as economic restructuring was undertaken after 1983 – at significant social cost, however. In June 1981, riots in Casablanca claimed over 600 lives, and countrywide disturbances in January 1984, as a result of the removal of consumer price subsidies, cost another 170 deaths and thousands were imprisoned. Again, in December 1990, there were major riots in Fes, occasioned by poverty and price inflation. It was clear from 1984 onwards that the government would have to respond to these social tensions either by allowing for increased political participation by the parties in the process of government or in increased repression. The problem was that the parties were not considered by the king to be mature enough to discharge their political responsibilities in an appropriate fashion, so reform was delayed until the December 1990 riots. Indeed, the latter incidents coincided with a political and diplomatic event that ushered in the latest stage in Morocco's path towards a more equitable polity and society.

In the wake of the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait the previous August, King Hassan had condemned the Saddam Hussain regime and offered support to the Multi-National Coalition created by the United States under United Nations auspices. In this respect, he was merely following established Moroccan policy which has always sought to support Western interests in the region and in the Middle East. Popular opinion, however, was resolutely against such an intervention and the king rapidly altered his position. Declaring that, "our head is in the Gulf but our heart lies with Iraq", he ensured that Moroccan forces would not participate in the attack on Kuwait in February 1991 and agreed to a massive demonstration of support for Iraq.

A process of cautious liberalization had already begun in the late 1980s, as far as the press was concerned, and in the wake of this incident it was widened. At the same time, criticism in Europe persuaded the king that wholesale support for respect for human rights and the rule of law was a better option than traditional repression. By the start of the 1990s, Amnesty International was able to report a significant improvement in the human rights situation in Morocco, with at least three local human rights organizations in operation (Amnesty itself has just opened a regional office in Casablanca) and with an active and critical press, free of most obvious restraints. The king also realized that, for the dynasty to survive, the monarchy had to be constitutionalized and removed from the party political arena. Unless these developments occurred, the continued stress caused by economic reform would not be contained and the political balance in the country - based on evolution and preservation of existing socio-political structures - would be unsettled. The state of his own health made it necessary, as well, to construct a transitional process for the effective accession of his son, Sidi Mohamed, as king in the future.

[43] The original "parti cocotte-minute" – a derisive term used for parties created to serve as vehicles for the interests of the Royal Palace

These requirements were completed formally in September 1996, when constitutional amendments were approved by referendum. At the same time, long-standing abuses of the electoral system were addressed by a new electoral law and the creation of multi-party commissions to oversee the future electoral process. In addition, progress was made on resolving the Sahara issue and Morocco embraced the European Union's ambitious Euro-Mediterranean Partnership Initiative, which seeks to create, by 2010, a single economic area in the Mediterranean basin tied to Europe. Even though this process will involve further economic restructuring and short-term difficulties, the Moroccan government is prepared to accept this because of the implications of political and economic linkage with Europe as a guarantor of its own stability. The new electoral process was begun in June 1997 with municipal elections, and legislative elections took place in November 1997. This was the opportunity for the political opposition to achieve power and escape from their decades-long political marginalization.

The Moroccan constitution, as amended in 1992 and 1996, provides for a cycle of elections every six years to a bicameral parliament. The upper chamber of this parliament, the Majlis al-Mustasharin (Chamber of Councillors), is indirectly elected by the municipalities, trades unions and professional organizations, whilst the lower chamber, the Majlis an-Nawwab (Chamber of Deputies), is elected by universal suffrage on the basis of a first past the post system. Although legislation is originated in the executive lower chamber, the advisory upper chamber can override its decisions and dismiss the government by a two-thirds majority vote. The largest party in the lower chamber has the right to nominate a prime minister and to select a government, although the final decision on this is subject to royal approval (the king presides over the council of ministers). The legislative elections are usually preceded by municipal and professional organization elections.

This electoral process came into operation for the first time in 1997, partly to counter the disappointments caused by the 1993 electoral process. In addition, its purpose was to obviate the electoral manipulation of the past and revive popular support for the democratic process, as part of the preparations made for the end of King Hassan's long reign and the new circumstances that will face his successor. Previous elections have provided for direct elections for two-thirds of a 330-seat single chamber parliament, with indirect elections used to fill the remaining third of the seats. Up to then, elections had usually been marked by significant official interference, with the result that the major centre-left, left and nationalist political parties had been excluded from government for the previous 25 years. This manipulation of the electoral results had been undertaken by the ministry of the interior, under Driss Basri - a former police inspector from Settat - who had been minister since the late 1970s and was removed from office only upon King Hassan's death in 2000. It had been typically applied at the *proces verbal* (vote count) stage of the electoral process. It had been amplified by local manipulation, either by the process of buying votes or by administrative interference with *qaids* - rural administrative officers appointed by the ministry of the interior in Rabat - instructing their *shaykhs* and *naibs* (local administrative personnel chosen from amongst tribal notables) to ensure that a particular candidate received the votes of their clients.

The king had promised that the June 1993 legislative elections would be "free and fair" as part of the process of political transparency and liberalization that was undertaken after the Iraq-Kuwait crisis. To a large extent this was the case as far as the direct elections were concerned and the USFP-Istiqlal alliance won 101 seats, as compared with the pro-royalist conservative alliance, known as the Wifaq (the Entente) and dominated by the UC and the

MP, which won 88 seats. The centrist RNI took 28 of the remaining 31 seats. The USFP-Istiqlal alliance was known as the Koutla (the Bloc - a name redolent with nationalist associations since it was the name of the first nationalist movement in the 1930s), and also included Morocco's communist party, the Parti du Progrès et Socialisme (PPS), the irredentist UNFP and the extremist Organisation de l'Action Démocratique et Populaire (OADP) which derived from the clandestine Front Progressiste of the mid-1970s.

The USFP, having won 49 seats, would have been expected to win the right to form the government. However, in the subsequent indirect elections, held in September 1993, the UC ended up, against all expectations, with an outright majority - to howls of abuse directed against the interior minister who was believed to have rigged the results. The press was particularly vitriolic and it was a measure of the changed circumstances that the interior minister was not able to repress the adverse reaction but was forced to plead his case in parliament. King Hassan attempted to broker a deal which would have given the opposition parties a majority and thus control of government, but was unable to accept their demand that he abandon the interior minister and also hand over the defence and justice portfolios to them - he had kept them in his personal gift as guarantor, he explained, of the constitution.

The result was that, between 1994 and the elections in November 1997, Morocco was ruled by what was effectively a technocratic government designated by the King, and the anticipated political evolution towards a constitutional monarchy was blocked. King Hassan had made it clear that he sought a solution based on "alternance" or "bipolar democracy", in which the two major blocs would alternate in government on the basis of their electoral support - resembling the British system. However, his attachment to the interior minister had blocked all attempts at political reform along such lines. The constitutional amendment in 1996, therefore, was essentially a device to breach the stalemate by allowing new elections earlier than provided for in the constitution in which the mistakes of the past could be overcome.

The November 1997 legislative elections were thus vitally important and the June municipal elections provided a guide as to what might be expected. These were generally reckoned to have been relatively free and fair, although there was plenty of evidence of local vote-buying and the left-wing Koutla did less well than expected, gaining only 32% of the vote, with the Wifaq winning 30% and the centrist parties, led by the RNI, winning 26%. It was expected, however, to do far better in the legislative elections. However, just as the electoral campaign was due to open, it was announced that the Istiqlal, the second most important component of the alliance, had decided to leave the Koutla and fight the election under its own banner. Although the alliance had been somewhat unnatural, since the USFP used an aggressively secular and socialist rhetoric whilst Istiqlal was primarily concerned with the nationalist and Arabo-Islamic dimension, and the two parties had been allied largely for reasons of common historic origin, its collapse should have favoured the pro-royalist groups and thus perpetuated their dominance of the governmental process, despite the king's anxiety for "alternance".

However, nothing in Moroccan politics is simple and rumours soon emerged that the UC might now seek to join the USFP-led alliance instead. Although, in the end, this did not happen, it would have been one way of guaranteeing the alliance electoral victory and thus saving the king's political project. Alongside this was the fact that the cause of the original crisis, Driss Basri, had comprehensively rehabilitated himself and recovered his original dominance within the political system. The USFP leadership, under Abderrahmane Youssefi, abandoned its opposition to him, as did the PPS and the OADP. Driss Basri, in his new guise

as constitutional politician (and, of course, as guarantor of the monarch's interests in this new and untried political arena) oversaw the legislative preparations for the elections and also monitored the party-controlled commissions in charge of drawing up new electoral lists and a new electoral law for it.

In the event, the outcome of the direct elections for the lower house of the Moroccan parliament was more or less in line with the results of the municipal elections, although the turnout, at 58.3%, was very low by Moroccan standards. In part, this was certainly due to voter apathy, given the disillusion felt by many with the Moroccan political scene. Moroccan political parties tend to be gerontocratic, in that the leaderships often stretch back to the struggle for independence and thus younger politicians feel frustrated and disillusioned. Furthermore, few of them have developed effective political programmes - a measure of the heavy hand that the monarchy has exercised over the political process for decades. In addition, only one of them (the PPS, now renamed the PRP) - before the elections, at least - had actually held a party congress at which the collective view of the party could be heard. Istiqlal was to do this after the elections, as a result of its poor showing and demands for leadership change. Their behaviour in previous parliaments had not always impressed the wider public because of the impotent squabbling in which they often engaged. The low voter turnout was, however, explained by other observers, somewhat cynically, as an indication of the degree of ballot rigging that had occurred in the past.

There was, however, a general feeling that the central authorities, at least, had not interfered in the electoral process and that the King's promise had been met. Unfortunately, this was not so true at the local level, where there were many complaints of vote buying and coercion by local notables determined to be elected and thus preserve the traditional hierarchies of power, particularly in rural areas and in small urban centres. Nonetheless, the population at large generally accepted the outcome of the elections.

The indirect elections for the new 270-seat upper house took place on 5 December 1997 and their outcome made it clear that the new government would be based on a coalition between the parties, since it was the centre-right that dominated the result. The Centrists won 90 seats, with the RNI capturing 42 of them. The Wifaq won 76 seats, with the UC taking 28 and the MP 27. The Koutla, however, did badly, winning only 44 seats. The balance was made up of 33 deputies from smaller parties and 27 reserved seats for the trade unions. In large measure, this voting pattern is traditional, although it must also be realized that the authorities have far greater influence over the indirect electorate and it is also possible that these elections were used to create the kind of political balance with which the Royal Palace could live.

The new government, when it was announced on 14 March 1998, over a month after the new prime minister had been appointed, reflected this complex set of objectives. "Alternance" was achieved by the appointment of the veteran USFP leader, Aberrahmane Youssoufi, as premier. Continuity was guaranteed by the Koutla's acceptance of the continuation of Driss Basri in office as interior minister, as well as its willingness to accept that the King should - because of his role as *khalifa* and thus above secular law - maintain his prerogative over the justice and *habous* (Islamic affairs) portfolios. In addition, the new governing coalition also ceded control over the foreign affairs portfolio as the price for acceding to power. In fact, all four portfolios were retained by their occupants under the previous administration. The defence portfolio also remained with its previous occupant.

Continuity was also ensured by the inclusion of members of four centrist parties in the new government. The RNI, as expected, picked up six portfolios and the MNP and the FFD each obtained two, whilst the PSD obtained only one. Although this meant that the option of a government of national unity had been avoided - as would have been the case, had the Wifaq been included in the coalition - it did ensure that that consensus within the Moroccan political elite (a major and enduring objective of Moroccan political culture albeit a little difficult to square with the normative objectives of Western-style representative democracy) was maintained. In essence, the established power centres of the Moroccan polity, whether in the economic or social sphere, could rest assured that their interests would not be ignored in the new government's policies. The same principles were applied to the organization of the new parliamentary body, now bicameral rather than unicameral, as had been the case before.

New elections are due in Morocco in September 2002, under the new king, Mohammed VI. Interestingly enough, there have been no constitutional changes since the last in 1996, nor have the political parties undergone significant development. Disappointment with the achievements of the USFP-led coalition government is rife and Istiqlal is expected to do better than in the past. The most striking feature of the Moroccan political scene, however, is the way in which opposition parties have so clearly demonstrated their desire for power on essentially the same terms as the parties that they oppose. Royal hegemony over the political process remains complete, not because of repression or co-option, as in Egypt, Tunisia or Algeria, for the electoral process in Morocco is effectively free and fair, but because party desire for power overrides ideological principle and because consensus is still a more highly prized political value. Thus, even in an appropriate political climate, political opposition in North Africa is a contingent factor that is still subject to political culture. Only, perhaps, in the case of the Islamist parties does this not apply and – even then - the lure of participation in formal power can often prove irresistible, to the detriment of principle.

3 A Tentative Conclusion

Against this background, formal political opposition inside a structured democratic system of the kind found in Europe or America is unlikely to emerge in North Africa in the near future. This is not merely because of political manipulation, although in four of the five countries discussed above, this is an irresistible conclusion. There is a further factor that often encourages political opposition parties to connive in the process of supporting established political systems, which deny them their "proper" roles - proper, at least, in the sense that those roles are understood by Western democratic systems. This factor is one that arises from indigenous political culture, and which regimes exploit effectively to reduce the tensions caused by their authoritarian attitudes. It is that, in North Africa, as in much of the Islamic world, a high premium is placed on social and political consensus and of collective consultation.

These values are inherent in Islamic culture and run counter to those of contestation and confrontation that inform most democratic systems. It is often difficult, therefore, for North African politicians to contemplate the apparently radical oppositions of the typical Western democratic model - whether the radicalism is rhetoric or substantive. Regimes are well aware of these inherent cultural tendencies and exploit them very well to solidify political support around a common consensual base, as evinced by the use of the National Charter in Algeria in 1978 and in Tunisia ten years later. They are reinforced by another tendency of political leaderships in North Africa, whereby authoritarianism is cloaked by a process of mediation within the political system between different political interests and trends. Thus the state's

paternalism hides its authoritarian intent and reinforces those values of consultation and consensus that resonate to basic cultural assumptions.

The real question, then, is how long such mechanisms can be used to conceal the very real problems of governance that North African states face, and which it should be the task of political opposition movements to highlight and seek to correct. In fact, the radical currents dynamizing these societies, linked to their internal economic and political failures as well as to an intrusive external world, suggest that this old model, which also implies political stagnation, cannot endure. If it does not evolve into something more operational that generates perceptible results in terms of changes in popular participation and inclusion in the political process, the danger is that the violent alternative will be all that is left. And that, too, of course, is part of a political tradition in the Muslim world and has also developed its new patterns of expression! It is, perhaps, for that reason above all others that outside powers have an acute interest in the fostering of viable and appropriate political opposition inside North African states, even if that might disturb illusions of short-term stability. Unfortunately, neither Europe nor the United States seems to be prepared to consider what that might mean!

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