

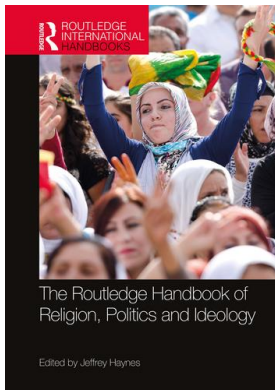
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### Islamism from piety politics to party politics

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# 8

## ISLAMISM FROM PIETY POLITICS TO PARTY POLITICS

*Roel Meijer*

### Introduction

In this chapter, I will analyse the ideological transformation of Islamism during its politicization over the past century. Islamism or political Islam emerged with the foundation of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in 1928. Its branches later spread to Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and Kuwait in the Mashreq; from the 1970s, the organization had counterparts in Morocco, Algeria, Libya and especially Tunisia. My main argument is that the term “political Islam” is a misnomer. Although Islamism laid claim to being political and this process started in the 1930s, only in the 1980s did its politicization developed in earnest, when Islamist movements established political parties and severed their ties with their movements. Political Islam started out as a social movement focused on spreading the word and organizing Muslims in a society (*jama'a*) in order to live according to God’s word (McCarthy 2018, 5). It is not that the movement eschewed power, but it was not focused on gaining power either; until the 1980s, it did not have an analysis of power and did not develop a strategy on how to gain it or how to wield it. Its goal was to gradually Islamize society in response to secularization. Only after it became a social force to be reckoned with and drew the attention of the powers that be (Mitchell 1994, 12) did it start to act politically. For countries in the Middle East, modern politics with its mass mobilization, elections and parliaments was quite new at the time. The confusion in the West about the nature of Islamism derives from its *claim* that Islam is a “comprehensive system” (*shumuliyya*), covering all aspects of life, personal, social, economic *and* political. Islamism assumes that Islam is a “complete system” (*nizam kamil*) and that if believers follow Islam, they will produce a perfect society. This idea is expressed in the well-known dictum “Islam is religion and state” (*al-islam din wa dawla*) (Mitchell 1994, 14; Al-Anani 2016, 54–6, 111–13; Kandil 2015, 85–6; Conduit, 2019, 45). Its translation to a populist electoral slogan in the 1980s was that “Islam is the solution” (*al-islam huwa al-hall*). This ideological claim has been called “totalitarian” (Mozaffari 2007; Soage 2008), but perhaps a better, more neutral term, coined by Shepard, is “Islamic totalism” (1987, 307–8). Entertaining a moralistic, idealistic, even utopian notion of politics based on individual and collective virtue was the foundation of Islamism. The main function of the Islamic state was to uphold and enforce this moral order. In fact, Islamism’s emphasis on faith, unity and harmony, and its condemnation of strife (*fitna*) and conflict and its rejection of finding ways of solving a clash of interests would be considered by political philosophers as Mouffe (1993, 4) and Lefort (1981, 85–106) as

“politicide” (Meijer 2017; Meijer 2012c). Others like Saba Mahmoud call it “embodied politics” (Mahmoud 2012). But the nature of this type of politics is that it reduces political, economic and social issues to a religious identity and morality. As a consequence, political opponents are regarded as sinners and religious deviationists (*munharifun*) rather than representatives of different political views (Kandil 2015, 49–50). It was only after parliamentary politics, formerly condemned as partisanship or “partyism” (*hizbiyya*), was accepted that politics came to be valued in its own right. Indeed, this step marked for Islamism a revolutionary transition from a utopian notion of politics as an ideal to the recognition of politics as a separate field and the acceptance of formal politics. To adjust to the new situation, Islamism not only had to end its dichotomous concept of the world, redefine its enemies and friends, draw up feasible political programmes and enter alliances with the “lesser enemy”, it also had to rethink Islam and the doctrine of its comprehensiveness. This entailed a major ideological shift to an ethical concept of Islam as providing guidelines to live by, the so-called principles of Islamic law (*maqasid al-shari‘a*).

One of the main results of Islamism’s claim to comprehensiveness was the tension between its origin as a piety movement, its political claims and the seeking of power and its option of using violence. While the flexibility to use all three instruments at the same time led neutral researchers to point out the movement’s deep ambiguity (Al-Anani 2016, 60, 111; Kandil 2015, 43–47; McCarthy 2018, 3–6; Meijer 2012b/c; Wegner 2011, 64–8; Wickham 2013, 14, 132–144), its critics have accused it of wilfully developing a “double discourse”, an uncompromising religious one for the members of the movement and a democratic one for outsiders (Meijer 2012a). However, this tension was not limited to outsiders. Recent research has demonstrated that it has also led to severe tensions within the movement between, on the one hand, the partisans of political participation and, on the other hand, the proponents of the gradual Islamization of society (Marks 2014, 17; McCarthy 2018).

In the first part of this chapter, I will show how the Muslim Brotherhood has turned Islam into an ideology through its doctrine of comprehensiveness (*shumuliyya*) and how this was reflected in its formation of a collective identity. In the second part, I will trace the politicization of Islamism and its gradual opening up to political ideas, a discourse of rights, cross-ideological alliances and democracy. Finally, I will look into the post-Islamism debate.

### The ideologization and mobilization of religion

It is the ideological character of Islamism that makes Islamism modern. Its leaders were not part of the *ulema* who are trained specialists in the complexities of jurisprudence (*fiqh*) but were laymen who took up Islam in order to instruct the population to cope with the challenges the modern world posed. Islamism finds its background in the decline of traditionalism, the emergence of the public sphere, open debate, contestation, mass movements, the end of the Ottoman caliphate in 1924 and the rise of the modern state and its capacity to regulate society. As Rachik points out, the ideologization of religion entails selectively choosing Islamic terms and using them as “tools” and “ideological weapons” in order to bring coherence to the otherwise complex text and adjust it to inspire and mobilize a following (2009, 354). Ideologies are simplifications of religions and function as maps in a modern world. According to Freedon, ideologies have their own rules. They consist of core concepts, which, together with their components and adjacent and peripheral concepts, build a solid structure and morphology that must be convincing through a mixture of cultural and logical elements (1994). The core concept of the Muslim Brotherhood is the virtuous community. Its goal is to establish an Islamic moral order and to protect Islam against the Western economic, political and cultural onslaught by calling in the help of the state, which together with Islamic law are adjacent concepts. In this sense, the state

is an instrument in the service of the ideologization of the community and politics: a means to enforce that moral order, not an independent field where conflicts in society are solved.

Officially the doctrine of the comprehensive system was launched during the fifth congress of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1939, where its founder Hasan al-Banna (1906–49) stated,

We believe that [the] rules and teachings of Islam are comprehensive in organizing people's affairs in this life and the next, and that those who believe that these teachings only cover worship and spiritual matters are mistaken. Islam is a belief and worship; homeland and citizenship; religion and state; spirituality and practice; revelation and sword.

(Kandil, 2015, 85–6)

This was also how the Tunisian Islamist movement started out 50 years later (McCarthy 2018, 15, 27). In 1979, its leader Rachid Ghannouchi stated, “Islam is not just spiritual *da'wa* but creed, and worship, and a comprehensive political system which does not differentiate between the material and the spiritual” (McCarthy 2018, 37).

But ideology is not just limited to a set of ideas and values or a world view, especially in a social movement. Islamism is also a practice and conduct. As recent research of its organizational structure and membership has made clear, they extend to the creation of a collective identity and the disciplining and socialization of members into an organization (McCarthy 2018, 96–112; Al-Anani 2016, 34–49; Kandil 2015, 5–47). Their function is to create an ideal Islamic society through bonding and establishing a strong organizational structure. In the case of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Al-Anani calls this the “weaving of a web of internal relations, culture, norms and values in order to produce a specific identity that constitutes the backbone of the organization” (Al-Anani 2016, 3).

The mixture of ideology and practice finds its expression in what has been called the Islamic “method/approach/way” (*manhaj*) (Al-Anani 2016, 62), which has its origins in the early Muslim Brotherhood (Mitchell 1994, 31–2). The *manhaj* of the Brotherhood can be divided into two activities. The first, *da'wa*, can be divided into the dissemination of ideology (propaganda) and recruitment, its main activity. In an antagonistic political environment, this is a long process of identifying a potential member and scrutinizing, monitoring and evaluating his character concerning faith, correct conduct, obedience and loyalty (Al-Anani 2016, 67–81). Once a potential member has been found eligible, he undergoes a period of cultivation and indoctrination, *tarbiya*, the second activity. *Tarbiyya* is focused on the deepening of indoctrination, the purification and disciplining of the movement's members to make them internalize the Brotherhood's rules, so they apply them to everyday life and instil in them a commitment to the goals of the organization and a deep sense of solidarity with the movement. After a probation period, which can last between a year and several years, he becomes a devotee/sympathizer (*muhibb*), subsequently climbing the ladder of supporter (*mu'ayyid*), appointee/associate (*muntasib*), and regular member (*muntazim*) and active or full member (*'amil*). At some point in this process, members enter an *usra*, sometimes called a cell, but, according to Kandil, it is more akin to a biological family, where they learn to support (*takaful*), understand (*tafahum*) and get to know each other (*ta'aruf*) (Kandil 2015, 7; Al-Anani 2016, 87). The emphasis throughout this process is on submission and fulfilling duties. The end result is a “conversion to a world view and the production of a new person, the Muslim Brother” (Kandil 2015, 6). In turn, he becomes a recruiter (*da'iyah/du'ah*). His family members, friends and neighbours are the primary focus of his *da'wa*. The result is an exclusive organization, constituting a parallel society. Its members, following the same codes of conduct, socialize only with like-minded members, fully engage in

promoting the Brotherhood's values and power and eventually marry a sister of the organization (Kandil 2015, 70–1). Their children, born into the Brotherhood environment, are socialized according to Brotherhood values (Al-Anani 2016, 73). Another important element that strengthened internal ties and separation from society is its cultivation of victimhood (*mihna*) at the hands of the authoritarian state (Al-Anani 2016, 137, 141–6) and its dichotomous world view (Kandil 2015, 56–8).

This highly structured disciplinary model was replicated in other countries. Or, if it was first an open democratic organization, as in Syria in the 1940s and 1950s (Reissner 1980; Conduit 2019, 46–52), it became far more closed after it was persecuted by repressive states in the 1960s. Research on the Ennahda movement shows that the same structure was followed in Tunisia. The criteria for recruitment were moral rectitude and commitment. Recruitment occurred when members moved from “informal families” to “formal families” and entered a tightly organized, exclusive, underground organization (Wolf 2017, 37–8). Members participated in a host of activities, ranging from study circles, *halaqat* (McCarthy 2018, 23) social events, common prayer sessions, sports and activism, until it became a “way of life” (*manhaj hayat*) (McCarthy 2018, 27, 53–9, 127–9). As in Egypt, Ennahda was hierarchically organized with regional branches and a congress, a national consultative council and leadership. The same applies to the Jordanian branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Wagemakers 2020, 92–3).

To what extent internal debate took place depended on the type of organization and the intellectual and political circumstances it operated in. Of these movements, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood was probably the most authoritarian. Political consciousness and critical thinking were subordinated to building the organization. The pursuit of knowledge for its own sake and critical debate and democratic procedures was discouraged (Kandil 2015, 14, 58–60). For fear of dissent, (*fitna*) unity is rigorously imposed, and punishment and repentance were applied to ensure obedience (Kandil 2015, 27–8, 47). Mitchell makes clear that from its inception, internal critique was regarded as dissent by its charismatic leader, Hasan al-Banna (Mitchell 1994, 17–19, 52–5). In contrast, Ennahda was much more open. Probably because its three trends—a progressive, liberal trend, a flexible political trend and finally a conservative *da'wa* trend—the more liberal trend was represented by its leadership and would gain the upper hand after 1995 (McCarthy 2018, 80; Wolf 2017, 61–3, 76–7, 93–8). It also tuned in to a much more liberal and rational modernist Islamic environment prevalent in the Maghreb (Cavatorta and Merone 2015).

### **Politicization of Islam**

To trace the politicization of Islamism and the shedding of the comprehensive ideology in the countries of the Middle East and North Africa in a systematic manner, I will analyse six stages: (1) the introduction of political ideas and the rejection of violence; (2) political participation and integration; (3) the founding of especially independent political Muslim parties; (4) the adoption of a discourse of rights; (5) the formation of cross-ideological alliances; and finally, (6) how these elements came together during the Arab Spring. The process, however, is neither uniform nor linear. It can even be reversed. Much depends not just on factors within these movements but also on local and international political circumstances and how the movements react to them (Brown 2012). For instance, for reasons of self-preservation, movements can retreat to safer *da'wa* activities and claim to be apolitical, or they can adopt a rights discourse when they are being repressed but reject it when the threat of repression recedes. More common is that they adopted different tactics at the same time and remained deeply ambivalent.

### **Early politicization**

The introduction of political ideas started with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood at the end of the 1930s, but it remained largely within the limits of the comprehensive system, demanding the establishment of an Islamic state and the application of *shari'a*. This changed in the 1940s, when poverty became one of the main political issues in the Middle East, and the modern state was called upon to intervene. In this period, the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood under Mustafa Siba'i adopted the doctrine of "Islamic socialism" (Reissner 1980, 302–15). It participated in general elections, winning between three and ten seats during 1945–63. It even entered coalition governments (Conduit 2019, 68). This was also the period in which Sayyid Qutb wrote his *Social Justice in Islam*. In 1956, the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan also participated in elections (Wagemakers 2020, 94).

This development was interrupted by the establishment of authoritarian states in the 1950s, either in the form of republics (Egypt, Syria, Iraq) or monarchies (Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia) and the repression of Islamism in most of these states. New Islamist intellectuals took the doctrine of *shumuliyya* to its extreme in promoting a total submission to God as the only means of personal liberation in the struggle against authoritarianism (Euben 1999, 49–92). Their influence on Islamism extended from Morocco to Syria and would last until the early 1980s. Although the Muslim Brotherhood had already published its rebuttal of Qutb's jihadism in the 1960s (Zollner 2009), it was the disastrous results of violence on the organization and reputation of the Brotherhood and its affiliates due to unmitigated state repression that induced the movement to recoil from violence and return to the *da'wa* strategy. The most spectacular expressions of violence were the assassination of Egyptian president Sadat in 1981 and the uprising in the Syrian town of Hama—and its destruction—in 1982 (Conduit 2019, 52–9). Also, in the Maghreb, violence was promoted by radical groups. In the 1970s, the Islamic Group (*Jama'iyya al-Islamiyya*), the forerunner of the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), had assassinated a Marxist intellectual, while in Tunisia, the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI), the forerunner of Ennahda, had undertaken a bomb attack in which one person was killed and was also involved in planning a *coup d'état* against President Ben Ali (Wolf 2017, 31–45, 64, 73–4, 95–7). The first reaction was to stay away from politics and concentrate on the expansion of the organization through *da'wa* and *tarbiya*. This retreat from politics had saved the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan in the 1950s when it escaped persecution by adopting the cloak of a pious society (Wagemakers 2020, 95). In most Arabic countries, the Islamic Group could keep under the radar by acting as pious societies and building their infrastructure *da'wa* and *tarbiya* subculture (McCarthy 2018, 53–9).

If political ideas penetrated these piety movements, this often occurred in the universities during clashes with the left in the 1960s and 1970s. It seems that where the left was strong and the debates more open as in Tunisia, Morocco and the major cities of Egypt, Cairo and Alexandria, politicization was deeper and faster; where the left was weak or non-existent, as in the new universities in the cities of Upper Egypt such as Asyut and Suhag, politicization was slower or non-existent. In Tunisia, the debates with the left were lively, the Islamists even posting their own newspapers such as *Political News*, posted on walls (McCarthy 2018, 51–3; Wolf 2017, 4, 32, 42–3). Other political events that contributed to the politicization of the movements were the protests in Tunisia in January 1978 and the Iranian Revolution in 1979, which provided them with a strong social egalitarian content in Islamic terms of the struggle between oppressed (*mustad'afin*) and oppressors (*mustakbarin*) (McCarthy 2018, 43, 54; Wolf 2017, 48–9, 71).

Despite these social and revolutionary upheavals, a major precondition for the process of politicization was the rejection of violence and anti-systemic radicalism. At some point between

1970 and the 1990s, these movements decided to play by the rules laid down by the regimes, even if they were heavily skewed against the Islamist movements. This occurred in Egypt in the early 1970s when the general-guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, Umar Tilmisani, accepted the legitimacy of the Sadat regime. As Al-Awadi shows, this was done on the basis of the traditional doctrine of the acceptance of the ruler as the imam of necessity (*imam al-darura*) (Al-Awadi 2004, 15–16). In Tunisia, this turning point was reached in 1995 when during a congress in Switzerland, Ennahda rejected violence in all its forms and accepted democracy and political pluralism (Wolf 2017, 94). Ennahda had taken several other steps on this road before, but these had been ambivalent, often not excluding violent methods as a last resort. Its more moderate and realistic political attitude is represented in the self-criticism of a member during the 1995 congress, who stated that “you cannot drag people into confrontation, because you have an agenda” (Wolf 2017, 94). In Morocco, the forerunner of the PJD, the Islamic Group, accepted the legitimacy of the monarchy in 1990 (Wegner 2011, 23). This opened the way for Islamist political participation, although its ideology was still couched in religious terms.

### ***Political participation and integration***

The next phase was that of participation in formal politics. This phase could overlap with the previous one in the sense that politicization is furthered through participation, but this does not necessarily mean that these movements participated in politics as political parties, nor that they immediately developed a political programme. The best example is the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. It was able to take part in elections for the first time in 1984 and 1987, first in a coalition with the liberal Wafd party (winning 8 of the 58 seats of the coalition), and then with the Socialist Labour Party (winning 36 of the 56 seats of the coalition; 448 total seats in parliament). In neither of these elections did its members participate as official members of the Muslim Brotherhood. Nor were its slogans, “Islam is the solution” and “Give your vote to Allah, Give it to the Muslim Brotherhood”, very political. Rather, it showed that parliament was considered a *minbar* (pulpit) for spreading the *da'wa* (Wickham 2013, 47). Or, as Umar al-Tilmisani said at the time, “When the Brotherhood talks of politics, they don’t speak as political men but as Islamic *du‘ah* (preachers)” (Wickham 2013, 48). Hamid confirms this view: political participation of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the 1980s was primarily meant to promote the application of Islamic law and the Islamic moral order (Shadi 2014, 67–77). On the other hand, once in parliament, members did address general issues such as housing, education, unemployment and international issues such as the American invasion of Kuwait in 1991 (Wickham 2013, 55).

This ambiguity is also reflected in Ennahda in this period. In 1981, it changed its name to the Islamic Tendency Movement (MTI) in order to take part in the first open general elections, but its programme called for the revival of Tunisia’s Islamic legacy and unity of Islam to “liberate the Islamic conscience from civilisational defeat by the West” (Wolf 2017, 55). Eight years later, the programme of its successor, Ennahda, was markedly more political, but by then, it had allied itself with worker’s rights and human rights organizations and established closer contacts with secular parties (McCarthy 2018, 62; Wolf 2017, 59–60, 69). In the fraudulent general elections of 1991, it won 14.4 to 30 per cent of the votes, although its application for a licence was refused (Wolf 2017, 71–2). It also distanced itself from its Brotherhood wing, which in 1995 was evicted (Wolf 2017, 94). But by that time, it faced the worst suppression in its history. Between 1992 and 2005, most of its political leaders lived in exile. Only after the worst had passed could its members in Tunisia establish an underground organization, which laid the groundwork for its revival as a political party in 2011.

In Morocco, this development would start later, proceed more slowly but also manage to be continuous and more thorough. Not until Hassan II ended the years of repression, the “years of lead” in 1990, did he allow for greater political pluralism. Over the next years, the forerunner of the PJD, the Movement of Unity and Reform (MUR), was integrated into the political system. Its twin goals were reviving Islamic culture and values in Moroccan society and working with the regime on the principle of “critical support” (Daadawi 2017, 362). Its realist view was that “to participate is the only way to improve things”. Another incentive was to gain political experience (Kirdis 2015, 80–1). In 1992, its political wing entered a deal with a secular shell party (formalized in 1996), a step that was mandatory before the monarchy allowed it to launch the PJD in 1998 as the political arm of MUR. The PJD’s focus during the first years was on promoting *da’wa* and the implementation of Islamic law (Wegner and Pellicer 2009, 160).

### ***Founding political parties***

The third step was the establishment of Islamic political parties. An important precondition for its success, as Wegner has shown in her excellent study of the PJD in Morocco (2011), confirmed by Zollner in her comparison of Egypt and Tunisia (2019b), is the creation of political parties that are *independent* of their movements. This step signifies the recognition of politics as an independent field and is decisive in replacing the doctrine of the comprehensiveness of Islamism. Only a few parties would succeed in making this transition. A good example of a party that failed to make this step is the Islamic Action Front (IAF), founded by the Jordanian Muslim Brotherhood. It was the first officially recognized party of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Mashreq. In 1989, the first open elections were held, and the Brotherhood-affiliated candidates won 22 of the 80 seats of parliament (together with independent Islamists, the Islamist bloc won a spectacular 36, or almost half of the seats). In 1992 the Brotherhood established the IAF, which participated in the 1993 elections, winning 20 per cent of the seats (Wickham 2013, 205–9). But because it criticized the government’s peace policy towards Israel, relations with the state deteriorated. The AIF did take part in the political process after the Arab Spring but never gained the same number of seats (Wagemakers 2020, 100–19). An important drawback was that it remained the political arm of the Muslim Brotherhood and could not break away. It also was plagued by internal division between a conservative *da’wa* faction and more progressive, reformist, political factions (Wagemakers 2020, 104–6).

In contrast, the Moroccan PJD was highly successful in becoming independent from the movement from which it sprang. The first elections in 1997 were still organized by members of the MUR who, under the banner of Morocco’s Islamic identity, called for the moralization of politics (Wegner 2011, 100–2). It won 9 seats, later expanding to 14 (of 325 seats in parliament). Over the following years, the PJD became increasingly financially and organizationally independent from the MUR, developing its own strategies based on political considerations rather than religious ones (Wegner 2011, 32–71). At the same time, the organization became more transparent and changed from a vanguard to a more open organization with internal democratic elections, attracting new members and broadening its appeal to non-members (Wegner 2011, 40–57). By 2007 it was a regular party ready to take advantage of the Arab Spring. It increased its seats in parliament from 42 in 2002 (total 325 seats) to 43 in 2007. The MUR continued as a movement and concentrated on *tarbiya* and *da’wa* (Wegner and Pellicer 2009, 161–5).

The Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood never established an independent political party. The main reason was that the Mubarak regime (1981–2011) did not allow the movement to do so. In addition, its candidates could not openly affiliate with the Brotherhood. As in Tunisia, the 1990s spelled the end of the previous decade’s brief period of liberalization. Nevertheless,



Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood, like its counterpart in Jordan, was never completely suppressed. Periods of repression were followed by brief periods of toleration. It boycotted the 1990 elections; in 1995, it won 1 seat, 17 seats in 2000 and during a brief period of openness in 2004–5, it won a spectacular 88 of the 444 seats in the 2005 elections, but none in 2010, when repression worsened again. However, the most important reason for not establishing a political party was that the Brotherhood leadership did not give sufficient support to the political struggle and suppressed a more democratic, open internal discourse, and the development of a broader coalition strategy that such an approach would have demanded (Wickham 2013, 97–153). Characteristic of the closed culture of the Brotherhood was that the preservation of the *Tanzim* and the exclusive collective identity, ingrained through years of *tarbiya*, had become a goal in itself (Al-Awadi 2004, 62–4).

It was the student generation of the 1970s that pushed politicization forward and explored strategies and intellectual vistas that transformed Islamism and, in some cases, ended it. Because the Egyptian Brotherhood had a long history, this generation has been called the “middle generation” (technically, it was the third generation). Originally, members of the *Jama'at al-Islamiyya*, this generation had been recruited into the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood at the end of the decade. This generation gained its political experience in the 1980s by entering the elections of the syndicates of the professional organizations. Despite the authoritarian nature of the Mubarak regime, these elections remained free as long as the secretary-general (*naqib*) was a government representative. Between 1987 and 1992, the middle generation won the elections of the syndicate of the doctors, the engineers, the lawyers and the pharmacists. According to Wickham, the cooperation with other ideological groups, the practical experience of working together with liberals, Nasserists and communists, making compromises and the realization that they shared common goals, especially in pushing back the authoritarian state, were decisive in developing a new, politically mature world view (2013, 58–66, 74; Al-Awadi 2004, 95–8). In 1996, this political experience and frustration with the conservatism of the leadership, expressed in the culture of obedience, authoritarianism and discrimination of youth and women, led to the foundation of the *Wasat* party (centre party) under the leadership of Abu Ala Madi. Indeed, the *Wasat* party was part of a much broader intellectual current of the *wasatiyya* current that had attracted Muslim thinkers outside the Brotherhood (Baker 2003). These intellectuals regarded Islam as a “civilization” rather than a law and a state. Islam accepts plurality, in fact, humanity is strengthened by pluralism. They proclaimed that all citizens in Egypt, including Christians and women, were equal and that Islam was, in essence, democratic (Wickham 2013, 81–95; Meijer 2017, 193–201). The liberals who remained in the Brotherhood and reached the Guidance Council were purged in 2008 (Wickham 2013, 127–31).

From the 1980s onwards, all Islamist movements experienced critique from their more liberal wings. Especially in the Mashreq, where rationalist modernism was stronger than in the east, this was the case (Cavatorta and Merone 2015). Another explanation is that, in contrast to the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, which had undergone a process of ruralization (Kandil 2015, 201), their members were better educated, belonged to the middle classes, lived in cities and had stronger female representation (Wegner and Pellicer 2011, 313). This was also reflected in the internal political debate of the Maghreb movements. Already in 1972, a progressive group had split off from the Tunisian MTI, followed in 1991 by a second group that left Ennahda, disagreeing with the confrontational tactics and undemocratic structures of the movement at the time (Wolf 2017). In Morocco, the democratic, conservative modernism goes back to Allal al-Fasi and Moroccan nationalism of the *Istiqlal* (Zeghal 2009, 72–6). The difference with Egypt was that dissenters were able to either influence the original movements or rejoin them at some point after they had reformed themselves. Exceptionally, in Jordan, the foundation of the Centre

Party (Hizb al-Wasat) in 2001, the so-called ZamZam initiative in 2012 and the foundation of an alternative Muslim Brotherhood in 2015 would even lead to the Brotherhood's demise (Wagemakers 2020, 111–19). The ideological divisions reflect the splits seen elsewhere between adherents of the comprehensive system and *da'wa* on the one hand and politicians and reformists on the other (Wagemakers 2020, 123–231).

### ***Adopting a discourse of rights***

The acceptance of equal rights and the notion of equal citizenship was the fourth indicator of moving away from the comprehensive system. It showed that the focus shifted from implementing *shari'a* and an Islamic state according to the doctrine of Islamism to a rights discourse (Al-Awadi 2004, 91–2). Modernism was reflected in position papers on the rights of women to work and vote, the equal position of non-Muslims and the acceptance of party politics (Wickham 2013, 69–70; Scott 2010). An early indication of this trend was the MTI's support of workers' rights and the popular protests in Tunisia in the 1980s. After Ennahda took part in elections, it demanded freedom of organization and free and fair elections (Wolf 2017, 87). This transition to rights was enhanced by the increasing repression of these movements by authoritarian states in the 1990s. As a result, Ennahda joined the human rights organization, the Tunisian Human Rights League (LTDH) (Wolf 2017, 59–60, 62). In the same period, the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood published position papers and programmes that supported the right to freedom of expression and organization (Al-Awadi 2004, 84; Wickham 2013, 55). As the middle generation acquired greater insight into politics, it became aware of the depth of corruption and demanded greater accountability (Al-Awadi 2004, 95), holding regimes responsible for the abuse of power (McCarthy 2018, 86–7). The last step in the discourse of rights was the right of the people to rule and the sovereignty of the people, as opposed to the sovereignty of God. The increasing embrace of a rights discourse laid the foundation for acceptance of the reformed Islamic movement by liberals and leftists. For instance, the left-wing politician Chebbi declared in 2006 that “Islamists are Tunisians” and that their “right to participate in political life” needed to be recognized (Wolf 2017, 102). The liberal programme of 2004 of the Syrian Muslim Brotherhood, after two decades of repression and radicalization, had the same goal (Conduit 2019, 61–5).

On the other hand, as Wickham points out, a rights discourse of freedom was often limited to the organization itself and was universalized nor included its opponents (2013, 44). Nor was it clear to what extent the whole movement switched to a rights discourse. The focus in Western research on Muslim liberals hides the fact that conservative currents remained the backbone of these movements and, in the end, were vastly more influential (Wickham 2013, 138–40). In fact, as McCarthy makes clear for Tunisia, during the period of repression in the 1990s and 2000s, the *da'wa* project of the 1970s revived. Morality, community building and applying Islamic ethics thrived in the underground movement and in the prisons while the liberal leadership was in exile (2018, 102–3).

### ***Cross-ideological alliances***

Where politicization, the establishment of independent political parties and the acceptance of a discourse of universal rights took place, the chances for forming cross-ideological alliances grew. As cross-ideological alliances are regarded as essential for taking down autocratic regimes or forcing them to reform, they attract scholarly attention (Abd al-Rahman 2015, 92–116; Clark 2006; McCarthy 2018, 112–22; Wegner Pellicer 2011; Wickham 2013, 7, 107–17, 155–62;

Wolf 2017, 98–103). Cross-ideological coalitions are made for different reasons. They can be tactical, to pursue temporary goals; strategic, to dismantle authoritarian regimes; or they can be long-term alliances based on ideological rapprochement. Long-term alliances depend on two ideological conditions: a) the recognition of the sovereignty of the people, expressed in the term civil state (*dawla madaniyya*) which replaces the concept of a religious state (*dawla diniyya*), ruled by Islamic law; b) and the acceptance of inclusive and equal citizenship (Meijer 2017; Steuer and Brouët 2015).

Not surprisingly, cross-ideological exchanges and influences seem to have been strongest in Tunisia, where in the 1970s, MTI/Ennahda had already exchanged ideas with the left (Wolf 2017, 48). During the 1980s, it joined the executive committee of the Tunisian League of Human Rights, and a new student organization, the Tunisian General Union of Students (Wolf 2017, 59–62, 62). Other alliances followed. The first reconciliation between Ennahda and other oppositional forces occurred in 1991. In 1995, a common communique calling for democracy and freedom of expression was issued. In 2001, the Tunis Agreement in Aix-en-Provence was launched, and in 2005, the foundation was laid for the post-revolutionary change when the 18 October Movement and the Collectif were launched (Wolf 2017, 100–3; McCarthy 2018, 112–14).

In Morocco, the initiative to create cross-ideological coalitions came from the PJD itself as a way of integrating into political society. In 1998 it lent “critical support” and later “constructive opposition” to the secular, left-wing Youssoufi government (Wegner 2011, 97). After 2007, it tried to cooperate with the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (USFP) at the national level. Cooperation was achieved at the municipal level after elections in 2009 (Wegner and Pellicer 2011). Also, in other respects, it was willing to accept cooperation even when it opposed certain measures. For instance, in 2003, it supported the change of the personal status code, despite its distaste for the law (Wegner 2011, 87–9). From its side, the USFP accepted the PJD as a legitimate political force after 2003. In the end, cooperation failed for political reasons—electoral competition—rather than ideological reasons (Wegner and Pellicer 2011).

In Egypt, cross-ideological alliances had begun in the 1980s with the tactical alliance between the Wafd and later the Islamic Alliance with the Socialist Labour party (Wickham 2013, 47). It was furthered by its reformist middle generation in the professional syndicates and the Wasat party, hailed by some leftist intellectuals (Wickham 2013, 84). During the 2000s, this trend was apparent in several cross-ideological initiatives, like the Egyptian People’s Committee for Support of the Palestinian Intifada (EPCSPI), the protests against the American invasion of Iraq in 2003, the Kifaya (Enough) movement in 2004–5 (which took eight months of negotiation to establish) and the National Association for Change (NAC) in 2010 was half-hearted (Wickham 2013, 148–9).

In Syria, cross-ideological cooperation only emerged after the Brotherhood had reformed itself and published its liberal programme in 2004. It signed the liberal reformist programme of the Damascus Declaration in 2005 in which secular and religious groups participated but abandoned it for the National Salvation Front with former vice president Abd al-Halim Khaddam a few months later (Conduit 2019, 87–8). In Jordan, the IAF was an active member of the Higher Committee for the Coordination of National Opposition Parties (HCCNOP) (Clark 2006).

### ***The Arab Spring***

The Arab Spring was a litmus test of the extent to which Islamist movements had succeeded in distancing themselves from Islamism. Their success depended on their ability to move away from the *manhaj* of the comprehensive system, create independent political parties and establish

cross-ideological coalitions strong enough to dismantle the authoritarian state. These developments were crucial because the uprisings were not related to Islam but demanded employment, the end of repression, freedom and social justice.

The failure of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood to withstand the military and the eviction of its president Muhammad Morsi in July 2013 can be ascribed to their inability to take these steps. The Freedom and Justice party (FJP) was founded in June 2011, but it was financed by its parent organization, which appointed its top leaders to the leadership of the new party, evoking strong critique from its reformist wing (Wickham 2013, 175; Meijer 2013). Many left the movement when the general-guide forbade members to join any other parties (Wickham 2013, 177). Moreover, rather than establish broad cross-ideological alliances, the Muslim Brotherhood/FJP put its faith in exclusive deals with the military (Zollner 2019a, 14; Meijer 2013) or aligned itself with the Salafi Nour Party, abandoning its rights discourse for a return to its Islamist roots calling for the implementation of *shari'a* (Shadi 2014, 174). Once its majority was secured in parliament, with 37.5 per cent of the votes (44.9 per cent of the seats), and 27 per cent for the Salafi Nour Party (25 per cent of the seats), it tried to translate it in bending the constitution assembly to its will. This provoked opposition from its own members. Abd al-Gawad member of the youth organization the Egyptian Current, for instance, stated that his political participation would “be a reflection of my religious convictions, but my main priority is to address the needs of the Egyptian street. I’m not going to say, ‘Islam is the solution,’ since the people cannot eat Islam” (cited in Wickham 2013, 180–1). Isolated, incompetent, and in the belief that moralism is sufficient to run a country, the Muslim Brotherhood rapidly became unpopular after Morsi was elected president in May 2012. As an unreformed, secretive, unaccountable movement, it provoked a deep mistrust of the Egyptian population (Meijer 2013).

In line with previous developments, Ennahda adopted a more reformist line in Tunisia. It immediately established a political party, and after winning 89 of the 217 seats (37.4 per cent) in the elections of 2011, it formed a coalition government with two secular parties, forming the “Troika”. And although there were severe tensions between the coalition partners in 2013, it was able to compromise on the constitutional assembly, accepting that *shari'a* was not mentioned and equal rights of women were recognized and blasphemy was not criminalized. The major decision, however, was to sever relations with the movement in 2016. As McCarthy makes clear, after the loss of the 2014 elections (26.5 per cent; 69 seats), it decided that the only way to operate as a broad political party and appeal to a larger conservative electorate was to cut its relations with the *da'wa* movement and establish an independent political party. In this transition, Islam became a moral guide instead of a comprehensive system (2018, 148–54).

The Moroccan PJD continued its march to power and won 107 seats (22.8 per cent) of the 395 seats in 2011, growing to 125 seats (27.9) in the 2016 elections. For the first time, it provided the prime minister. It won the municipal elections in 2015, which attests to its impressive campaign machine. Its “Islamist-light” discourse of “honesty and transparency” is in line with the citizenship movements on rights and accountability (Daadawi 2017, 366). Although the danger of co-optation increased, the PJD still tries to chip away the monarchy’s political power.

The Syrian Brotherhood had already made the ideological change in 2004 and, after the uprisings in 2011, worked together with other oppositional forces in the Syrian National Council (SNC) and later the National Council for the Syrian Revolution and Opposition Forces (SOC) (Conduit 2019, 163). But like the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, it was widely distrusted because of its dominance in these organizations (Conduit 2019, 162–5).

## Post-Islamism

As a result of the changes analysed above, some researchers have stated that Islamism no longer exists in its original form and has morphed into post-Islamism. According to Roy, post-Islamism is the precedence of politics destroying the myth of unity of politics and religion in Islam, both becoming independent. This leads to a fragmentation of religious identity (Roy 2002, 3–4). According to Bayat, the major change is a shift from duties to rights. No longer is the emphasis on implementing Islamic law and establishing an Islamic state. Pluralism, party politics, the acceptance of liberal political values, the separation of powers and a democratic system has largely been accepted; the old emphasis on *tarbiya* (education, indoctrination) has been replaced by *hizbiyya* (party politics). The culture of listening and obedience has been undermined as well, as the Muslim Brotherhood no longer claims to be the only organization to represent all Muslims (Bayat 2013).

However, many scholars are deeply sceptical of the extent to which Islamism has changed its character. Shadi rejects the whole notion of post-Islamism as a chimera. Although he acknowledges that the movement has accepted democracy, this has its foundation in the conviction that it is inconceivable that God's sovereignty and people's sovereignty would not coincide and that the will of people would go against *shari'a*. By adopting this stance, the doctrine of comprehensiveness of Islam is incorporated into democracy, and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Jordan have become illiberal democratic movements (2014, 167–89). Kandil, who focuses on the internal structure of the movement, argues that the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood remains a *da'wa* organization (Kandil 2015, 137–45), while Wickham, who acknowledges greater diversity within the movement and does not exclude the possibility of change, is also sceptical (Wickham 2013, 25). It has not reformed itself because in the struggle for power between its three currents—the *da'wa* current, the pragmatic conservative current, and the reformist, progressive wing—the first two defeated the reformist wing just before the Arab Spring (Wickham 2013, 132–44). But even the reformist wing, according to Wickham, falls short of liberal ideals, accepting in the final instance the rule of *shari'a* (Wickham 2013, 92–5). Like Shadi, Wickham explains the moderation of the movement in the 1990s and 2000s as a response to repression (Wickham 2013, 151). None of the Muslim Brotherhood movements in the Mashreq succeeded in making a full transformation, ideologically, organizationally or in their strategies towards potential allies. Like Shadi, Wickham argues that the adoption of a rights discourse lasts as long as repression and that it is relinquished as soon as it wanes. Ironically, democracy revives the comprehensive doctrine as long as movements dominate the political parties (Shadi 2014, 141–5); Wickham 2013, 275–8).

In contrast, Maghreb Islamist movements were better prepared for the Arab Spring. After 1996, the PJD had transformed itself organizationally and ideologically, while the political wing of Ennahda, which was also the reformist wing, had embraced democracy in exile. Although here repression had also led to moderation (Cavatorta and Merone 2013/2015), it had become ingrained and ideologically rooted during the years of exile. This transition was probably helped by the fact that its *da'wa* branch had been suppressed for so long and was unable to establish a presence in civil society on the scale of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood. Although both Ennahda and PJD are conservative parties, their trajectory seems to confirm the view that post-Islamism can only come about after a substantial transformation has taken place in which five steps are taken: politicization, political participation, the embracement of a discourse of equal rights, the establishment of an independent political party and the formation of cross-ideological alliances. This transformation is accomplished by the acceptance of the doctrine of the broad principles of *shari'a*, which leaves room for freedom of expression and organization,

equal citizenship, protection of minorities, inclusion and sovereignty of the people. This transformation spelled the real emancipation of political Islam from the totalizing claims it had made in the 1930s as a movement.

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