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Understanding The Failure of The Arab Maghreb Union: A Critical Constructivist Account

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Abstract

The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), which was established by the countries of the region known as North Africa, also called as the Maghreb, to strengthen regional cooperation, draws attention as an organization that has lost its effectiveness today. This study examines the factors that affect the "failure" of the AMU. The discussions for the AMU to gain an active structure, which was established with the participation of Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Mauritania and Libya in the late 1980s, have increased even more with the current political crisis in Libya. The idea of "a united Maghreb" was actually a political argument used to mobilize the people of the region against the colonial powers during their struggle for independence long before the establishment of the AMU. Many reasons can be put forward to explain why the leaders of the region, who used the idea of creating a "united Maghreb" in their discourses, did not show enough will to achieve this dream. This study uses a critical constructivist account of state identity and interest and argues that Maghreb states were not able to develop shared identities and interests. It argues that the creation of the AMU could not pave the way for regional cooperation because Maghreb states consider each other as rivals and articulated their interests on this conception.

Keywords: Arab Maghreb Union, state identity, national interest, process of othering, Western Sahara conflict.

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1. Introduction

The Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) comes forward as a topic that is being discussed again in these days as the crisis in Libya gains a different dimension with each passing day. This regional organization was established by five states of North Africa, namely Morocco, Libya, Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania on 17 February 1989 (Zoubir, 2001: 83). This union draws attention as a dysfunctional and a failed regional cooperation project. So much so that the Presidential Council has not been held since 1994 (Zoubir, 2012: 86). Recently, there is a desire, albeit weak, to revive the Union in order to overcome the Libyan crisis. Tunisian President Kays Said and Mauritanian President Mohammed Vild al-Gazvani expressed their consensus on the re-activation of the AMU at their meeting last May (TRT Haber, 2020). There is an emphasis on regional integration in the constitutions of the five Maghreb states (Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Mauritania and Libya). Political leaders of the region support Maghreb integration by enumerating historical, religious, cultural and economic reasons in their official discourses. However, political differences and internal security issues affect the integration process negatively (Hernando de Larramendi, 2008: 179). While this situation prevents the region from being active as a bloc in the international arena, it reinforces its isolated position economically and politically.

The main aim of this article is to analyze the factors that might explain the failure of this intra-Maghreb integration. This study will employ process tracing method in order to shed light on complex political and social transformations which have shaped intra-Maghreb relations during the 1980s and 1990s (George & Bennet, 2005: 205-232). The Process tracing method will allow converting “a historical narrative into an analytical causal explanation couched in explicit theoretical forms” (George & Bennet, 2005: 211). It is composed of three parts. In the first part, I will present a theoretical framework based on the concept of identity from constructivist international relations (IR) theory. In the second part, I will use these concepts to explain the failure of AMU. In light of these concepts, I will analyze the initial economic and political circumstances leading to the establishment of the AMU. Because these same circumstances are crucial to and reveal the specific difficulties with which Maghrebi regimes are faced during the late 1980s. In the third part, I will put forward three main reasons to explain this failure. Particularly, I will emphasize the lack of common understanding between Maghrebi regimes, the persistence of the Western Sahara Conflict and the organizational structure of the AMU itself. All these factors will illustrate that Maghreb states define their identity and interest on the basis of what they perceived as “other” in a regional power rivalry.

2. A Constructivist Account of Identity

Constructivist IR theory aims to understand international relations as a social construction and it is a social construction project without an end (Kubalkova, 2001: 58). It is possible to distinguish constructivism from other IR approaches by its focus on ideational factors in world politics which constituted a neglected aspect in theoretical analysis. What is also important is that the constructivist research project takes into account the role of identity formation in international politics. The end of the Cold War revealed the incapacity of neorealism and neoliberalism because they could not predict this transformation in the international system. The failure of rationalist approaches to predict or to comprehend this systemic transformation opened a new opportunity for rethinking world politics (Wendt, 1987; Onuf 1989; Wendt, 1995). Rationalist approaches highlight the importance of causal mechanisms for explaining regularities in the international system (Keohane, 1989:8). By contrast, reflectivists or critical theorists focused more on interpretations, inter-subjective understandings and structures of domination by taking into account some particular social, cultural and historical conditions in which they have acquired a meaning (Waever, 1996: 164).

The end of the Cold War has stimulated theoretical discussion in IR discipline and constructivism has appeared as an approach that brings together contributions of international critical theory and rationalists' main arguments (Reus-Smit, 2005, s.195-196). In this sense, one might consider constructivism a middle ground between rationalist theories and critical theories, because it has an intersubjective ontology and rationalist epistemology and methodology based on empirical theoretical development and hypothesis testing (Fierke, 2012: 193). According to constructivists, ideational structures are important at the same degree of material structures for understanding state behavior. Wendt assumes that "material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded" (Wendt, 1995: 73).

What is more, constructivists highlight identities of actors in international politics are shaped by norms, values and shared understanding while they also take into account the role of material factors. It is fair to say identities of actors are constraint and constituted by structures. As social beings, states are part of a normative framework which in turn affects their choices and decisions. Accordingly, the concept of sovereignty might be considered as a constitutive category because of the fact that it implies a common acceptance and recognition from other states (Fierke, 2012: 190). For constructivists, norms and shared identities play a key role in international politics. This social process is also marked by a mutual constitution between structure and agency. Indeed, normative and ideational structures such as norms, values, identities, rules play a primordial role in defining agents and their interests (Katzenstein, 1998: 675).

In this perspective, states have "distinct identities shaped by the cultural, social, and political -as well as material-circumstances in which they are embedded" (Fierke, 2012: 191). It should also be noted that these same circumstances are dynamic in their nature and reshaped continuously. McSweeney define identity as a process of negotiation between groups and persons and a political process in which identities of different states are formed et reformed in relation to changing circumstances (McSweeney, 1999: 73) Similar to McSweeney, Adler (1997: 337) emphasizes also the role of the "political process" which pushes individual states to adopt a particular conception of ideas and interests in line with the competition with other states. She assumes that;

a national, intersubjective conception is arrived at through competition of ideas and interests in the 'political process (...)' national interests are intersubjective understandings about what it takes to advance power, influence and worth, that survive the political process, given the distribution of power and knowledge in a society (Adler, 1997: 337).

Therefore, it seems crucial to take into consideration the prevailing conception of national interest in a given society depending on the distribution of power. Also changing political circumstances seem to play a crucial role in the formulation and reformulation of a state identity on the one hand, Wendt points out that identities and interests are constituted by culture as well as collective identity and other states' interpretations affect national identity formation (Wendt, 1999: 177). Identities are Indeed, conventional constructivists argue that a state identity is shaped as a result of "interaction with other states; they come to see themselves and each other in terms of the subject positions that are constituted by the social structure of international politics" (Rumelili, 2004: 31). For Wendt "the truth conditions for identity claims are communal rather than individual" (Wendt, 1999: 177). On the other hand, critical constructivists emphasize that the construction of identity can not be explained only with reference to states' interactions and domestic politics are also relevant in making sense of state identities and interests (Weldes, 1999: 9). The main assumption of critical constructivists lay in the role that they have attributed to practices of othering because states may develop their identity in relation to differences and contrasts which exist between themselves and others (Fierke, 2007: 77). For

example, Weldes criticizes Wendt regarding the question of state identity because he did not take into consideration internal affairs or domestic politics in the construction of state identities and interests (Weldes, 1999: 9). Moreover, she points out that national interest might be seen as a consequence of representations of identities (Weldes, 1999: 14). In addition, she assumes that;

national interests are social constructions created as meaningful objects out of the intersubjective and culturally established meanings within which the world, particularly the international system and the place of the state in it, is understood. The categories of common sense for foreign policy, the intersubjective and culturally established meanings on the basis of which state officials make decisions and act, are provided by the security imaginaries of states. A security imaginary is, quite simply, a structure of well-established meanings and social relations out of which representations of the world of international relations are created (Weldes, 2010:1).

In this sense she follows Wendt argument which maintains that “identities are the basis of interests” (Wendt, 1992: 398). In addition, critical constructivists emphasize that identity and foreign policy are two interrelated domains for states in international politics (Arkan, 2014: 27). In fact, state identity is produced by foreign policy practices which in turn contribute to the formulation and reformulation of state identity. It seems also pertinent to note that state identity is constructed and defined by reference to difference. It might be argued that;

“Maintenance of one identity (or field of identities) involves the conversion of some differences into otherness, into evil, or one of its numerous surrogates. Identity requires difference in order to be, and it converts difference into otherness in order to secure its own self-certainty” (Conolly, 1991: 64).

Therefore, one can think that this conception of identity requires a mutual constitution between identity and difference. Identity is articulated and rearticulated in relation to difference and then it implies a process of othering. Parallel to this understanding, problems that occur in foreign policy and state identity are also mutually constituted. Indeed “when state identity is created through othering, it is in fact precarious and thus needs to be stabilized or reproduced” (Weldes, 1999: 222). Three concepts emerge from the above theoretical contributions of critical constructivists including Weldes, Adler and McSweeney. Identity, national interest and security imaginary are key concepts for making sense of diverse states’ interactions at regional or international level. Identity is a core concept that is constructed in a process of othering between self and other states and it is a reflection of representations in changing political circumstances. Accordingly, a security imaginary is articulated from these representations which inform states. A structure of social relations including threat perception emerges from relations among states. Therefore, national interest is formulated depending on these representations and perceptions provided by a state’s security imaginary.

Three important points will guide the following sections. First, as emphasized by critical constructivists like Adler and McSweeney, a state identity is constructed through political circumstances which are shaped by competition between states. Second, domestic politics have a greater impact on the formulation of state identity and interest which are intersubjective meanings about the distribution of power and knowledge. Third, it exists a mutual constitution between identity and national interest which in turn implies conversion of difference to otherness illustrated in states’ security imaginary. By taking into account this argumentation developed by critical constructivists, following paragraphs will try to shed light on the failure of the AMU on the basis of social construction of state identity and interest.

Particularly, I will show that Maghreb regimes which initiated this Union at and of the 1980s were more concerned by the challenges of this time namely economic problems and rise of the popular dissent.

Their national interests at that time were highly motivated by these challenges which lie at the origins of the AMU. During the 1990s in relation to the changing political circumstances especially in Algeria which experienced a civil war and the Algerian-Moroccan power rivalry made AMU an ineffective and obsolete regional project. Indeed, diverging identities and national interests push Maghreb regimes to perceive each other as “other” in their bilateral (especially Algerian-Moroccan relations) as well as regional relations (examples of Libya, Mauritania within the AMU). Then it is argued that AMU’s member states’ identities push them to prioritize their own national interest in a process of othering their Maghrebi neighbors.

3. Historical Background to The Creation of the AMU

The creation of the AMU has marked an important step forward to fulfill an aspiration expressed during the struggle against colonialism in the Maghreb. The Maghreb states had formed two sets of alliances in the mid-1980. The first was the tripartite alliance of Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania and the second was the “union” between Morocco and Libya. The agreement between Morocco and Libya ended in 1986 by the Moroccan side following American discomfort with this rapprochement. Surprisingly, Morocco and Algeria have brought closer their relationship and this rapprochement had become concrete with the meeting between the Algerian President Benjedid and the Moroccan King Hassan at May 1987. A year later, these two countries have decided to re-establish their diplomatic relations which were frozen since the recognition of the SADR (Saharan Arab Democratic Republic) by Algeria in 1976 (Willis, 2014: 281).

This alliance had been possible with the shift in the Algerian foreign policy. If one compares Boumedienne with Chadli Benjedid, it will be true to make such an affirmation that Benjedid adopted a more nuanced and calculated approach with regards to regional issues. In fact, Chadli Benjedid had the objective of countering his opponents who were mostly supporters of Boumedienne’s foreign policy vision (Mortimer, 1992: 244-50). The dramatic drop in oil prices in 1985-86 and the worsening economic situation combined with the decline of the hydrocarbon’s revenues pushed Algeria to adopt a more flexible foreign policy towards the Maghreb. It should be noted that Moroccan King Hassan II hoped that Algerian foreign policy towards Western Sahara will eventually shifted and Chadli will adopt a more moderate position on this issue (Hassan II, 1993: 201). In addition to the rapprochement between Morocco and Algeria, the peaceful replacement of Habib Bourguiba by Ben Ali in November 1987 reduced tensions between Libya and Tunisia and paved the way for a greater cooperation among the Maghreb countries (Hernando de Larramendi, 2008: 179).

A number of economic and political factors have motivated Maghreb states to come together and to form a common platform for the resolution of their problems. In economic terms, the late 1980s represents a difficult period for all Maghreb states. Willis argues;

The already debt-laden economies of the region were hit hard by a succession of events in the latter part of the decade: notably the collapse of the price of oil, a series of droughts and locust plagues that seriously damaged agriculture and the enlargement of the European Community (EC) to the north to include Spain and Portugal, giving the new members huge economic advantage over the Maghreb states which had been their main competitors in terms of agricultural exports to the EC (Willis, 2014: 283).

Considering this economic conjuncture, Maghreb states were persuaded that economic integration could strengthen regional trade and then maximize its economic potential vis-a-vis their European trade partners. One of the main objectives for the establishment of the AMU was the creation of a common market. In fact, it was expected that the union would be able to “strengthen the ties of

brotherhood” and “achieve progress and prosperity”, “to pursue a common policy in different domains” and “to work gradually towards achieving free movement of persons and transfer of services, goods and capital among them”.² Furthermore, for the realization of economic goals, the article three of Treaty of Marrakesh declares that the AMU envisions;

In the economic field: to achieve industrial, agricultural, commercial and social development of member States and take the necessary measures for this purpose particularly by setting up joint ventures and working out general and specific programs in this respect.³

Therefore, one can claim that economic integration was an important motivating factor for Maghreb states to work together. Another important motivation was the political context in which this Treaty was concluded. The regional balance of power was in favor of Egypt which had gained a new prestige in the Arab World in 1988 and US attacks on Tripoli and Benghazi in April 1986 had pushed Maghreb regimes into developing regional relations in order to prevent foreign interventions to their region (Mortimer, 1993: 173). Another important political reason for the creation of the AMU was the rise of radical Islamism in the late 1980s in the region which was perceived as a big obstacle to the internal stability by Maghreb regimes (Zoubir, 2012: 86). By far the most important factor for this regional Project was the conviction that the union might provide a common platform for the resolution of the dispute over Western Sahara.

The Treaty of Marrakech states that “Member States pledge not to permit on their territory any activity or organization liable to threaten the security, the territorial integrity or the political system of any of them”.⁴ This article might be commented as Algeria’s withdrawal of support from the Polisario Front in its struggle against Morocco. In fact, Morocco had expected that AMU could help to resolve the Western Sahara conflict because it had interpreted the lack of any reference to SADR or Polisario as a sign of the shift of the Algerian position with regards to the issue. On the other side, Algeria was convinced that Morocco was willing to accept the ideological framework of “the Maghrebi identity” encouraged by the union and eventually to make some concessions towards reaching a more flexible solution (Mortimer, 1992: 251-253). In the next section, I will explain the reasons of the failure of the AMU in relation to these economic and political conditions and emphasize that the persistence of the same problems has caused the decline of the union.

4. Understanding the Failure of the AMU

The Maghreb populations share a common language, religious belief and similar culture which constitutes a part of their identity and also forge their Maghrebi consciousness (Jabri, 1985: 63-86). Despite these unifying factors, intra-Maghreb relations have often been undermined by a lack of mutual trust, common understanding and suspicion among the Maghreb regimes (Zoubir, 2000: 43-74). If one tries to explain the inability of the AMU in dealing with regional problems, it seems essential to take into consideration historical sequences of events.

The 1980s coincided with great political, economic and social transformations in the Maghreb. The founding states of the Union had sought to cover their lack of legitimacy and mass support by

²Article Two of the Treaty of Marrakesh on 17 February 1989, accessed November 25, 2020, https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/treaties/en/amu/trt_amu.pdf

³ Ibid.

⁴ Article Fifteen of the Treaty of Marrakesh on 17 February 1989, accessed November 25, 2020, https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/treaties/en/amu/trt_amu.pdf

emphasizing the regional unification process. As emphasised by Weldes, national interest In the case of Morocco, the royal palace adopted some political reforms with the objective of improving the Kingdom's image by decreasing social and economic troubles by the late 1980s. The motivation for this decision was rooted in the need for Western support for Morocco's campaign for the annexation of the Western Sahara (Damis, 1987: 198).

In Tunisia and Algeria, there was a new overture for liberalizing the political field at the end of the 1980s. In fact, it is possible to observe important differences between Algerian and Tunisia in terms of their one-party systems. Both regimes took the decision to liberalize their political system as a result of economic and political crises that Maghrebi states had to face by the end of the 1970s (Willis, 2014: 127-128).

In Algeria, the October 1988 riots pushed President Chadli Benjedid to announce a series of reforms including the adoption of a new constitution in February 1989. This constitution was permitting the "formation of an association of a political character" which paved the way for the legalization of a number of political parties including Islamists (Volpi, 2003: 46). However, the legalization of the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS-Islamic Salvation Front) might be seen as a consequence of internal power struggles since the death of Boumedienne. In fact, the adoption of multi-party politics was a strategy for weakening Chadli's powerful opponents within the FLN as well as allowing Chadli to dominate a National Assembly which was shaped by multi-party politics (Roberts, 1994: 124-126). Cavatorta points out;

The origin of Algerian transition is held to be the October 1988 riots. The harsh crackdown signified the beginning of the end for the ruling the Front de Liberation National (FLN). The riots were rooted in economic distress but were also a sign of a more profound malaise in Algerian society, which had been subjected for too long to authoritarian rule. Surprisingly, the regime responded to the crisis by opening up the political system and gave way 'to a new era of pluralistic competition'. President Chadli and the Army hoped that multi-party competition and freedom would lead to renewed legitimacy and their political survival (Cavatorta, 2002: 29-30).

In Tunisia, President Ben Ali had adopted a strategy of reconciliation with the Islamists and other oppositional groups. This moderate approach was resulted by the signature of the National Pact in 1988. A year later, Islamists participated in multi-party elections. It was hoped that this new era would allow Tunisia to have a more pluralist political system. However, these grand hopes soon ran into problems because Ben Ali decided to eliminate the Islamic movement by declaring that they were fighting against the religious extremism. This decision was motivated by the will of maintaining the political power (Shahin, 1998: 100-101). In Algeria, Islamists' success in the elections was impeded by the Algerian military which cancelled the second round of the elections and the banning of the FIS (Volpi, 2003: 52-55). In fact, the Maghreb regimes perceived the Islamic challenge as a genuine threat to their authoritarian rule. Willis claims that "in contrast to the military, the nature of the challenge posed by Islamism was principally through the movement's ability to mobilize vast numbers of the ordinary population in each state" (Willis, 2014: 155). Therefore, as critical constructivists argue, these changes in domestic politics of the AMU member states will affect their regional politics. Accordingly, they have considered AMU as a regional platform in order to face the Islamist challenge and manipulate the public support for their survival.

At this particular conjuncture, the creation of the AMU was perceived by Maghreb states as an important step in order to overcome the economic and political perturbances which were undermining

their internal and foreign prestige. Nevertheless, the lack of common consciousness between the Maghreb regimes remained a profound obstacle for deepening the regional relations.

It is possible to observe that the AMU's function has been interrupted because of the incapacity of developing a common attitude towards regional problems. If one takes into account the process, some examples illustrate this lack of common understanding and diverging interests among Maghreb states. The Presidential Council, the body which has the authority to take decisions has met only irregularly. This Council has met six times and the last summit was in April 1994. Following this meeting AMU member states have ceased participating in Maghreb summits. The lack of support from the member states of the AMU with regard to international sanctions imposed to Libya in 1992 because of its involvement in the Lockerbie Affair has marked a critical turning point which further distanced this country from the union (Hernando de Larramendi, 2008: 179-180). Thereafter Colonel Qadhafi reoriented its foreign policy towards Africa by losing its conviction for the progress of the Maghreb integration (Ronen, 2008: 130). This shift of the foreign policy focus became more visible when Libya refused to assume the rotating presidency of the AMU in 1996. What is more, Morocco had refused to participate the union's activities because of the Algerian compliance with Polisario in 1995. Another striking example of the lack of solidarity among the Maghreb regimes with regards to international issues was Mauritania's decision of establishing diplomatic relations with Israel in 1999 (Mortimer 1999). Therefore, Mauritania became the third state with a Muslim majority population that recognized the state of Israel after Egypt and Jordan. This decision triggered inherently a shock effect for the Arab nationalist sentiments of the Maghreb societies particularly in Libya and Algeria (Willis, 2014: 287). This diplomatic step made by Mauritania illustrates how long Maghreb states act unilaterally regarding international issues and prioritize their own national interest over the sensibilities of other Maghrebi societies. It also exemplified that Maghreb states constructed their identity on the basis of othering each other.

Also, intra-Maghreb trade would be supposedly a driving force of the regional integration as stipulated in the Treaty of Marrakech. However, the reality was different and intra-regional trade was 3 % of the total trade of the AMU member states in 1989 while the Maghreb trade between European states was 40 per cent in 1989. Ten years after the establishment of the Union this situation had not been changed (Mortimer, 1999: 178). While the Maghreb states did not display enough will for developing their economic relations, they have signed bilateral trade agreements between themselves outside of the AMU (Guechi, 2005: 187). This figure explains why the Maghreb counties could not be able to constitute an economic bloc regarding the European Union. The weak economic integration was further consolidated with the signature of bilateral free trade agreements of Morocco and Tunisia in 1996 and Algeria in 2001 with Europe (Willis, 2014: 287)

Another important factor that has hampered the performance of the AMU was its institutional structure (Willis, 2014: 287). The Article Six states that "only the Presidential Council shall have the authority to take decisions, and its decisions shall be taken unanimously".⁵ This structure is the origin of the difficulty in developing and progressing the Intra-Maghreb cooperation. Because "the fact that all decisions needed to be taken by the presidential council meant that progress became dependent on the individual heads of state and their personal whims and prejudices" (Willis, 2014: 286). An example that shows clearly this difficulty was the Gulf crisis and the war of 1990-9 because the member states of AMU could not develop a common attitude on this issue. The organizational structure of the AMU itself represents a clear example of the fact that Maghreb states forge their identity and national

⁵ Article Six of the Treaty of Marrakesh on 17 February 1989, accessed November 25, 2020, https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/treaties/en/amu/trt_amu.pdf

interest in a process of othering. This situation sheds light to the lack of conviction for the resolution of regional problems.

Beyond the reasons explained above, the most important obstacle for the revitalization of the objectives of the AMU was the dispute over Western Sahara. It was hoped that the AMU would constitute a platform for the resolution of the conflict. The closing of the land border between Algeria and Morocco in 1994 worsened bilateral relations and fueled the mutual suspicion (Hernando de Larramendi, 2008: 179). Since the late 1975, the northern two-thirds of the Sahara has been occupied by Morocco. The Polisario Front, an armed liberation movement has continued to fight against Morocco since 1979. Algeria's continued diplomatic and military support for Polisario has exacerbated the antagonism between Algeria and Morocco. If Morocco succeeds to annex the disputed territory, the country's territory will increase by 60 per cent and will add a region rich in natural resources including phosphate deposits (Damis, 1985: 138-139).

The creation of the AMU had raised hopes and expectations in both Algerian and Moroccan sides. These two states envisioned that the AMU will push them to rethink their positions towards the disputed territory. However, these expectations did not come to reality and Morocco froze its activities within the Union in 1995. It is also important to take into consideration the particular conditions during the 1990s which were combined with the Algerian civil war. In fact,

“The Islamist threat fueled mutual suspicions, becoming an element of interference in intra-Maghrebi relations. Radical Islamists were perceived primarily as a domestic threat and as an instrument neighboring country could use to destabilize one another” (Hernando de Larramendi, 2008: 183)

Benjedid has adopted a pragmatic approach with respect to the Western Sahara conflict. Mohamed Boudiaf who replaced Benjedid in January 1992 was also a close leader to Morocco because of having passed nearly thirty years of its exile in this country. Only six months after being president he was assassinated and his assassination worsened bilateral relations. In fact, the Moroccan side has perceived that the reason of his assassination was its close relationships with Morocco and the possibility that he was willing to follow a policy of reconciliation over the Western Sahara conflict (Zoubir, 2004: 159). The mutual suspicion has undermined Algerian-Moroccan relations during the civil war in 1990s and it was believed by the Algerian side that Morocco was supporting the armed Islamist groups in order to weaken Algeria's regional power.

Some efforts for the resolution of the Western Sahara conflict have been made after the creation of the AMU. A meeting was held between Hassan II and members of Polisario in January 1989. Therefore, United Nations was involved in the process in order to find a full solution to the conflict by convincing the parties to hold a referendum on the future status of the Western Sahara. This referendum was never held considering the difficulty of identifying persons who would vote. Because an important part of the Sahrawis live inside Morocco and Polisario did not accept this approach (Dunbar, 2000). As a result, this conflict continues to block the progress of the regional integration process since the creation of the Union.

5. Conclusion

The main objective of this article was to analyze the failure of the AMU through a critical constructivist account. The conception of state identity and national security developed by critical constructivists offers an insightful perspective and sheds light to the process of the AMU's ineffectiveness. The late 1980's marks a specific historical period for the Maghreb countries to fulfil their aspiration in order to

create a “United Maghreb” and a “Greater Maghreb”. However, these aspirations have not been materialized beyond the unionist ideals in the rhetoric of regional leaders.

In the case of the AMU, it is possible to observe that the union activities were obstructed because of some initial steps which have shaped the subsequent process. By taking into consideration the assumption that state identity and interest are formulated mutually and through a political process this study has shown that Maghreb states consider as “other” one another and defined their national interest on the basis of competition and power rivalry and not on cooperation. During the 1980s the Maghrebi regimes have had to face different challenges which have exacerbated their economic and political vulnerability. The Maghreb regimes have shown their commitment to fight against the rise of radical Islam which was seen as a big challenge to their internal security and stability. These regimes adopted some political reforms towards the end of the 1980s to counter the spread of Islamism across the region and to restore their declining reputation in the eyes of the public. The popular uprisings in Algeria in 1988, the replacement of Bourguiba in 1987 by Ben Ali, are some of these important transformations during this period. The persistence of economic problems culminated by the decline of oil prices and high unemployment were other motivations for the establishment of the AMU.

It would not be wrong to say that the Maghreb regimes, which showed great will in the establishment of the AMU, posed a great obstacle to the effectiveness of the Union due to the power struggle which shaped their identities and interests. Therefore, the incapacity of developing a common approach to the regional problems was a big challenge for the success of the AMU. The civil war that continued in Algeria in the 1990s, the Western Sahara problem which negatively affected the relations between Algeria and Morocco since 1975, and the border closure between the two countries in August 1994 blocked the regional cooperation. In addition to these, the sanctions against Libya, which was held responsible for the Lockerbie disaster in 1992, took Colonel Qadhafi away from the Maghreb and moved him to get closer to African countries in its foreign policy. In 1999, Mauritania's establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel contradicted the Arab nationalist sentiments that were effective in the region and this recognition was a step that reinforced antagonisms among the Maghreb countries.

Regarding regional economic cooperation, no serious progress has been made since the establishment of the AMU. Essentially, the perspective of forming an economic bloc was among the constitutive purposes of the union. While the total trade volume of the five member states in the Maghreb region was around 3 per cent in 2002, the trade volume of each member state with the EU was well above the trade volume among the Maghreb countries. As a matter of fact, considering that two-thirds of the total trade of the Maghreb countries is with EU countries, it can be better understood why the AMU could not negotiate with the EU as an economic bloc. The goal of creating an economic bloc, which is among the founding objectives of the AMU, was unsuccessful when Morocco, Tunisia in 1996 and Algeria in 2001 signed bilateral trade agreements with the EU independently. The fact that the biggest trade partners being the European countries since the independence of the Maghreb countries has not changed.

Another factor that negatively affects the AMU being an effective regional organization is its own organizational structure. Essentially, the Presidential Council where the presidents of five member states are located is the only body of the AMU with decision-making authority. Taking all decisions by the Presidential Council means that the personal value judgments of the heads of state of each country determine the fate of the union. This council has not been able to convene since February 1994.

In addition to these factors, it is possible to contend that the Western Sahara problem has a special importance in the failure of the AMU. Because perhaps the most driving force in the emergence of the Union was the hope of finding a solution to the Western Sahara dispute. From the Algerian perspective,

Chadli Benjedid hoped Morocco would take a more moderate approach to Western Sahara, thanks to the AMU. Thus, the debate on whether the Western Sahara belongs to Morocco or not could be overcome, and the "Maghrebi identity" as a more inclusive identity could encompass this region. Within the institutional structure of the AMU, direct negotiations could be initiated between Morocco and the armed resistance movement Polisario. To conclude, the analysis above shows that the critical constructivist account of state identity and interest offers a much more comprehensive understanding of the AMU's failure process. Because it includes domestic politics into its analysis and perceives state identity construction as a process of othering. The persistence of the Western Sahara conflict, the lack of common regional approach towards economic and political issues and the problems of its organizational structure explain problems associated with this type of identity construction Combined and taken into account together, all of these aspects explain AMU's failure.

Web Resources

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Article Two of the Treaty of Marrakesh on 17 February 1989, Retrieved November 25, 2020 from https://www.wipo.int/edocs/lexdocs/treaties/en/amu/trt_amu.pdf

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