Political Islam in Morocco: negotiating the Kingdom's liberal space[1]

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Abstract

The uprisings of the Arab spring have highlighted the weakness of traditional opposition actors which have been unable to predict and lead the revolutions. This paper, focusing on the case of Morocco, examines how the discourses and practices of the regime shaped the complex field of Political Islam, contributing to two distinct but interlinked phenomena. On the one hand, they have managed to lead Islamists and seculars to overcome many of their previous divisions to sustain common battles in the name of democracy and human rights. On the other they have deepened rifts and divisions among Islamists themselves on the crucial issue of political reforms.

Keywords: Islamism – globalisation – democracy – human rights - Morocco

Introduction

While it is too early to provide an assessment of the reasons that led to the 2011 Arab spring or to postulate how the different uprisings are going to conclude, there are already a number of interesting elements that emerge from current events (El-Din Haseeb, 2011). Among them, is the very notable absence in the demonstrations at the helm of the uprising of traditional opposition parties and mainstream civil society movements, including the Islamists. This is rather surprising if one considering the existence of a variety of opposition movements in most countries of the region. This is true also in the case of Morocco where the 'February 20th' movement at the origin of the current anti-regime demonstrations is also not affiliated to any specific opposition movement. While the absence of a clear political and ideological characterisation of the different uprisings is in the short-term beneficial to the potential success of the movements heading such uprisingsthem, it might constitute in the long-term a problem in so far as the success of processes of democratisation, based on past experiences, seems to be dependent on the existence of strong political parties or social movements transformed into parties. This calls therefore for an examination of opposition dynamics pre-uprising in order to explain why they seem to play a rather limited role in the current situation. This article focuses specifically on the multiple facets of political Islam in Morocco and argues that an explanation for the weakness of organised and structured social and political movements is due not only to the traditional differences between seculars and Islamists, but also to fundamental disagreements among Islamists as well. In addition,

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the articles argues that the case of Morocco demonstrates quite clearly how the discourses and practices of authoritarian regimes matter significantly in shaping opposition strategies and have unintended consequences beyond their attempts at authoritarian upgrading (Heydemann, 2007).

<u>Opposition politics in the Arab world</u>

The literature on opposition movements in the Arab world has focused traditionally on the role that they perform in challenging the incumbent regimes. As Albrecht (2010: 3) argues 'opposition and contentious collective activism has almost exclusively been addressed by looking at the potential overthrow of incumbent regimes.' Recently however, more refined analyses of opposition politics in the Arab world have emerged. These studies examine the way in which opposition parties and movements become, willingly or unwillingly, pillars of the authoritarian regime that they so resent. ~~Despite the constant threat of repression, i~~It has been argued <u>further</u> that Arab regimes are able to manage vast sectors of the opposition more through direct co-optation than repression (Albrecht, 2005). The acceptance of many within the opposition <u>camp</u> to be co-opted stems from belief that they might in some way <u>influence</u> the politics of the regime or from the material benefits they might derive in becoming a 'loyal' opponent. More significantly however, co-optation is at times the direct outcome of divisions within the opposition itself (Cavatorta and Elananza, 2008). Opposition movements in the Arab world tend to subscribe to radically opposed ideologies and views of what policies the country should follow. These profound divisions undermine the unity of the opposition, which is a crucial asset if ruling elites are to be faced down convincingly. In the Arab world, the main dividing line over the last four decades has been the one between Islamists and secular-leftists and while there have been numerous examples of cross-ideological co-operation between these two sectors and a convergence towards a shared definition of democratic accountability (Abderahman, 2009: Clark, 2010), mutual suspicions still remain and make successful and lasting co-operation difficult. The debate about the role of the *En-Nahda* party in Tunisia in the construction of a post-Ben Ali political system is for instance highly contested in spite of the party's pro-democratic declarations and its participation to coalition-building with secular parties while in exile <u>(Martinez-Fuentes, 2011)</u>. Thus, when co-operation occurred, this was often *ad*

hoc and limited in time and space, failing to generate a sustained and effective coalition against authoritarian rulers (Clark~~Cavatorta and Durac~~, 200~~6~~10).

In Morocco this was also the case. During the 1990s and early 2000s political Islam and secular leftist groups found it extremely difficult to find common ground due to their profound ideological differences. However, the paper argues that, paradoxically, the rhetoric of democracy, accountability, human rights and development that the regime adopted so openly since the arrival of Mohammad VI in power has been instrumental in creating the possibility for both sectors of the opposition to move beyond ideology and confront each other on concrete political issues. This has led to two phenomena. On the one hand, sectors of political Islam entered a dialogue and cooperation with secular-leftists due to a convergence of interests and opinions. On the other, there has been a deepening of already existing divisions within both the Islamist and secular/leftist camps, indicating that a neat separation between the two might not be a useful analytical tool to interpret opposition politics in Morocco, as it has become clear that the divisions are the product of the acceptance or refusal of the rules of the game dictated by the monarchy rather than absolute ideological positions. In this game whose rules are set by the Monarch, the sacralisation of the public space is a crucial element (Tozy, 1999). Although the July 2011 Constitution no longer refers to the Monarch as sacred, the religious legitimacy of the Monarchy is still a crucial aspect of its overall legitimacy to rule and opposition parties have to accept such legitimacy of they want to be able to openly participate to the political game. This has profound repercussions for political movements wishing to remove the central policy-making role of the Monarchy by denying it a religious sacred legitimacy. This means that opposition politics and therefore the discourse linked to it are better understood by looking at whether Islamist or secular groups are included in the official and accepted political sphere or outside of it, which depends on accepting the religious pre-eminence of the Monarchy, a concept that is potentially highly problematic for both religious and secular parties.

Since the early 1990s, the Moroccan monarchy has accompanied the sacralisation of the political and public space with a discourse based on the values of democracy and modernity, including notions of liberal human rights and sustainable economic development. ~~In this respect~~According to most observers (Amar, 2009: Vermeren, 2009) the Moroccan regime ~~might have~~ adopted a strategy of 'upgrading

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authoritarianism' (Heydemann, 2007) in introducing such notions in its official discourse. While this is certainly true, the very introduction of such concept that has had had unintended consequences. By introducing a rhetoric and practice of globalisation that rested on the Adopting a mainstream and internationally-accepted notion of globalisation that rests on the values of human rights, democracy and development in order to 'divide and conquer' the opposition and to bolster its international standing, the Monarchy unwittingly opened the door to a re-composition of the political field where old divisions disappeared making a dialogue between Islamists and leftists possible. All many of the actors of Moroccan Islamism seized on this opportunity to advance their causes and objectives, linking up at times with leftist elements and therefore re-shaping the way in which opposition politics works in Morocco. This was made possible because the nominally global values of human rights, democracy and development have been contaminated with local experiences and understandings, allowing different political movements to use them against the incumbent (Browers, 2006). This has led to a new set of cooperative efforts between Islamists and leftists, although it has also created new The downside of this linking up however is that the rifts between the two camps are deepening, allowingthat still allow the Moroccan Monarch to still dictate politics even in face of mounting protests. It is in this vacuum that affects the opposition that both violent radicalism and youth-driven social movements not connected with parties become the protagonists of Moroccan political life.

The Moroccan liberal space

On October 1st 2010, the *TelQuel* media group formally announced at a press conference that the Arabic language weekly *Nichane*, which had become the best selling weekly magazine in the country, would cease its publication. *Nichane* was formally closed because it lacked the financial resources to continue operating, but in reality the magazine was a victim of a concerted campaign of financial boycott on the part of the state and business interests close to the regime, which refused to continue to place adverts in the publication. This occurred because *Nichane* had become too independent and critical of many of the policies that the government and the Monarchy were pursuing. As the press release of the *TelQuel* group indicates, 'since 2009, the determined struggle of the State against independent newspapers and

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magazines has accelerated significantly…the Moroccan authorities seem to be bent on following the Tunisian model [under Ben Ali], where only the newspapers that serve the interests of the regime are tolerated.'[2] The closure of *Nichane* and the repression of independent journalism are simply one of the latest episodes in the authoritarian retrenchment that Morocco is experiencing since the middle of the 2000s. While some would contend that the new Constitution approved by referendum in July 2011 is a potent signal that Morocco is still on course for democratization, a degree of scepticism is necessary in so far as the central role of the Monarch in shaping and dictating policies has not been undermined (Dalmasso and Cavatorta, 2011) with both repression and co-optation simply taking on new forms. In many ways this authoritarian retrenchment is in sharp contradiction with the enthusiasm and genuine hope for political change that had greeted the arrival of Mohammed VI to power in 1999 and with the liberalising policies that he implemented, including ones that 'made Morocco a regional exception in terms of freedom of the press' (Interview with Ahmed Benchemsi, editor at the time of *Tel Quel* magazine, 2010).

During the first few years in power Mohammed VI showed with concrete actions and policies his intention to seemingly democratise the country and instil a 'human rights' culture in state's institutions. His father had understood in the early 1990s that Morocco needed liberalising political reforms and he had begun to undertake some of them, including the creation of a Human Rights Ministry, but most Moroccans and many analysts simply believed these changes to be a *façade* and placed much greater hope in the son. They were not to be disappointed and, as one former political prisoner and human rights activist declared in 2005 'society is now allowed to breathe' (Interview with author, 2005). The change in emphasis in favour of both democracy and human rights was not only rhetorical, as Mohammed VI took meaningful steps to support his declarations. He fired the powerful Minister of Interior Driss Basri, encouraged the creation of a reconciliation commission to investigate past abuses, the first one of its kind in the Muslim world, and passed legislation aimed at making it easier for civil society organisations to be set up and be involved in policy-making processes. The enthusiasm that these initiatives generated should not be underestimated and they gave a certain momentum to all those political and civil activists who had suffered during Hassan II's repressive era, mobilising

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[2] Groupe TelQuel, *Communiqué de presse*, Casablanca, October 1, 2010.

previously hidden and new energies within society. Thus, under Mohammed VI there has been what Howe (2005) termed 'an explosion' in civil society activism, including organisations promoting and defending human rights. Such organisations were involved in the setting up of the *Instance Equité et Réconciliation* (IER), which bought a significant amount of legitimacy to the King both domestically and internationally as did the 2004 reform of the family code. Such initiatives were coupled with the implementation of policies aimed at rendering the electoral process and the state's institutions more democratic. The 2002 legislative elections were in this respect a turning point in Morocco, as they did not display the same level of 'interference' from the authorities as previous consultations did. In addition, there seemed to be the genuine intention to involve Parliament more significantly in policy-making rather than relying exclusively on the executive, which is appointed by the King (Denoeux and Desfosses, 2007).

While a small number of activists always doubted Mohammad VI's liberalising intentions, the majority of them bought into the vision that they were contributing to build democracy in Morocco in the context of a western-inspired globalisation structured precisely around the values of democracy and human rights they could easily be reconciled with. The changes that Mohammed VI introduced are not the product of globalisation and were not generated from the outside, but were made possible because there was a framework that the Monarch could utilise to placate both domestic and external critics. The notions and selective meaning of democracy and human rights that were acceptable to the international community were used in the Moroccan context in order to allow the new Monarch the space to navigate the system and renew the legitimacy of the throne. In this context, Mohammed VI did not introduce anything innovative in so far as he follows on the tentative gradualist approach to selective democratisation that his father had inaugurated, but what changes with the new global democratic zeitgeist is that forms of protest and dissent that were always in existence ion Morocco and used to be repressed are now legitimate because the Monarchy refers to them as a legitimising tool for its new course. This new course is however meant to co-opt previously repressed actors rather than fundamentally reconfiguring power. During Hassan II's reign those political and social actors that demanded democracy, justice and respect for human rights were countered by the Monarchy by using notions of tradition and cultural specificity, resorting basically to use Islamism against the broad left. Once the

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legitimising discourse changes and favour precisely notions of democracy and human rights, Islamists are also largely forced to follow suit although they appropriate these values differently.

The rhetoric and actions emanating from the Palace seemed in fact to substantiate the support that the King enjoyed in political circles previously hostile to the Monarchy because of its authoritarian rule such as the leadership of the Socialist party, the Marxist left and sectors of political Islam. Thus, there was the legitimate expectation that the reforms would continue and that Mohammad VI would be the one enabling the Moroccan transition to democracy by gradually modifying the role of the Monarchy from an executive to a simply representative one. On May 16 2003 however the history of Morocco took a different course. Fourteen suicide bombers, belonging to a local radical Islamist group called *al-Salafyia al-Jihadia*, attacked targets in central Casablanca, signalling the end of the Moroccan exception. Until then, Moroccan ruling elites prided themselves of being exceptional within the Arab world in so far as the country was not concerned with terrorism The attacks shattered the belief that Morocco was immune to regional trends.

The response of the regime was particularly strong and a new spiral of human rights abuses began, targeting specifically manifestations of political Islam. Initially, large sectors of the human rights community were not overly concerned with such abuses as other reforms beneficial to 'human rights' in general were being implemented, but the repressive turn soon extended from Islamists to other social actors such as *Diplomés Chômeurs*[3] or independent magazines and newspapers. In addition to this, no meaningful democratisation of the political system took place. For instance, the 2007 legislative elections were far from being the historic event that the regime enthused about with foreign diplomats, as ordinary Moroccans simply did not bother turning out (Storm, 2008). and, iIf anything, the Monarch hass been able to reasserted his central and undisputed authority on Moroccan politics and the Constitutional reforms of 2011 have not changed this. , avoiding any constitutional reform that would limit his executive powers. The 2007 legislative elections were far from being the historic event that the regime enthused about with foreign diplomats

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[3] *Diplomés Chômeurs* literally means 'Unemployed Graduates' and is a collection of different groups of students with university degrees who are unable to find suitable employment despite their qualifications and organise protests against the government to highlight their plight and the poor economic policies adopted. *Diplomés Chômeurs* activities, such as marches or sit-ins, are very often broken up by the police with violence. For more on this issue see Badimon Emperador (2007).

~~and ordinary Moroccans simply did not bother turning out (Storm, 2008).~~ Thus, after over ten years in power, it emerges that, according to numerous scholars and observers of Morocco, Mohammed VI's reign has been largely disappointing in terms of democratisation and the promotion of human rights (Amar, 2009; Vermeren, 2009). What is more worrying from a normative point of view is that the regime seems to have become more authoritarian and intolerant of dissent during the past few years, effectively ending any hope that Morocco would be the first country in the Arab world to move from authoritarianism towards democracy. ~~Mohammed VI promised in March 2011 that the recommendations on how to democratise the system of a newly appointed Constitutional Commission would be implemented, but the appointees are largely members of the *Makhzen* and loyal to the king, leadings sceptics to argue that this is another delaying tactic in the face of mounting street protests.~~

The way in which King Mohammed VI handled the transfer of power from his father to him and the subsequent policies he adopted are now understood through the notion of 'upgrading Arab authoritarianism' (Heydemann, 2007). While there is probably some truth in this analysis, this should not overshadow two significant points. First of all, this reading is applied after the fact and this inevitably underestimates the way in which society and the political system were genuinely opened up by Mohammad VI (El-Ghissassi, 2006). The framework of upgraded authoritarianism is indeed a very useful one to account for the survival of Arab leaders in power, but it might wrongly assume that this strategy was intentional from the beginning and entirely successful. Secondly, today's Morocco is not the Morocco of the 'years of lead.' This does not mean that it is not authoritarian and that there are no echoes of past practices as the disappearance of *Salafist* prisoners at the hands of the security forces demonstrates (Human Rights Watch, 2010), but there is nevertheless a liberal space that exists and within which a number of political movements and civil society actors operate.

Democracy, human rights and economic development through integration with the global economy constituted the rhetorical framework that the Monarchy utilised to implement political, social and economic reforms since the late 1990s and this links Moroccan domestic developments to global trends. ~~Even in these current times of authoritarian retrenchment T~~the rhetoric of democracy and human rights has far from disappeared <u>in the public Moroccan discourse</u> and in fact constitutes the point of reference of the Monarchy, which argues that repressive measures are necessary to

protect the achievements of the past decade in the face of hostile and anti-democratic forces. As Mohammad VI pointed out in the speech which with he launched the IER, there is a connection between adhering to a human rights doctrine and fighting terrorism. He explicitly argued that 'this [was] the way to consolidate positive citizenship and to promote democracy, patriotism and the dissemination of a culture of human rights and duties. [These values] are the strongest ramparts to protect our society from extremism and terrorism, which We are determined to fight with the firmness required of those who are in charge of protecting the stability and security [of the country] in the context of the rule of law.'[4]

This liberal environment, however limited it might be, has mobilised the different 'souls' of Islamism, which have responded in different ways to the changes in the Kingdom and reacted differently to both the rhetoric and daily practice of democracy, human rights and economic development as conceived of by the Monarchy. It is therefore important to analyse the way in which these religious actors have dealt with the new political arrangements in place and how they have at times appropriated and at times fought against the rhetoric and the political values that the King through the new international pro-democracy context 'globalisation' brought to Morocco, building on their own understanding and experience of such notions.

<u>Political Islam in Morocco</u>

Contrary to what scholars such as Munson (1991) argued in the early 1990s, Islamism in Morocco has become a political force to be reckoned with, indicating that the Kingdom, despite the religious legitimacy of the Monarchy, did not constitute an exception in the region. In a 2003 article reviewing the different expressions of political Islam in Morocco, Laskier argued that there were three clusters of Islamism in the country and to a certain extent his analysis is still valid today, although new Islamist actors have also appeared on the scene since then.

First of all, there is a legally recognised political formation, the Party for Justice and Development (PJD), which is a socially conservative party integrated since 1996 into the political and institutional system devised by the Monarchy. The party is indeed allowed to participate to institutional politics precisely because it

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[4] Mohammad VI, *Discours prononcé par SM le Roi à l'occasion de l'installation de l'Instance Equité et Réconciliation*, January 7, 2004. Text available at http://www.maroc.ma/NR/exeres/B272623A-227C-46D3-AC67-557BE9DCDF7A

accepts the limits imposed by the Monarchy on the political game and therefore the PJD explicitly recognises the primacy of the Monarchy in the country's institutional and constitutional set-up. The PJD, despite never having entered a government's coalition, is deemed to be integrated into the liberalised autocratic system because of its unwillingness to criticise the monarch and bow to the Makhzen's pressure when necessary. The acceptance of the sacred nature of the Monarch was the precondition for being able to operate openly in the political system and the PJD can be certainly considered loyal opposition (Zeghal, 2005). For instance, upon request by the authorities, the party decided not to run candidates in all constituencies at the 2002 legislative elections precisely to avoid sweeping the board and embarrassing the King with a significant Islamist electoral victory (Willis, 2004). As recently as February the Spring of 2011, the PJD refused to support the protest movements sweeping across Morocco precisely because they believe that constitutional reform should not be demanded in the streets but should be the product of parties' lobbying and should be formally initiated by the Monarch. This attitude has triggered the resignation from the party of three prominent members supportive of the demonstrators.[5] In short, the PJD is very much part of what can be labelled the 'loyal opposition' in so far as it remains deferent to the monarchy and to its executive primacy. The Monarch recently announced that there will be constitutional reforms and that the new provisions will limit the executive role of the King, although the repression of demonstrators continues.

Second, there is the very popular semi-legal Justice and Charity Association (*al-Adl*) founded by the long time dissident Sheikh Abd al-Salam Yassine. This association operates like a social movement providing services and assistance to the poorer sections of society and is preoccupied with Islamising society from below by promoting a sort of Sufi-infused utopianism (Kristianasen, 2007). The social service it provides however have a considerable political dimension and the association also has a '*cercle politique*' that functions like a political bureau. The *cercle* is charged with drawing up the political positions of the association on a number of national issues and has been consistently critical of the way Morocco is run and therefore directly critical of the Monarchy, whose legitimacy to rule it does not accept. This anti-

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[5] For the details of the PJD's position on recent demonstrations and internal repercussions, see the magazine *Aujourd'hui le Maroc* at www.aujourdhui.ma/instantanes-depeche81050.html Accessed on March, 10, 2011.

monarchical stance prevents the association from gaining not only the legal permission to operate social services, but, crucially, prevents them from becoming a political party. In fact, in order to be able to compete in elections the association would have to accept the limits, role and legitimacy of the Monarchy, which is a price that the association refuses to pay because it would then undermine their status as uncompromising opposition. Sheikh Yassine himself has been and still is a very outspoken critic of the Crown, which is blamed for not tackling the social and economic ills of Moroccan society (poverty, corruption of moral values, deference to the West, social atomisation). Islam is pointed out as the solution to all these difficulties and the social services, the cultural meetings and the political activities of the association are all infused with religious piety in order to demonstrate that there is a concrete alternative not only to the way in which Moroccan society operates, but also a spiritual dimension with which governance should be infused. This does not make the association a naïve and purely spiritual group or a mad lunatic fringe as often depicted in pro-regime media. Over time its leaders have been capable to of demonstrating their political acumen on a number of issues by adopting very rational positions (Cavatorta, 2007). As prominent member Nadia Yassine argued 'we have a *cercle politique* that draws up concrete policy proposals, [which means] that we are not only mad naysayers …we have concrete proposals [for the country]' (Interview with author, 2008).

The third Islamist camp is composed of ~~two~~ different Salafi tendencies. On~~e the one hand there~~ is the clandestine *Salafist Jihad*, a nebulous group devoted to overthrowing the government through violence. It is a minority strand and does not enjoy much popular support, but was responsible for the May 2003 Casablanca attacks. The movement *Salafist Jihad* has virtually disappeared due to the mass arrests that it experienced over the last few years. The security forces' crackdown on Islamist terrorism and the marginalisation of *Salafist Jihad* by all other political groups combined to dismantle its network. Most of the militants are in jail and the ~~only~~ activities currently ~~taking place~~visible in the public space connected with the movement are the ones that the association *Ennasir* holds in order to highlight the plight of the prisoners and their families. Most of these prisoners have been arrested and tried in very controversial circumstances and *Ennasir* attempts to highlight how the Salafi prisoners' convictions have been unlawfully obtained by state, which employed kangaroo courts and torture. In addition, *Ennasir* struggles to defend the

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rights of the families of the prisoners as spouses and children suffer from harassment and discrimination on the part of the authorities in a number of realms ranging from the schooling of children to welfare benefits. The association *Ennasir*, founded in November 2004 ~~,with the objective of defending the prisoners' rights and the rights of their families,~~ is a self-defined human rights organisation. On the other hand, we have also the return on the scene of *Dawa Salafism*, which 'concentrates on Islamising its followers and isolating them from the political process rather than directly challenging the state' (Boubekeur, 2008). While this phenomenon seems to be growing considerably in Algeria, it does not seem to have become as popular yet in Morocco, although there is a history of it in the country. Today, the best know representative of this type of Islamism is theologian Sheikh Maghraoui, whose religious association promotes a very strict and literal interpretation of Islam. The Sheikh has come under severe criticism in recent years for his position on the issue of under-age marriage and in a 2008 fatwa he stated that 'the marriage of nine-year-old girls is not forbidden because according to the *Hadith* (the Prophet Mohammed's sayings), Mohammed married Aisha when she was only seven-years-old and he consummated his union when she was nine.'[6] These declarations have political undertones in so far as they seem to indicate that political and social relations should be based on immutable interpretations of sacred texts and sayings, but it they are strictly non-political in the sense that followers are encouraged to isolate themselves from official and institutional politics. In any case they have provoked a backlash against the association and the Sheikh with the authorities intervening to shut down some of their activities, although the Sheikh himself has a considerable power base in Marrakech and has been left alone by the authorities who have allowed him to leave for Saudi Arabia.[7]

Finally, there exists a cluster of Islamism connected to and supportive of the Monarchy, which is often marginalised in studies of Moroccan politics, but that nevertheless is an important actor in the legitimisation of current political arrangements. There are for instance brotherhoods and associations such as the sufi *Zaouiya Boutchichia*, which has an important role in Morocco because it functions as the connection between sectors of the pious middle-class and the monarchy. The

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[6] See statement at http://www.middle-east-online.com/ENGLISH/?id=27880 Accessed on October 22, 2010.
[7] More on Dawa Salafism in Morocco see http://www.lobservateur.info/Maroc/enfance-salafiste-les-brigands-de-linnocence.php Accessed on March 11, 2011.

movement is very much aligned with the monarchy on political and social matters, which means that it can be mobilised to compete with opposition Islamism.

Thus, the field of Islamism in Morocco is both varied and complex with competing trends and approaches to politics and social engagement, which depend on the religious beliefs held and on the political outlooks of leaders and members. Given the variegated field of Islamism in Morocco, the introduction of the values of mainstream globalisation incarnated by the notions of democracy, human rights, and economic liberal development has had a different impact on the actors of Islamism, which have taken these values and re-interpreted to suit their specific agenda. What is interesting to note is that in the process of engaging with such mainstream values, all these movements attempt to give them a '*halal* rubber stamp' to make them compatible with their religious and political beliefs. This has led to different types of concrete relations with other actors on the political and social scene that do not subscribe to religious values as guides for policy-making and activism. In the next section we analyse these relations.

Between religious ideology and pragmatism

Haynes (2010: 149) recently argued that 'despite the undoubted impact of western-dominated globalisation…the impact on the MENA in terms of changing the context, terms of debate and preferences in favour of liberal-democracy is relatively limited.' This argument carries a degree of validity in so far as the values of liberal-democracy might not yet be as widespread as one would expect, but it is also important to note that not all the MENA countries are the same and in the case of Morocco, some religious actors have appropriated the discourse and practice of Western-dominated globalisation to turn it in fact to their advantage and at times against its very proponents both domestic and international. It is this discursive and practical appropriation filtered through local traditions and modes of understanding that we investigate to illustrate how religious actors in Morocco operate. In turn, these different understandings of what democracy, human rights and development are produce significant divergences between the different souls of political Islam and this has consequences for the way in which coalition-building among nominally opposition groups takes place.

There is little doubt that one of the core-values of liberal western-dominated globalisation is the respect of individual human rights. While in the past Islamist

movements, much like other religiously inspired actors in Christianity or Judaism, countered this discourse by rejecting the very notion of individual rights to focus on the notion of the common good which implied that some individual rights could be sacrificed to obtain it (Fuller, 2004), this is no longer the case today for some Islamist actors. The position of the association *Ennasir* linked to the *Salafi Jihadi* movement is for instance one provides an example of a group that would not normally be associated with the promotion and defense of individual rights. However, it is precisely this Islamist association that has for the past few years been at the forefront of the struggle for human rights in Morocco when it comes to the right to a fair trial, the right not to be discriminated because of specific political beliefs and the right of being treated respectfully while in custody. While the association is certainly not representative of the broader Salafi trend and has been set up with a very specific and narrow mission, it is still important to highlight that its The struggle they conduct rests on a classic liberal interpretation of human rights and has benefited, paradoxically, from the rhetorical engagement of the Moroccan authorities on this very theme. The Monarchy and the Moroccan state have built its current reputation on the willingness to break with past abusive practices and the necessity to have proper rule of law and respect human rights. Despite, the authoritarian retrenchment in evidence since late 2003, the rhetoric, as mentioned earlier in the paper, has not changed. This stance exposes the Moroccan authorities to the charge of hypocrisy given the way in which the rights of the members of *Salafyyia Jihadia* and the families of the members have been treated and the association *Ennasir* utilises the very same rhetoric to point at the inconsistency of the regime discourse. This does not mean that members of *Ennasir* uncritically accept the notion of individual human rights as a gift from the West that they are grateful for. There is an elaboration of such a concept taking place in light of the indigenous experiences, both practical and discursive, which is used to frame the demands they make, but, crucially, the resonance of the notion of human rights is much grarter and carries more influence both at home and abroad. A further twist is that the response that the cause of *Ennasir* has elicited from other human rights associations and from fellow Islamists. This has meant that large scale human rights abuses committed against Islamists, however unpalatable their political views might be, did not find unanimous condemnation in traditional human rights circles because, again, the elaboration of such notions depends on the wider ideological framework that different movements and even individuals might have. Quite the contrary in fact

occurred, asRather than being welcomed in the human rights camp, *Ennasir* activists found that the doors to traditional left-wing dominated human rights groups were closed to them when they raised the issue of the *Salafi* prisoners. As Abderrahim Mouhtad, president of *Ennasir*, admitted, 'before taking the decision of founding *Ennasir*, we knocked on all the doors of NGOs involved in human rights issues here in Morocco so that they might wish to take up the *Salafi* prisoners' issue. Truly, I want to confirm that these NGOs did not want [to help] us' (Interview with author, 2008). Islamists prisoners are no longer shy about telling their stories of abuse at the hands of the state publicly, as Storm (2009: 112) argues. She states that 'radical Islamists often have unfair trials, and are ill-treated while in prison, something that is becoming increasingly apparent as more and more Islamists begin to tell their stories of torture and abuse, not only to their families, but now also to human-rights organizations and the media.' Their plight is therefore quite public, which makes the decision not to help out all the more puzzling.

Thus, the decision of many human rights NGOs in Morocco not to defend the rights of the *Salafi Jihadi* prisoners occurred irrespective of the often private acknowledgment that many of the ones who had been unjustly arrested, tortured, tried and sentenced in unfair proceedings were not guilty of any violent act, but were being punished for their political ideas. For example the president of *Forum Marocain Verité et Justice*, an organisation that in the past had seen the coming together of both Islamist and leftist activists in defence of human rights , recently declared that 'the [human rights] violations committed after 1999 are not as serious [as the ones committed before then]' (*Le Journal*, January 2010). While this might be numerically correct in the sense that the *Salafi* prisoners who suffered and still suffer in jails are between 2,000 and 5,000, the scale should be irrelevant when it comes to abuses. However, this declaration sums up the view of many within secular civil society regarding the human rights regime that the Monarchy has put in place: human rights do not necessarily apply to problematic Islamists. There is however one important exception to this trend., Tthe secular-leftist *Association Marocaine des Droits Humains* (AMDH) has from the beginning beening very critical of the regime's treatment of the Salafi prisoners and of the abuses to which they were subjected to. Such an engagement with this issue dates back to at least 2005 when members of the families of Islamist prisoners were allowed to tell their story during the AMDH series

of open forums entitled '*Temoignages en toute liberté pour la vérité*.'[8] As the president of association Khadija Ryadi declared 'given that international conventions are our framework of reference [for our activism], our positions, discourse and demands are always in line with those conventions. This applies to every issue, be it the rights of women or the rights of Islamists. We defend everybody, all those who are victims of violence and abuse on the part of the regime' (Interview with author, 2009). This is quite an important point because it indicates that one of the key values of liberal globalisation, no matter what the specific elaboration of it, has become the glue of movements that are normally on opposing ideological sides. Naturally, it could be argued that the belief in a liberal notion of human rights on the part of *Ennasir* is simply instrumental, but while this might be the case, it should be disregarded as irrelevant because once a movement begins to express support for specific ideas it is then bound to them to certain extent (Schwedler, 2006). The position of *Ennasir* is striking also because the other Islamist groups, including the Party for Justice and Development and Yassine's *al-Adl* movement, prefer to remain almost entirely silent on the issue of Salafi prisoners. Their virtual silence can be explained by the ideological and political threat that Salafism poses to both movements and by the fear of increased repression against them if they do get involved.

The *al-Adl*, while critical of the monarchy, does not support the use of violence as a means to achieve political change in Morocco because this is not only religiously proscribed, but ultimately self-defeating politically as the masses have to be brought to be participants of change rather than simply having change imposed on them through a violent overthrow of the present regime (Nadia Yassine, interview with author, 2008). The PJD is integrated into the political system designed by the Monarch and it therefore has to tow the line on this very sensitive issue as well. Thus, the Casablanca bombings had the effect of crystallising a fragmentation of civil society that still today prevents the creation of a unanimous front on what human rights actually are and how they should be promoted or defended. The upshot is the absence of a serious challenge to the interpretation and implementation of human rights policies that the *Makhzen* has now the monopoly on. This particular relationship between movements of different ideological hues is not the only one that

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[8] See www.amdh.org.ma/html/act_pub.asp Accessed on March 11, 2011.

has drawn on ~~the western inspired globalisation surrounding~~ the notion of human rights <u>as understood in the liberal tradition</u>. The discursive and practical applications of the different religious groups regarding the nature of human rights run along multiple and variable lines. In this context it is worth examining for instance how socio-economic rights ~~has~~ entered the Moroccan political scene. In the face of the aggressive economic liberalisation that the Monarchy implemented over the course of the last decade to integrate the country into the global economy according to neo-liberal principles (Cohen and Jaidi, 2006)<u>.</u> some religious actors have turned to the language of socio-economic rights to criticise such policies and the devastating social outcomes they have had. The position of the *al-Adl* is in this respect quite strong, as the association provides a thorough critique of the neo-liberalism and its effects in Morocco not by resorting to trite anti-imperialist sloganeering, but by focusing on the absence of respect of the most basic socio-economic rights of ordinary Moroccans, which, according to the *al-Adl* undermines the quest for democracy. In this context, the dramatic socio-economic data ranging from youth unemployment to rates of literacy and from GDP per capita the number of Moroccans emigrating~~, that~~ the *cercle politique* employs in its critique are not simply equated with failed economic policies, but, crucially, are seen as the concrete denials of democratic rights[9]. Thus, in many respects, socio-economic rights have primacy over political and civil ones because only when there is just economic development and a fairer distribution of resources there can be democracy. <u>This debate is very similar to the one carried out in many other developing nations and even in developed ones, whereby g</u>~~G~~lobalisation is not identified as being negative *per se* because the negative effects it has are the product of the greed and mismanagement of <u>national</u>~~the~~ economic elites and <u>rulers</u>~~the Monarchy~~. They are the ones who are held responsible for the poor state of the nation<u>.</u> <u>In the Moroccan case,</u> ~~and the~~ *al-A<u>d</u>l*'s 2007 document concludes that 'it is the Makhzen that has become the real obstacle to democracy and development.'

Accordingly, ~~the~~ *al Adl* is very engaged in supporting all forms of struggles that take place in Moroccan workplaces where workers strive for better pay and conditions and to end exploitation. It is therefore obvious that they support the current anti-regime demonstrations. This emphasis on socio-economic rights is in line with the thinking and the activities of some secular leftist groups and this has generated a

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[9] See the *Lettre ouverte à toute conscience resposnable*, publsihed in December 2007 by the cercle politique of the al-Adl. Available at www.hoggar.org

degree of cooperation and coordination with them. The political formation with which the *al-Adl* is most closely cooperating with *Annaji Addimouqrati* (AD), a leftist group that is very engaged in alter-globalisation initiatives and in anti-regime political activities. This leftist group shares the same analysis of the ills of Morocco with the leadership of the *al-Adl* it is also considers the negation of socio-economic rights as the most significant obstacle to democracy because it conceives of democratic governance not merely as procedures and mechanisms of elections, but, crucially, as the necessary condition for the distribution of wealth. Thus, democracy has a considerable substantive dimension. At the operational level, this analytical coincidence with the *al-Adl* leads the two movements to support all sorts of demonstrations, strikes and struggles that have an economic dimension and are therefore active in providing material and political support to workers in different industries that strive to better their conditions, to the unemployed and to people living in slums who demand better living standards. One of the leaders of AD, Ali Afkir, pointed to a specific example of cooperation with the *al-Adl*: '[we both] support the struggle of factory workers in a factory for the treatment of phosphates to have their independent union recognised' (Interview with author, 2010).

There is also a political and institutional dimension to this cooperation between the two. At the ideological level, the AD is committed to a type of political pluralism that includes the right of all movements to be heard on the public stage, including the Islamists of the *al-Adl*, even if they 'have profound disagreements with them on the issue of personal freedoms. Ali Afkir declared that 'as long as the debate is conducted democratically and with respect, all have the right to express their political point of views' (Interview with author, 2010). The same degree of tolerance of difference characterises the discourse of Omar Iharchane, member of the *cercle politique* of the *al-Adl*, who argued that '[the *al-Adl*] is ready to discuss with every other political force in Morocco. Obviously we are aware of the fact that some political movements perceive us badly and are afraid of us, but the fears are mutual and this is why debating with everyone is important' (interview with author, 2010). The two movements have indeed taken their cooperation beyond declarations of mutual tolerance and beyond concrete support for workers into the institutional arena, having run candidates on the same list for elections in the professional association of the engineers.

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At the institutional level, the regime has also made much of the notion of democracy and democratisation to frame the politics of Mohammad VI. On this issue as well, Islamists have applied different perspectives and subscribe to opposing readings. The PJD perceives itself as 'building democracy' through participation in institutional politics, running candidates for Parliament and attempting to influence policy-making from within the system. In this respect they cooperate with established political parties that have been loyal to the monarchy since their creation and behave as 'responsible' members of the establishment. Institutional participation in Morocco depends on the acceptance of the predominant role of the Monarchy and its legitimacy to shape policy and the PJD, as a religious party, accepts this because the monarch is legitimated to rule by the fact that he is the descendent of the Prophet. There is therefore a religious justification for their participation in addition to the practical one that they prefer to be inside institutions and trying to affect change rather than being outside and being unable to see any of their most preferred policies implemented. In this respect they behave much like the Socialist party (USFP), a one time foe of the Monarchy and now fully co-opted in the political system.

Contrary to the PJD, the other clusters of Islamism refuse participation because they see it as selling-out to a monarch that has no intention of creating a genuine democracy where elected representatives rule and the King is simply a figure-head. This is the position of the *al-Adl* for instance as well as *Ennasir* with both movements very critical of the notion of democracy used by the Monarchy and the parties involved in the political structures that the King has attempted to revitalise. In this respect a crucial demand of those outside the official political system is a thorough reform of the Constitution that would significantly reduce or eliminate the executive powers of the Monarch, but even the constitutional changes of 2011 failed to deliver on this. Even when the monarch announced in March 2011 that such reform would indeed take place, movements on the extra-parliamentary left and the *al-Adl* are critical and suspicious because they do not believe that the King will follow through as this is what the Monarchy has always done in the past at times of difficulty. The announcement is therefore interpreted as a tactic to buy time in the face of mounting social dissatisfaction. Criticising the Monarchy however is not what the PJD does. In fact the party prefers to see some of its policies implemented by relying on the Monarchy itself and therefore it 'lobbies' it on specific policies because the party is aware that only the King can make things happen. While this strengthens

the party due to the objectives it achieves, there is no doubt that such a strategy reinforces the authoritarian and arbitrary nature of monarchical rule, as the PJD competes with other parties for royal favours. As mentioned, it is not surprising that in the current revolutionary climate in North Africa, the PJD has steadily refused to encourage its members to participate to the demonstrations regularly taking place in Morocco since the early February 2011 while both the *al-Adl* and other leftist forces not represented in parliament support the demonstrations and have militants participating in them.

Conclusion

The complexity of political Islam in Morocco and the different ways in which it appropriates and 'contaminates' the language and values of globalisation introduced by the Monarchy ~~to remake the legitimising foundations of its rule~~ demonstrate that religious actors can and do adapt to new circumstances and are far from relying simply on anachronistic stances. Furthermore, the divergences that exist between Islamist groups ~~has an impact on~~influence potential coalition building among opposition groups with the old divide between seculars and Islamists no longer as valid to interpret politics in Morocco. ~~and possibly across the Arab world.~~ A number of points emerge from this analysis. First of all, 'religious' ideology does not seem to be very important when it comes to interacting with movements of a secular persuasion. In fact, quite the contrary is true. Islamists movements, which should have core ideological points in common, find it easier to strike alliances with non-Islamist groups and associations rather than within the same Islamist camp. This indicates the significant tensions that exist within political Islam in Morocco, illustrating the impossibility of treating Islamism as a unified actor. This does not mean that religious precepts are irrelevant because Islamist movements in Morocco rely on different scholars and ideologues to justify their position and all of them have specific religious references (Zeghal, 2006) ~~that are at times in sharp conflict with each other~~, but it is the political situation and the concrete objectives that movements wish to achieve that shape to a considerable extent the manner in which they operate. This leads to a second significant point. All Islamist movements seem to find credible and committed partners in secular movements to which, in theory, they should be distant from. ~~In~~The case of Morocco~~, this is not the case, confirming once again~~ confirms ~~–~~that other factors other than supposed ideological distance explain the nature of cross-

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ideological relationships. In Morocco, it is the relationship with the Monarchy that determines the relationship with other political and social movements because of the sacred nature of the Monarchy itself. For Islamist movements, despite their rhetorical and at times concrete opposition to secularism in so far as it is believed to destroy the fabric of society because of its perceived elimination of spirituality from social and political life, secular actors can constitute an important ally in a struggle for an enhanced role in Moroccan political life. For instance, during the electoral campaign for the new Constitution of July 2011 we can see that the sufi Brotherhood Boutchychya was in the pro-Monarchy 'yes' camp while the sufi al-Adl was in the 'no' camp. The same division applies to the Salafists, with the ones following Maghraoui in the 'yes' camp and the ones in *Ennasir* on the opposite side. Conversely, the traditional suspicions that many within the secular left have for Islamists are assuaged because there is a degree of convergence on shared objectives. Finally, the most interesting finding of this analysis is that the values of western-inspired globalisation such as human rights, democracy and development are being used and appropriated by a range of religious actors to advance their own understanding of it based on their own political philosophies and indigenous experiences, which is at times in leading at times to contradiction with their mainstream internationally-accepted conceptualisation. This is an effective strategy to re-position themselves away from the label of 'medieval' and 'un-modern' political actors and it is a strategy that the Turkish AKP has successfully implemented (Dagi, 2009). The rhetoric emanating from Islamists movements in Morocco today is substantially different from the one they employed in the 1980s and 1990s when 'Islam is the solution' seemed a sufficiently clear slogan for supporters and enemies alike to identify the political positions of Islamist groups. While attachment to the notions of democracy and human rights might still be instrumental, the daily exchanges and relationships they have with secular counterparts suggest a rather radical re-think of Islamism on the part of its proponents, which have taken advantage of the limited liberal space in Morocco to offer alternative visions of society based on universal values.

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