**THE ISLAMIST MOVEMENT IN MOROCCO
MAIN ACTORS AND REGIME RESPONSES**

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DIIS REPORT 2010:05

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Abstract

Morocco's formally accepted Islamist party, the *Justice and Development Party* (PJD), has further underlined its recognition of the authoritarian regime in response to a disappointing electoral showing and tough competition from the new *Authenticity and Modernity Party* (PAM). In contrast, the forbidden, although tolerated, *Justice and Spirituality Movement (Al Adl wal Ihsan)* retains its principled oppositional role. While there is speculation that this may change when its ailing and aging leader and founder, Sheikh Yassine, passes away, it seems most likely that Justice and Spirituality will retain its role as the main oppositional movement in Morocco in the near future.

Introduction

The purpose of the present report is to provide easily accessible background information about the main Islamist organizations in Morocco and about recent trends in regime responses to them. Islamist organizations are here defined as organizations and actors distinct from the wider Islamic community or *umma* by their seeking to create a *political* order defined in terms of Islam (Mandaville, 2007: 20).

Morocco hosts a profusion of Islamist organizations. Among these are a number of radical organizations which do not shy away from using violence to obtain their goals. Such organizations were behind the terrorist attacks in Casablanca of 16 May 2003, were involved in the Madrid bombings in 2004 and have also been behind a number of small-scale events, such as an unsuccessful bombing attempt in Casablanca in 2007.

However, the present report focuses predominantly on the two main and non-violent Islamist organizations in Morocco; namely *Harakat al-Islâh wa at-Tawhid* (*Movement for Reform and Unity*, MUR) and its related political party, *Hizb al Adala wal Tanmia* (*Party of Justice and Development*, PJD); and *Al Jama'a al Adl wal Ihsan* (Justice and Spirituality Organisation).

The report has been prepared on the basis of existing literature and on insights gathered during a field visit to Morocco in November 2009. Merieme Yafout (doctoral student at the University of Hassan II in Casablanca) has contributed with important research input in Morocco.

Religion and Politics in Morocco

Some observers of religious life in Morocco contend that religiosity is on the rise. This has notably been argued in a recent report edited by Mustapha el Khalfi (director of the newly established 'Centre marocain des études et des recherches contemporaines' as well as of the Arabic daily *Attajdid,* the official paper of the MUR). The report bases its arguments on quantitative observations such as an apparent rise in the numbers of mosques, of demands for pilgrimage (*hajj*) and of pupils attending Quranic schools.

Meanwhile, other observers question whether religiosity really is on the rise. For acknowledged Moroccan scholars such as Mohammed Darif and Mohammed Tozy, it does not really make sense to talk about a religiosity on the rise, and certainly not based on the quantitative observations presented by Khalfi. For instance, the increasing number of mosques may as well be interpreted as a sign of the desire of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and *Habous* (Islamic endowments) to increase its local presence and control (author's interviews with Mohamed Tozy, Casablanca, 9 November 2009 and with Mohamed Darif, Casablanca, 11 November 2009).

According to these prominent observers, it is not clear whether religiosity is on the rise in Morocco. There may well be changes in the manner in which Moroccans practice their religiosity, but these changes are far more complex and contradictory than the developments alluded to by El Khalfi. Accordingly, one must be careful before generalizing these changes to be tokens of rising religiosity, Islamization, secularization or any other simple development. Rather, what is clear is that Islam continues to have a strong everyday influence on the lives of most Moroccans, the large majority of whom see themselves as Muslims, despite vast differences in lifestyles and ongoing transformations in their individual religious practices.

Moroccan Islam has three general characteristics: it is predominantly Sunni, it is inspired by the Maliki legal school and it is characterized by a historic heritage of strong adherence to Sufi brotherhoods (*zawiyya*) and saint worship.

The post-independence Moroccan regime has substantially relied on and instrumentalized Islam in its efforts to legitimize itself. The ruling Moroccan Alaoui dynasty claims descendance from the family of the prophet Muhammad, and the constitution grants the Moroccan King status as the highest Islamic authority, the *Emir al Mouminin*

(Commander of the Faithful). Recognition and acceptance of the religious role and authority of the King and the ruling family constitutes one of the fundamental 'rules of the game' for both religious and/or political actors in Morocco, who need to accept this religious role of the authoritarian regime in order to participate in the formal public sphere. This role also constitutes one of the central 'red lines' for the regime – questioning or criticizing the religious legitimacy of the King and the regime is considered lèse-majesté and is severely sanctioned.

The main state agency dealing with Islamic affairs is the wealthy and influential Ministry of Islamic Affairs and *Habous*. The Minister of Islamic Affairs and *Habous* is directly appointed by the King. The present Minister, Ahmed Tawfiq, is known as a religious scholar and adherent of the most influential Sufi brotherhood in Morocco, the *Boutchichiyya zawiyya*. Through the Ministry the regime also controls the majority of religious scholars (*oulema)* who are organized in a number of national and regional councils.

Morocco only has few religious minorities. The country has historically been home to an important *Jewish* community of Spanish or Sephardic origin and the Moroccan state has in earlier years played an important diplomatic role as a go-between between Israel and the Arab countries. However, following the creation of Israel, the vast majority of this community has emigrated. Over the years the role of go-between has also diminished considerably, not least due to the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine which nurtures strong anti-Zionist public sentiment.

When excluding the large presence of foreigners, there are few Moroccan *Christians* and the Moroccan regime actively tries to block foreign (notably US) attempts at Christian proselytism. Also, the presence of Muslim *Shiites* is limited yet attempts at proselytism are strongly opposed by the regime. Morocco cut diplomatic ties with Iran in March 2009 after allegations that Teheran interfered in internal affairs and tried to promulgate Shia Islam in Morocco.

The Islamist Movement in Morocco

Historically, Islamization has had a slow trajectory in Morocco compared to developments in neighbouring Arab states. The first important developments happened during the 1970s, when the formal Arabization policy led to an influx of teachers from the Middle East who brought new, notably *salafi*, ideas with them (see below). This decade also saw the emergence of the first Moroccan Islamist organizations, among these notably the violent and clandestine *Chabiba Islamiyya* (Islamic Youth). Also, Sheikh Yassine (a former adept of the *Boutchichiyya zawiyya* and the future founder of *Justice and Spirituality*) made his first public appearance with his publication of a highly critical and controversial public letter to Hassan II, which was to cost him many years of confinement.

During the 1980s and 1990s the Islamist influence was considerably strengthened. Whereas adherents of *Islamic Youth* and *Justice and Spirituality* were severely persecuted, the *Wahhabi salafi* current was officially allowed (if not outright promoted) by King Hassan II as a means to counter and weaken specifically the increasing influence of *Justice and Spirituality* but also that of the future PJD/MUR, whose members are all considered as *kuffar* (infidels) by the *Wahhabi salafists*. Only after 11 September 2001, and more so after 16 May 2003 (when a group of young *jihadi salafists* inspired by Al Qaeda committed the first large-scale terrorist attack in Morocco), did the regime change its attitude vis-à-vis the *salafists*.

The *salafi* movement in Morocco can be divided into three different although mutually interconnected schools of thought; respectively *wataniyya* (national), *Wahhabiya* and *jihadiyya salafism*.

Moroccan adherents of *national salafism* were inspired by the work of Islamic reformers such as Afghani and 'Abdu, and their quest for an Islamic renaissance reconciling modern development with a return to the golden age of Islam and the practices of the first pious companions of the Prophet Muhammad, the *salaf al-salih*. These ideas have played an important historical role in Morocco, inspiring key figures and the arguments of the independence movement. However, national *salafism* does not play an important role in the current religio-political scene in Morocco.

The *Wahhabi salafism* (which promotes a very literal and conservative interpretation of Islam) has officially been allowed (if not encouraged) by the Moroccan regime

since the late 1970s. The current was officially introduced by Taqui Eddine El Hilali. After his death in 1987 the formal representative of *Wahhabi salafism* in Morocco became Sheikh Mohammed Maghraoui. He founded the Association for the Quran and the Sunna in 1995 and has been successful in setting up a number of Quranic schools inspired by the Wahhabi doctrine. He has however recently come under the public spotlight after producing a controversial fatwa stating that marriage of 9-year old girls was allowed.

The development in Morocco of the third current, the violent *jihadi salafism,* dates back to the early 1990s. According to Tozy this current is best understood as a non-structured cluster of violent *jihadi* organizations such as *al-Takfir wa al-Hijra* ('Excommunication and Exile'); *Jamâ'at al-Sirat al-Moustaqîm* ('The True Path'), *al Jamâ'a Salafiya* ('the Salafi Community') and *Ahl al-Sunna wa al-Jamâ'a* ('People of the Sunna and of the Community').

According to Darif, *Al Qaeda* has generally avoided perpetrating attacks in Morocco, which they have sought to keep as one of their centres of logistical support (i.e. falsification of passports etc). However, there has been one exception to this rule with the attacks in Casablanca in May 2003 which, according to Darif, were ordered by Al Qaeda which wanted to teach the Moroccan regime a lesson in the aftermath of 9/11, when it was considered as being far too supportive of US efforts to combat terrorism. But, still according to Darif, this was the exception. For instance, the small acts of terrorism in 2007 are to be considered as isolated acts produced by home-grown Moroccan *Salafi jihadists* (who Darif sees as a product of the large wave of imprisonments following the May 16th attacks) (author's interviews with Mohamed Darif, Casablanca, 11 November 2009).

All in all, most observers agree that the *salafi* current remains marginal in Morocco, where it draws only limited membership and does not seem likely to play a dominant social and/or political role in the near future.

This contrasts with the moderate or non-violent Islamist organizations which are far more important in terms of popular following in Morocco. These are by far dominated by two major currents, respectively the MUR/PJD and *Justice and Spirituality* (see later).

A few years ago there was also much interest in two other, emerging organizations (*Harakat al Badil al Hadari* (Movement for the Civilizational Alternative) and *al*

Haraka min Ajli al Umma (Movement for the *Umma*) which both tried to reconcile ideas from the left wing (particularly the importance of human rights and constitutional change) and from Islam. However, the leaders of both these organizations have recently been arrested after accusations of involvement in a Moroccan–Belgian terrorist cell. While these accusations remain very controversial and are considered to be politically motivated by many observers, in practice they have left both organizations paralyzed.

Accordingly, at present the MUR/PJD and *Justice and Spirituality* remain the dominant Islamist actors in the current Moroccan religio-political landscape, and it is hence to these two movements that the latter part of this report is consecrated.

Developments within Al Islah wa at-Tawhid (MUR) and the PJD

The MUR/PJD have their historical roots in the *Chabiba Islamiyya* (Islamic Youth), the first Islamist organization in Morocco, which was dissolved after its leading figures were accused of implication in the assassination of Omar Benjelloun (a leading trade union and socialist figure) in 1975.

In the early 1980s former members of the *Chabiba* created a number of new organizations, among them the *Jami'yyat al Jama'a al Islamiyya* (Association of the Islamic Community) which decided to rely on a purely political (non-violent) strategy and to recognize the political prerogatives and religious legitimacy of the king in return for being allowed to enter the formal political scene. In 1992 the name of the organization was changed to *Al Islâh wat-Tajdîd* ('Reform and Renewal')*,* signalling a wish by the leaders of the organization to distinguish their group from activities and organizations in neighbouring Algeria.

After many attempts to gain official recognition as a political party, the organization was finally allowed, in 1996, to join an existing political party, the Constitutional and Democratic Popular Movement (MPCD) and in 1997 its efforts at integrating the formal political sphere were crowned by its participation (under the name of the MPDC) in the parliamentary elections, where it gained 9 out of 325 seats in parliament. In 1998, the party changed its name to its present name, the Party of Justice and Development, the PJD. In parallel, the original Islamist organization merged with a number of other splinter organizations of the *Chabiba Islamiyya* and changed its name to its current name *Harakat al-Islâh wa at-Tawhid* (Movement of Reform and Unity, MUR).

This somewhat confusing organizational story is very revealing, not only of the difficulties of gaining official recognition but it also reflects the rather complex ideological basis of the present day MUR/PJD, which has not only made serious political compromises in order to reach its current position as a legitimate political player and party (PJD), but has also gone through serious organizational mutations in order to reach this position. The MUR/PJD has never had one clear leading voice. Rather, the movement has been constituted of a rather large group of prominent individuals and organizations who have come together in a hybrid organization over time. Accordingly, it is difficult to give a precise characterization of the ideology and frame

of reference of the movement, which are the result of ongoing negotiations and a synthesis of diverging internal differences.

It would, however, seem warranted to risk the following characterization. The MUR/PJD is a conservative Islamist movement, which borrows inspiration both from the Muslim Brotherhood and from *Wahhabi salafism*. Since the break from the *Chabiba,* the movement has been set on a course renouncing the use of violence and aiming towards official recognition and participation, which has entailed compliance with Moroccan rules of the game – that is, recognition of the constitution which, in practice, confers almost full executive power to the King and furthermore presents him as the highest religious authority as Commander of the Faithful.

Accordingly, one can say that the MUR/PJD remains a culturally, socially and religiously conservative organization, focusing much of its energy on social justice and of combating corruption as well as on highly symbolic issues within the socio-cultural domain (combating alcohol, prostitution, homosexuality etc.) – while remaining fundamentally complacent when it comes to the political prerogatives and religious legitimacy of the regime.

The somewhat complex if not contradictory nature of the ideology of the MUR/PJD is also reflected in its organizational set-up. According to the official discourse of the MUR and the PJD respectively, the two organizations are independent as the PJD is a political party and concentrates on the parliamentary arena whereas the MUR remains an independent civil society organization which puts its main emphasis on *da'wa* (propagation, "calling" to Islam) and associational activities. In interviews, a comparison between the green movement and the new green parties in Europe has been brought up several times.

The division of labour between the MUR and the PJD also has an ideological dimension, reflected in their respective religious and political stances. Both in its political and religious discourse, the PJD remains pragmatic and flexible and has few clearly outspoken ideologists. Politically, it remains close to the regime (a necessity, if it wants to remain accepted, as was very clearly demonstrated in the aftermath to the May 16th bombings). Also, the Islam of the PJD, while inspired by the *salafiya*, is flexible and rather pragmatic. When asked about their main goals, central figures do not stress religious goals but point to "*ameliorating the situation of the country... We are a political party which inscribes itself in the framework of the Moroccan state and its constitution. We are not a revolutionary movement*" (author's interview with Abdelilah

Benkirane, Rabat, 19 November 2009) or to "*social justice, economic development… democracy and rule of law*" (author's interview with Saâd dine El Otmani, Rabat, 14 November 2009). In contrast, the MUR is more religiously strict and also somewhat (although carefully) more critical of the regime.

Yet, despite the above organizational and ideological differences, most analysts agree that the differences between the MUR and the PJD are very much of a strategic and showcase nature, not least as there is considerable overlap in the membership of the two organizations. According to most analysts this 'showcase' division is very opportune for the movement as it allows for a certain flexibility with regard to how much to say, when to say it and by whom it is said. When the party feels the necessity to pay lip service to regime demands the MUR can take over the ideological discourse. And when the political scene is more open to clear participation, the PJD can draw directly on new personnel and ideas developed within the MUR which, in this way, remains both a buffer and an incubator for the party. Hence, it can be considered, as Mohsen-Finan and Zeghal do, that while the Moroccan regime "divides in order to rule" – the MUR/PJD is "divided in order to survive" (Mohsen-Finan and Zeghal, 2006: 98).

However, while this 'strategy of fragmentation' may explain the persistence of the PJD in the formal political arena despite strong resistance against it, this strategy is also rather dangerous as it puts the party at risk of being double-tongued if not directly unreliable. This may provide one of the explanations for the rather weak electoral showing of the PJD in recent parliamentary elections (September 2007) and municipal elections (June 2009). It should be noted that 'weak' does not here refer to the absolute number of votes won, as the PJD did in fact gain more votes at both elections than in previous elections, and even came out as the winner in terms of votes during the parliamentary elections in 2007 (that they only subsequently gained the second highest number of parliamentary seats was primarily due to the election law, which gives priority to rural districts to the detriment of the urban districts, where the PJD has its main following). Rather, the recent electoral results were 'weak' in the sense that they fell far below the expectations of both the PJD leadership and of many prominent observers (while becoming the first party in terms of votes, the 2007 electoral result was far from the 'landslide victory' expected).

While the relative results can, to some extent, be explained as an outcome predominantly of regime manoeuvres to circumvent their influence (besides the weak weighting given to urban constituencies these notably include the creation of a new Party

for Authenticity and Modernity or PAM, see later). Yet these manoeuvrings cannot completely explain why the number of votes received by the PJD was so far from the expected outcome. In order to explain this, the record low degree of participation, in particular in the parliamentary elections, must also be taken into consideration, as it would appear that this low level could reflect not only a general lack of belief in the elections as such, but also in the specific ability and/or genuine wish (or ability) of the PJD to fight for fundamental social or political change.

According to many interviewees, the main response of the party to the somewhat disappointing recent electoral results has been a choice to further state their loyalty to the regime while accentuating the apparent differences between the PJD and the MUR, in an attempt to alleviate fears among regime hardliners (given that the MUR is generally considered more outspoken and critical than the PJD). This strategic choice of playing up the differences between the PJD and the MUR is clearly reflected in the recent choice of a new secretary general, Abdelilah Benkirane. Whereas the former Secretary General Saâd dine El Otmani was known to be very close to the MUR, Benkirane (while also originally coming from the MUR) is seen as someone much closer to the strictly parliamentary political life.

Developments within Al Adl wal Ihsan (Justice and Spirituality)

Justice and Spirituality is a home-grown Moroccan organization. Its double aspirations are reflected in the name of the organization: to ensure social justice and spiritual wellbeing. Interviewees stress the inseparable and mutually constitutive nature of these two aspects of their aspirations. The organization is furthermore based on three fundamental principles: 1) Non-violence; 2) Non-clandestinity and 3) Non-acceptance of foreign financing. The organisation was established by Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine, a former schoolteacher and officer within the Ministry of Education as well as a former adherent of the *Boutchichiyya zawiyya*. His multiple writings serve as an important common denominator and base of reference for members of the organization.

Sheikh Yassine became widely known after his publication in 1974 of *Al-Islam aw at-Tufan* (Islam or the Flood/the Deluge); a controversial open letter to Hassan II in which he openly accused the monarchy of having strayed off the right path by installing a dictatorial regime and serving its own interests rather than those of the *umma* (Islamic community). The letter cost him three years of internment, the majority of them spent in a psychiatric ward. He has subsequently spent many years under arrest, the majority of them under house arrest.

From the mid 1980s Yassine paid increasing attention to social problems and warned against the ideological and mobilizational potential of Marxist Leninism and against leaving the arena of social justice to the leftist movement. In the same period he also changed the name of his association to its present name *Jama'at al-Adl wal-Ihsan* (Association of Justice and Spirituality) which also signalled a development towards an increasing focus on social justice. *Justice and Spirituality* accordingly became more engaged in various social services (schooling, medical care, sanitation etc) for the vast majority of the Moroccan population living under poor social conditions – while ensuring at the same time religious and spiritual guidance to their beneficiaries. Since the 1980s the organization has gained influence among university students and the student unions. It notably attracts and influences young teachers, doctors, lawyers and engineers.

While *Justice and Spirituality* is generally believed to be the most important Islamist organization in Morocco, its significance is difficult to assess. Not only because it remains banned (albeit tolerated), but also because it keeps the number of its members

a secret. According to an anonymous interviewee this is so because it would come as a shock to the regime if it knew how numerous they are. The organization also has a rather complex organizational set-up with many small 'cells' organized on national, provincial and regional levels, and also down to the smallest level; namely that of individual 'families'. Its main executive bodies are the Majlis al Shura (Consultative Council) which meets annually and the Majlis al-Irchâd (Guiding Council) which is the executive body of the organization. The other main bodies of the organization are two educational organizations, for men and women respectively, as well as the so-called 'political circle', which is a *de facto* political party.

With regard to its political views and position, *Justice and Spirituality* criticizes the current political constitution for not sufficiently dividing the political power and for granting privileges to a small, corrupt elite to the detriment of the vast majority of the population. Their main criticism is directed against the famous Article 19 of the Moroccan constitution which confers substantial political (and religious) authority upon the King. They hence retain a clear oppositional position and as such remain the only important oppositional force in present-day Morocco.

During the early 1990s, when the regime engaged in increasing political liberalization and sought to strengthen its alliances and legitimacy, the Palace allegedly made a move towards Yassine and offered him the possibility of creating the first formal Islamist party – under the condition that he would be willing to respect the position of the King and *Emir al Mouminin*. But the *Makhzan* did not succeed in convincing him. Accordingly *Justice and Spirituality* has remained officially banned, whilst somewhat tolerated by the Palace.

In practice, this means that members are allowed to meet at the former residence of Sheik Yassine (the villa in Salé where he spent his years in house arrest) – but they are otherwise prevented from meeting in large-scale fora and from organizing activities and the organization has no formal headquarters. It is substantially hampered in its means of communication (attempts at establishing a written press have been aborted). The main communication strategy besides word of mouth is the web page of the organization [http://www.aljamaa.net] which frequently is closed down). Local NGOs known to include members are shut down and active members are frequently arrested.

While remaining outside the formal political scene, the participation of the MUR/ PJD in official elections since 1997 has, however, triggered some internal question-

ing within the *Majlis al-Shura* (consultative council) concerning whether the organization should also partake in the formal political game. So far the leadership of the organization seems quite clear in its rejection of formal political participation, which is seen as a threat to the integrity and legitimacy of the organization under the current political constitution and conditions. They fear the organisation would undergo a co-optation similar to that experienced by the MUR/PJD. Accordingly, the leadership of Al Adl has agreed on a long-term, non-violent and incremental (rather than revolutionary) approach to change, waiting for a fundamentally new political situation to arise.

In the meantime, a comprehensive political party structure has been established within the organization (the so-called 'political circle' under the leadership of Abdelwahed Motawakil, which includes regional branches as well as separate trade union, student and women's sections). Accordingly, when or if the organization decides to participate in formal political life, it already has an organization ready to do so. According to Motawakil, leader of the political circle, such participation is not envisaged for the near future as it will demand a fundamental political opening allowing for a substantial change of the constitution. It is not quite clear, however, how and when he thinks such a 'new situation' will happen (author's interview with Abdelwahed Motawakil, Salé, 17 November, 2009).

However, when this new political situation arises, Motawakil envisages a new, national, Islamic Pact involving all important political actors in Morocco (be they political parties, civil society activists or important personalities) which are to come together to debate and work out a formula on how to effect a peaceful transition. The key elements in this transition will be an electoral process and the drafting of a new constitution, the guiding principles of which shall be respect for Islam and democracy (sovereignty of the people and power sharing between executive, legislative and judiciary bodies).

While there seems to be a broad consensus among leading figures as to the necessity of remaining aloof from the formal political scene in the near future (as it is judged unlikely that the regime is not about to make fundamental political concessions), it does however remain difficult to say what will happen to the organization the day its ailing founding father is no longer there.

In Morocco there has, for several years, been substantial speculation as to whether the organization will remain capable of assuring its integrity and homogeneity once

Sheikh Yassine is no longer there to incarnate and unite the organization. Some analysts, among them Mohammed Darif, find it possible that the organization may at this point splinter into a full-scale participating political party – and a new Sufi *zawiyya* – hence dividing its socio-political and spiritual aspirations (author's interview with Mohamed Darif, Casablanca, 11 November 2009).

However, when confronted with this scenario, leading figures interviewed all stress that it is imperative that the two dimensions remain together as they are mutually constitutive and equally important. According to Fathallah Arsalan, the spokesperson of Justice and Spirituality "*humanity is like a body, it has two sides: a spiritual side, the soul; and a material side, the body. The West responds to all the **material** needs (which human share with many other creatures) – but forgets the spiritual side. That represents a very big loss for the human being*" (Author's interview with Fathallah Arsalan, Rabat, 19 November 2009).

Regime Responses: Reforms and Repression

The Moroccan regime responds to developments in the religious sphere in general and the Islamist movement in particular via a two-pronged strategy relying on both reform and repression.

With regard to *reform*, the Moroccan regime has engaged in important reforms of the formal religious sphere, particularly via the Ministry of Islamic Affairs and *Habous* which has become a key player in official efforts to counter the attraction of the Islamists and to prevent religious radicalization. The Ministry of Islamic Affairs and *Habous* was led for many years by the staunchly conservative *'alim* Abdelkébir Alaoui M'Daghri, who was one of the key pillars of the rule of Hassan II. In 2002 Mohammed VI replaced him, with Ahmed Taoufiq; a younger Sufi scholar. This replacement was very symbolic of a new, reforming line in regime policies towards the religious sphere, indicating a will to change from a staunchly doctrinal stance towards one officially promoting (and controlling) a new and moderate 'Moroccan' Islam, which increasingly relies on and promotes the Sufi heritage (promoted as a national heritage and a key source of moderation and tolerance).

Besides drawing on the Sufi heritage, the new official 'Moroccan' Islam also provides a new and broader role for women in the religious sphere. In recent years, Moroccan women have been allowed into formal councils of 'oulema and their formal religious education is encouraged, including into the new official position of *mourchidates* (religious counsellors, who give advice to women in mosques but also in other places, such as prisons).

The promotion of the new 'Moroccan Islam' goes hand in hand with an increasing presence and visibility of representatives of official Islam in the public sphere (not least through the establishment of new regional offices of the Ministry and new regional councils of 'oulema, guided/controlled by the Ministry) and with massive investments in the religious sphere. The already important Ministry budget has seen a steep increase in recent years, used to finance the mushrooming of state funded mosques in remote rural areas as well as in urban residential areas hitherto without nearby official mosques. The Ministry has also engaged in a massive programme of general education of imams, the vast majority of whom have previously received little or no formal schooling beyond the religious educational system.

The main aim of these efforts seems two-fold. On the one hand these efforts aim at modernizing the field while countering religious radicalization by ensuring that the population has easy access to qualified and 'moderate' religious voices. On the other hand, most observers also see the efforts as an attempt by the regime to increase its control over the religious sphere – by ensuring that what is preached is in conformity with the official line, not only with regard to a moderate Moroccan Islam, but also with regard to recognizing and appreciating the religious status and legitimacy of the King and regime.

Whether the regime will be successful in these endeavours remains an open question. During the interviews conducted for this report many observers expressed scepticism with regard to the impact of the current reforms. Among the points frequently raised was that the regime currently does not address or meet the religious or spiritual needs of the population, as what it tries to promote is not religion, but rather a certain version of Moroccan tradition. Hence, those longing for a religious/spiritual feedback will still go elsewhere. Another point raised was that the regime risks further undermining the already limited legitimacy of the ʿoulema, given that their freedom for manoeuvre has been further restricted in the new administrative set-up. This in turn risks backfiring on the regime, which needs the legitimacy of the official religious scholars to boost its own religious legitimacy. Finally, it can also be questioned whether the current attempts by the regime to create and maintain a specific Moroccan Islam are at all viable in a globalized world with advanced information technology and global media, massive migration – and strong global pressures of all kinds, be they towards *salafis*m, *Shi'a* Islam or Christianity – or towards increasing secularity and individualization of religious practice (see Tozy, 2009 for an important discussion of this point).

In addition to its efforts at controlling and moderating the religious sphere through reforms promoting an official moderate Moroccan Islam, the Moroccan regime also engages in various forms of *repression* against religious actors in general and the Islamist movement specifically. This repression varies depending on whether it is directed against suspected *jihadi salafists*, members of *Justice and Spirituality* or members of the MUR/PJD.

With regard to the suspected members of violent *jihadi* organizations, the Moroccan regime introduced staunch anti-terrorist legislation and mass arrests and detentions in the aftermath of September 11 and May 16. Although these activities have been downscaled drastically in recent years, Amnesty International still notes in its most recent report that:

"More than 100 suspected Islamist militants were arrested, mostly by police. However, the Directorate for Surveillance of the Territory, a security force accused in previous years of torture and other ill-treatment, allegedly participated in some arrests. Most of the detainees were charged and some were tried on terrorism offences and sentenced to up to 15 years in prison... Hundreds of Islamist prisoners sentenced after the 2003 Casablanca bombings continued to demand a judicial review of their trials, many of which were tainted with unexamined claims of confessions extracted under torture. Detainees in Sale prison staged hunger strikes to protest against poor prison conditions, including ill-treatment by prison guards and security forces external to the prison, lack of access to medical care, and restrictions on visits by families" (Amnesty International, 2008).

The regime has also reacted very strongly against suspected Shia proselytism. Besides the ousting of the Iranian ambassador in Morocco, the recent *El Badil al Hadari* affair is a good case in point. In this case two prominent political personalities and leaders (Moatassim and Marwani) of the two new and moderate Islamist parties (Movement for a Civilizational Alternative and Movement for the Umma, respectively) have been accused of belonging to a Moroccan-Belgian terrorist cell led by Abdelkader Belhaj. However, according to observers such as Mohammed Darif, the main motive behind these arrests was to issue a warning against Iranian/Shia proselytism, as the two politicians were both former members of a violent, clandestine group *al Ikhtiyar al Islami* (the Islamic Option), known to have been inspired by the political strategies (albeit not the religious doctrines) of the Iranian revolution.

With regard to *Justice and Spirituality,* although tolerating the existence of the movement, the regime continuously harasses and threatens its members. Again, according to Amnesty International:

"Thousands of members of Al-Adl wal-Ihsan... were reported to have been questioned by police during the year and at least 267 were charged with participating in unauthorized meetings or belonging to an unauthorized association" (Amnesty International, 2008).

Finally, even the included and moderate MUR/PJD is also met with negative regime responses, albeit of a less violent and more subtle nature. These obstacles are primarily directed against the PJD and can, as such, be considered as belonging primarily to the political rather than the religious sphere, although the two in practice overlap

considerably, not least due to the combined religious and political prerogatives of the King.

The obstacles set up against the PJD have been most visible during the two recent elections; parliamentary in September 2007 and municipal in June 2009. As already mentioned, these obstacles have predominantly been of two kinds: 1) The drawing of electoral rules and maps so as to weaken the PJD vote (notably by giving far more weight to the rural than to the urban vote, where the PJD has its primary following); 2) Sanctioning/supporting the establishment and speedy growth of a new political party, the Party for Authenticity and Tradition (PAM), created by a close friend of the King and former deputy Minister of the Interior, Fouad el Himma, and explicitly aimed at weakening the influence of the PJD while ensuring a continued 'equilibrium' between the different political parties.

It does, however, seem puzzling that the regime has stepped up its obstacles against the PJD, given that the PJD would seem to pose a very limited danger to the regime considering its consistent recognition of the role of the King/Palace and the 'red lines', its continued moderation following May 2003 – and its apparently rather limited popular support (at least judging from recent electoral results). Further-more, the Moroccan regime has always relied considerably on a certain degree of political pluralism – which has allowed the incumbent to portray himself as benign arbiter, while playing out and weakening his diverse political opponents via policies of divide and rule. So why the recent creation of and support for the PAM, which has gained tremendous influence on the formal political arena, not least during the recent municipal elections which it completely dominated? Finally, further weak-ening the PJD would seem to be counterproductive to the original idea behind the regime's decision to allow it into the formal political game; namely that it needed a complacent bulwark to attract the Islamist vote away from other, more regime-criti-cal organizations (be they non-violent [*Justice and Spirituality*] or violent)? So, all in all, it does indeed seem puzzling that the regime has seemingly recently stepped up its obstacles to the PJD.

While not providing exhaustive explanations to the above questions, interviewees have provided important elements of an answer. Among the most frequently mentioned explanations is that the recent establishment of the PAM represents a continuation of one of the main principles of political rule in Morocco: multipartism. Not to be mistaken for democracy, the Moroccan tradition for multipartism has provided the regime with political legitimacy (by allowing for a high degree of political pluralism

compared to regional standards) while also helping it to divide and rule, and thereby maintain a certain political equilibrium where no party ever gains a majority. Historically, Hassan II has twice created new political parties (the RNI and the UC) to counter the influence and attraction of his then key opponents (the left wing parties). According to this analysis, the recent creation of the PAM represents a continuation of this tradition. The PAM has been created to counterbalance the PJD but not to eliminate it, as neither party will, in this interpretation, ever be allowed to gain more than a maximum 20% of the public vote.

Another frequent explanation has been that while the current PJD leadership may be complacent towards the regime, the movement (and here notably the ideologically stronger MUR) still represents a potential threat, not least due to the rather heterogeneous nature of its ideology and leadership. A third and related explanation points to the regime also wishing to keep the PJD down because it is scared of the Western reaction were the PJD (and hence, an Islamist, albeit moderate, party) to become stronger.

Finally, a fourth and complementary explanation concerns the nature of the Moroccan 'regime' and addresses not only the recent obstacles to the PJD but the more general political de-liberalization which seems to characterize current political developments in Morocco. According to this political analysis, the Moroccan regime is not constituted by one omnipotent figure (the King), but is composed of multiple groups of actors, which do not always have overlapping interests (army generals, main business leaders, key political figures etc). In this interpretation, groups of regime 'hardliners' (notably from the army) allowed for a general atmosphere of political liberalization in the years preceding and following the takeover of power of Mohammed VI (often perceived as far weaker and less charismatic than his father, Hassan II), in order to ensure that this royal transition would succeed without popular demands for more fundamental political reforms. Meanwhile, according to this interpretation, these hardliners now feel assured that the royal transition has succeeded and fear that a continuation of the political openings will jeopardize and expose their own privileged positions and resources. Hence, they have succeeded not only in blocking the moderate Islamists (the PJD) but in generating a general process of de-liberalization of which the current multiplication of arrests and closure of independent media are the most prominent indicators.

Future Scenarios

While it remains notoriously difficult and risky to predict future developments, based on interviews for this report it would however seem most likely that no major changes are to occur within the near future, either within the major Islamist organizations (Al Adl and MUR/PJD) or in the regime's responses to them. Rather, the most probable near future scenario is a continuation of the current situation.

In practice this implies that it seems most likely that the MUR/PJD will be allowed to continue on the formal political scene – in return for its continued support of the regime and the fundamental rules of the political game. Also, it seems likely that they will not be allowed to gain considerably in influence but will be kept 'in place' at their current level of support/influence via electoral rules and continued support to the PAM (which, however, doesn't seem likely to gain a political majority either, although it may well come out as the winner of the next parliamentary elections in 2012).

With regard to Al Adl, it seems most likely that they will retain their current principled position against the authoritarian regime and hence will not partake in formal politics. However, one important unknown remains as to what will happen after the decease of its elderly leader and founder, Sheikh Yassine. Some observers consider it possible that his death will be followed by a splintering of the organization along its two main lines (spirituality and social justice), implying the participation of those predominantly engaged in the latter aspect in formal politics. However, the majority of interviewees did not consider this to be a likely or (for Al Adl activists) a positive scenario.

Finally, with regard to the regime, it seems most likely that it will continue its current balancing act between reform and repression in its response to the Islamist movement described in the above. At present, there does not seem to be any clear force of political opposition putting pressure on the regime, with the exception of Al Adl which, however, does not seem likely to push for fundamental and drastic changes in the immediate future.

However, there are of course several unknown variables to be taken into consideration, of which two are to be highlighted here.

For one thing, future dynamics among radical Islamist organizations may significantly alter current developments within the Islamist movement, as well as the ways in which the regime relates to the various Islamist actors. If a clandestine radical organization should succeed in carrying out serious attacks in Morocco, this may of course lead to more drastic changes in the conditions of and relations between Islamist actors and the regime, particularly so if such an attack were to succeed in promoting pervasive popular mistrust in the legitimacy of the regime in general and the King (and *Emir al Mouminin*) in particular.

Secondly, with the marked exception of Justice and Spirituality, there currently seems to be only a very weak and fragmented political opposition in Morocco. Accordingly, an organized popular uprising demanding increasing social justice does not seem to be a likely near-future scenario. Yet it must be taken into consideration that stark social inequalities remain pervasive in Morocco, where a very large segment of the population struggles daily with poverty and with meeting very basic needs (housing, employment, getting an education etc) as indicated by a marked fall in Morocco's recent HDI ranking by the UNDP. While it does not seem likely that the social frustration nurtured by these difficulties and inequalities will spill over into an organized popular mobilization within the near future, it still remains an important unknown variable when assessing the future dynamics within the Islamist movement, as well as in the regime response to the latter.

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