

MOROCCAN ISLAMISTS: BETWEEN INTEGRATION, CONFRONTATION, AND ORDINARY MUSLIMS

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Two distinct politico-religious movements emerged in Morocco in the 1960s and 1980s. The first was a radical movement, which was confronted by the government thus forcing it to break up, change, and adapt. The second was characterized by its confrontational and inflexible stance vis-à-vis the status quo. Thus, while the former became integrated at the expense of its early radical glamour, the latter remained adamant in refusing to become integrated in the political system. Despite the popularity of both movements, their efforts to attract new recruits remain limited since most ordinary Moroccan Muslims do not want to mix religion and politics.

INTRODUCTION

Since its inception in late 1960s, the Islamist movement in Morocco has been growing—especially on university campuses[1]—and has been dominated by two distinct currents. The two tendencies present different perspectives on political activism and thus reflect distinct political cultures. One leans toward integration and political participation; it is aware of the importance of democracy as a necessary instrument for the right to run for public office and vote. This group believes in political pluralism, tolerance, and equality. The other “distances itself from the institutions” and refuses to be integrated into the political system.[2] This group seems to lean more toward a strategy of confrontation, and struggle vis-à-vis the status quo in its political behavior, and an ambivalent stance on the notion of democracy.

The Islamist movement in Morocco appears to have developed in two distinct phases. One began in the late 1960s and early 1970s and could be considered the birth, infiltration, and expansion of radical Islamism into society.[3] This stage was also marked by the complacency and even open government complicity in the development of this early religious movement. Part of this movement became even more radicalized in the early 1980s, prompting the government to pursue a dual policy of greater repression of the most radical elements and increased control of its moderate ones.[4] The second phase began in 1974 and was led by Abd al-Salam Yassine, whose famous epistle to King Hassan II defied the monarch and asked him to repent for all of his sins and redeem himself.

In both phases, Moroccan Islamism was influenced by the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Hassan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb have had a deep impact on Abd al-Salam Yassine and Abd al-Karim Mouti, the two prominent Islamist leaders, influencing their thinking and writings, and even their organizational strategies for the creation of a functioning Muslim *umma* (totality of the world’s Muslims).

THE ISLAMIC YOUTH MOVEMENT (IYM)[5]

In late 1960s, the Islamic Youth Movement (IYM, Harakat al-Shabiba al-Islamiyya) was founded by Abd al-Karim Mouti, an inspector at the Ministry of Education, and became an official organization in 1972. Mouti’s initiative most likely received the government’s blessing.[6] Since its early inception, the IYM was

marked by the influence of the Muslim Brothers, who fled the crackdown on religious activism in Egypt and Syria and found refuge in the Maghreb. The IYM began in earnest to spread its roots and gain more adherents, using the writings of Sayyid Qutb and Hassan al-Banna as its ideological base.[7]

The IYM was legally founded in November 1972 and was dissolved in December 1975. In his application for the IYM, Mouti emphasized to the authorities his organization's religious and educational aspect, arguing it was not interested in politics. The Islamist leader further argued that his movement was an organization of a group of Muslims and did not claim to represent all Muslims. Its educational activities were based on the Islamic principle of exhorting people to urge what is good and to explain the Muslim faith.[8] However, the IYM engaged in political activism thereafter, becoming increasingly radical and leading to a government response. The security forces managed to infiltrate the Islamist organization and began to discredit it by jailing many of its leaders, including Mouti himself.[9]

Among Morocco's numerous militant Islamist groups, the IYM is considered to be the most radical and has been known to engage in violent acts.[10] The IYM's radicalism could be summarized by the following quote from one of Mouti's interviews: "Our present and our future are caught between the hammer of the American imperialism and the anvil of its agents represented by the corrupt monarchical regime and those who support it... For the Arabs are Muslims... the Arabs will never return to their greatness unless they open their hearts to Islamic brotherhood and cooperation, and their minds to the guidance of Muhammad." [11] Clearly, "the guidance of Muhammad" denotes the idea of reviving the Islamist model of governance. Following Mouti's accusation for the murder of Omar Benjelloun, chief editor of *al-Moharir (The Liberator)*, a daily newspaper of the Socialist Union of the Popular Forces Party, the IYM was dissolved and the Islamist leader was sentenced in absentia to life in prison.[12] Subsequently, the IYM degenerated into several cells, creating greater internal divisions and struggles among them, and making any prospect of their reunification unattainable. These internal squabbles also made the cells more vulnerable to the onslaught of the security forces who sought to weaken—but not annihilate—them, a strategy the Moroccan regime has been known for in managing the Islamists.

THE REFORM AND RENEWAL MOVEMENT (RRM)

In 1981, Abdelilah Benkirane, one of the Islamist leaders announced his decision to separate from the IYM. [13] This decision led to further chaos within other IYM cells, characterized by a hesitation between remaining a secret organization and becoming an overt one. This phase of ambivalence lasted until 1984. During this time, many Islamist activists were arrested in several cities, adding to the demoralization of the Islamist leadership and prompting it to form a new association and to forego religious radicalism. In 1983, Benkirane applied for a license to create al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya (The Islamic Community), [14] soon changing the name of his organization to Harakat al-Islah wa al-Tajdid or the Reform and Renewal Movement (RRM) in order to comply with government regulations. [15] Benkirane explained the name change by claiming that the name al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya may have been mistakenly understood as referring to the movement as the sole representative of all Muslims (hence the English name "The Islamist Group"), whereas it was intended simply to mean *jama'at muslimin*, or a group of Muslims, among many others..

The RRM joined Abd al-Karim al-Khatib's Popular Democratic Constitutional Party (PDCP) in June 1996. The initiative marked a turning point for the Islamist movement in Morocco and was considered the RRM's

first step toward open politicization and its shift from a religious and cultural movement to a political party. [16] The integration of Islamists within a legal political party could be viewed as an attempt by the PDCP leadership to assimilate the RRM's moderates while alienating its radical wing. [17] The integration came after a long process of negotiations and was established on several conditions that the Islamists agreed to before they were allowed to join the PDCP. Three of these conditions are worth noting: 1) recognition that the constitutional monarchy is the *sine qua non* institution of the state; 2) foregoing of violence as a means for political expression; and 3) acceptance of democracy and human rights within the bounds of Islam. Benkirane emerged from the signing of the integration protocols and declared that his movement's integration with the PDCP was the expression of a new direction for the Islamist movement in Morocco and that he was looking forward to the local and parliamentary elections. [18]

However, despite Benkirane's moderate stance, the Islamists had no compunction in declaring his radical views on some manifestations of political life in Morocco, arguing that they affected Islamic principles. For instance, he criticized the minister of tourism for inaugurating five casinos to stimulate tourism. Benkirane's movement also denounced the distribution and sale of alcohol to Muslims and the celebration of Christmas as anti-Islamic. [19] The movement played an instrumental role in promoting a campaign against women's associations, which sought to change the personal status code (*mudawana*). Further, the movement opposed Morocco's normalization of relations with Israel. It published a statement in its paper arguing, "the Zionist entity is a hostile aggressor and no normalization should be allowed with it.... the establishment of any relation with it, is *haram* (forbidden by Islamic law), be it diplomatic, commercial or cultural. And the consumption of any Zionist product should not be allowed because it would be aiding and supporting the aggressor." [20]

On the question of democracy, Benkirane accepts what he calls "the minimum democratic requisites, which [are stipulated] in five conditions: universal suffrage, free elections, partisan pluralism, existence of a stable consultation law, guarantee of rights and liberties." [21] This seemingly moderate position is offset by other former RRM Islamists' views who argue, "When we affirm that our movement is democratic, it is in relations to values that are consistent with our culture and civilization [...]. It remains, however, inadmissible to abrogate a revealed law or to render a judgment in contradiction to Shari'a in the name of democracy." [22] Despite these declarations, however, the new PDCP members remained faithful to the principles of their newly founded party.

THE JUSTICE AND DEVELOPMENT PARTY (JDP)

In 1967, Dr. Abd al-Karim al-Khatib founded the PDCP after he broke away from the Popular Movement Party (PMP), arguing that Morocco was in a dire state and its people did not know whether they were Moroccan national Muslims or secular citizens. Al-Khatib denounced what he viewed as the negative Western influences on Moroccans: the corruption, indifference, and moral decay of a remorseless society. He posited that it would be impossible to introduce any fundamental change or reform without a return to the founding principles of Islam. Al-Khatib's brand of Islam does not differ much from that of the palace; it is relatively moderate and is consistent with the official version, which could have been the reason Benkirane's Islamists joined al-Khatib's party. Indeed, the Islamists sought to show they were no longer hostile to the governing regime. It was in the context of this merger and in order to accommodate and appease the Islamists that the PDCP changed its name to al-Adala wa al-Tanmiyya or the Justice and Development Party (JDP) in 1998. [23]

This new name was the result of a long and arduous process. The point was to avoid picking a name with

a religious connotation, since the establishment of political parties on a religious, ethnic, or regional basis is forbidden in Morocco.[24] Thus, the JDP has all the trappings of a secular party and has among its goals the participation in the education of the Moroccan public for a better, more just society; equality; human dignity and an equal opportunity to all; and last, the realization of a democracy rooted in the principles of Islam and Morocco's national traditions of peace, within the framework of a constitutional monarchy, thereby allowing people to exercise their rights.[25]

THE JUSTICE AND CHARITY GROUP (JCG)

Al-Adl wa al-Ihssan or the Justice and Charity Group (JCG) was founded by its leader Abd al-Salam Yassine. Yassine was a teacher and an education inspector before he became an Islamist. He was known for his daring 114-page letter to King Hassan II, entitled "Islam or the Deluge: An Open Epistle to the King of Morocco." The letter was a denunciation of the king's regime and policies, with exhortation to repentance. According to Yassine, Moroccan society is in a state of anarchy (*fitna*). The notion of *fitna* embodies the concepts of crisis, underdevelopment, instability, lawlessness, and atheism. The same terms are used by Sayyid Qutb to describe *jahiliyya*, referring to Egyptian society.

Although Yassine draws from Qutb's ideas, he does not use the same terminology, because he believes every region of the world has its specific political context. The Islamist leader argues the same *fitna* or state of chaos is witnessed in all Muslim countries.[26] Yassine's political philosophy seems to be rooted in changing this state of anarchy through the institution of an Islamic *umma*. Yassine has written tirelessly on his ideas about changing the decaying moral state of Moroccan society, explaining in minute details how he would design and implement his political project. He compiled these writings into a book called *al-Minhaj al-Nabawi*.

Al-Minhaj al-Nabawi is a collection of Yassine's writings, which began to appear in his *al-Jama'a* magazine in 1981. The 500-page book reads more like a manual, designed to instruct his disciples and followers on how to act and behave according to Islamic principles. It serves as a reference source as well, for it includes—in addition to Yassine's core beliefs—his political philosophy and his plans to strengthen the *umma*. The book is based on Koranic principles as well as Muhammad's conduct and contains practical instructions for new recruits. By using the Muhammad's approach in preaching and exhorting people to embrace Islam and live by its principles (*da'wa*), Yassine seeks to lend his agenda religious legitimacy.[27]

Yassine's project to transform society from a decadent state into a righteous Muslim *umma* includes four fundamental phases: *tarbiyya* (education), *tanthim* (organization), *zahf* (propagation), and *quaouma* (revolution). He views these stages as interconnected circles.[28] Thus, education lays the groundwork for effective organization, and organization sets the stage for the propagation of the teachings of Islam among the people, all in preparation for revolution. Yassine, however, does not use the term "revolution." Instead, he insists on using the concept *quaouma*, a substantive which derives from the verb *quama*, meaning to rise or stand up. The Islamists' rationale for not using the term "revolution" is that it is an imported concept whereas *quaouma* is an Islamic endeavor. Yassine argues, "We use the word *quaouma* in order not to use the word *thawra* (revolution). For in *thawra* there is violence (*unf*) and instead, we want *quawa* (force). Force realizes its actions based on legality while violence is realized following desire and anger criteria." [29]

Al-Minhaj al-Nabawi also provides a structured outline of Yassine's organization and the theoretical

principles on which the movement's political and religious legitimacy is based.[30] By implication, this entails Yassine's legitimacy as a leader, a *murshid* (guide). While the king, thus, draws some of his political and religious legitimacy from Muhammad, in his writing, Yassine strives to show that he is linked to this same sacred lineage, albeit through his prophetic exemplary life.[31] According to Yassine, then, being a direct descendant of Muhammad does not seem to fulfill all the requirements of political and religious legitimacy. Leading a commendable life on the model of Muhammad's, as he claims he does, is just as important, perhaps even more important. By challenging the king on this point, Yassine is thus questioning the monarch's status as *amir al-mu'minin* (Commander of the Faithful).

YASSINE: MESSIAH OR POLITICAL LEADER?

Yassine has been under house arrest since December 30, 1989. His arrest was officially lifted on December 13, 1995, but he was arrested again by the authorities a few days later due to a speech he delivered at a neighboring mosque the day after his release in which he strongly criticized the government. This event marked a historical moment in the Islamist movement and became a symbol of its struggle against the status quo. The movement became embittered by this experience, further straining its relations with the state. The existing tensions between the JCG and the Moroccan government are in large part due to the former's refusal to recognize the king as Commander of the Faithful. Despite efforts by the Ministry of Religious Affairs in 1992 to negotiate with the JCG on this matter, no agreement was reached.[32] While earlier as well, the regime had offered the JCG normalization of its status in exchange for some concessions, Yassine persisted in agreeing to accept only the condition to "work in respect of the laws in force." [33]

In explaining its attitude toward the state, the JCG noted that the "Moroccan government is uneasy on the existence of a legally organized Islamist force because it will challenge it on its religious legitimacy." [34] Thus, the state resorted to its encirclement (*hissar*) policy—an encirclement that is not limited to Yassine, but that affects the whole Islamist movement politically, economically, socially, and from a media standpoint.[35]

The JCG blames the political parties for the injunction set against it, especially the Istiqlal Party and the Socialist Union of Popular Forces, which, according to Fathallah Arsalane, a top JCG leader, view the Islamist movement with "contempt" because it is the political force of the future that will defeat them. Political parties have become the subject of manipulation by the regime and only the JCG is capable of representing a genuine opposition and "shall remain so until the end of the Islamic *quaouma*, God willing." [36] Arsalane further argues that his association has been the subject of an elaborate plot in which foreign agents, including the French, took part in order to discredit it.[37] While the arrest of Yassine and the pressure on his movement may have served some of the state's immediate political goals, they also may have forced the Islamists to react to such treatment and become more reticent to engage in any dialogue with the government.

Has the JCG been pressured and conspired against by the state, the political parties, and other actors? Ahmad Malk, a representative of the Islamist movement, argued that every political entity, including the regime in power in Morocco, would spare no effort to "destroy" the JCG.[38] Another Islamist, who is a member of the movement, vociferously denounced all Moroccan political parties as "cheap prostitutes who have no dignity and no future," arguing that "only Islam will deliver Moroccans from the tyranny of the few infidels who sit on top of the state's wealth and throw crumbs to the people, starving and humiliating them." [39] All of Yassine's followers are unanimous in their unflinching dedication to their cause, which

they all agree is the institution of an Islamist state, following Muhammad's model. They have great respect for Yassine, whom they view as a God-sent messiah, a *mab'uth*, to deliver society from its burden of secularism and materialism.

This attention is not lost on Yassine, who refers to himself as God's messenger (*mab'uth*). He is unquestionably the uncontested leader or general guide (*murshid*) of the JCG. He is not only respected for being the political leader of his movement, but he is venerated to a degree that borders on worship. The Islamist leader sits atop his organization and possesses the ultimate authority in running the movement, despite claims to the contrary by some of his disciples. Yassine says of himself: "A *murshid* is the cornerstone of the edifice, there is no *jama'a* without him; he is the state man and the [preacher]." [40] The base of followers has no power and does not participate in the decisionmaking. [41] The general guide nominates the heads of the cells and makes all of the organization's educational decisions. He also has the right to make emergency executive decisions without needing to confer with the orientation counsel. [42]

PRELUDE TO ISLAMISM

The first signs of Islamism began to appear in Morocco in the late 1960s and coincided with major political developments at home and abroad. Such developments created a "crisis environment" and were prone to the development of a religious revivalism. In Morocco, the Marxist ideology swept university campuses and presented, along with the National Union of Popular Forces Party's (NUPF) leftists, a major challenge to the government. In 1965, Moroccan secondary school teachers in Casablanca grew dissatisfied with their low wages and poor working conditions and decided to go on strike. Soon after the strike began, students and massive numbers of unemployed Moroccans had joined as well. [43] The strike was severely repressed by the security forces and left between 300 to 400 dead. [44] Further, over 10,000 workers were dismissed as a result of the crisis. [45]

Morocco experienced a severe economic crisis at the time. The king himself acknowledged the seriousness of the situation. The monarch initially blamed "outside agitators" for the riots but later placed the blame on the parliament, political parties, and on the teachers who—according to him—had "incited" students to violence. In a speech on March 30, 1965, he stated, "There is no danger for the state as grave as that of the so-called intellectuals. It would be better if you were all illiterate." [46] However, the riots had more of an impact on the country's elite than on the parliament and political parties. [47]

In the early 1970s, Hassan II nearly escaped two serious attempts to overthrow his regime by his most trusted military officers. [48] While the king's legitimacy was seriously shaken, he managed to stave off the repercussions of the attempted military coups and to maintain the opposition of the "educated middle class and army officers." [49] The events of the early 1970s seem to have been eclipsed by the king's "Green March," a political endeavor to take control of the Western Sahara, vacated by Spain in 1975. The march consisted of 350,000 civilians, armed with nothing but copies of the Koran. This event rallied all political parties around the flag and became an annual national holiday.

Elsewhere, the 1967 Arab defeat by Israel was the one single event that humiliated all Arab nations. This

led to a severe Arab identity crisis, leaving many Arabs desperate for new alternatives to help them overcome their debacle and to restore an already precarious legitimacy vis-à-vis their people.[50] This defeat did not affect Arab identity alone; it touched Islamic pride as well, especially in light of the fact that the opponent was Jewish. In 1979, the Iranian Revolution and King Hassan II's support for the shah as well as the Camp David Accords emboldened the Islamists and accelerated religious activism.[51] For example, in November 1979, Moroccan Islamists participated in the high-jacking of Mecca's sanctuary in Saudi Arabia.[52]

During the same year the Islamists became more and more active in demonstrations denouncing the king's support for the shah and rejecting the Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel. In 1980, the Islamists organized a rally in front of the criminal court holding the trial of the alleged murderer of socialist Omar Benjelloun. The Islamists participated in massive numbers in the 1981 hunger riots, which took place in the country's major urban centers. In 1982, another demonstration was organized to protest the docking of a U.S. ship in the Bay of Tangier. Seven hundred Islamists were arrested during that same year throughout the country. Another hunger riot in 1984 brought massive numbers of Islamists into the streets of Casablanca.[53]

In Morocco, the 1967 Arab defeat by Israel, which was felt with the same degree of pain and frustration as in other Arab countries, became a useful instrument in the hands of the Islamists. They pointed to this defeat as proof that only a return to the fundamentals of Islam would restore Muslim and Arab pride. Islamists argued that Jews defeated the Arabs because they did not deviate from their religion. The same Islamists were used by the government in the early 1970s and throughout the early 1980s to fight the National Union of Moroccan Students, labor unions, the teachers union, and leftist political parties, because they all incarnated atheism, Marxism, and Nasserism.[54]

These developments are consistent with Dekmejian's crisis environment theory, which posits that Islamic revivalism has always been triggered by a crisis situation wherein Muslims return to the fundamental tenets of Islam to search for answers to their problems.[55] These problems could manifest themselves in the form of an identity/cultural, leadership, modernization, or misrule/coercion crisis. Although the economics approach does not believe in the regenerative capacity of Islam,[56] Morocco's economic crises throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s played a fundamental role in the creation of Islamism.

Dekmejian's crisis milieu is tantamount to Abd al-Salam Yassine's *fitna* (anarchy), which could be translated as a state of disarray as a result of deviating from the righteous path of Islam's teachings and the blind embracing of the Western model of a secular lifestyle. Abd al-Karim Mouti, who was the first Islamist to establish a politico-religious movement, saw the emergence and spread of Marxist thought on university campuses as the manifestation of this crisis milieu. He called this a *jahiliyya* state, much as did his guru, Sayyid Qutb. Mouti spent his last few years in Morocco fighting both government and the Marxist students.

While relying on Dekmejian's crisis milieu perspective to understand Islamism in general, this study focuses more on Muslims, or the public at large in Moroccan society, to understand the rise of Islamism in Morocco. Islamists are a small minority within this larger and thus more influential group of Muslims. It is from this larger group of Muslims that the smaller Islamist fringe emerged, making them (the Muslims at large), at least by default, the first witnesses to the development of Islamism. The position of ordinary Muslims vis-à-vis Islamists is thus crucial for understanding the phenomenon of religious revivalism in Morocco.

ISLAMISM AND MUSLIMS IN MOROCCO

It is important to draw a clear distinction between an Islamist and a Muslim. While all Islamists are Muslims, not all Muslims are Islamists; in fact, very few Muslims are. An Islamist is a Muslim who believes Islam can, in addition to being a religion, organize all aspects of life (*din wa dunya*) and that the Koran is a political as well as a religious document. Muslims in general do not mix religion and politics. However, the distinction between an Islamist and a Muslim may not exist or could be elusive at best because some Muslims and all the Islamists reject any separation between the two concepts.

Despite the belief among Islamists that increasing numbers of people are turning to Islam, Islamism is still restricted to very few and selective parts of the country, and the Islamists are still a minority. According to Ibrahim Aarab, university campuses have seen an increase in Islamist activism.[57] The author may be referring to the mid-1990s, and if this is indeed the case, this might be because all of the students of the political and religious associations felt empowered by the political opening initiated by Hassan II in 1992. For the majority of students, it was not due to the appeal of Islamism as an ideology, although that may have been a reason for some.

In 1984, Tozy conducted an important survey of 400 university students to assess their position on Islamist militancy. When asked what it meant to be a Muslim, only 15 percent of the students responded that it meant being a militant in an Islamist group.[58] Tozy also asked the students if they favored the mixing of men and women in public places, and only 11 percent of the students were against the mixing of the two genders.[59] This is an important finding because Islamists oppose the mixing of men and women. In addition, while only a mere eight percent of the students practiced the five daily prayers required of every Muslim, 85 percent of them fasted during the holy month of Ramadan.[60]

Thus, while the majority of students practiced one of the five pillars of Islam, only 15 percent supported an Islamist interpretation of what it means to be a Muslim. Yet answers to other questions in the survey showed that about 40 percent of the respondents related more to an Islamist view of the issues. For instance, 40 percent of the students surveyed believed that a return to the Islamic values of the “Golden Age” would be the only way for Muslims to emancipate themselves, and 54 percent of students viewed the backwardness of Moroccan society as a consequence of not following the teachings of Islam faithfully.

Forty-three percent of the students thought that religion should play a role in politics, and 40 percent of respondents believed Islam was an all-encompassing system that could organize all aspects of life.[61] As important as these findings are, one should keep in mind that the percentage of university students in Morocco is very small compared to the size of the overall population of the country. In 1998, for example, there were 248,000 university students enrolled out of a population of 28 million.[62]

Society as a whole does not reflect the growth of Islamism on campuses. Most people interviewed for Tozy’s project were surprised to hear Islamism was on the rise on campuses. Moreover, only a few were aware of the specific Islamist movements in Morocco and even fewer could identify Abd al-Salam Yassine and Abd al-Karim Mouti. Even more striking is the fact that in the main streets of the cities there is no indication of an obvious or overwhelming Islamist presence. There were no symbols or signs of any religious or political movement or activity. The Moroccan streets looked as secular as in any secular society.

However, this does not mean there are not more Islamists today than in the 1980s, for example. In fact, a greater number of Muslims embrace Islamism today and that number may be growing.

Contrary to the widely-held belief among Islamists that there is no separation between religion and politics, in Morocco, worshipping appeared to be more of a spiritual experience than political activism in all the mosques observed. Henry Munson observed that he has often heard Moroccans discuss Islam for hours without even a remote mention of politics or the monarchy.[63] In observing Muslims in the daily practice of their religion, one notes no indication of anything remotely political. Even the Koranic verses recited and repeated while performing their ritual prayers have nothing biased about them. They are spiritual in nature and focus on the individual's expression of gratitude to God and request for his blessings and forgiveness.

Most Moroccan Muslims interviewed for this study seem to believe in the notion of fate (*maktub*). They seem convinced that as human beings, there is only so much they can do in order to control their lives, that all is pre-ordained and fated by *Allah* who oversees all their actions and decides their outcome. A political science professor from Rabat argued that the overwhelming majority of Muslims in Morocco do not mix politics with religion. The professor added that only Islamists, whom he believes are a minority, reject this separation between the two spheres.[64]

The Muslim prayer sessions observed by the current author in various Moroccan cities did not contain political statements or implications. For example, during Friday sermons, when the imam is supposed to talk about the problems facing the community, the language used seemed carefully crafted and weighted so as not to cross the line between the religious and the political. However, this may have less to do with the imam's true beliefs than with the policies of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in regulating Friday sermons, especially since the events of May 16, 2003.[65] Although the regulation of Friday sermons goes back to the 1980s, it was more vigorously reinforced immediately after the 2003 terrorist attack in Casablanca. In the very few remaining private mosques, the imams' sermons seem more daring in their denouncement of government corruption, the decay of Muslim society, and the blind emulation of Western societies. However, the imam here goes to great lengths to spare the king; no disrespectful or critical comments are uttered of the royal family directly or indirectly.

The current author spoke to several of the worshippers who frequent these mosques and discovered that although they were Islamists in the sense that they see no dichotomy between religion and politics, they did not all belong to either of the largest Islamist movements in the country. Three of the interviewees agreed with the general Islamist premise for the creation of an Islamist state on the basis of the Koran, but they did not support any particular Islamist leader.[66] They spoke with fervent enthusiasm about the virtues of Islam and its glorious past, but soon became inhibited and hesitant in their answers when questioned on the political situation of the Islamists and government. All three interviewees agreed that their activities, including worship, have come under closer scrutiny by the security forces since May 16, 2003. They added that they knew they were being watched but would continue to do what they felt was God's will.

Finally, when asked their view of Muslims, the majority of whom do not associate religion with politics, they responded that as Muslims themselves one of their duties is da'wa (proselytizing) and that they will "open everybody's eyes" because Muslims who do see a separation between religion and the state are simply "blind." When the current author remarked that Islamists were a small minority among a much

larger Muslim community, which does not involve itself in politics, they argued that Muslim/Islamist was a false dichotomy and that both concepts basically referred to the same thing. A Muslim is one who strives to do good by exhorting others to God's righteous path and using all means necessary to achieve that goal, including jihad, regardless of what that Muslim is called.[67]

Abdallah Mir, a member of the JCG and a representative of the Islamist movement, agreed with the three interviewees that a "Muslim is Muslim," and all of the other references, such as "fundamentalist" and "Islamist" were merely imported concepts that did not affect the Muslim's true mission.[68] Mir sees this mission as the spread of the word of God (da'wa), the education of Muslims and their preparation for *quaouma* (revolution) and the establishment of the Islamist *umma*. The interviewee repeated verbatim the same ideas one can read in Abd al-Salam Yassine's books on the decay of Moroccan society's moral values as a consequence of emulating the secular societies of Europe and the need for Muslims to intervene and redeem their identity as Muslims.[69]

Yet beyond this point of agreement with the three Islamists, Mir was very dismissive of other Islamists, especially members of the JDP and other associations within this movement such as the RRM. Mir argued that all the Islamists who joined Al-Khatib's PDCP compromised their integrity because their integration within this political party "brought them under the tight control of government." [70] The only genuine Islamist movement in Morocco was *al-Adl wa al-Ihssan*, argued Mir, which the government tried unsuccessfully to "buy" on numerous occasions. Then, he spoke of Yassine with great admiration and credited him with the success of the JCG's independence as an Islamist movement. Mir believes firmly that an Islamist "state" will be established in Morocco and that "people are waiting" for that moment with great anticipation because a return to an Islamic way of life is "imminent," "natural," and the "logical" solution for a Muslim society to pursue.[71]

The return to the "Islamic way of life" is one thing all of the Islamists interviewed agreed on. Muslims on the other hand, while they accept an "Islamic way of life," do not necessarily see the erection of an Islamist state as the best way to attain that goal. Muhammad Bouna, a retired teacher and devout Muslim, views the development of Islamist movements as a "sham," for he does not believe embracing any form of Islamism is the appropriate response to God's commandments. Islamism in Bouna's view is a political project that is "irreligious." [72] Bouna added that people confuse the growing numbers of Islamists with the increase in the number of practicing Muslims. Indeed, more and more Muslims are attending mosques and most of these Muslims do not know the difference between a Muslim and an Islamist. Nor do they believe politics is inherent in religion.

However, this distinction does not seem to reassure Dr. Ahmad Boualam, a prominent physician, businessman, and community leader who says that the number of Islamists is increasing in a "very worrisome way in Morocco," adding that this development should not be viewed like an "unemployment" problem. More seems to be at stake, said Dr. Boualam, who concluded that many of his own workers who had never prayed a day in their lives became very pious Muslims overnight.[73] Dr. Boualam argued that this "sudden" increase in religiosity is not "natural," regardless of what these "new worshippers" were called. He seemed convinced that the increasing number of Muslims who frequent the same mosques as Islamists will eventually become "indoctrinated" by the latter's views.[74]

Abdou Sabar, a general manager of an electronic firm that employs over 4,000 workers in Casablanca, echoed the same sentiments about the rise of the number of workers who have "re-embraced" Islam.[75] Sabar explained that since taking over as head of his company in 1999, he has seen a dramatic increase

in the number of employees who have become practicing Muslims. At first, it did not concern Sabar that “regular, secular” workers had become pious Muslims or, as he put it, “overzealous” Muslims. Yet Sabar’s employees soon began asking to stop work midday on Fridays to perform the ritual weekly prayer. In addition, they began arguing with him about the company’s dress code and complaining about men shaving their beards.[76]

The current author talked to several employees from Sabar’s firm and received different perspectives on the development of this “overzealous” Islam in the workplace. Interviews were conducted with two engineers in top management positions, four line supervisors, and eight assembly workers. While the questions to the interviewees varied, based on their religious practices, they all revolved around the theme of religion in the workplace. All of the interviewees agreed that an increasing number of workers were becoming practicing Muslims, but they did not agree on the rationale for this religious enthusiasm. While the assembly workers and two of the supervisors believed workers were re-embracing Islam because it was the Islamic thing to do and that they should have done it sooner, they were not sure why they had decided to become practicing Muslims at this juncture.

The employees said they took advice from “more learned” friends who were faithful mosque-goers, and explained that they lived more peaceful and fulfilled lives as practicing Muslims. In addition, the workers reported that they listen to Friday sermons in private mosques and that they supported and voted for Islamist leaders because they believed these leaders understand them and their issues better than anybody else. The two managers were Muslims as well, but did not speak with the same passion about the practice of religion as did the workers. One of the managers was very candid in declaring religion should be a personal matter and that whatever an individual did with his life should be left between him and God. He argued that some Muslims wear their beliefs “on their sleeves” for everybody to see and that this may, unconsciously, provoke other people from other religious backgrounds. The other manager argued that to be a good Muslim is to do one’s job right and “not get distracted by Islamist politics, which most workers do not understand.” The two managers and Mr. Sabar were convinced that the workers had been manipulated by Islamists.

Mr. Bouna, Dr. Boualam, and Mr. Sabar’s perspectives on Islamism were mostly consistent with the views expressed by many professionals whom the author interviewed, including well-to-do doctors, lawyers, and engineers. All of the interviewees in this category seemed very concerned about the “rise” in Islamist militancy and the ambivalence on the distinction between a Muslim and an Islamist. Although most of them did not distinguish between the two concepts either, they did not believe religion should be mixed with politics. For instance, even young unemployed graduate students and some state employees who bemoaned the low wages and the poor work environment did not believe an Islamist agenda would be the appropriate approach to tackle unemployment, low morale, and poor working conditions for state bureaucrats.[77]

This lack of confidence in Islamists and the notion of separation of religion and public affairs seem to be held by the vast majority of the well-to-do professionals interviewed and observed. Despite economic hardships and the socioeconomic inequalities felt by most people most Moroccans they seem reluctant to understand and much less accept the idea that religion is the solution to many of their pressing problems. They appear to be more trusting of the secular political parties than of either of the Islamist parties.

CONCLUSION

Although the appeal of Islamism in Morocco seems to have increased since its inception in the 1970s, it remains limited, because most people do not associate religion with politics. However, if the country's economic situation worsens, this could lead many to be drawn to the Islamist cause. Thus, unless the state tends successfully to the economic needs of its citizens, it may face a more challenging Islamist force in the future. This is more likely to materialize if both the JCG and the JDP join forces and win a majority of seats in both houses of parliament. If this were to happen, would the Islamists be able to govern a society as open, diverse, and cosmopolitan as Morocco—especially given their declared position on such issues as democracy, human rights, and freedom of speech? Would the king allow the country to be under the complete control of even a democratically-elected Islamist government?

The prospects of an Islamist government in Morocco are bleak, and it is even less likely that the JDP and the JCG will join forces. The Islamists do not seem to be as potent a political force as was once believed. On February 20, 2011, when several demonstrations took place across Morocco, the Islamist presence was rather weak in comparison to other groups representing different facets of Moroccan society, especially young unemployed Moroccans. The protesters were calling for political reforms, including a constitutional monarchy, an independent judiciary, and a new cabinet—among many other demands. The demonstrations were initiated and organized by a youth movement called the February 20 Movement.

Following the demonstrations, the king initiated several socio-political reforms: He freed many political prisoners, maintained subsidies on food items (e.g., oil, sugar, and flour), elevated the Moroccan Human Rights Council from a consultative body to a national institution (National Human Rights Council), and ordered the hiring of thousands of unemployed university graduates. Thus far, the monarchy does not seem to be in any immediate danger of losing power, and the Islamists seem to be overshadowed by a rising youth movement, determined to push for further political reforms.

However, the Islamists should not be dismissed as insignificant at this point, despite their current position. While maintaining a low profile during the February 20, 2011 events, the JDP Islamists are already adapting to the country's new political environment by appealing to the youth movement, because they realize its increasingly important role as a political force. However, what may be more important and perhaps even urgent for Morocco's future is how genuine the socio-political and economic reforms are and how soon those affected by them will begin to feel their impact. Equally imperative to the country's future is the monarchy's willingness to contemplate drastic constitutional reforms in response to the protesters' demands—a move that could affect the king's prerogative powers. Such an initiative would likely be welcomed by the protesters and could spare the country of an unnecessary revolution.

* *Kassem Bahaji was born in Morocco and educated in the United States where he received a doctorate in Political Science in 2007. Dr. Bahaji's research interests are focused on the study of religion and politics in North Africa.*

NOTES

[1] Ibrahim Aarab, *al-Islam al-Siyasi wa al-Hadatha* (Casablanca: Afriqiyya al-Sharq, 2000), p. 111.

[2] *Ibid*, p.112.

- [3] Abderrahim Lamchichi, *Le Maghreb face à l'islamisme* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997), p. 28.
- [4] Ibid, p. 29.
- [5] The Islamic Youth Movement (IYM) is better known as MJJ (Mouvement de la Jeunesse Islamique).
- [6] Lamchichi, *Le Maghreb*, p. 30.
- [7] Aarab, *al-Islam*, p. 40.
- [8] *Al-Mithak al-Watani*, June 29, 1996.
- [9] Ibid, p. 229.
- [10] Henry Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 159.
- [11] Ibid, p. 159.
- [12] Malika Zeghal, *Les islamistes marocains: Le défi à la monarchie* (Paris: La Découverte, 2005), p. 199.
- [13] *Al-Mithak al-Watani*, January 6, 1982.
- [14] Darif, *al-Islam al-Siyasi*, p. 257.
- [15] Ibid, pp. 257-276; Muhammad Tozy, *Monarchie et islam politique au Maroc* (Paris: Presses de Sciences Po, 1999), p. 235.
- [16] Aarab, *al-Islam*, p. 113.
- [17] Ibid.
- [18] *Maghreb al-Yawm*, June 9, 1996.
- [19] Aarab, *al-Islam*, p. 119.
- [20] *Araya*, April 20, 1990.
- [21] *Araya*, November 3, 1992.
- [22] Tozy, *Monarchie*, p. 249.
- [23] Darif, *al-Ahzab*, p. 302.
- [24] Ibid, p. 303.
- [25] Ibid.
- [26] Aarab, *al-Islam*, p. 80.

[27] Ibid, p. 81.

[28] Ibid, pp. 81-85.

[29] Abd al-Salam Yassine, *al-Minhaj al-Nabawi* (Casablanca: Al-Oufoq, 1989), p. 18.

[30] Zeghal, *Les islamistes*, p. 165.

[31] Ibid.

[32] Zeghal, *Les islamistes*, p. 174.

[33] François Burgat and William Dowell, *The Islamic Movement in North Africa* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1993), p. 180.

[34] Fathallah Aarsalane, *Hisaru Rajulin a'm Hisaru Da'wa?* (Casablanca: Al-Oufoq, 1996), p. 58.

[35] Ibid.

[36] Ibid, p. 50.

[37] Ibid, p. 48.

[38] Interview with Ahmad Malk (pseudonym), representative of the Justice and Charity Group (JCG), Casablanca, Morocco, August 1, 2005.

[39] Interview with Salman Oubaiaa (pseudonym), nurse and JCG member, Rabat, Morocco, July 11, 2005.

[40] Yassine, *al-Minhaj*, p. 42.

[41] Tozy, *Monarchie*, p. 215.

[42] Ibid.

[43] John Waterbury, *The Commander of the Faithful: The Moroccan Political Elite, A Study in Segmented Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), p. 312.

[44] Ibid, p. 313.

[45] Ibid.

[46] Ibid.

[47] Ibid.

[48] Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco*, pp. 134-35; Burgat and Dowell, *The Islamic Movement*, p. 169.

[49] Ibid.

[50] R. Hrair Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution: Fundamentalism in the Arab World* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1985), p. 27.

[51] Ibid, p. 179.

[52] Ibid.

[53] Lamchichi, *Islam*, p. 180.

[54] Ibid, p. 177.

[55] Dekmejian, *Islam in Revolution*, p. 7

[56] Ibid.

[57] Aarab, *al-Islam al-Siyasi*, p. 111.

[58] Muhammad Tozy, *Champs et contrechamp politico-religieux au Maroc*, Ph.D. Thesis, Université de Droit, d'Economie et des Sciences d'Aix-Marseille, 1984, pp. 217-219.

[59] Ibid, pp. 248-52.

[60] Ibid, pp. 249-253. Fasting during the holy month of Ramadan has become both a religious and cultural tradition as opposed to a purely religious ritual, since only a portion of Muslims who fast in Morocco observe the other four fundamental pillars or tenets of Islam, namely, *Shahada*, *Salat*, *Zakat*, and *Hajj*.

[61] Ibid.

[62] *P.E.P., 1998 Annuaire statistique du Maroc (Rabat: Direction de la Statistique 1998)*, pp. 367-68, 373.

[63] Munson, *Religion and Power in Morocco*, p. 117.

[64] Interview with Moussa Afraou (pseudonym), professor of political science, Rabat, Morocco, July 7, 2005.

[65] Ibid.

[66] Interview with Moussa Benmardi, Malak Mtebit, and Akka Noufod (pseudonyms), students, Meknes, Morocco, June 10, 2005.

[67] Ibid.

[68] Interview with Abdallah Mir (pseudonym), Islamist representative and high school teacher, Meknes, Morocco, June 20, 2005.

[69] Ibid.

[70] Ibid.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Interview with Muhammad Bouna (pseudonym), retired Arabic high school teacher, Meknes, Morocco, June 14, 2005.

[73] Interview with Dr. Ahmad Boualam (pseudonym), medical doctor and businessman, Rabat, Morocco, July 7, 2005.

[74] Ibid.

[75] Interview with Abdou Sabar, (pseudonym) General Manager of electronic firm, Casablanca, Morocco, July 28, 2005.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Interview with managers, supervisors, and workers at Sabar's firm, Casablanca, Morocco, August 29, 2005.