Mohammed Hashas

RELIGION AND POLITICS IN MOROCCO: ISLAMIC, ISLAMIST, AND POST-ISLAMIST DYNAMICS

ABSTRACT

This paper aims to map the terrain of religion and politics in modern and contemporary Morocco. Seeing the chronological and intellectual diversity within Moroccan religious thought and politics, this paper proposes three major historical periods to facilitate approaching the topic: the pre-/colonial, the colonial, and postcolonial times. The first pre-/-colonial period is hybrid; it coincides with the rise of the first generation of the Moroccan Nahda renewal, before the colonial period, although it lived into the colonial period and played important roles in it for liberation. I mark this with the "Islamic" label, since Islam was the only common identity marker for any project of renewal in an intellectually "homogeneous" society. As to the colonial period, this Islamic identity became stronger since the colonial administration tried to weaken this identity and the social fabric and its related institutions, be they religious brotherhoods, religious endowments, or Sufi orders; at a certain moment in 1930, the colonial administration played on linguistic differences to divide and rule, and in another occasion, in 1953–1955, it tried to dethrone the nationalist Sultan and replace him with a docile one. Here, again, the "Islamic" identity marker of society and politics was further emphasized as a force of unity, thus the label of Nationalist Islam in this stage, despite the variety of currents within the nationalist movement. As to the postcolonial period, it is a phase in which the modern debates over the format of the nation state, the place of religion in politics, democracy, liberalism, socialism, and secularization become part of Moroccan thought and politics. Thus, three major labels are used to describe the variety of political Islams in society: the Ultra-Orthodox Islam, the Orthodox Islam, and Critical Islam. And since they all share Islam as an identity but interpret it differently, I borrow the term from Asef Bayat to call this period the "post-Islamist" period, since the actors with the Islamic label are multiple, and no one single trend or project manages to win to enforce its Islamist interpretation on society and political stakeholders. More importantly, this diversity of interpretations is what saves the "Islamic" from rigidity and turns it into its fluidity of pre-modern times, i.e. to the "Islamic" as a lived spirituality and moral compass, as a theocentric way of life, in a forthcoming post-Islamist society, a secular world and neoliberal economies.

KEYWORDS

Moroccan Islam,
Ultra-Orthodox Islam,
Orthodox Islam,
Critical Islam,
Post-Islamist Society.

Mohammed Hashas, Department of History, Humanities, and Society, University of Rome Tor Vergata, Rome, Italy; mohammed.hashas@uniroma2.it.

Introduction

In a world governed by modern nation states, and not classical empires or caliphates, it is reasonable to look first at ideas and concepts in the particular context of the nation state to see how they mature from therein before they may find echoes regionally and internationally. This applies to Islamic thought and how it has metamorphosed during the last two centuries of encounter with the project of modernity and its major pillar of secularism. In the Arab world in particular, three major dates stand as intellectual periodization moments: 1) the 1798 Napoleonic campaign in Egypt that led to the major intellectual Nahda (Awakening/Renaissance) productions in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries; 2) the 1967 Israeli swift war and victory that led to the defeat (Naksa) of three Arab armies (Egyptian, Syrian, and Jordanian), and the rise of the post-1967 intellectual generation that formed various critical cultural, philosophical and theological projects; 3) and the so-called Arab Spring Uprisings of 2010–2011 in various Arab contexts, in the Maghrib, Mashriq, and Arabia.[1] For various internal and external factors, the responses to these massive protests have taken different orientations: from devastating civil wars in some states (e.g., Syria, Libya, and Yemen), to the return of authoritarianism in some (Tunisia and Egypt), and normalcy of the pre-uprisings conditions in most others (in the monarchies in particular). Morocco, an old autonomous monarchy at the western edge of the Arabicate and Islamicate classical worlds[2], has interacted with these socio-political and intellectual challenges and changes during the Nahda, the Naksa and the Spring Uprisings (Aboul-Ela 2018: 143–162).[3] Moroccan scholars and thinkers, some of them also public activists, have proposed widely read and engaging projects for how to revisit Arab-Islamic thought to

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1   I will keep my references to the minimum in this mapping article, with a focus on the original sources, including new video sources whose content is not available yet in written formats. The translations are mine unless otherwise indicated. When first sources are indicated in Arabic, and the English titles in square brackets, subsequent references, however, refer only to the English titles for ease of reading.
On the political-intellectual notes above, see, for example: Corm ([2015] 2020), Hatina (2015), Belkeziz and Barout (2013), Kassab (2010), Al-Azm ([1968] 2007), Hanafi and al-Jabri (1990), Bah (2010), Abu Rabi' (2004), Boullata (1990), Hourani ([1962] 2013).
2   "Arabicate," formed based on Hodgson's known concepts of Islamicate and Islamdom, refers to whatever pertains to the Arabic linguistic, cultural, and geographical worlds, irrespective of the religious or ethnic origins of the producers of these products and worlds; these worlds, in the age of migration, can extend to mean also Arab culture as found outside the classical Arab world (Hodgson 1974).
3   The ongoing genocidal war on Gaza since the violent events of 7th October 2023 could usher in a new thinking over the intellectual relations of the "Arab and Muslim worlds and the West." The "West," especially its component of the G7 big economies, is accused of being complicit in this genocide for its inability to push for the end of the devastating war, despite UN and Security Council, and International Court of Justice resolutions for a ceasefire. But this we leave for future historians of ideas to outline, after the geopolitics of the region settle down.

champion socio-political and intellectual liberty, and ultimately social justice, in Morocco and also in the larger Arab-Islamic societies.[4]

This paper aims to map the terrain of religion and politics in modern and contemporary Morocco. Seeing the chronological and intellectual diversity within Moroccan thought and politics, this paper proposes three major historical periods to facilitate approaching the topic: the pre-/colonial, the colonial, and postcolonial times. The first pre/-colonial period is hybrid; it coincides with the rise of the first generation of the Moroccan Nahda renewal, before the colonial period, although it lived into the colonial period and played important roles in it for liberation. I mark this with the "Islamic" label, since Islam was the only common identity marker for any project of renewal in an intellectually "homogeneous" society. As to the colonial period, this Islamic identity became stronger since the colonial administration tried to weaken this identity and the social fabric and its related institutions, be they religious brotherhoods, religious endowments, or Sufi orders; at a certain moment in 1930, the colonial administration played on linguistic differences to divide and rule, and in another occasion, in 1953–1955, it tried to dethrone the nationalist Sultan and replace him with a docile one. Here, again, the "Islamic" identity marker of society and politics was further emphasized as a force of unity, thus the label of Nationalist Islam in this stage, despite the variety of currents within the nationalist movement. As to the postcolonial period, it is a phase in which the modern debates over the format of the nation state, the place of religion in politics, democracy, liberalism, socialism, and secularization become part of Moroccan thought and politics. Thus, three major labels are used to describe the variety of political Islams in society: the Ultra-Orthodox Islam, the Orthodox Islam, and Critical Islam. And since they all share Islam as an identity but interpret it differently, I borrow the term from Asef Bayat (1996) to call this period the "post-Islamist" phase, since the actors with the Islamic label are multiple, and no one single trend or project manages to win to enforce its Islamist interpretation on society and political stakeholders. More importantly, this diversity of interpretations is what saves the "Islamic" from rigidity, and turns it into its fluidity of pre-modern times, i.e., to the "Islamic" as a lived spirituality and moral compass, as a theocentric way of life, in a forthcoming post-Islamist society, a secular world and neoliberal economies.

Pre/-colonial Times: The Moroccan Nahda, Patriotism and the Islamic Revival

The fact that Morocco is situated in the western edge of the classical Arab-Islamic world has not distanced it from debating the core issues that touch this socio-cultural and political domain it belongs to, although it has retained its autonomy from its classical central powers from the late 8th century AD,

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4   For an overview of contemporary Moroccan thought on religion, philosophy, and society, see: Hashas (2025).

when it formed its own Sultanic state of the Idrissids, the founders of Fez and al-Qarawiyyine cultural citadel. Imperial Marrakech would afterwards become, between the eleventh and thirteenth centuries, the central state of the Islamic west, which included the al-Andalus in the Iberian Peninsula (Gomez-Rivas 2023; Bennison 2016, 2002; Fromherz 2012). The *Reconquista* and the rise of the Spanish and Portuguese expansions, the discovery of the New World and change of the place of the Mediterranean in world politics, and internal divisions would impact the status of the Sultanate. In the early nineteenth century, because of Napoleonic wars after the French Revolution inside Europe, and drought and famine in Morocco, the Sultanate would experience a period of introversion in its external relations with this continent (al-Mansour 1990).

Although the Napoleonic campaign to invade Egypt (1798-1801) had echoes in Morocco, it was the French seizure of Algeria from the Ottomans in 1830 that would alarm the cultural and political elite in the Sultanate (Al-Manouni 1973, Laroui [1977] 2016). When the Moroccans went in support of the Emir Abdulkader of Algeria in combatting the French, their military was defeated in 1845, which revealed their weakness; a similar defeat under the Spanish military in 1859-60 further showed how weak the traditional army was, based on volunteerism, compared to the new modern organized armies of Europe. That would henceforth lead to the ultimate inclusion of Morocco in the European colonial enterprise, to be called a Protectorate under the French and Spanish officially from 1912 to independence in 1956.[5] But how did the Moroccan cultural elite respond to these modern challenges?

Testimonies from either Moroccan ambassadors, consuls, or sent missions to Europe do not seem to have shown at first a keen interest in what the new Europe was; they saw material progress and colonialism and missed to see also the Enlightenment heritage (Belkeziz [1998] 2008: 67–105). The educated elite was trained in seminaries and ancient major colleges-mosques, like al-Qarawiyyine in Fez and Ben Youssef in Marrakech, besides others in Rabat-Salè in the center, in the Souss region in the south and Tetouan in the north, before the rise of modern educational system during the colonial and postcolonial periods (Baqa 2011: 261–302, 303–336, 361–374). This means that major scholars of the time had also a solid religious scholarly training. Examples here illustrate their reaction to both the colonial enterprise and Sultanic political compliance with it in its weak moment, and to the reform or Nahda movement the winds of which had reached from the Levant and al-Hijaz in Arabia, where some Moroccan scholars had sojourned (Ibid.: 251–260). We could distinguish here between two major generations of Moroccan Nahda revivalists: the first founding

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5   The story of independence does not end in 1956; some southern Saharan territories were recovered in the 1960s and 1970s; the Sahara issue overall remains unresolved at the UN level, and two enclaves in the north of Morocco, Ceuta and Melilla cities, also remain under Spanish control from the fifteenth century, the Reconquista period, and which Morocco considers part of its territories.

generation, and its subsequent offspring generation; the first grew during the precolonial and colonial period, and the second during the colonial and early postcolonial period, thus lived different political and intellectual challenges.

Overall, revival was considered both a patriotic and ummatic requisite; the cultural heritage of the glorious far past was the guide; henceforth the Islamic spirit behind the revival movement. And "Islamic" here was broad in meanings: it was a civilizational paradigm, a socio-political barometer, guided by historical experience and achievements in all sectors of life. Replicating this past was conceived possible in modern times not only to encounter the European colonial enterprise but especially to revive societies from centuries of socio-cultural and political decadence. Otherwise here, the "Islamic" was not only law or politics but that galvanizing energy that can resuscitate life in the broad umma of which Morocco is a part.

Among the major scholars that fit into this first generation of Moroccan Nahda is the influential scholars and historian of Fez Mohammed Ben Jaafar al-Kattani (1857–1927), known as Abu al-Fayd. He wrote *Naṣīḥat Ahl al-Islām bi-mā Yadfaʿu ʿanhum Dāʾ al-Kafara al-Liʾām* [Advice to Muslims against the Infidels], a work in which he refuses cohabitation with the Europeans and calls for jihad to liberate Muslim lands. When the French entered Morocco, to escape the rule of the infidels in an Islamic space he migrated to Medina and Mecca where he taught and lectured for nearly a decade (c. 1912–1918), before moving to Damascus after the Arab revolts against the Ottomans. When the French annexed Syria, he returned to Fez and al-Qarawiyyine (al-Kattani: 1971). Relatedly, Mohammed Ben Abdelkebir al-Kattani (1873–1909), another renowned scholar of al-Qarawiyyine, considered the father of the first modern Moroccan Constitutional movement, led the initiative of some scholars that sought to constrain the new Sultan Abd al-Hafid (r. 1908–1912) through the *bayʿa* (oath of allegiance) from succumbing to the French encroachments on the land via compliant treaties. He was punished by flogging for this activism and he died of his wounds in 1909.[6]

In the north of the country, in Tetouan, another scholar played an important role in the formation of the national liberation movement during the colonial period, i.e., Abdessalam Bennouna (1888–1935). Bennouna was a reputed scholar in the northern part of Morocco that was under the Spanish rule, a region that enjoyed more freedom of the press than its counterpart in the south under the French rule. And he was well connected with scholars and liberation movement activists in the Mashriq, like the renowned Lebanese Shakib Arsalan (1869–1946) who visited Tetouan to boost support for the national liberation movement and exchange with its intellectual leaders. Bennouna's intellectual activism demonstrates his immersion in the liberation front in defense of the Islamic lands, besides the national lands. He co-founded the Moroccan Scientific Council (*al-Majlis al-ʿIlmī al-Maghribī*) in 1916, along with Ahmed al-Rahouni (1871-1953), and the journal *Liberty* (*al-Ḥuriyya*) with Abdelkhaleq

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6   For more on this Constitutional phase and subsequent ones, see: Hashas (2013).

Touris (1910–1970). He sent his two sons Mahdi Bennouna (1919–2010) and Tayyeb Bennouna (n.d.) to study in Nablus, in Palestine; Mahdi Bennouna, for example, later on played an important role in the intellectual, diplomatic, and journalistic world of Morocco (Ghallab [1991] 2017: 77–82).

Another towering figure that would indirectly impact also the political liberation movement is Abu Choaib al-Doukkali (1878–1937), who studied in Morocco before spending more than a decade in Mecca and Medina, first for studies then for teaching and lecturing, and afterwards also in the ancient al-Azhar in Egypt, and in al-Zaytuna in Tunisia, before returning to Morocco to teach and lecture in the Royal Palace, and to work as judge in Marrakech and minister for justice afterwards between 1922 and 1932 (Riyad 2005). More importantly, al-Doukkali would influence with his erudition and revivalist spirit he has brought from the Levant another leading scholar who would in turn influence a whole generation afterwards, i.e. Mohamed Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui (1880–1964).

Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui became known as "Shaykh al-Islam" and father of the Moroccan progressive Salafi patriotism, or patriotic neo-Salafim, as Allal al-Fassi refers to it (al-Fassi [1948] 2003: 153–169, al-Alaoui 1997: 75–84, Ghallab [1991] 2017: 43–54). Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui taught in al-Qarawiyyine mosque-college of Fez, reintroduced tafsir tradition in curricula, tried to make modern religious educational reforms, and defended the education of women. In Fez, he taught some of the most active scholars and political leaders of the colonial and post-colonial Morocco, i.e., Mohamed Taqi al-Din al-Hilali (1893–1987), Mohammed al-Mokhtar al-Soussi (1900–1963), Allal al-Fassi (1910–1974), Mohamed Hassan al-Ouazzani (1910–1978), and Abdallah Ibrahim (1918–2005), among others; and these developed their own ideas afterwards and belonged to different intellectual trends as will be noted below. He also blessed the birth of the Leftist opposition party post-independence. He was exiled nationally a number of times by the French for his political opinions in defense of the national liberation movement. He also defended the Maghribi and Palestinian liberation movements and was ready to volunteer in the resistance movement in 1948 in Palestine (Belkebir 2014: 7–11, 13–49; al-Fassi [1948] 2003:153-155; al-Fassi 2008: 205–212).

Overall, this period of Moroccan Nahda rose politically resistant to colonialism, and tried culturally to reform the educational systems in the classical madrassas and colleges, emphasized the role of women's education in the development of society, and used amply the newspapers and magazines as a way of divulgating the idea of civilizational and national revival. At this stage, the waves of the Mashriqi Nahda were impactful, since some leading figures, as scene above, were well connected to this part of the Arab and Islamic world and what was happening in it (Jebroun 2022: 134–135). This is manifest in the way Shaykh Mohamed Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui was perceived by direct students, like al-Fassi, and indirect ones, like Abdellah Guennoun. The latter described him as the "[Muhammed] Abduh of Morocco" (Guennoun [1975] 2015: 110) and the former described him as a major thinker, in the footsteps of [Jamal Eddine] al-Afghani and Abduh (Al-Fassi 2008: 205–212) – the two pioneering figures of

the Arab Nahda and its reverberations also in the rest of the Islamic world. In sum, again, liberation here was moving in a broader orbit and its spirit could be described as Islamic, in the broad sense of the term, i.e., the Islamic world was under siege, and it was the spirit of Islam and its founding liberation moment that had to be invoked for revival; Islam as a religion, a faith system, and as a civilization were perceived as able to rise again and defend the lands and cultures.

Colonial Times: Nationalist Islam

The fact that the monarchy enjoyed historical religious legitimacy in the country played an important role in retaining it as a parallel authority, besides the colonial administration led by a French governor (*Le résident général*) who effectively ruled on most issues, which the monarch had to ratify under the French Protectorate treaty of 1912. However, the new monarch Mohammed V (r. 1927–1953; 1955–1961) joined hands with the liberation movement from the early 1930s and pushed for real reforms under the French rule.[7] He was dethroned and exiled to Corsica and Madagascar between 1953–1955 until the national liberation movement, with its various factions, supported by social protests, brought him back to the country and the throne (Jebroun 2022: 136–137, 230–247).

On 16 May 1930, the French colonial administration issued a decree, known as the Berber Decree. This was read by the nationalist movement as a divide and rule policy, an institutionalization of a division between the Arabs and Berbers – the native Amazighs – a division or schism that did not exist before then. This was the colonial act that brought together the liberation aspirations under the banner of an Arab-Islamic written cultural identity. The nationalists turned 16 May each year into a spiritual retreat in the mosques to read the Qur'an, and plan for liberation. If the French planned to use ethnicities and languages to divide the social fabric, the nationalists used the same narratives to reunite and resist – Islam is the religion, Arabic is the language, and the monarch is the axis of unity; this would become the moto of the national anthem later on: God, Land, King (*Allah, al-Waṭan, al-Malik*) (Ibid.).

Because the political and cultural elite was trained in classical schools, they had a solid religious education, and some of the leaders were also religious scholars, like al-Doukkali and the leaders he influenced, as mentioned above. For instance, Allal al-Fassi a graduate of al-Qarawiyyine who retained his scholarship in parallel with political activism, would become one of the most prominent leaders of the nationalist movement and the Independence (al-Istiqlal) Party. He is the most known Moroccan scholar of the first part of the nineteenth century outside Morocco because of his scholarly as well as political engagement with leaders of the Arab and Islamic liberation movements

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7   In the Spanish controlled zone, the resistance intensified earlier under the leadership of figures like Abdelkarim al-Khattabi (1882–1963), another iconic figure of international reputation for resistance. On this figure, see: Al-Messari (2012).

(Hourani [1962] 2013: 372). In the post-independence period, he retained a major active role in which he defended the dynamics and flexibility of sharia to be integrated in the modern nation state laws. His magnum opus *al-Naqd al-Dhātī* (Self Criticism) was published in 1954, two years before independence, as a theoretical guide to the post-colonial Muslim society of Morocco. In the work he brings political theory, political theology, as well as social theories and economics together in his outline of the major features of what the Moroccan cultural elite and ruling authorities have to envision in the formation of an independent and prosperous society (Al-Fassi [1949] 2008). During the early postcolonial period, in 1963, he published *Maqāṣid al-Sharīʿa* (The Objectives of Shari'a), and *Difāʿ ʿan al-Sharīʿa* (In Defence of Shari'a) in 1966 to combat the emerging secularists and communists that had a different interpretation of how the Moroccan society and its politics should be (Al-Fassi [1966] 2010).

Al-Fassi's peer, also a student of Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui at al-Qarawiyyine, was Mohamed Hassan al-Ouazzani, who continued his studies in Political Science in Paris in the late 1920s. In France, he developed strong connections with Arab and Muslim students' associations, where the idea of the Maghrib union was first being discussed among Maghribi students and future national liberation movements leaders. Al-Ouazzani returned to Morocco and became a leading figure with al-Fassi in the founded nationalist movement of the early 1930s, but he would distance himself from al-Fassi and his group from 1937 over details about the work and organization of the National Liberation Block (*Kutlat al-ʿAmal al-Waṭanī*), founded in 1934, in which they were two major leaders. In 1946, he founded *Ḥizb al-Shūra wal-Istiqlāl* (Democratic Independence Party) as a split party from the Independence Party. Both of them were prolific writers, public speakers, and charismatic leaders; and they retained active roles during the colonial and postcolonial period, until the mid-1970s. Al-Ouazzani is often presented as a liberal figure in the intellectual and political life of modern Morocco, and al-Fassi as a progressive but conservative figure. However, this distinction is not very clear if their written literature is examined; they both believed that Islamic political concepts adjust to human conditions and are thus compatible with the ideas of constitutionalism and democracy; and both considered a constitutional monarchy the long-term aim for Morocco. They differed, nonetheless, in the details concerning the management of their parties. On the whole, if al-Fassi represents, for some, the progressive conservatives, like the progressive Salafism he was influenced by, for his steadfast commitment to converging classical shari'a legal prescriptions into the modern state laws, and al-Ouazzani represents, for others, the liberals for his belief in modern deliberative institutions, was there a leftist competing voice in their midst? Yes, there was, and it was led by the charismatic young Mahdi ben Barka (1920–1965), a Leftist with a strong national, regional and global liberation narrative.

Ben Barka was a mathematician with a socialist orientation. He was among the youngest signatories of the national liberation declaration of 1944, and a leading young member of the Independence Party. However, he would split

from the latter in 1959 to create the National Union for Popular Forces (*al-It-tiḥād al-Waṭani li-l Quwāt al-Shaʿbiyya*) over organizational matters with the Independence Party and its senior leaders. The Popular Forces would develop into the Socialist Union for Popular Forces and become the most fierce political opposition in the country from the 1960s to 1998, when it entered into a coalition government for the first time. A staunch believer in socialism as an alternative to capitalism as a colonial machine, Ben Barka sought to empower civil society and to organize the labor forces. He was also for the divisions of powers, free and fair elections, issues that brought him trouble with the political system, and the Crown Prince Hassan II (1929–1999, r. 1961–1999). Regionally, he was for the Arab unity and for the Palestinian Cause, and against Western hegemony. Internationally, he was an active member in support of Third World movements in Africa, Asia and Latin America. He was in charge of preparing for the Three Continents Conference to be held in Havana, Cuba, in January 1966 (Ghallab [1991] 2017: 273-282).[8] However, he was kidnapped and his body disappeared in October 1965, never to be recovered. His case, still open in the Moroccan political history, is known as Ben Barka Affair.[9]

The point behind referring to Ben Barka is because of his major role in the national liberation movement from the 1940s to 1965, and the regional as well as international connections he gave to this engagement from a context that is Islamic, and in a political regime that has religious legitimacy as an Islamic State (Sultanate). More importantly, his Socialist Party would become the major voice of opposition in the country for three decades (1960s–1990s), i.e., from the early postcolonial period, which coincided with the Cold War and the division of world geopolitics between the West (US/Europe, and their allies) and the East (the Soviet Union and its allies). The Moroccan ruling political system sided with the West, and opted for a more open political multiparty system, governed by two houses of representatives (sometimes the Upper House was frozen during stalemates), the open market (not to say fully liberal), and important freedoms of associations and expressions. Political Islam as an organization in the 1950s and 1960s was still absent from the scene. The rivals at the political stage were all patriotic nationalists, whether critical conservatives, like al-Fassi, or liberals, like al-Ouazzani, or socialists, like Ben Barka.[10] The other dis-institutional rival, out of the political game, were the two failed coups d'états of 1971 and 1972, which pushed the monarch Hassan II to further monopolize power and weaken the political parties of all trends – the parties which sometimes had to form a Block to create a stronger opposition to boycott "given Constitutions" (by the monarch), constitutions not agreed upon by the political actors (Hashas 2013). The 1970s was also the moment of the rise of new Islamic movements and political Islam in the country. And since

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8   See also: Barka (1966, 1968).
9   For the "Affair Ben Barka," see: Daoud and Monjib (1996).
10   Internal diversity and other major figures within these major camps, as well as the parties that split from them are bracketed here.

Islam was anyway a major component of the already existing national liberation movements, the new Islamic movements would give their identities different levels of Islamicity. More importantly, critical projects would also emerge to engage intellectually with the socio-political situation of not only Morocco but the whole Arab-Islamic world as forms of calls for genuine liberation and renewal. That is, prominent intellectual projects that engage with Islamic thought, but are not necessarily Islamist or Islamic (i.e., Critical Islams), will be referred to below, besides the political actors that identify as Islamic, or Islamist. More on this below.

Post-colonial Times: Ultra-Orthodox, Orthodox, and Critical Islams

Moroccan political Islams have various roots and orientations, much the way liberals and socialists do. To begin with the roots, first, and to state the obvious, the Islamic references are used by all stakeholders since it is the fundamental identity marker that have made the Moroccan intellect over the last fifteen centuries. Second, the political system is an ancient Islamic State, the Islamic Sultanate that has survived centuries of imperial changes in the region, be they empires from the Arab-Islamic east or Euro-Christian north. And since the eighth century, a homogeneous Islamic theological and legal identity was consolidated, until the colonial and postcolonial periods that disrupted this intellectual homogeneity with the modern episteme and its variegated interpretations, nationalist, liberal, socialist, and ultimately also Islamist. Third, the colonial experience, and the encounter with modernity and the ideas of secularism and the power of the people to decide on their own affairs have challenged the Muslim intellect as well as politics to interact. This has led first to generic revivalist movements all over the Islamic world during the colonial period, before these movements turned into more nationally focused ones, without losing their regional and international conversation with the Muslim condition in this age.

As a reminder, in the Arab world, and the broader Middle East, the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt in 1928, the Nakba of 1948, and the Naksa of especially Arab nationalist ideology in 1967 gave space to the rise of another narrative, the political Islam narrative. That political Islam can reclaim its place in society and politics in an authoritarian regime of the Shah of Iran that did not participate in the defense of the Palestinians in 1948 or in rescue of their neighboring authoritarian Arab regimes in 1967 gave a strong impulse to Sunni political Islam as well to reactivate its sources and resources to do politics and change power dynamics. This was being seen in Afghanistan (1979–1989), and Algeria (1991), besides Iran itself (1978–1979), to name these. Or, alternatively, it was the authoritarian and military regimes that started using more religion in their narratives to absorb the Islamic revivalism and opposition; and this was seen in Pakistan (1977–1988) and Sudan (1983–1984) for instance. As to the monarchies, which have religious legitimacy, some of them (Morocco and Jordan) only opened up to political Islamic movements

that were not a threat to their thrones, and abolished those that spoke against the monarchic regime.[11] Morocco did both: it opened up, and also abolished, or at least limited, the margin of liberty of opposing Islamist movements in the 1970s and 1980s, but started opening up to them further by the end of the 1990s, which is why its Spring Uprising was not as radical and was soon challenged through the electoral path to reach power seats (2012–2016; 2017–2021), and also to leave it, institutionally, and peacefully afterwards, as will be further clarified below.

Now, for the orientations of Islamic political movements and their thinking in the Moroccan context, three labels can be used to map the field and clarify the picture.[12] These orientations can be synthesized in three labels and groups: the Ultra-Orthodox or Salafi Islam, the Orthodox or Mainstream Conservative Islam, and Critical or Intellectual Islam.

Ultra-Orthodox Islam: Salafi Islam and Political Sufism

Ultra-Orthodox Islam

In the Moroccan intellectual context, there is a distinction between the precolonial Salafism (Salafiyya) of Moroccan Nahda pioneers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century – such as al-Doukkali, Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui, Bennouna, al-Fassi, and Guennoun, as noted earlier – and a postcolonial Salafism that started to emerge in the 1970s. The first is considered progressive and nationalist; it used a religious narrative for cultural revival and for resistance against some cultural practices that were deemed anti-Islamic (i.e., sainthood and superstitious practices), and for its resistance against colonialism. The second is considered regressive and transnational since it aimed at re-Islamizing Muslim societies through a more conservative narrative and literature that was not fully home-grown according to the Ash'ari-Maliki theological-juridical schools and orthodox Sufism of Morocco. The Hanbalite Wahhabism from Arabia was considered an imported product and met resistance by most religious scholars of Morocco in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[13] However, from the 1970s onwards, it would find more space in the country by local scholars and shaykhs. The imported Salafi movement was led by erudite

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11   For an overview of political and intellectual dynamics of Islamic movements, parties and their ideologues across the Islamic world, including Morocco, see: Esposito and Shahin (2013).
12   I leave aside the jihadist movement here. For an overview on this theme, see: Masbah (2021); al-Bashir al-Turabi et. al. (2022). I will refer to the jihadis again when I speak of the birth and dispersion of the Muslim Youth Movement of the early 1970s below.
13   Wahhabism found first official welcome in Morocco under the Sultan Mawlay Sulayman (r. 1792–1822) who was attracted to the calls of renewal of the Wahhabi movement in its initial phase of renewing the meanings of Tawhid in Islam and fighting superstitious and sainthood practices prevalent among some Sufi brotherhoods then; this explains why Sufism was critiqued heavily by progressive Salafism in the Maghrib and Mashriq.

scholars like Taqi al-Din al-Hilali (1893–1987), who studied in the Levant, Arabia and Germany. Al-Hilali was embraced by some major scholarly authorities like Rashid Rida (1865–1935) and later on in Arabia by Nasir al-Din al-Albani (1914–1999) and Abdelaziz Ben Baz (1912–1999). Moroccan new Salafi branch was epitomized by Mohammed al-Maghraoui (b. 1948), a student of Taqi al-Din in the mid-1960s. Al-Maghrawi is considered the most prominent Salafi shaykh in the country since the early 1980s; his base has been Marrakech where he opened various schools (madrassas). And although he had strong links with the Wahhabi Salafism, his Salafism, however, remained rooted into the Moroccan tradition and recognizant of the Moroccan political system. Al-Maghrawi's national Salafism is proved through his critique, for example, of Abdessalam Yassine's letter "Islam or the Tempest" to the King, or his support of State policies that aim at surveying Moroccan Islam from external spiritual infiltrations, like Shi'i discrete activism in the country or among the Moroccan diaspora abroad (Aboullouz 2013: 345–354, 380).

Nonetheless, some other Salafi leaders took a more critical stance on the Arab regimes that especially ally with the hegemon and invading USA. This criticism increased after the 9/11 (2001) terrorist events in the USA, and the invasion of both Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003. Then the 16 May 2003 terrorist events in Casablanca would turn these vocal critical Salafis into a target of state surveillance and also accusations of incitement to violence, and ultimately long prison sentences. For instance, these accusation put Salafi leaders like Mohammed al-Fizazi (b. 1949), and Mohammed Abdelwahhab Rafiqi, known as Abu Hafs (b. 1970), Omar al-Haddouchi (b. 1970s), and Hassan al-Kattani (b. 1972), as well as ordinary followers in prison for up to 20 years. They were released in 2007 through a royal pardon and tribunal decree, after their confession that they differed from apolitical Salafism, and that they were Shaykhs of Jihadi Salafism (Ibid.: 381–386).

The few freed Salafi leaders have made revisions to their thinking. Al-Fizazi, among the freed, called for the creation of a Salafi party after the "Arab Spring Uprisings" of 2011, but the idea remained a call, and was never realized. The Salafis are back to their apolitical activism, although a few of them are sometimes present in public discussions through their revisionist ideas, like Abu Hafs who has adopted a liberal reading of the juridical tradition regarding inheritance, and male-female relations outside marriage (Hafs 2023).

Political Sufism

In parallel, another ultra-orthodox movement was formed officially in 1983 under the leadership of Abdessalam Yassine (1928–2012), i.e., the Justice and Excellence Movement (*Ḥarakat al-'Adl wal-Iḥsān*). Yassine studied under the renowned scholar – mentioned earlier – Mukhtar al-Soussi in Marrakech at an early age, before joining the Qadiriyya Butshishiyya Sufi Movement afterwards; the latter was led by Shaykh al-Abbas Ben al-Mukhtar Butshish (1922–2017). Yassine dissented from the Sufi movement in 1972 when the leadership

was passed from the Shaykh al-Abbas to his son Hamza, later Shaykh Hamza, instead of to Shaykh Yassine, who saw himself more eligible for the leadership of the Sufi path. The novelty of the path Yassine would develop, however, was more political.

From an ultra-orthodox perspective about the concepts of democracy, sovereignty, and caliphate, Shaykh Yassine issued a public letter entitled "*al-Islām aw al-Ṭūfān*" ("Islam or the Tempest") to King Hassan II in 1974, asking him to change his authoritarian regime into a just ones, according to Islamic teachings, for the development of society (Yassine 1974). A similar letter was sent to the new King Mohammed VI in 2003, entitled "*Ilā Man Yahummuh al-Amr*" ("To Whom It May Concern") (Yassine 2003). Yassine and his movement which has an important size of followers inside the country and among the diaspora in Western Europe have managed over the years to remain a public critical voice against corruption, lack of social justice, and under-development in the country. During the Years of Lead (1970s–1990s) they were often harassed, or imprisoned, by the police and surveillance agency of the ministry of internal affairs, but since the 2000s, they have been allowed public visibility and activism. During the 20 February social movement after the Arab Uprisings of 2011, the movement was a visible component of the protesters. Despite its steadfast critique of the ruling political regime, and its belief in a Caliphal system based on consultation and public selection and not hereditary, the movement has from the start denounced violence, which makes of it very connected to its Sufi teachings that seek change through peaceful protests and spiritual education to change the self and citizen for the better (Darif 1995). Still, despite the nonviolent narrative it applies, it is critiqued by the other variant of political Islam that works within State institutions, since Yassine's Movement's idealist concept of the Caliphate ignores the centuries long history of the Moroccan Sultanate and how Moroccans interact with it. One of such a critique comes from Mohammed Yatime (2000: 36–78), one of the leaders of the Islamist PJD party, on which more below.

Orthodox Islam: State Islam and National Political Islam

Two major groups can be distinguished within Moroccan Orthodox Islam: official Moroccan Islam, or State Islam, and national Moroccan political Islam, or democratic political Islam. The first is Moroccan State Islam that is represented by State institutions or has gradually been integrated into State institutions, the head of which is the King as Commander of the Believers (*Amīr al-Mu'minīn*), including the non-Muslim believers, like the Moroccan Jewish Community. It is the Constitutional Islam as well, "the religion of the State," according to Article 3 of the Constitution of 2011. Moroccan Islam embraces the classical and modern institutions that promulgate it, from al-Qarawiyyine and Dar El Hadith El Hassania, Higher Council of Ulema (*al-Majlis al-'Ilmī al-A'lā*), Mohammedia League of Ulema (al-Rabita al-Muhammadiya lil-Ulama), to the Ministry of Religious Affairs, religious education at all educational

levels from primary school to the university. These institutions also use various media outlets that propagate it, like TV channels, radios, publications, and websites. Apolitical Sufi movements that receive state financial support are part of this Moroccan State Islam; the Butshishiyya and Tijaniyya brotherhoods are two major examples.[14]

As to the second type of Orthodox Islam, it refers to Moroccan political Islam that emerged as a convergence of a number of Islamic movements of the 1970s and 1980s. Although some of its factions had very critical reviews concerning the monarchy during the radical times of the 1970s and 1980s, it developed since the 1990s into a political Islam that is rooted in the Moroccan religious tradition and its established institutions, the head of which is the monarchy. This political Islamic movement emerged in the 1970s to contest three major political stakeholders: 1) the State, as a monopolizer of both the Islamic discourse (the monarch as Commander of the Believers) and all powers in the country; 2) the local nationalists that failed to cater for the socio-economic and political aspirations of postcolonial times, and regional Arab secular nationalists post-1967 Naksa; 3) and the socialists and communists that dominated the Moroccan political, cultural and university life in the 1970s and 1980s during which they at times held anti-religious narratives as a means of radical cultural and political change. In this context grew the so-called Muslim Youth Movement (*al-Shabība al-Islāmiyya*), in 1969 and officially in 1972 in Casablanca, led by Abdelkarim Muti' (b. 1935), and joined by his new leading companion in the movement Ibrahim Kamal (1931–2019) (Muti' 2020). Initially, both were members of the national liberation movement and Independence Party, and briefly joined the newly created Socialist Party in 1959, before leaving it in the mid-1960s. The movement aimed at educating the masses and the emerging lower middle class of basic Islamic fundamentals as they relate to their daily social and economic life, and ultimately at changing radically the political system. At this stage, the literature of Hassan al-Banna (1906–1949) and Sayyid Qutb (1906–1966), of the Muslim Brotherhood of Egypt, came into circulation (Kamal 2016). Both Ibrahim and Muti' were accused of inciting violence and the murder of the socialist leader Omar Benjelloun in 1975, but they denied these accusations. Kamal suffered five years of torture in prison and left it in 1980 when his innocence was proven, while Muti' has been in exile since then, to avoid the death sentence, passed in 1980 in absentia. That murder led to the dispersion of the movement inside the country, and the rise of other movements in other major cities of Fez, Meknes, Rabat, Salé, and Tetouan, with a different narrative that works within the Moroccan legal and political system. Muti', however, keeps advancing his views and revisions online from outside Morocco, by renouncing change through violence, although he remains very critical of the current ruling system and its oppression of freedom of expression, and lack of distributive justice. Muti' is also critical of the failure of political Islam

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14 On State Islam, political Islam, and Sufi politics, see, for instance: Hmimnat (2021), Bouasria (2015), Daadaoui (2011), and Tozy ([1998] 2001).

that grew after his movement, and managed to lead politics after the Moroccan Spring of 2011 (Muti' 2013).[15]

In 1983, Abdelilah Benkirane (b. 1954), a school teacher and former member of the Muslim Youth Movement, appeared in Rabat as a young leader of a new movement called the Association of the Muslim Society (*Jam'iyat al-Jamā'a al-Islāmiyya*), to be renamed the Movement of Renewal and Innovation (*Ḥarakat al-Islaḥ wal Tajdīd*) in 1990. Similarly, the League for the Future of Islam (*Rābiṭat al-Mustaqbal al-Islamī*) would emerge and organize itself since 1994, under the leadership of Ahmed al-Raissouni (b. 1953), a scholar of religion and university professor. The two movements merged in 1996 to become the Movement of Tawhid and Renewal (*Ḥarakat al-Tawḥīd wal-Islāḥ*), and al-Raissouni became its first president. Al-Raissouni became some two decades later also head of the International Union of Muslim Scholars, after Shaykh Yusuf al-Qaradawi (1926–2022). Al-Raissouni, known as an expert scholar on the objectives of shari'a through a contextualist reading of al-Shatibi's (d. 1388 AD) *al-Muwāfaqāt,* defends modern democratic institutions, social justice and liberty as the source of vitality and revival of any society (Al-Raissouni 2014).

The political party of the Justice and Development (*Ḥizb al-'Adāla wal-Tanmiya*, PJD) emerged from the movement of Tawhid and Renewal. The PJD, led by Benkirane, had to seek support of the nationalist figure Abdelkarim al-Khatib (1921–2008) and his Popular Movement (*al-Ḥaraka al-Sha'biyya al-Dustūriyya al-Dīmuqrāṭiyya*) to integrate this "Islamic" party into the official political system of the country; this took place already in 1996; from then on the PJD started running for local and legislative elections, and winning more seats, until they reached the peak after the Moroccan Spring protests in 2011. Benkirane became the first "Islamist" Prime Minister (2011–2017) in the country,

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15   On the theme of "revisions" of the Islamists pre-and-post the Arab Spring, see: Talidi (2013). Muti's movement remains important in the genealogy of Moroccan political Islam, since it contributed to the growth of two major trends of thinking within it. A note is helpful first. When Muti' escaped the country in 1975, the movement's dispersion would develop two major trends. One trend dissented from Muti' movement and became more radical in its rhetoric, and worked to train itself also militarily from 1975 in some zones of wars (like Afghanistan and Lebanon) as a way of preparations to change the political system in the country. However, the movement never managed to implement any bloody event in the country or outside it, mostly because its leader Abdelaziz al-Nu'mani disappeared in 1985 in France, where he was often based, and his movement gradually froze its ambitions, and ultimately its new leader made revisions, after prison experience. As to the other trend, it would develop in collaboration with other movements that were active in society; this trend would choose the institutional path, work within the legal and political system of the country. For a most recent testimony on the birth of the Moroccan Jihadis in the mid-1970s, see, for instance, the testimony of the second Emir of the movement, after prison experience and intellectual revisions: Sumah (2022). On this theme, revisit: Masbah (2021). For an internal critique of the Islamic movements' thinking and ways of operating, and especially for a critique of the persona of Muti' and its influence, see: Al-Ansari (2007: 67–87).

followed by his companion Saad Eddine El Othmani (b. 1956) for the second mandate of the PJD in leading the government (2017-2021).[16]

However, the PJD would lose drastically in 2021 legislative elections for various reasons: the growth of strong coalition parties against them; the failure to deliver socio-economic improvements as were propagated during the campaigns (Yildirim and Zhang 2021); the failure to remain faithful to some of the ideals of the movement, like the protection of Arabic language in the teaching of some scientific subjects in education, besides the inability to leave the coalition government after the re-naturalization of relations with Israel took place in December 2020 – relations that the head of the government, for the Islamist PJD, Saad Eddine El Othmani had to sign. The party and its background movement of Tawhid and Renewal still oppose such naturalization, although it was the head of government of the Islamist PJD that signed it then, following higher strategic choices led by the monarch directly (Rddad 2021). Overall, recent testimonies by leaders of the PJD that were ministers during the 2011–2021 Islamist-led coalition governments say that the Islamists were not welcome by the deep state and its allies within the political spectrum; and although they did their best to implement some social, health, and economic policies that aimed at improvising the situation of the poor and lower middle class, not all such initiatives could be implemented, and some of them were blocked or caused to fail after their mandates. While they insist on the very positive relations with the monarch, and his support of their governance when they were in power, they do at the same time underline that the geopolitical relations have to be taken into account to understand the way the political and economic infrastructure, i.e., the deep state, works in the country (Daoudi 2024).

Critical Islam: The Ethicists, Egalitarianists, and Liberals

The Ethicists

Now that the socio-political context in which various forms of Islamic thought and activism in Morocco in the twentieth and early twenty-first century have been clarified through two major trends, the Ultra-Orthodox and the Orthodox, we can give an idea of how the third trend, the Critical trend, looks at Islamic thought, and political theology in particular, for change. And it is obvious that this trend is the most theoretical compared to the previous two that merge theory with practice. More importantly, and like the previous trends, it too can be divided into three trends so as to understand the field better. And to show how interconnected these trends are, I will trace some intellectual affinities for each of them, to illustrate the point further. These critical trends can be labelled as such: the ethicists, egalitarianists, and liberals. The three trends, led by some major scholars and thinkers that have marked "Rabat school" and Arab scholarship at large since the 1950s, can intertwine in certain issues, and

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16   For a historical overview as well as integration of the Moroccan Spring dynamics and the involvement of the Islamic movements, see: Aourid (2020).

do not necessarily fully exclude or oppose each other (Hashas 2025: 1–124). What they share is that they seek liberation, each of them from a particular perspective. And although the last two trends do not identify as Islamic, they are read here as such – Islamic – in the broad sense of the term, since they engage intellectually with the Islamic movements as well as Islamic intellectual tradition at large, past and present. "Islamic" here is then a cultural marker, and not a political one.

To start with, the ethicists believe that Islamic thought in general and liberation theology in particular have to revisit the fundamental ethos of the Qur'an, the applied ethics of the Prophet Muhammad, and the ethical message that Islamic sharia and legal theories uphold, beyond rigid legalism. While they do not deny the role of the community and state institutions, the ethicists do believe that the essential step for the liberation of society, and the broad umma of believers, goes through individual reformation, based on genuine Islamic teachings. Thus, they are moralists, individualist-oriented in their intellectual projects, but they do contend that only when such a step is undertaken that societal change at large follows as a successive and consequential step. The ethicists can also be called traditionists, and not traditionalists, since they remain tied to the ethical backbone of the tradition, at the heart of which is the idea of Revelation; ethics need an axis, a source of profound inspiration and Revelation; the Qur'an is that source, while the Prophetic experience is its applied version and sample in its historical circumstances.

Allal al-Fassi's *Self Criticism* (*al-Naqd al-Dhātī*), referred to earlier, Mohammed Aziz Lahbabi's (1922–1993) *Muslim Personalism* (*al-Shakhṣāniyya al-Islāmiyya*), and Abderrahmane Taha's *The Spirit of Religion* (*Rūḥ al-Dīn*) are three pillar theological texts that are also philosophical in argumentation (Al-Fassi [1949] 2008, Lahbabi [1964] 1969, Taha 2012). Al-Fassi's intellectual and political weight in the country is unrivalled, and he was mentioned earlier among the early young national liberation leaders since the early 1930s. Regarding Lahbabi, he was the founder of Philosophy Department at Mohammed V University of Rabat, and a leading figure in the Moroccan postcolonial academic life; he tried to merge Islamic ethics with modern philosophical debates on ethics and social change based on the place and role of the person in society and the global community; he was also a Third Worldist in his perspective. As to Taha, he is one of the leading Muslim philosophers of modern times; he, too, has developed his theory of "trusteeship paradigm" based on a philosophic reading of the Qur'an and the place of the human being therein; he believes that the essence of humanity is ethics, and not reason; reason is a means towards an ethical life.

More importantly, these texts make sense in their times of publications, and beyond: al-Fassi's text was published in the early 1950s, a few years before independence as a guide to the future postcolonial elite; Lahbabi's was published in the 1960s, in the postcolonial period to give intellectual confidence to Islamic thought that it can contribute to global philosophical conversations on the place of the individual and faith in the modern age; and Taha's was published

in 2012, immediately after the Arab Uprisings of 2010–2011, as if to say that revolts if not led by genuine internal ethical compass, they cannot succeed, even when led by various narratives of political Islams, be they Sunni or Shi'a.

The Egalitarianists

As to the egalitarianists, they have prioritized equality before the law and social justice in their intellectual projects. The epitome of this trend is the renowned political theorist and critical revisionist of "Arab reason," Mohammed Abed al-Jabri (1935–2010). Al-Jabri joined the younger camp of the national liberation movement of socialist leanings, led by Ben Barka, by the end of the 1950s, and became one of its major idealogues in the 1970s, before he left the political world in the early 1980s to dedicate himself fully to scientific research and academic life. In his four volumes of *Critique of Arab Reason,* al-Jabri defends democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and public good for renewal in Arab and Muslim societies; he sees issues in political thinking, in the political use of religion, and not in religion per se. He believes that the Islamic defense of public good and social justice is so evident, and that Muslim societies have to reclaim these major values for genuine liberation from internal authoritarianism and external hegemony (Al-Jabri 1990, 2001).

The egalitarianist thesis al-Jabri holds is not dissimilar from what Fatema Mernissi (1940–2015) also holds, from a gender perspective. Like al-Jabri, Mernissi, who became an icon of Islamic feminism from the 1990s although she did not use the term herself to describe her work, contends that patriarchal interpretations have usurped the egalitarian spirit of the Qur'an and Islamic juridical tradition; and she asks Muslim women to walk proudly into the future, since the original sources are egalitarianist and have to be reclaimed as such for modern changes in Muslim societies. Mernissi's indirect disciple, the medical doctor Asma Lamrabet (b. 1960) also holds similar views of egalitarian teachings, and believes that reforming some traditional juridical interpretations to meet the equality of rights and equality before the law is not an infidel reading of the original sources, but is, on the contrary, a faithful one and the most accurate one in this age for renewal (Mernissi 1975, [1987] 1991, [1992] 2002; Lamrabet 2018, 2016). Overall, the egalitarianists could be read as Islamic Leftists, to borrow the term from Hassan Hanafi (1981). Al-Jabri, for instance, was socialist as his political direct political engagement with the Socialist Party between 1959–1982 demonstrates. Through their positions at the university, and in public intellectual life, inside Morocco and abroad, these egalitarianists have made an important impact on Moroccan scholarship, especially the first two ones, al-Jabri and Mernissi, for their academic and prolific careers. Their intellectual projects have given ample space for scholars as well as activists amidst Islamic movements to recognize that liberation has multiple paths, and overcoming rigid legalism is one of them – a rigidity the Ultra-Orthodox Islam and Orthodox Islam still stick to as an unchangeable faith and identity marker.

The Liberals

As for the liberals within the critical trend, the political theorist and historian Abdallah Laroui (b. 1933) is its leading representative in contemporary Morocco, as well as the Arab world, since the 1960s. Laroui's thesis is that Arab reason in particular has to understand its place in history, and has to adopt a historicist approach towards its tradition so as to renew itself in light of the modern episteme. If it applies such an approach, it could become rationalist, in the sense of making reason its ultimate reference for public affairs; as to the private sphere, the individual can retain their beyond-reason (or meta-rational) interpretations of the world. Consequently, Laroui thinks that an epistemological break is already underway in Muslim societies, even when Muslims or political Islam denies it or refutes it. For him, the modern episteme permeates public affairs, governance, economics, geopolitics, and also individual affairs. Laroui's critique of Arab nationalism as well as political Islam stems from his belief that they deny that modernity has already encroached upon and transformed the Arab and Islamic classical worldview and its perception of history, and thus the place of, for example, sharia in public affairs (Laroui [1981] 2014, [1992] 2005, [1996] 2012, [2008] 2018). Unlike al-Jabri, Laroui does not see that expanding the meanings of sharia objectives could bridge the gap between sharia legal prescriptions and modern positive law, the ideas of equality, liberty, and the rule of law. While he believes that the patriotic Islamists or early Nahda pioneers played an important role in the overall cultural revival and resistance against colonialism in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, Laroui thinks that the early spirit of reform did not live long to adapt to the postcolonial new realities in society and the world. The pioneers could not decide on the type of the future postcolonial states; their descendants, the later reformists and nationalist leaders, however, failed to carry on the renewal aspirations as should be.

Similar views are held by Ali Oumlil (b. 1940), a prominent historian of ideas and historical sociology, and a co-founder of various national and regional human rights associations in Morocco and the Arab world. Oumlil thinks that classical Islamic political philosophy was too theoretical, not rooted in social affairs, while Islamic political theology was dominant and of influence. In modern times, however, he thinks both belong to the past, and require a real epistemological adaptation to the modern condition. Even classical figures that are re-appropriated by some scholars in Morocco and the Arab world for renewal from within, e.g., Ibn Rushd and Ibn Khaldun, Oumlil thinks that their episteme belongs to the past, and they do not have much to offer to modern Arab-Islamic societies. Instead, it is up to modern scholars and engaged critical intellectuals to implant the concepts of modernity, democracy, constitutionalism, and the rule of law, based on liberty and equality of all before the law, in Moroccan culture and Arab-Muslim societies at large (Oumlil [1996] 1998).

Abdelilah Belkeziz (b. 1959), another major younger political theorist compared to Laroui and Oumlil, has developed a similar approach to the tradition,

and to the Nahda tradition in his various writings, like his project of "the Arabs and modernity" (*al-'Arab wa-l Ḥadatha*) (Belkeziz [2009] 2020, 2014). Overall, the liberals who critically engage with the narratives of the nationalists as well as Islamists are rationalists who see that public affairs can be, and have to be, managed by human reason alone, without a constant reference to metaphysical interpretations of the world and human affairs. At the same time, individuals have full freedom to believe in whatever gives them internal peace; it is part of freedom of belief and expression. Yet, the modern social contact and sovereignty are governed by mundane reasoning. For Belkeziz, Laroui and Oumlil before him, to name but these examples, liberation of societies from tutelage, internal and external, starts with a rational view of modern times and human affairs. Simply put, Islamic theology has to free itself first to be able to free society from various ills; and it has to transform into individualist theology, theology of the self, first before it seems to transform society at large. Modernity is a rational and individual enterprise in the first place, and these two have to be underlined for any liberation theology and thinking.

Conclusion

This paper has tried to map the terrain of religion and politics in modern and contemporary Morocco. This has proven to be a not easy task for the limited space permitted. This overview has proposed both chronologies and concepts to better understand what characterizes each period intellectually and politically: the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial periods. Ideas transverse periods and conceptual molds, but there is no way of understanding them without freezing them, even for a while, in some historical periods to fathom them better. One could digress on how a late nineteenth century or early twentieth century intellectual figure of the Moroccan Nahda could still influence another compatriot intellectual in the early twenty-first centuries, say how Ben Laarbi al-Alaoui (d. 1963) impacted al-Fassi, and how the latter impacted Taha (b. 1944) or al-Raissouni (b. 1953), to give but this example. Similarly, one could trace the development of the liberation movement and its use of religious narratives in the 1930s, then in the 1960s, and up to the early 2000s, and then post-2011 changes. The intellectual and political histories I have tried to connect in each historical period all boil down to how to change while remaining faithful to the roots, the essential traditions, in the light of global changes and challenges.

All the intellectual and political leaders this paper has referred to do believe that their interpretation of the Islamic tradition as lived in Morocco is a liberationist interpretation that can bring prosperous changes in society, if implemented. It was seen how the Ultra-Orthodox think that deviations from the origins are multiple and going back to the roots is the way to go ahead, while the Orthodox do believe that going forward, slowly but steadily, is the way to go, since society's memories do not like abrupt changes, radical changes, towards more conservatism or towards more liberalism. Seeing the overall socio-cultural, economic, and political slow rhythm of change, the Critical

Islam thinkers also believe that change has to be embraced, but each from a particular view (ethicist, egalitarianist, liberal). Historically, the nationalists, socialists, and lately the Islamists have entered into the ruling circle and led governments, each in different circumstances, from the authoritarian 1960s to the 1990s-early 2000s, and then in 2000s. Each of them contributes to the public sphere and governance, but also faces limitations in action; the electoral system does oblige co-habitation; and the deep state, the monarchy, is active and executive. In such a context, then, what this paper has tried to show regarding the Moroccan context is that the Islamic narratives are multiple, which means that the Islamic identity marker is there to stay, however much the socio-economic policies change. It is this particular feature of the political culture of the country – the oldest monarchy in the Arab world, and one of the oldest in the world – that makes any political "Islamist" narrative an ephemeral one, and what remains is "the Islamic;" even when political "Islamist" twice led governments (2011–2021) leave the political scene, the "Islamic" will remain through Moroccan State Islam symbols and policies, on which there is both consensus as well as criticism. The intellectual implications that concern this paper most is that ultimately, it appears, the "post-Islamist" condition in which the Islamic permeates all society is also permeated by secular and liberal concepts and policies. That is, political Islam as – rigidly –conceived in modern times, as if it were the "only" custodian of faith and liberation theology, seems more free from the hurdles of secular and neoliberal policies if it remains active in society, in the public, without taking hold of power which it appears it cannot fully control. My borrowed description of the Moroccan current phase as a post-Islamist phase proposes that liberation theology has to be free from political constraints before it could preach and practice liberation. And this is another classic interpretation of the idea of Islam as a theocentric worldview, and not a theocracy. Farid al-Ansari, an Islamist who turned into a critical post-Islamist, if I can say so, captures this reading of post-Islamism already in a book entitled *The Six Errors of the Islamic Movement in Morocco* which was first published in 2000. Briefly, for him, political Islams are like any other political movements and ideologies, but the worst that befalls them is that they fail to practice the core teachings of their faith: correctness and piety for individuals, justice for society. That is why he called for renewing the human self of the Islamist, and ordinary Muslims, through an aesthetic and virtuous re-reading of the Qur'an. Al-Ansari was a post-Islamist ahead of his times in Morocco, before the Islamists reached power in 2011. He envisaged that post-Islamist Islam may be more faithful to Islamic liberation theology than political Islam, an idea I have also sought to present differently through intellectual mapping in this paper.

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Mohamed Hašas

Religija i politika u Maroku: islamska, islamistička i post-islamistička dinamika

Apstrakt:

Ovaj rad nastoji da mapira teren religije i politike u modernom i savremenom Maroku. S obzirom na hronološku i intelektualnu raznovrsnost u marokanskoj religioznoj misli i politici, ovaj rad predlaže tri glavna istorijska perioda kako bi se olakšao pristup temi: pre-/kolonijalno, kolonijalno i postkolonijalno vreme. Prvi, pre-/kolonijalni, period je hibridni; on se poklapa sa usponom prve generacije obnove marokanske Nahde, pre kolonijalnog perioda, iako je postojao u kolonijalnom periodu i igrao važnu ulogu za oslobođenje. Ovo označavam oznakom „islamski", pošto je islam bio jedini i zajednička jedinica identiteta za svaki projekat obnove u intelektualno „homogenom" društvu. Što se tiče kolonijalnog perioda, ovaj islamski identitet je ojačao nakon što je kolonijalna administracija pokušala da oslabi ovaj identitet i društveno tkivo, kao i institucije povezane s njim, bilo da su to verska bratstva, verske zadužbine ili sufijski redovi; u jednom trenutku 1930. kolonijalna administracija je koristila jezičke razlike kako bi podelila i vladala, a drugom prilikom, 1953–1955, pokušala je da svrgne sa trona nacionalističkog sultana i zameni ga poslušnim. Ovde je, opet, „islamski" identitetski marker društva i politike dodatno naglašen kao snaga jedinstva, odnosno oznaka nacionalističkog islama u ovoj fazi, uprkos raznovrsnosti struja unutar nacionalističkog pokreta. Što se tiče postkolonijalnog perioda, ovo je faza u kojoj moderne debate o obliku nacionalne države, mestu religije u politici, demokratiji, liberalizmu, socijalizmu i sekularizaciji postaju deo marokanske misli i politike. Dakle, tri glavne oznake se koriste za opisivanje raznolikosti političkih islama u društvu: ultra-ortodoksni islam, ortodoksni islam i kritički islam. Budući da svi oni dele islam kao identitet, ali ga različito tumače, pozajmljujem termin od Asefa Bajata da ovaj period nazovem „postislamističkim" periodom, pošto su akteri sa islamskom etiketom višestruki, te ne postoji jedan trend ili projekat koji uspeva da pobedi i ujedini islamističku interpretaciju društva i političkih delatnika. Što je još važnije, ova raznolikost tumačenja spasava „islamsko" od rigidnosti i pretvara ga u njegovu fluidnost pre-modernog vremena, odnosno u „islamsko" kao življenu duhovnost i moralni kompas, kao teocentrični način života, u budućem post-islamističkom društvu, sekularnom svetu i neoliberalnim ekonomijama.

Ključne reči: marokanski islam, ultra-ortodoksni islam, ortodoksni islam, kritički islam, post-islamsko društvo.