

Portfolio Part 2_Lucenti

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The significance of a Muslim movement in a Muslim majority context

This paper intends to briefly reconstruct the presence of Islamist movements in Morocco in recent decades (from the 1990s) and the positioning of other political forces in recognising / negotiating the presence and claims of these movements. The comparison with neighbouring Algeria is certainly also useful. Political Islam, in fact, is fully understandable only in the interactions and exchanges between local and global contexts, even more so if we take into account the fragmentation of authority and the transnational linkages (Eickelman & Piscatori, 1996). Morocco is certainly not an exception and, as will be shown shortly, many of the political decisions taken by one of the main Islamist movements were linked to the vigilant observation of the political implications that occurred in Algeria.

A peculiarity of Morocco is the substantial absence of Islamist movements in the formal political processes of the 1980s and 1990s, unlike neighbouring Algeria and Tunisia. "Morocco's Islamist movement was the last to enter the political arena en masse in North Africa" (Layachi, 2013, p.9). The formal explanation concerns the role of the monarch as a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and "commander of the faithful" (amir al-mu'minin), "which undercut the primary Islamist accusation of the secularisation of the state" (Willis, 2013, p.4). Another explanation is the presence in the country of a political diversification and an opposition that has mitigated discontent, so that the conditions for the birth of movements of the scale of FIS and al-Nahdah were not there. Furthermore, we cannot forget the decisive role of the monarch in controlling and preventing the birth and spread of Islamist movements. Nevertheless, although in a less "noisy" way, the growth of Islamist movements has also been seen in Morocco since the 1980s.

One of the specificities of political Islam in Morocco concerns the presence of a multiplicity of movements and not of a single and unitary one, unlike in other countries where one main movement dominates the political scene. Alongside small and minority radical movements which are characterized by the use of violence and which are merged under the umbrella term *jihadi Salafism* (Layachi, 2013) – organizations such as al-Takfir wa al-Hijra (Excommunication and Exile), Jamâ'at al-Sirat al- Mustaqîm (the Group of the True Path), al-'Jamâ'a al-Salafiya (the Salafi Group), and Ahl al-Sunna wa al-'Jamâ'a (People of the Sunna and of the Community) – we can distinguish two main movements: *At-Tawhid wa al-Islah* (Unity and Reform) and *Al-Adl wa Ihsan* (Justice and Spirituality). The first, inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood and Wahhabi Salafism, has been recognised at the political and institutional level, through the granting of forming a political party, the *Parti de la Justice et du Développement* (PJD). The party first participated in the 1997 elections and has experienced remarkable growth since then, in a few years becoming one of the main parties in the country.

Al-Adl wa Ihsan (Justice and Spirituality) represents the leading Islamist movement in terms of followers (Pruzan-Jørgensen, 2010). The peculiarity of this movement is its recent

development (late 1980s) and the scarce relations or ideological affiliations with other movements outside the country. Centred on the leadership of a single individual, the movement was born following the initiative of the leader Abdeslam Yassine, to address a letter to the king to "reproach" him for distancing himself from the authentic Islamic faith. Although not formally recognised, the movement has a certain political authority in mobilising followers and directing their political choices. The refusal to enter the institutional political scene is linked to the non-recognition of the authority of the royal dynasty. The two movements carry out their program independently and autonomously, the first within the party and institutional system, the second through a mobilisation "from below", on the basis of the principles of the Islamic faith. The presence of a more marked spirituality close if not adhering to the Sufi movement differentiates the latter from the former, which promotes a more orthodox and legalistic approach. Willis (2004) analyses the positioning of the two movements ahead of the 2002 general election. The PJD's attitude is one of extreme caution. The past experience of Algeria whose Front Islamique du Salut (FIS) party was banned and repressed following the landslide victory in the 1991 political elections, prompted the PJD to opt for less political campaign and public visibility and to propose a number of seats – only in a limited number of districts – that do not alarm the government and the king. Among the statements released to the newspapers were: "the Algerian scenario is the phobia of all Moroccans", and "we are frightened of frightening people" (Willis, 2004, p.60). Al-Adl wa Ihsan opted for a boycott of the elections, in line with his beliefs about the "staging" of democratic processes in the absence of real democracy. The political program of the PJD reveals an accommodation of the typical instances of an Islamist party, where precisely to end up in the spotlight, the party prefers to avoid controversial issues such as the veil or amputations. However, some flaws stemming from both a heterogeneity of positions and a lack of coordination about the press statements came to light when Mustapha Ramid declared that in the long term they were in favour of the application of the Sharia which includes supporting amputations for thieves. Following this incident, only more moderate members were placed in charge of the local party delegations. The 2002 elections were a real success for the PJD which became the third party in the country. Al-Adl wa Ihsan reacted positively, interpreting the victory of the PJD as a consolidation of Islamism in Morocco. However, he suggested not to agree to form the government, but to join the opposition, in order not to "betray" the expectations of the electorate, whose promises would not be kept due to the multi-party nature of the government. Indeed the PJD decided not to join the new government, but to join the opposition. This choice was linked both to the historical and political contingencies of the moment, and to a tradition of the country more in line with gradual rather than sudden changes, on the model of neighbouring Algeria. The political events of 2003 – on May 16th suicide bombs hit five targets in Casablanca killing a large number of people – gave the press and secular parties the opportunity to denounce the Islamist danger by proclaiming the possible involvement of the two groups, even if in fact they weren't involved. The two groups took the opportunity not only to condemn the attacks, but also to present themselves as the solution to the problem of radical Islam. "Both also claimed that more moderate Islamist organisations, such as themselves, represented the best chance of undermining support for radical groups such as Salafiyya Jihadia, by involving the more marginalised and younger elements of Moroccan society in their own structures" (Willis, 2004, p.76). The example of Morocco clearly shows that it is not possible to speak of Islamist movements or political Islam as a monolithic phenomenon. Not only does each group have different characteristics, objectives and a unique agenda, but they move in a pre-existing context where only through negotiations, compromises and changes does this agenda make sense. From the point of view of young people, Bennani-

Chraïbi shows that “political Islam is not a flag behind which the masses of young Moroccans would be ready to move as one homogenous and united group” (2010, p.65). But even for that minority of young people who are active in political Islam, nothing is fixed and established. There is still a lot at stake.

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