INTRODUCTION

In its 187th monthly book, released July 2022 and titled ***Political Islam and Extremism in Morocco***, the Al-Mesbar Studies and Research Center addresses the concerns gathering around the trajectory of Islamist movements in Morocco over the past two decades. The book focuses primarily on Islamist movements in Morocco, with a particular interest in the experience of the Justice and Development Party in governance between 2011 and 2021, as well as the relationship between Al-Adl wa'l Ihsan (the Justice and Spirituality Group) and the February 20 Movement. It analyzes the changing configuration and interrelationship of these coalitions, whose evolution points to a new era, one justifying further study of political Islam's permutations, and analysis of extremist movements' attempts at renewal. Lastly, it evaluates their impact on the process by which Islamist discourse is crafted, and the threat it poses to North Africa's environment of religious convivencia.

Islamist movements have long been known for their embrace of radical change as a strategy, undermining the State by targeting government services and facilities while also subverting traditional and family norms and restraints, all through a divisive, populist discourse. Islamist movements have had some success with these tactics, only to falter once they themselves attempted to meet the challenges of governance, to which they all to often proved inadequate. Such has been the unhappy experience of the National Islamic Front in Sudan (1989-2019), Hamas in Gaza, the regime of the Wilayat al-Faqih in Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood's brief rule in Egypt (2012-2013), the Ennahda movement in Tunisia (2011-2021), and the Justice and Development Party in Morocco. Most of these experiments ended with Islamist movements ejected from power, whether through elections or street unrest.

The book begins by examining the factors that led to the defeat of the Justice and Development Party in the latest parliamentary elections in Morocco on September 8, 2021. The book's introductory study highlighted the drivers behind the party's victory in two consecutive

parliamentary terms (2011-2016). The researcher who authored the study notes that the party's first victory in November 2011 stemmed from its complex relationship with the February 20 Movement. The party stoked and capitalized on popular anger, with its leader arguing that they "had dissociated themselves from the utopia of violent revolutionary change and radical stances towards the political system." He and his party claimed to have reached a "political maturity that qualifies them to govern within the constitutional framework."

As for the party's second victory in 2016, it relied more on a narrative of victimhood, lamenting the supposed manipulations of the "Deep State" and tarring its domestic opponents as "goblins and crocodiles." Over time, these rhetorical turns, coupled with the party's failure to address complex issues of governance, eventually combined to drive Moroccan voters' away from the Justice and Development Party in the 2021 elections. In assessing the party's literature, one encounters an abundance of commitments whose prospects for realization were dim, at best. The researcher notes that this tendency to over-promise largely sapped the party of its credibility with core supporters. Meanwhile, the party's ambiguous attitude towards Brotherhood-adjacent organizations failed to satisfy opponents deeply skeptical of Islamist currents. In some ways, the researcher contends that a will to power overwhelmed the party's organization, sparking factional rifts, and leading to a fragmentation that reached the core of the movement, dividing it between those who wish to adapt to the new climate, and stalwarts opposed to any ideological revision.

The interaction of the Adl wal-Ihsan group with the February 20 Movement, alongside its cooperation with Leftist and Socialist parties, is the focus of the Moroccan researcher Ahmad Solhi. In his view, this cooperation represented an departure in light of the Islamist group's conservatism and relative isolation. The study begins with a biography of Abd al-Salam Yassin (1928-2012), covering his Sufi background and his defection in the 1970s from the Qadiriyya Budshishiyya Sufi order. The study examines his texts, which are redolent of the influence of Hasan al-Banna, Sayyid Qutb, and traditional panoply of Brotherhood literature. Solhi observes that Yassin appears to have exercised substantial control over his group's literary output. The study also traces the group's move to join the public sphere, and its attempt to reinterpret concepts such

as Al-Hukm Al-Jabri ("the rule of tyrants") in a manner that permits reconciliation with practical politics, and even a "rationalization of its concept of caliphate," as its leader Fathullah Arslan reportedly said in 2008. The group attempted in 2011 to publicly amend its concept of "revolution" to accord with the discourse then regnant in the February 20 Movement. Subsequently, it became involved in the uprising. Persisting in its refusal to pledge allegiance to the Moroccan monarchy, and its policy of nonparticipation in referendums and elections, the group contributed to fomenting unrest through shifting alliances with street protesters in a non-ideological manner.

In her essay, Moroccan researcher Fatima Al-Zahraa Al-Hatemi studies the paths by which Moroccan Islamist movements adopt violent tactics, whether the symbolic violence of the Iranian model and Khomeini's revolutionary vision, or the Salafi-Jihadism that emerged in public after the Casablanca terrorist bombings on May 16, 2003, effectively announcing the spread of Al-Qaeda into Morocco.

The study examines the precursors of Islamist extremism in Morocco, which can be traced to the 1970s, and the establishment of the so-called "Shabiba Islamiya": a clandestine network of violent Islamist operatives gathered around Abdelkrim Motii, which planned operations in two broad categories. The first was a campaign against the traditional scholars and jurists who operated under the auspices of the Ministry of Awqaf, seeking to replace them with proponets of armed jihad and an ill-defined "awakening". The second category came in the form of undermining opponents from any other ideological orientation. This campaign ascended even to the level of assassinating rivals, as in the case of Omar Benjelloun, whose violent murder in 1975 is widely suspected to have been perpetrated by the Shabiba.

Another study draws linkages between three interrelated Islamist tendencies. The first repudiates the state's legitimacy as blasphemous to Islamic ideals. The second brands as heretical non-Islamist social elements, which serves to legitimize and justify campaigns of violence. The last perpetrates the violence itself. The study also chronicles the permutations of factions which adopted a policy of open violence in Morocco. In this context, it outlines the history of the first generation: Mohammed Al-Fazazi,

Abdel Karim Al-Shazly, and Omar Al-Hadouchi. The second generation of violent actors followed in the wake of September 11, 2001. It is represented by figures such as Muhammad Abdul-Wahhab Rafiqi (also known by his nom de guerre of Abu Hafs) and Hassan Al-Kitani, who sought to lend legitimacy and sympathy to terrorist operations through selective use of classical Islamic sources — a rhetorical style dubbed by some observers as a kind of "jurisprudential adolescence." The flaws of these efforts meant that they were susceptible of marginalization, especially after the terrorist attacks that rocked Casablanca. As a result, by 2008 Moroccan security services succeeded in dismantling the main terrorist cells. Thereafter, authorities embarked on a series of programs designed to "immunize" the country against extremism. These encouraged division among extremist ranks, and the rehabilitation of remorseful former extremists by offering amnesty to jihadists willing to lay down their arms. These efforts enabled Morocco to absorb the repercussions of the "creative chaos" unleashed after 2011. A key part of this effort was ensuring that the religious establishment remained faithful to the country's spiritual principles, as represented by the doctrine of Imam Malik, the Ash'ari faith, and the path of Sunni mysticism.

This policy, which led to the pardon of the most prominent repentant extremists, coincided with the events of February 2011. Given the mixed results of such rehabilitation programs in other countries, many were understandably apprehensive about their likely impact in Morocco. Some, such as Moroccan researcher Nur Eldin Al-Hatemi, remain skeptical of the rehabilitation process, so long as individuals in question remain adherents to the basic ideological structure which justifies extremism. His study traces the fluctuating positions of the Moroccan extremists, from the criticisms of the Egyptian Islamic Group's "revisions" at the time of its emergence, to those who approvingly cited those revisions after 2003. He also notes that Omar Haddouchi, for example, was fixated with the writings of Jordanian salafi jihadist Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi, to the extent of reformulating al-Maqdisi's argumentation and attributing them to himself. This highlights a view prevalent among many Moroccan observers, namely that Moroccan Islamism is largely dependent on the theorists of the Mashriq (i.e. the eastern part of the Arab world). This view, in fact, is central to the public messaging of Morocco's counter-terrorism strategy, which insists that extremist ideologies are "imported from abroad," and not of authentically

Moroccan provenance. Precisely for this reason, the Islamist party known as the Tawhid wal-Islah Movement is so keen to establish Moroccan roots for its ideological platform, as discussed in one of the book's later chapters.

This dynamic of Moroccan-Mashriqi interaction features prominently in the study authored by Mohamad Al-Zahrawi, who probles the establishment of the "Moroccan Islamic Fighting Group", which was comprised of the remnants of the so-called "Afghan Arabs." Two narratives surround this group's origins. According to the first, it was established in 1997 from the platform of "Echo of Morocco" [no idea what this is, need Arabic original], in an inaugural declaration that called for the establishment of an "Islamic caliphate to reclaim Andalusia." The second narrative dates this group's origin to 2002, following a meeting between al-Qaeda leader Muhammad al-Karbouzi and Osama bin Laden's assistant in Istanbul, ostensibly to launch a "jihad against Morocco." After tracing the group's initial phase, the researcher sketches outlines of the group's key figures, such as Abdul Karim Al-Majati and Sa'ad Al-Hussaini and adumbrates its core ideological tenets.

The testimonies of repentant former terrorists and dissident Islamists concerning "legitimizing extremism" constitute a rich material for understanding the motives of those belonging to terrorist organizations, as well as what motivates former members to repudiate extremism. In this effort, researcher Ayman Lamrabet has made a thorough study of several prominent former Islamists. The first is represented by Farid al-Ansari and his book Political Immorality and the Islamic Movement in Morocco, in which he concluded two decades of work with the Tawhid wal-Islah Movement. In a subsequent work, titled The Movement's Mistakes and published in 2007, Al-Ansari took aim at the prevailing spirit among the Islamist leadership, and in particular how Marxist revolutionary spirit had infused their thinking. In his telling, this was especially pronounced in the Al-Adl wa'l Ihsan' Group. Al-Ansari attributed much of the left-wing influence in the Islamist movements to Abdul Karim Mutie' who, he believed, mimiced the socialist activists' approach while grafting it onto an Islamist structure. The second prominent figure in this mold is represented by Omar Al-Omari, who adopted a narrative literary style that highlights the alienation of the Moroccan Islamist who, in his words, became like one "living in Morocco but with the heart of an Egyptian Brotherhood.

He hates Abdel Nasser and Sadat; he loves what the Muslim Brotherhood love." Also of note is Akram Hassan, whose book Bearded Wolves comes in for substantial discussion.

In recent years, the Islamist-inflected Justice and Development Movement sought to confirm its separation from the Brotherhood's ideological framework, and muddy the waters concerning the organizational ties between it and the Brotherhood's international organization. However, one study focuses closely on the ideological framework, common history, and similar political strategies between the Moroccan Brotherhood and the Brotherhood's international organization, noting many points of commonality. This study details incidents of cooperation between the two, and notes with interest the coordination of similar positions towards specific issues. It casts a critical eye on the supposed uniqueness of the Moroccan Justice and Development Party, suggesting that its break with the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood may be less than meets the eye.

Studies of political Islam have flourished in different successive historical stages. The first came after 2001, and was, in some respects, an elite phenomenon. The second wave of studies followed the Arab Spring of 2011. In both waves, Islamists exercised substantial influence over the content, promoting theories that jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda and ISIS could be contained by supporting the "moderate Islamist" movements. In this context, Moroccan researcher Nazha Sadek offers a valuable contribution dealing with the publications of the Moroccan Islamist movement in Arab and Western research centers over the past two decades. This period was marked by, in Sadiq's assessment, the "penetration of Islamist sympathizers" into the Western policy community. In one notable example, Noah Feldman, author of After Jihad: America and the Struggle for Islamic Democracy argues that "the American governments should push for the option of moderate Islamists, and allow Islamist political parties to run in free elections." Also, in the post-2011 period a number of publishing houses engaged in what Sadiq describes as "the promotion of political Islam promotion," effectively rationalizing the Islamist political platform.

Another Moroccan researcher, Anasse Chaara, focuses on the intellectual production of the Moroccan Islamist movement from 2011 to 2021. This body of work includes numerous articles published to the websites of Al-Adl wal-Ihsan related to its leadership, or focusing on street protests and criticism of reconciliation with state authorities. Al-Sha'arah examines the official website of the Tawhid wal-Islah Movement, its periodic political report (which chronicles ongoing organizational churn), as well as numerous political memos, and lectures by party leaders and theorists. The study focuses on documenting the contemporary key figures of Morocco, in a way that seeks to deconstruct the central narrative adopted by official Moroccan agencies; i.e. that extremism and Islamism are foreign to Morocco and wholly imported from abroad. Therefore, writings such as The Renewal introduced by Allal El Fassi by Ahmed Raissouni, and Lectures on the Pioneers of National Salafism, seek to establish the non-Mashriqi foundations of Moroccan Islamist literature.

In his essay, Rachid Ihoum observers that several factors which helped to curb Islamist extremism in Morocco are linked to particular facets of Moroccan Islam. In particular, Moroccan Islam has developed a distinctive identity with its own specific theological orientation and a well-known source of authority. It has been shaped by the long history of Moroccan pluralism and the consolidation of the philosophical heritage of Averroes, particularly as articulated in the writings of Abdallah Laroui.

In another study, Moroccan researcher Mountassir Hamada details the role of the institution of the Imarat al-Mu'minin (the Emirate of the Faithful) in intra-Islamist ideological one-upmanship. The study ponders the institutions concerned with protecting Moroccan spiritual life from potentially destructive patterns of religiosity. Hamadeh points out that the monarchy succeeded in restructuring the religious field through a variety of distinct initiatives, including centralizing responsibility for issuing fatwas under the responsibility of the institution of Amir al-Mu'minin, as well as endowing regionally distributed religious delegates, incorporating women scholars in religious scientific councils in 2004, and forming the Charter of Scholars in 2008. This last was a project that emerged from the programs designed to train Imams and religious guides. Also noteworthy are a number of platforms that were launched to confront ideological

extremism in 2015, as well as the formation of Mohammed VI Foundation of African Scholars in June 2022.

In a related context, Tunisian researcher Nidal Al-Azem explores in one study the methodology of clandestine activity as discussed in Islamist literature. In particular, he delves into the case the Tunisian Ennahda movement's secret apparatus, which was active from the party's formation until the assassination of activist Shoukri Beleid on February 6, 2013.

In conclusion, Al Mesbar Studies and Research Center thanks its colleagues and researchers who participated in the publication of this book, with special thanks to the colleague Mountassir Hamada, who coordinated the issue. We hope it will find favor in your eyes.

Editor-in-Chief

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July 2022