



DEMOCRATIZATION THROUGH THE MEDIA

IKV Pax Christi Work in Morocco
2007 - 2009

This paper is the result of a review of the work of IKV Pax Christi in Morocco in the period 2007 – 2009. The review is commissioned by IKV Pax Christi to the University of Amsterdam and conducted by Dr. Francesco Cavatorta. For more information about IKV Pax Christi visit www.ikvpaxchristi.nl and for more information about the activities in Morocco contact Gijsbert van Iterson Scholten, Senior programme officer Morocco, at vaniterson@ikvpaxchristi.nl.

Colophon

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Introduction

Over the last few years, the focus of democratisation studies in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) has changed considerably. Since the end of the Cold War and until the mid 2000s, scholars of the MENA have been preoccupied with finding signs of democratisation in the countries under examination in order to demonstrate that the region was not 'exceptionally' resistant to forms of democratic governance. There are two reasons that explain the attention being given to this 'demo-craze' (Valbjorn and Banks, 2009).

First of all, there was widespread expectation that effects of the end of the Cold War would finally allow the third wave of democratisation to hit the Arab world and the enthusiasm provoked by the sudden changes in Latin America and Eastern Europe found its way to Middle East specialists.

Secondly, and more importantly, MENA regimes did indeed adopt a number of liberal and democratic reforms that seemed to indicate that they were on their way towards the establishment of some form of democratic government. The formal institutions of democracy such elections and parliaments were introduced and/or strengthened across the region, as core liberal freedoms were also widened. The positive experience with liberalising reforms countries as different as Yemen and Algeria had at the turn of the 1980s and early 1990s provided empirical substance to the claim that democracy was coming to the region. With time however, it became increasingly clear that, with the possible exception of Algeria, the introduction of liberal and democratic reforms was simply a tactic that regimes in the region employed to stave off meaningful change and such reforms were quickly emptied of any substance, leading to the creation of regimes that can be termed liberalised autocracies (Brumberg, 2002). The events in Algeria between 1988 and 1992 finally shaped the way in which all the other Arab countries responded to demands for democratisation coming from society.

Algeria is the only country in the Arab world which took its liberalising and democratising effort to its logical conclusion: free and fair multi-party elections for meaningful political institutions in a context of freedom of expression and association. The outcome of the December 1991 legislative was however quite shocking for many, both in the Arab world and across the globe, as the Islamist party (the *Front Islamique de Salut*) was poised to take the absolute majority of seats in Parliament and therefore was set to rule the country without the need to enter in a governmental coalition. The Algerian military, with the support of external actors and of key social groups within the country, carried out a military coup and Algeria reverted back to authoritarianism (Cavatorta, 2009). The lesson of Algeria for all the other regimes across the region was that democratisation would very likely result in the complete demise of the regime itself and the marginalisation of the ruling elites. Thus, a number of survival strategies were implemented ranging from renewed repression to co-optation in order to stabilise the regime, ride out the storm and construct a new type of authoritarianism (Schlumberger and Albrecht, 2004). Since the mid 2000s the focus of scholars has therefore shifted to analyse the ways in which MENA regimes survive despite the presence of a number of different opposition movements.

It is often argued that MENA regimes lack popular legitimacy and that a genuine democratisation would lead to the dismissal from power of the current ruling elites, which, in turn, rely almost exclusively on repression to remain in control of the state. According to Bellin (2004) it is therefore the robustness of the coercive apparatus, which, in the absence of legitimacy, explains the persistence of authoritarian rule. There is no doubt that Bellin points to a significant explanatory variable, as repression is indeed one of the instruments that MENA regimes employ to extract obedience from the masses.

However, it would be misleading to focus only on repression as the explanation for the persistence of authoritarianism, as other strategies are equally, if not more, important. A number of scholars (Schlumberger and Albrecht, 2004; Cavatorta, 2007) emphasise how no government can rely simply on fear to extract obedience from its citizens and that there has to be some form of legitimacy underpinning the rulers, although it does not have to be necessarily democratic, popular legitimacy. While this is certainly the case and MENA regimes do have a degree of legitimacy derived from traditions (monarchies for example), or legitimacy derived from the distribution of economic benefits (Gulf states and Saudi Arabia) or ideological and historical legitimacy, it should be highlighted that such legitimacy could be easily reversed if an alternative ideological shared project regarding the running of the state emerged. Unfortunately, such a project has yet to emerge in the MENA because of divisions within the opposition. Thus, the MENA finds itself in a paradoxical situation: the presence of both illegitimate ruling elites and strong opposition actors actually reinforcing the *status quo* rather than provoking change. For some analysts the main issue is the inability of the opposition to present a coherent united front that would have the resources and the legitimacy to demand reforms from the regime (Albrecht, 2005). More specifically, it is postulated that, despite a number of attempts aimed at creating alliances and shared synergies, it is the divisions between the opposition Islamists and the opposition seculars that undermine the convergence required to launch a credible democratising effort.

For other scholars, the inability of the opposition to create a meaningful coalition does not rest only on the ideological divisions between seculars and Islamists, but has to do with the fact that both camps are also divided and there exist tensions both among seculars and among Islamists on how to deal with the regime.

The empirical evidence does not really clarify the matter, except for confirming that a powerful coalition capable of challenging the regime in power has yet to emerge. On the one hand, we do have numerous examples of attempts at alliance-building between political Islam and secular opposition groups. Indeed a number of scholars point out that coalition-building has been in place for some time and continues to characterize MENA political systems when these become more open. For example, in Jordan the Islamist Islamic Action Front (IAF) participated in the Higher Committee for the Coordination of National Opposition Parties (HCCNOP) with leftist and secular parties (Clark, 2006). In Egypt, the Muslim Brotherhood has a history of striking electoral alliances with secular opposition parties as it did with the Wafd and Labour party (Pripstein-Posusney, 2002) in the 1980s, while more recently 'Islamists are part of the pro-democracy Kifaya coalition' (Pratt, 2007). In Algeria, the Islamist FIS and a number of secular, leftist movements agreed on a common platform of

demands during the civil war, highlighting the proximity of views between ideological rivals on democratic procedures (Impagliazzo and Giro, 1997). In Tunisia, secular intellectuals and political parties with an anti-Islamist ethos made a rapprochement towards Islamists in order to highlight the repressive measures of the regime for the international community (Labidi, 2006). More recently, Lebanon experienced the emergence of an unexpected alliance between Hezbollah and Michel Aoun's party (Seeberg, forthcoming 2010). In Yemen, the Islamist Islah party has a tradition of cooperation with its secular counterparts (Schwedler, 2006). In some cases this cooperation continues to this day, as the Lebanese case demonstrates. These cross-ideological alliances however never seem to get enough steam behind them to become a viable interlocutor for the regime and a political force to be reckoned with.

On the other hand, we also have clear examples of divisions among Islamists of different ideological persuasions and among seculars. In Algeria, groups and associations that strive to increase the rights of women exclude almost a priori alliances with Islamists, while associations like the Algerian League of Human Rights have in the past cooperated with families of Islamist victims of state torture on issues related to the law of national reconciliation, which both opposed. This has created conflicts within the secular camp regarding the desirability of cooperating with Islamists.

In any case there is no doubt that political Islam plays a central role in these dynamics and this is even more so where movements and parties of Islamist persuasion have prospered over the last two decades, as the is the case in Morocco (Zeghal, 2005).

Political Islam in Morocco: a Multifaceted Challenge and a Unique Opportunity

In a 2003 article reviewing the different expressions of political Islam in Morocco, Laskier argued that there were three clusters of Islamism in the country. First of all, there is a legally recognised political formation (the Party for Justice and Development - PJD) that fully participates to the political and, crucially, institutional life of the country. It is allowed to participate because it is a party able to compromise with the regime and, in particular, on the crucial issue of the role of the King as the Commander of the Faithful. The PJD, despite never having entered a government's coalition, is deemed to be integrated into the liberalised autocratic system because of its unwillingness to criticise the monarch and bow to the Makhzen's pressure when necessary. For instance, upon request by the authorities, the party decided not to run candidates in all constituencies at the 2003 local elections precisely to avoid sweeping the board and embarrassing the King with a significant Islamist electoral victory (Willis, 2004). Secondly, there is the very popular Justice and Charity Association (*al-Adl*) founded by the long time dissident Sheikh Abd al-Salam Yassine, which is a semi-legal group. This association operates like a social movement providing services and assistance to the poorer sections of society and is preoccupied with Islamising society from below by promoting a sort of Sufi-infused utopianism (Kristianasen, 2007). This does not mean that the association does not have a political line. The Sheikh is very outspoken in his criticism of the Crown, which is blamed for not tackling the social and economic ills of Moroccan society (poverty, corruption of moral values, deference to the West, social atomisation) and Islam is pointed out as the solution to all these difficulties (Cavatorta, 2007). Finally, there is the clandestine *Salafist Jihad*, a nebulous group devoted to overthrowing the government through violence. It is a minority strand and does not enjoy much popular support. Currently, its leaders and members are imprisoned, although most of them have been arrested and tried in very controversial circumstances, as the association *Ennasir*, founded with the objective of defending the prisoners' rights and the rights of their families, claims.

Laskier's analysis of the Islamist camp in Morocco is still valid today. The PJD, having failed to secure a substantial majority as many had predicted in the 2007 legislative elections, has not entered the government coalition and remains in opposition in parliament. However, it should be underlined that the PJD is very much part of what can be labelled the 'loyal opposition' in so far as it remains deferent to the monarchy and to its executive primacy. In Morocco, sitting in opposition in Parliament does not necessarily equate with opposition to the regime, as Parliament, despite its more recent strengthening (Denoeux and Desfosses, 2007), is not the principal locus of policy-making, which rests squarely with the monarchy. The PJD, as all of the other political movements that are allowed to participate to institutional politics, can do so only because it has sanctioned the current system.

The *al-Adl* is still in a legal limbo and continues to operate with a considerable degree of success in civil society by providing a number of social services and attempting to carve out a political role through the continuous presence of its leading members in the public debate. The position of the *al-Adl* regarding its participation to institutional politics has not changed over the years and while the movement remains committed to non-violence, it does not wish to enter politics unless a thorough reform is undertaken, which would greatly curtail the constitutional powers of the monarchy. This inevitably pits the movement against the monarchy and the parties loyal to the King.

The movement *Salafist Jihad* has virtually disappeared due to the mass arrests that it experienced over the last few years. The security forces' crackdown on Islamist terrorism and the marginalisation of *Salafist Jihad* by all other political groups combined to dismantle its network. Most of the militants are in jail and the only activities taking place at the moment connected with the movement are the ones that the association *Ennasir* holds in order to highlight the plight of the prisoners and their families. These three clusters examined in Laskier's study do not constitute however the whole Islamist camp. While often marginalised in studies of Moroccan politics, there exists a politicised and social Islam connected to the monarchy. There are for instance brotherhoods and associations such as the sufi *Zaouiya Boutchichia*, which has an important role in Morocco because it functions as the connection between sectors of the pious middle-class and the monarchy. The movement is very much aligned with the monarchy on political and social matters, which means that it can be mobilised to compete with opposition Islamism. In addition, there seems to be the return on the scene of *Dawa Salafism*, which 'concentrates on Islamising its followers and isolating them from the political process rather than directly challenging the state' (Boubekeur, 2008). While this phenomenon seems to be growing considerably in Algeria, it does not seem to have become as popular yet in Morocco, although there is a history of it in the country. Today, the best known representative of this type of Islamism is theologian Sheikh Maghraoui, whose religious association promotes a very strict and literal interpretation of Islam. The Sheikh has come under severe criticism in recent years for his position on the issue of under-age marriage and in a 2008 fatwa he stated that 'the marriage of nine-year-old girls is not forbidden because according to the Hadith (the Prophet Mohammed's sayings), Mohammed married Aisha when she was only seven-years-old and he consummated his union when she was nine'.¹ These declarations have political undertones, but they are strictly non-political in the sense that followers are encouraged to isolate themselves from official and institutional politics. In any case they have provoked a backlash against the association and the Sheikh with the authorities intervening to shut down some of their activities.

This brief outline of Islamism in Morocco indicates that there are numerous currents one has to be aware of, rendering the field of political Islam more segmented than in other countries of the region. There are two points that should be made and that influence the way in which political Islam is present in the public space.

First of all, the relations between the different Islamist groups, despite some common references and symbolism, are quite conflictual and uneasy. The *al-Adl* and *Zaouiya Boutchichia*, despite owing much to Sufism, have no relationships with each other due to the 'political' distance between them and the personal animosity that exists between the two respective leaders. While the *al-Adl* has a 'republican' ethos that prevents it from acquiescing to the power of the monarchy, the *Zaouiya Boutchichia* supports the idea of 'divine right' when it comes to political rule and therefore supports the monarchy. The *al-Adl* and the PJD also have a relationship fraught with difficulties. On the one hand the PJD is perceived by the members and leadership of the *al-Adl* to have sold out to the monarch whereby they exchanged autonomy in favour of position of powers within the administration and the political institutions, although they are not deemed to be as corrupt as the other political

¹ <http://www.middle-east-online.com/ENGLISH/?id=27880>

formations. Conversely, the PJD accuses the *al-Adl* of working for the collapse of the system in order to create a form of political rule that would not be in line with Moroccan interests and traditions. Basically, while the PJD looks at the Turkish experience as a good outcome for both the party and the country, the *al-Adl* is accused of wanting to establish an unrealistic Caliphate. On the other hand, the PJD is more conservative than the *al-Adl* on social issues, as it became clear during the debate for the reform of the Family Code, and this leads to differences that are not easily reconciled. All movements also shun *Salafist Jihadism* because it promotes violence, although the association Ennasir has found recently some sympathy because of its work with the families of the prisoners and because of the attempt to ensure that the trials of members of *Salafist Jihad* are conducted within the law.

Secondly, the relations of the Islamist camp with the secular parties and associations, which are quite strong in Morocco, are also fraught with suspicions and difficulties (Cavatorta, 2009). In the parliamentary arena, the PJD, while not entirely isolated, finds it difficult to cooperate with the nationalist party and, more significantly, with the parties of the left and the new party (the Party of Authenticity and Modernity) led by El-Himma, a former minister and close adviser to the King, who has made no secret of the fact that he wishes to marginalise the PJD as much as possible. While this may be part and parcel of parliamentary politics, the inability and, partly, the unwillingness of the PJD to have any of its major policies taken into consideration has led to its loss of support among ordinary citizens, who have turned away from the party, but more significantly, have turned away from politics rendering elections almost meaningless (Storm, 2008). Within civil society activism, the relations between Islamists and seculars are even more contentious given the fundamentally different values they have when it comes to individual rights, which in Morocco are highly problematic. Thus, aside from sharing similar points of view on a number of foreign policy issues, conflict seems to be the norm. There are exceptions obviously to this conflictual trend, such as the support that the Moroccan Association of Human Rights has given to some Islamist militants in jail (Le Journal Hebdomadaire, 2010) or the good rapport that exists on socio-economic issues between the *al-Adl* and the left-wing party *Annaji Addimouqrati*, but they remain such: exceptions to the rule.

All of this makes for a very divisive public debate and for a divided political field, which, ultimately, benefits the *status quo*. The monarchy has been able to divide and rule the opposition (Cavatorta, 2007), strengthening itself in the process and virtually halting any meaningful move towards genuine democratic governance. If anything, the last two years have seen a return to some of the stricter authoritarian practices of the past. Thus, Morocco is one of the very few Arab countries where very little dialogue exists between the different currents.

The IKV Pax Christi Project

The overall framework of the project is both innovative and challenging. It is innovative because it attempts to combine the experiences and work of two rather different organisations that, while having a common interest in the wider issue of democratisation, have focuses on different aspects of dialogue, reconciliation and promotion of liberal democratic rights. There is no doubt that, as the project clearly states, 'the media have become an important battleground in the ideological struggle about the role of Islam in Moroccan society.' This assumption constitutes the foundation of the project, which aims at fostering dialogue between ideological rivals by encouraging the main protagonists, including journalists and media professionals, to become more aware of their respective political positions and of the necessity to create a meaningful mutually tolerant dialogue. Working through the media on the role of political Islam in Morocco is extremely important because journalists are significant opinion-makers in the country and are quite politicised. The way in which Islamism is covered in the Moroccan media has repercussions on how political and social actors behave and the promotion of dialogue passes through a more objective and professional coverage of is often a much misunderstood phenomenon. The media have a leading role to play in processes of democratic change. When an authoritarian regime relaxes its grip on power and allows for a degree of political liberalisation, newspapers and journalism in general begin to prosper with a pluralism of voices emerging. The way in which these voices then deal with emerging political and social trends affects the liberalisation process. It is therefore crucial to examine how new publications and programmes break taboos and discuss topics that were never tackled prior to liberalisation. The necessity of professionalising this pluralism is quite evident in Morocco where Islamism is understandably covered in a very partisan manner. Dialogue between different political and social actors will be more effective if the issues they disagree on are covered in the media with professionalism and objectivity. As mentioned above, the project was also very challenging. The media landscape in Morocco is complex and constantly in flux. It also still suffers from a number of constraints, both financial and political, that prevent it from taking full advantage of the openings that the regime has accorded. Thus, making the coverage of political Islam, the thorniest issue the regime faces and the most divisive one for society as a whole, presents challenges that are not easily overcome because this highly sensitive topic affects the very lives of individual journalists.

The innovative and challenging elements however should be seen as strengths rather than weaknesses of the project. The cooperation between IKC Pax Christi and Press Now has produced a project whose potential has been in great part fulfilled.

The part of the project that IKV Pax Christi has put in place is based on the assumption that only dialogue between the different political currents that exist in Morocco can lead to a shared understanding of the future of the country. The project evolved around a series of public debates where the representatives of different and often opposing political sensibilities discussed a number of very sensitive topics regarding Moroccan current affairs. The topics chosen were 'press freedom', 'values in education', 'political violence' and 'political Islam meets the secular left.' The topics are inherently divisive and go to the heart of the relationships between opposition groups and between the opposition and the parties in government.

The issue of press freedom is paramount today in Morocco because it represents one of the values upon which the monarchy has built up its domestic and, more significantly, its international legitimacy. In fact, according to *Tel Quel* editor Ahmed Benchemsi, Morocco has the freest press in the Arab world with the exception of Lebanon. However, recent trends indicate that there has been a serious regression in press freedoms with independent journalists being personally targeted with repressive measures and with the independent magazine *par excellence* (*Le Journal Hebdomadaire*) shutting down in very controversial circumstances. As Benchemsi stated, 'freedom of expression is severely under threat in Morocco. There is a renewed repression from the state, no one knows the real reason, it is politics within the palace that determines these things, but what emerges is that there is a return to the real nature of the regime, which is profoundly authoritarian. There was a weakness in the early years after 2000 that is no longer there and the result is that journalists and NGOs suffer.' A similar point was made by Mohammed Hafid, editor of the Arabic *al Hayat al Jadida*, who explained that 'the most significant problem for journalists and the media in general in Morocco is the authoritarianism of the regime. The fact that there is only one political project out there, the King's, indicates that there is a gap between the reality of social life and politics. At the political level, there is an absence of diversity which is generally reflected in the media where conservatism and deference prevail, particularly because media have now become a terrain of conquest for large economic groups. This is in contrast with the pluralism that emerges from society.' This clearly indicates how the discussion of press freedom features prominently in the political and civil society arenas. Bringing different political movements to discuss what constitutes press freedom is a helpful exercise in so far as there are very different ideas about it. The *al-Adl* for instance complains that no newspaper or magazine gives them fair and objective treatment, although *Le Journal Hebdo* and *Tel Quel* were singled out for praise for trying to buck this trend. In addition for the *al-Adl* press freedom means having the possibility to publish its own newspaper or magazine, which the regime refuses to allow. Thus, what they seek from the discussion is support for their right to publish their own periodical or newspaper and they demand that coverage of the *al-Adl* cease to be so politicised. The secular independent press has a similar preoccupation with censorship and regime repression, but their focus is also on attempting to stem the tide of journalistic coverage that is accusatory towards the marginalised and those who are 'different'. This is for Islamists not acceptable, particularly for the PJD, as they point out that they have the right to denounce what they perceive to be deviant behaviour through their publications. This has been specifically the case on issues such as homosexuality and the right to ignore Ramadan's injunctions to fast and abstain from a number of activities that restrain individual choice. In sum, the issue of press freedom is divisive, but there is a degree of agreement in demanding that a new press code be finally put in place and that clear standards be set for journalists.

The issue of political violence is also a very sensitive topic as Morocco, for a long time insulated from the violence that characterised its Arab neighbours, has experienced the growth of violent Islamist movements that operate both inside and outside the country. The debate was therefore important to gauge what the views of different political groups are in respect to this phenomenon. This is possibly the debate that saw participants' views coincide the most, as there is widespread acceptance that violence to achieve political goals is both morally wrong and practically useless. The commitment to non-violence of large swathes of Islamism, including the *al-Adl*, should not be underestimated and

presents an opportunity to build meaningful dialogue with their secular counterparts based on democratic principles of tolerance and respect. However, if the concept of political violence is stretched to include verbal tirades against those who are perceived to be different or un-Islamic, then the tone of the discussion changes and the dialogue is more problematic. The PJD in particular and the Arabic speaking newspapers where more conservative views on social matters are expressed are often accused of fomenting violence against marginalised groups or individuals that do not fit the social conformist requirements the party believes to embody. The secular-nationalists also are at times accused of fomenting violence and discrimination in what then becomes a vicious cycle of mutual recriminations and accusations. Thus, as journalist Abdou Berrada, states, 'the amazigh speaking minority is overtly attacked by the newspapers close to the Istiqlal (*al Alam* and *L'Opinion*) and by the Arabic-speaking newspaper *al Massae*. The Jewish minority is accused of being pro-Zionist and pro-Israel by *al-Massae* again and by the newspaper of the PJD. The minority of citizens favorable to the independence of western Sahara is not openly defended by any newspaper or publication.' All this indicates that debates on political violence have to clearly specify the type of violence that it is dealt with. At a general level, there is widespread agreement that political violence against the regime and against each other is unacceptable, but more subtle verbal violence, which may result then in physical violence, against what are considered improper behavior or unorthodox views is still very present in the discourse of many political and social actors.

Clear divisions exist as well on the values that should underpin the education system, which was the theme of the third debate. Again, the dividing line is between Islamists, who emphasizes both moral values firmly anchored in religious teachings and technical-scientific education, and secular groups, who emphasize universal values and stress the continuous importance of humanistic-liberal education in creating 'better' and more informed citizens. At this stage however it is necessary to take into account that Moroccan society as a whole is quite conservative even when compared to other Arab society, with the exception of the Gulf States. This should be taken into greater account by external actors intervening in the country with projects aimed at strengthening dialogue and civil society. There is at times the perception that Moroccan society is closer to French society because the interaction occurs often with Moroccans who are indeed reasonably liberal and close to what we could term European values, but this is not the case for the vast majority of society where social conservatism on many matters, including education, is the norm. The recognition of this reality is necessary in order to have an informed and sustainable dialogue between different political and civil groups on the question of education.

The debate on political Islam 'meeting' the secular left was unanimously judged as a great success because it brought together points of views that rarely have the opportunity to dialogue in a setting that is not politically charged. What emerged is what usually emerges in these types of forums. On the one hand, there is widespread agreement on the idea that democratic principles should prevail in the political system, but such principles coincide largely with procedural mechanisms such free and fair elections, accountability of elected representatives, policy-making powers in the hands of those who are elected and absence of violence against political adversaries. On the other hand there are clear divisions on matters related to individual rights, which then makes law-making on personal status legislation for instance a confrontational arena where differences are irreconcilable, as

recognized by both sets of actors. This is probably where most of the work should concentrate on, although there are cultural sensitivities that need to be respected. It should also be acknowledged that often the interlocutors of European NGOs, as mentioned above, hold views on these matters that are de-aligned with the views of the majority of society.

The themes of the debates were all informed by the logic that all ideological persuasions should be represented and, more importantly, that this would help create a sort of ideological rapprochement between Islamists and seculars. The local partner, MECA Maroc, was represented by Maati Monjib. The debates took place in 2007. The debates were obviously quite 'theoretical' as different groups and individuals were asked to present their general view on the different issues. This proved to be the added value of the debates because it is impossible to work on more concrete and shared measures if the preliminary ideological positions are not aired out and dealt with through forums such as the ones organised by IKV Pax Christi and MENA Morocco.

Analysis and Findings

The overall impression of the project is highly positive in terms of objectives and organisational matters. What follows is a summary of the goals achieved. After that, a more thorough examination of the debates that IKV Pax Christi coordinated is presented.

The project had a number of goals:

- a. *Promoting the role of the media as platform for public debate and 'watchdog' of society by supporting special journalistic projects.* This objective has been achieved. The support for journalists through the provision of professional training and through the initiative of the prize in investigative journalism has enhanced the ability of some media professionals to contribute to the public debate. The support for investigative journalism in particular has allowed journalists to investigate topics that are highly relevant for Moroccan society, breaking a number of taboos in the meantime and providing the necessary information for a meaningful public debate.
- b. *To foster media professionalism in dealing with issues pertaining to Political Islam.* This is a much more difficult objective to attain given the sensitivity of the topic and the politically charged atmosphere that surrounds the coverage of political Islam in all of its forms in Morocco. The research that was undertaken during the project has had the merit of pointing out to the problems that exist in the coverage of Islamism and the study has generated a significant amount of reactions. There is the realisation on the part of media professionals and journalists that the issue of political Islam has to be covered with a much less politically biased approach, but this is extremely difficult for both 'individual' and structural constraints. Structural constraints have to do with the editorial line of specific media outlets, as the majority tend to espouse a pro-regime political line and this has consequences for the individual journalist and the degree to which he or she is allowed to operate in autonomy. Individual constraints have to do with the fact that many journalists might prefer to either stay clear of such a topic because of its sensitivity or they are too close to the topic because of their particular political leanings. In any case, the project has been certainly successful in raising these problematic questions about the ethics of how to cover political Islam. Unfortunately, the media landscape in Morocco is going through a very difficult period of authoritarian retrenchment with some independent outlets being forced to close and others being forced to take a more pro-regime political line. This is having a negative impact on how political Islam is being covered, particularly because groups such as the *al-Adl* are still not permitted to publish their own magazines or newspapers. In all of this, it should also be highlighted that the public awareness about media treatment of issue relating to political Islam might not have increased as much as it could have been expected. This is not necessarily due to the weaknesses within the project and how it was both conceived and carried out, but it has to do with the progressive de-politicisation of the Moroccan public. However, there is certainly the realisation at elite level that more professionalism in the media is required.
- c. *Fostering the debate about the role of Islamists in the Moroccan political system and society.* This objective was fully realised and constitutes a clear 'victory' for the organisations

As for the part of the project for which IKV Pax Christi was more directly responsible, the following analysis will deal with these aspects and although it deals with them separately, it should be recognised that they are inevitably interlinked. First of all the project was very well conceived in terms of the immediate objectives it wanted to achieve. The main purposes behind the organisation of public debates were to facilitate dialogue between different political organisations and civil society actors and get media coverage in order to highlight such dialogue for public opinion. The assumption that dialogue is essential to initiate a process of democratisation is based on very solid evidence from past cases across the world where opposition political actors and, at times, members of the ruling elites came together to hammer out a mutually satisfactory deal to take the country in a more democratic direction. Such coalition-building is often preceded by meetings where issues are discussed in a much more informal manner and where decisions do not have to be made, but where respective positions are aired out in order to provide an indication of where different actors stand

The intention of the organisers was to initiate dialogue and get representatives of parties and movements that rarely meet to have the opportunity to talk to each other directly and, when the case, to disagree openly with each other. All the participants to the debates, with no exception, found them very useful precisely because of this. The most important outcome for the participants was that they had the possibility to directly come in contact with people who have widely different views from them on very sensitive topics. The very idea of the dialogue was in fact what attracted them in the first place, if only to hear their counterparts and profoundly disagree with them. As Brouksi argued 'what these debates taught to the participants is that different points of view can coexist and the debates have therefore contributed to a rapprochement between the two sides, although divergences are still quite profound on a number of matters.' This was true for both the secular and the Islamist camps, as this is probably the main dividing line in the country, particularly in terms of individual rights and administrative reforms.

On the one hand, secular activists like Simon Levy argued, 'I have no problem participating to events where Islamists are present despite the fact that they can have a harsh anti-Jewish rhetoric.' Levy's attitude represents quite well the views of the participants because 'dialogue' did indeed take place.

On the other hand, Islamists had finally the opportunity to present their ideas in a structured setting where sloganeering is neither useful nor acceptable. As the representative of the *al-Adl* also said 'obviously we are aware of the fact that some political movements perceive us badly and are afraid of us, but the fears are mutual and this is why debating with everyone is important.' In addition, it should be highlighted that participants felt that the event allowed them to conduct this dialogue outside the normal bounds of personal contacts and to place it in a wider context. On a personal level, many activists, both Islamist and secular, do know each other and are aware of their respective political positions, but the context of a formal setting where positions and ideas are outlined for public consumption allows for a much more structured dialogue, particularly because the environment is not highly politicised or institutionalised (i.e. it is not Parliament) and the debate takes place in a neutral venue with the presence of an external European audience. This point was clearly emphasised by

Omar Iharchane of the *al-Adl* who stated that 'this was the first time where the debates went further than personal contacts. It was a political exchange and there was a real willingness on the part of the participants to engage with respect.' All participants came with an open mind and there was a real exchange of ideas and opinions. Hosni was very impressed with the fact that every political actor, even the one he considers extremist, have been invited and took part. As Messari of the *Istliqlal* party argued, 'there was no attempt on [my part] to convince' others of his opinions and this seemed to be the approach of all participants; dialogue and getting to know what the other 'side' thought was the most important objective.

Omar Brouksi probably sums them up best: 'the debates were very original and much needed. For the first time secular intellectuals and activists openly discuss a number of different matters with Islamists. The discussion evolved around fundamental and very sensitive questions, which is very significant. The debates were both interesting and rational.'

The scholar and analyst Said Elakhal, coming from a more neutral perspective, was also impressed with the quality of the debates. He stated that 'we have moved from a phase of conflict and hostility that made it impossible to have the secular left and the Islamists to sit together round the same table to a situation where they actually do share the same table. This stage where dialogue exists is enormously important and useful to convince the different political currents to continue the discussion and maintain dialogue so that they progressively can leave behind the distance and the absence of communication that characterized their previous relations.'

The coverage in the media of such debates was good and at times rather prominent, both in the Arab and French-speaking presses. The Moroccan radio and television were present, but these initiatives, according to Messari again, do not draw great attention as the general public might not be that interested, as it concerns intellectuals. This seems to indicate that the choice not to cover such events is a purely commercial one, as it would draw a very small audience. This is however disputed by others who argue that Morocco is still very much an authoritarian regime and therefore that 'radio and TV have not given any space to this event [for political reasons]. Information and communication to the wider public are managed by the state and the ruling elites do not want this public to be reached.' It should be noted that *Al Jazeera* covered one of these events. Thus, when it comes to the objectives they seem to have been largely met: dialogue did occur and media outlets covered the events, although it was not prominent on national radio and television. It is much more difficult to measure the impact that such debates and their coverage have had on public opinion and Moroccan citizens more generally. There are reasons to be sceptical about the popular reach of such initiatives for a number of reasons. First of all, it cannot be denied that such debates are indeed very intellectual and appeal to a restricted public with an interest in these issues. Secondly, the de-politicisation of the Moroccan citizenry is a reality that needs to be faced and that limits the appeal of what seem to be high-level political debates and contacts. Thirdly, the censorship measures that the regime has in place to prevent wider circulation of ideas are implemented quite thoroughly. This does not mean that the public was not in some way reached because the print press did cover the events and the participants talked about them in other forums.

A second aspect that contributed to the success of the debates is the way in which they were organised and managed. These organisational matters were successful largely because of the choice of local partner. All participants were very impressed by the professionalism of Maati Monjib of MECA Morocco and it is down to him that the debates went so well. There is a consensus not only that the idea of gathering together different ideological sensibilities was excellent. The way in which the debates were organised contributed to foster an atmosphere in which there was real confrontation, but where democratic principles were respected. Monjib was unanimously considered an excellent choice as organiser and moderator. From a logistical point of view, all went very smoothly and it was an excellent opportunity to foster dialogue, as participants also mingled for lunch and for tea breaks. In this more informal setting there is no doubt that personal relationships might be created or strengthened. Monjib is a well-known professor and an esteemed activist who enjoys a solid reputation. In addition, it should be noted that the involvement of a foreign NGO in setting up such debates is more than welcome because there is the feeling that it is only through the help of external actors that such meetings can be organised.

The Islamists were particularly enthusiastic about foreign involvement. This is due to the fact that many other foreign actors in Morocco, both governmental and non-governmental, do not take them into great consideration when organising events or carrying out their projects relating to democratisation and civil society activism.

While the debates were a success, their subsequent impact is not as easily assessed. The immediate objective was to establish a framework for some sort of dialogue to take place and this was achieved, although it should be highlighted that Islamists and seculars did cooperate on specific matters in the past. When it comes to the aftermath of the debates, the most visible is the publication of the book with all the contributions and which has been sold in over 5,000 copies throughout the country. While the number might not seem high, given the topic and the state of the Moroccan market when it comes to books, it should be considered an excellent return on the investment. The main questions that should be asked are: a) what are the effects of the debates on the groups and movements that took part and b) how concrete is the rapprochement between the different political sensibilities. As of today, there is still no formal coalition or alliance between the opposition groups and one could therefore contend that such debates and meetings are self-contained intellectual exercises with no spill-over effects. Abdelali has for instance stated that there was no real concrete progress after the debates and that no rapprochement has taken place between Islamists and seculars. A similar view is held by the *al-Adl* whereby Omar Iharchane has argued that their cooperative agreements with the secular left preceded the debates, although he also pointed out that such agreements have been strengthened by common participation to the debates. This judgement is however too harsh, as it is impossible to determine the difference that such meetings might make in the future of the country and in the future relations by the two camps. One initiative is hardly going to bridge many decades of mutual mistrust and paper over fundamental ideological and policy differences.

There are at least four mitigating factors that should be considered. First of all, this series of meetings was the first one to take place and to expect the creation of formal political alliances between groups

that have very little previous history of cooperation would be unrealistic. In fact the very participation of most political sensibilities to the debates is a success in itself, as the immediate objective of shedding suspicions and fostering democratic dialogue have been achieved.

The second factor that should be taken into account is that divisions remain profound and although there are shared analyses regarding the crisis Morocco faces and there is a shared understanding of the necessity of introducing meaningful democratic procedures, there are still profound divisions over the issue of fundamental individual rights. This obstacle might not be insurmountable in the longer term, but there is no doubt that it provides a powerful blockage in contemporary Moroccan politics as recognised by all participants.

Thirdly, it should be noted that there is still a significant level of interference on the part of the security services when it comes to opposition dynamics of rapprochement. The debates themselves were monitored by the security services, some pressure was placed on the hotel where the debates took place and the main organisers have been filmed to make sure that there is a record for the police to go back to. In addition, the regime implements well-oiled strategies of divide and rule. With regards to the potential rapprochement of the PJD and the Socialist party USFP, the monarchy, fearful that the two movements might come to a mutual understanding on demands to be made to the king in terms of political reforms, appointed as minister a leading member of the USFP, Driss Lachgar, in order to neutralise him. Until his appointment Lachgar was in favour of cooperation with the PJD and argued against the USFP's participation to government unless the monarchy accelerated its democratising efforts by placing on the table the issue of constitutional reforms. His promotion to minister and Lachgar's acceptance of the post have virtually put to rest the demands and projects he was pursuing before his appointment. The offer of personal advancement with all the perks that come with the job, as Monjib argued, was too good to turn down and in exchange Lachgar has now modified his stance *vis à vis* dialogue with the PJD and the necessity of constitutional reforms. This is a very significant problem because personal advancement trumps many of these attempts at creating larger and potentially more effective alliances, as potential partners are let down and become frustrated. This leads in turn to avoiding openings that come from parties or personalities that then 'sell them down the river'.

Finally, there is no doubt that some participants have no real intention of budging from the positions they set. This is quite clear when it comes to representatives of parties in government such as the *Istliqlal*. Participating to the debates is interesting from an intellectual point of view and they do engage meaningfully with both the audience and the other participants, but the objective of participation is certainly not meant to upset the current political balance.

There are also a number of criticisms that can be laid at the project and that might be useful to take into account. Some of the criticism relates to the form of the debates and some of it relates to the substance. The first point that emerged from the interviews with participants is that the book, while a very useful tool to propagate what was discussed at the meetings, should have been translated into French rather than English. The Moroccan elites read French and they should have been targeted through this language. As Brouksi said 'the French-speaking elites are very important in Morocco and

this should be recognised. 1,000 copies sold on the French language market are more valuable in terms of impact than 5,000 sold on the Arabic language market.’ The second point that emerged is that there were too few women that took part. While this can be partly explained by the fact that women’s rights were not one of the topics for discussion and therefore no women’s rights associations were present to offer their points of view, this should not obscure the fact that there are female activists and politicians who could have contributed in one or more of the debates. The organisers point out that there was a women invited to speak in every forum held and Monjiib was particularly proud of this because of the notorious bad relations between women’s rights movements and Islamists, but it does not obscure the fact that it seemed to give the impression, particularly to secular participants, that this was a classic case of a token-woman being invited. Admittedly, it is very difficult to involve women in such initiatives though. The third and most significant problem is however that the seculars are invited and generally take part on a personal basis, while Islamists fully represent an organised movement. This point was raised specifically by Khalfi and Iharchane. While seculars therefore make a contribution to the debates through their understanding and ideas of the topic on hand, they are often not tied to any political party or group and, if they are, it is hardly a mass movement. This is not the case for Islamists and the format is therefore biased towards the seculars.

It should be pointed out that there have been two further debates (on women’s rights and Berber identity) organised in 2009 and they have partly addressed the criticism mentioned above. First of all, the debate on women’s rights was an excellent opportunity not only to have women fully participate to public debates and increase their visibility, but to also discuss what is probably one of the most divisive social issues in the country. Secondly, the discussion of Berber identity allowed for the issue of social diversity and what it means for national identity to come to the fore at a time where a number of different social groups are emerging to demand a voice in the new Morocco. Finally, two conferences on terrorism were also organised in order to move the debate on political violence forward. In this respect the follow-up to the previous debates has been quite successful in identifying important and meaningful topics.

The Answers in Brief

This section provides a summary of the answers to the central questions regarding the project.

- a.** *How do participants in the debates evaluate the debates?* The participants were overwhelmingly positive and enthusiastic about the debates. They were a rare opportunity to have discussions with different political and social actors that have radically different ideas and policy solutions for the problems of contemporary Morocco. The evaluation is positive because the debates generated dialogue and this dialogue was conducted peacefully and within democratic principles of tolerance and respect for different opinions.
- b.** *What has been the overall picture in Moroccan media about these debates?* The written press has covered these debates and the independent newspapers in particular presented a positive image. National radio and TV were present, but did not air anything. *Al Jazeera* covered one of the events and this should be considered a huge success.
- c.** *How do other civil society activists value the debates?* The majority of civil society organisations are obviously very keen on dialogue and have a positive impression of these debates. Some of them already collaborate with Islamist organisations on certain matters and welcome the opportunity to be involved in such dialogues. Islamists as well are keen on building bridges. There is however a sector of secular civil society that is still highly suspicious of Islamists and does not see much benefit in 'bringing them in from the cold.' This is true for example of many women's associations, which simply refuse to even acknowledge the possibility that Islamists might make a positive contribution to the issue of women's rights. In addition, some groups suspect Islamists of engaging in dialogue so that they can exploit the exposure they receive and even on human rights issues such as the ones that the Islamist organisation *Ennasir* brings up, there is no consensus within the human rights community that the work of the association should be supported.
- d.** *Is there any additional impact visible from printing the results of the debate?* It is very hard to gauge and measure the impact of the debates. The only tangible measure is book sales, which have been good. Another tangible development is that after the debates the *al-Adl* has dropped the requirement of allegiance to Islam that it placed on potential collaborators, although in practice this requirement had already been dropped. Personal relationships have however developed and 'clear the air' debates are always a useful starting point for more formal coalitions to occur.

Conclusions and Recommendations

There is very little doubt that this type of projects aiming at strengthening dialogue between different and at times clearly opposed political and social actors constitutes the future if meaningful democratisation in the MENA is a genuine concern of donors. There is the recognition today within the wider democratisation scholarship that political Islam needs to be engaged as its marginalisation did not produce the outcome that was expected.

Partial liberalisation, rather than conducive over time to increased openings, has stagnated in no man's land and while this might be sustainable in the short to medium period, in the longer-term the dangers of citizens' de-politicisation, which have been emerging in Morocco for a few years (Maghraoui, 2002), risk undermining the whole liberalisation project and plunge countries like Morocco into some sort of revolutionary chaos, as Brumberg warns in his study on liberalised autocracies (2002). While increased democratisation might indeed not solve the problem of political violence (Dalacoura, 2006; Gause, 2005), it would certainly lend more legitimacy to the political institutions, as more stakeholders would share into them. Some local secular actors have understood this some time ago and have progressively engaged Islamists on collaborative projects and social struggles. As Simon Levy argued, 'it is not surprising that Islam is such an important political reference because Moroccans are on average much more religious than their European counterparts. This is true for all Moroccans, including Jews. All civilisations have experienced ideological struggle based on religion and given that some of these struggles have not ended in Europe, how can we be surprised that they take place in Morocco, which has been fast-forwarded to modernity through colonialism.'

While it is true that most of these domestic collaborative initiatives had to do with foreign policy issues where consensus is easy to reach and on localised and *ad hoc* themes, there is a degree of experience of dialogue that can become a useful instrument to deepen the understanding between the two camps. In many ways the dialogue between seculars and Islamists can also be helpful to understand the differences that exist within both camps, as there are significant ideological and policy differences that characterise political Islam as well as secular political and civil society.

Until the present day, the academic recognition of the central role of dialogue between Islamists and seculars as well as the experience of local actors have not received much attention from Western policy-makers for three reasons. First of all there is still the tendency to equate Islamism with extremism, particularly when it comes to issues such as democracy and human rights. Western countries and western political actors, which are the ones that have most invested in the discourse of the promotion of democracy, have so far been incapable of intellectually accepting the notion that Islamism can be a contributor to democratic change and increased respect of human rights. This is due to two factors:

- a) The European experience of political development has been built on the perceived marginalisation of religion to the private sphere and increased democracy has been virtually synonymous with secularisation. Thus the expectation is that democracy can only be derived from and strengthened by secularisation.

- b) Islamist parties have a genuine problem when it comes to the acceptance of many liberal values that in western European political theory necessarily underpin democratic procedures. Thus, while there might be a consensus on what the necessary mechanisms of democracy are, including the notion that elected representatives have to be accountable to ordinary citizens and can be dismissed at election time if they do not perform according to the wishes of the citizenry, there is no consensus on the degree of liberalism that should underpin such democratic mechanisms of popular consent (Fuller, 2004).

Secondly, Western countries fear upsetting friendly regimes by supporting initiatives that explicitly or implicitly legitimise the proponents of political Islam. Most Western governments and international organisations still marginalise Islamist movements and exclude them from both consultations and funding. The fear of upsetting friendly regimes perceived to be the guarantors of regional stability is still dominant in many policy-making circles, particularly at a time when non-democratic actors such as China invest heavily in the region without raising concerns about democratic institutions and human rights.

Finally, the international community tends to support movements and personalities with which it has an ideological affinity. While this is certainly understandable, it is also counter-productive in the long-run because making an explicit choice of one camp over another runs the risk of furthering domestic divisions rather than promoting dialogue.

In light of all this, the IKV Pax Christi's project deserves to be praised because it challenges received notions about political Islam and concretely attempts to put in practice the values of dialogue, respect and reconciliation. The project has encountered some criticism on the part of some participants, but, generally speaking, the criticism has been very constructive. For instance it is true that a more careful selection of participants would have been needed to ensure greater female participation among the speakers. This was partly corrected in the follow-up to the original debates when the very sensitive topic of women's rights was tackled. This topic has been covered and debated greatly elsewhere in Morocco, so it maybe made sense for IKV Pax Christi and MECA Morocco to stay away from it in the first round of debates in order not to replicate what had been already done, but any dialogue between Islamists and seculars should include such a divisive issue. When it was subsequently tackled, the format had already been tried and tested ensuring a smoother development of the debate on such a delicate matter. In any case the criticism is aimed at encouraging IKV Pax Christi to continue its involvement in Morocco.

This evaluation concurs with the idea that it would be a pity to have taken such a courageous first step and end the engagement with Moroccan political and social actors. There is certainly the need for Western policy-makers, including NGOs, to have a better knowledge of social and political trends in the Arab world and these can be provided by Islamist actors because they are more embedded in society and have the pulse of such society. The successful completion of the project should be interpreted as a stepping stone for other projects that IKV Pax Christi should conduct in Morocco in order to exploit its role as frontrunner on this issue and its now well-known 'brand.' The next step for

IKV Pax Christi is to conceive how it can go forward. The public debates have now taken place, some contacts have been established and a degree of public awareness exists. How can the goodwill created in the public meetings be harnessed to generate a genuine push for change in Morocco? It seems logical that the next step would be to concentrate the attention on working out a detailed and shared platform with clear objectives to be reached.

1. The public debates discussed the different topics in a rather abstract and philosophical manner and this was a good starting point in order to highlight differences and begin a dialogue, but any initiative forward will have to deal with specific and concrete issues. One way of conceiving a new project would be to include in future only representatives and activists that can speak on behalf of clearly identifiable political formations. This is in line with the reasoning of both Khalfi and Iharchane, who thought the debates were useful, but believe also that a decisive move forward is needed. For Iharchane 'such a move, which could take place in a context that still sees the participation and sponsoring of European organisations, would be to hold much more focused debates on specific issues with a restricted number of high-ranking party officials and representative social movements where the key would be to try to manage differences. The objective of this series of encounters, which could run for a year, would be to structure dialogue around the type of reforms that in the end all parties could decide to push for: constitutional reform, electoral law and system and human rights. We need a consensual roadmap to lead us to then compete in a new system.' This is very much in the mould of the political pacts that characterised transitions in Eastern Europe and Latin America. In order to hold such specific and focused debates it would probably be necessary to involve Dutch political parties as they might provide the necessary expertise of political negotiations that is certainly going to be required. Holland is in many ways a consociational democracy where religious and class cleavages had significant importance of shaping the political system and so there might be the historical memory necessary to provide useful advice on how dialogue can lead to the solution of complicated governance issue. This is probably even more the case today with the emergence of controversial parties in Holland as well. It is not a coincidence that such a suggestion comes from Islamists as they are the actors with the most interest in initiating a change in the political system from which they feel partially or completely left out. This would be a substantial departure from the debates organised in 2007 and 2009, but could lead to a shared programmatic platform of reforms. This way forward is the most political and probably riskiest one in terms of the backlash it might provoke from the authorities and in terms of the consequences that a failure of the participants in agreeing on anything might have.
2. Rather than focusing on purely political issues and therefore supporting a context of dialogue on specific issues between political parties, IKV Pax Christi could concentrate on bringing together civil society actors, including Islamists, in order to concentrate on concrete development related issues such as illiteracy, poverty reduction or the rights of prisoners. These actors of different ideological persuasions might find common ground and activate projects or make demands on the government behind a shared platform for change. Targeting a specific issue might solve the problem of ideological differences and personal rivalries. The format could be similar to the one suggested above. In this context, the issue that might generate the most external interest is the plight of political prisoners and the human rights abuses they faced and still face. The memory of

3. There could also be the choice of reverting back to more mainstream projects excluding all Islamist groups that refuse the current rule of the political game put in place by the state authorities. These projects would continue in the long tradition of projects in the region and would evolve around the attempt to expand the area of liberal thinking by engaging groups within civil society and political parties and providing them with the necessary resources (both material and moral) to continue preaching the cause of liberalism in society. This strategy aims at draining the strength of Islamism through exclusion and investing the resources available in fostering some sort of liberalisation from above by engaging the ruling authorities and by propagating liberal ideas in society through cooperation with activists that share similar values. This is the strategy advocated by Zakaria (2004) among others. It would be however problematic to revert to this strategy for two reasons. First of all for IKV Pax Christi has invested quite a bit of 'legitimacy capital' in the dialogue between Islamists and seculars; it would certainly be detrimental to the reputation and standing of the organisation to back away from that having built a good rapport with both sets of actors precisely on its role as a 'bridge'. Secondly, from a more general point of view, it might be highly unrealistic to think that political Islam can be marginalised over the long-term, particularly if privileged local interlocutors with the West have also very troublesome democratic and liberal credentials (Cook, 2005).

There are a number of risks associated with all strategies for moving forward. The first one is the 'environmental risk', meaning that Morocco is still an authoritarian state which has both the political strength and operational capabilities of clamping down on opposition if the threat is deemed serious. This is particularly true today that the regime has recovered most of its self-confidence in dealing with the opposition and dissenting voices through repression. In addition, the growing de-politicization of the Moroccan public reinforces the regime, and, as Elakhal argued, 'Moroccan public opinion is not interested in what happens in seminars and roundtables.' Finally the monarchy controls the flow of information to the general public through radio and television. Thus, while public debates among politicians and intellectuals might be looked at suspiciously, they are not heavily interfered with because they are perceived to be unproblematic when it comes to the mobilization of public opinion. However more political meetings with the objective of creating a shared platform for change might encounter difficulties, as this would certainly indicate that the divisions among opposition actors that the regime counted and still counts on are disappearing.

The second risk is associated with the issue of relative gains versus absolute gains. In any attempt at coalition-building between different actors with different degrees of power and popularity is bound to encounter the problem of relative gains and absolute gains. Which actor is going to gain the most from effective coalition-building and form a political pact? Some movements might believe that it is not worth it to enter in such a coalition because change might spell the end of their influence or they might lose the powerful message they now have. This is even more the case when the terms of the debates they are entering are set by external actors who have preconceived views of what the end-product should look like. Thus, Islamist movements might be reluctant to enter cooperative agreements that do not acknowledge the more powerful role they have in society and the strength of their values because of the need to defer to a political experience that comes to the outside.

The third risk is the rather trite, but still real one, of the sincerity of engagement on the part of Islamist groups or organisations. In the case of Morocco, two examples suffice to highlight this dilemma. According to Elakhal, 'the participation of representatives of the *al-Adl* to the debates that see the coming together of Islamists and seculars does not have the objective of revealing the true and original discourse of the movement and its points of views as developed by Sheikh Yassine. The *al-Adl* representatives to these debates play the role of sales managers, people who are in charge of masking the real intention of the movement in order to give a make-over and make it more appealing to both domestic and international audiences. At the same time they try to give the impression that the movement is both open and democratic when in fact this is an illusion as the *al-Adl* opposes these very values. Thus, dialogue with Yassine's movement will never lead to a convergence between the *al-Adl* and the other political parties because the *al-Adl* has its own social and political project which is the complete opposite to the one that the secular democrats have.' This view has found some support in academic circles outside Morocco as well (Maddy-Weitzman, 2003). The second example has to do with the association *Ennasir*. While nominally defending the human rights of political prisoners and the rights of their families on the outside not to face official discrimination, the association presents the particular problem of being close to *Jihadi Salafism*. It follows that its rhetorical commitment to human rights and democratic principles is at best suspect in the eyes of many within Moroccan civil society and in the wider international community. This is why the association has only been able to strike cooperative agreements and have joint activities with a very restricted number of actors. Obviously this analysis can be disputed on the basis that we cannot *a priori* know what a movement is really about until it fully and openly engages with other political actors in institutionalized settings from which constraints then derive and change through political learning can come, but such an analysis cannot be ignored because it is shared by a number of civil society and political actors, including the powerful women's rights movement. There is therefore the risk for external actors to pander to illiberal and undemocratic actors, providing them with resources and legitimacy to the detriment of groups that actually share similar ideals to their European counterparts. The only realistic way out of this dilemma is to initiate joint projects with Islamist organizations and monitor how the relationship develops. Rather than making *a priori* assumptions about their ethos and their ultimate goals, having joint projects with them on very specific topics or issues would allow the 'process' of running a joint project determine what these movements are about and what they wish to achieve. There are a number of issues on which such projects could be designed and it might be a better idea to start from more development oriented ones rather than sheer political issues. Again, the issue of the human rights of political prisoners and their families might be a potentially area of cooperation as would be cooperation for the provision or training on advocacy in human rights, broadly conceived, to young activists in Islamist organizations. In any case, it is only through direct cooperation on joint projects that one can see whether the Islamists are bluffing when it comes to democracy and human rights (Dagi, 2009).

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Abdelali Hamidine (vice-president *Montada El-Karama*), Rabat, January 11th , 2010.

Abdou Berrada (free-lance journalist and left-wing activist), Casablanca, February 4th, 2010.

Ahmed Benchemsi (Editor of *Tel Quel*), Casablanca, February 4th, 2010.

Ali Afkir (founding leader of *Annaji Addimouqrati*), Casablanca, January 9th, 2010.

Aziz Rabbah (member of parliament, PJD), Kenitra, February 8th 2010.

Hosni Abdelatif (journalist), Rabat, January 28th, 2010.

Larbi Messari (former minister, member of *Istiqala*), Rabat, January 11th, 2010.

Maati Monjib (MECA Maroc), Rabat, January 8th, 2010.

Mohammed Hafid (editor of *Al Hayat al Jadida*), Casablanca, February 4th, 2010. Interview conducted in Arabic.

Mohammed Khalfi (chief editor of *Attajdid*), Rabat, January 28th, 2010. Interview conducted in English.

Omar Brouksi (journalist at AFP) Rabat, February 2nd, 2010.

Omar Iharchane (cercle politique, *al-Adl*), Casablanca, January 12th, 2010.

Said Elakhal (independent researcher), Kenitra, February 4th, 2010. Interview by phone and e-mail.

Simon Levy (Jewish Museum), Casablanca, January 12th, 2010.

Taoufik Bouachrine (Chief editor and cartoonist for *Akhar Al Yaoum*) Rabat, February 10th, 2010.

² All interviews were conducted in French and in person unless otherwise stated. All translations are by the author.

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