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A Difficult Inheritance: Moroccan Society under King Muhammad VI

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This article addresses King Hasan II's legacy and the central problems facing his son and successor, Muhammad VI. These problems include the need for reform in human rights and democracy, the Islamist challenge, the role of women, and the Berber awakening. While Morocco has begun making key reforms over the past decade to better deal with these issues, in practice, even many of these reforms have been entirely stalled or only been partially implemented.

On July 23, 1999, Hasan II died after thirty-eight years as King of Morocco. In the final years under his tenure, the country underwent some reforms, and the accession of his son, Muhammad VI, added momentum to this process. Morocco, however, faces key challenges. The population is expanding, from 10 million in 1956 to 31 million in 2003, at an annual growth rate of 2.1 percent--this, despite its high infant mortality rate of 57 per thousand. As a result, the country suffers from water scarcity and unemployment has reached 20 percent, according to official figures. The real figure, however, may be much higher, and this percentage is increasing by 7 percent annually. In addition, there are major problems with accessing education, particularly in rural areas.(1)

This article highlights four challenges confronting the kingdom: 1) democratization, human rights, and the fight against corruption; 2) Islamist radicalism capitalizing on the malaise affecting Moroccan society; 3) the status of women; 4) Berber cultural and linguistic awakening.

Democratization, Human Rights, and Fighting Corruption

Despite the proliferation of political parties that predate national independence, and since 1988, the founding of non-governmental (NGO) human rights organizations, trends toward genuine democracy in Morocco were of negligible importance before the late 1990s. Human rights violations on the part of the monarchy and the governments subordinate to it abounded, while corrupt bureaucratic practices went unchecked. True, the 1996 Constitution provided for a parliament and an independent judiciary. However, under the leadership of King Hasan II, as well as under the current leadership, much of the political power within the country rests with the palace.

King Muhammad VI continues to preside over the Council of Ministers (the governing cabinet), appoints key members of the government, and may, at his discretion, terminate the tenure of any minister. He is invested with the authority to dissolve the parliament, call for new elections, and rule by decree. Since 1996, the bicameral legislature consists of a Lower House, elected every five years through universal suffrage and an upper "Chamber of Counselors," whose members are elected by various regional, local, and professional councils.(2)

In March 1998, Hasan II named a coalition government headed by opposition Socialist leader Abd al-Rahman Yussufi, composed largely of ministers drawn from the Union Socialiste des Forces Populaires (USFP) and the nationalist Istiqlal party. This was the first time since 1960 that the monarchy entrusted authority to the opposition parties in forming a government. It came in the wake of the November 1997 legislative elections as a confidence-building measure by King Hasan toward increased democratization: a clear signal to these leading parties of his intent for political unity and coexistence in order to grapple with the nation's chronically neglected domestic problems. Some could argue that Hasan considered reforms necessary to save the monarchy, especially once he would be gone and his inexperienced successor would need to cope with the changes. In line with this thinking, one might add that the monarch preferred to involve the opposition in this experience so that, in case of failure, all sides would share the blame.(3)

A veteran Moroccan nationalist, Prime Minister Yussufi served at one time as the editor of *al-Tahrir*, the daily newspaper of the Union Nationale des Forces Populaires (UNFP), the group from which arose the USFP in 1975. He had been imprisoned in December 1959 for allegedly taking part in a plot against then Crown Prince Hasan. In the 1970s, Yussufi was sentenced to death in absentia but received a royal pardon in 1980. At King Hasan II's urging, the Yussufi government declared its intentions to modernize the nation's administrative and judicial structures, and to liberalize the economic and political systems.(4)

Unlike in previous governments, the Yussufi cabinet of March 1998 to October 2002

encouraged sweeping reforms, including completely free elections and the "closing of the books" on Morocco's dark human rights past. In November 1998, the government announced measures to ensure wider human rights activism, including training teachers and developing curricula to promote human rights in elementary schools.(5)

Human rights and democratic reforms were inextricably linked when the matter of the forced disappearance of the monarchy's political opponents came up before and following Hasan II's death. Since 1998, the Yussufi government had pledged to ensure that such policies would not reoccur and to disclose as much information as possible on past cases. Many of those who disappeared were members of the military implicated in attempts to overthrow the government and monarchy in 1971-1972. Others were inhabitants of the Western Sahara occupied by Morocco in the 1970s, as well as Moroccans who supported their territorial claims. Most of those who disappeared were held in secret prison camps, notably the infamous Tazmamart prison colony, while others were killed.

In the final two years of Hasan's tenure, the Yussufi government was already allowed to free many detainees; however, the most important gestures came under Muhammad VI, who facilitated the release of thousands of prisoners between the end of 1999 and 2003. Simultaneously, leading exiled political opponents or their families were granted permission to return to Morocco, such as the Marxist activist Abraham Serfaty and the family of the late Mehdi Ben Barka, an opponent of King Hasan killed by the Moroccan secret service in Paris during the 1960s. At the same time, hundreds of Moroccan families continued to be deprived of information about missing relatives by the regime.(6)

Violations of democratic principles, especially freedom of expression and press, began under King Muhammad V between 1956 and 1961, and extended into the era of Hasan II and Muhammad VI. In theory at least, the 1996 Constitution provides for freedom of expression. Further, in the past two decades the regime has tolerated the publication and dissemination of a vast array of newspapers and journals in French and Arabic belonging to both political parties and politically independent organizations. Nonetheless, the Palace and the government restrict press freedom in certain areas. A 1958 decree, still in effect, authorizes the government to register and license domestic newspapers and journals. The authorities can thus use licensing to prohibit the publication of data that they claim crosses the threshold of tolerable dissent.(7)

A good example of this can be found in the sanctions adopted against newspapers that delved into sensitive dossiers about past political opponents of the Palace. This proved to be very costly to three popular publications: the French-language *Le Journal*, its Arabic sister publication *al-Sahifa*, and *Demain*. In December 2000, Yussufi banned the three weeklies for publishing and commenting on a letter dating from the early 1970s which implicated Moroccan socialist politicians, including Yussufi himself, in an abortive 1972 coup against King Hasan II. The restrictions were enforced despite Muhammad VI's pledge to eliminate all forms of press

ensorship. Justifying the ban, Minister of Culture and Communication Muhammad Achaari argued that the newspapers had "launched campaigns against the political stability of Morocco and its democratic experience."(8)

However, these newspapers were allowed to resume their publication soon thereafter, due in no small measure to pressure on the Moroccan government from international human rights organizations and the Committee to Protect Journalists. These groups warned the king that renewed censorship would damage Morocco's prospects for foreign trade and investment.(9)

Within months of *Le Journal* re-opening (under the name *Le Journal Hebdomadaire*), its troubles reemerged when two of its officials were sentenced to short prison terms and heavy fines for defamation by then Foreign Minister Muhammad Benaissa. The minister cited articles accusing him of corruption and squandering public funds in real estate transactions while serving as Morocco's ambassador to the United States. On November 21, 2001, Ali Mrabet, editor of *Demain*, received a four-month jail sentence and a fine for "disseminating false information likely to disturb the public peace."(10)

The growing chorus of protests pertaining to violations of democratic principles and corruption included international and local human rights groups. In the late 1980s and the 1990s, NGO's had urged Hasan II to enhance liberties and lay the groundwork for a modern civil society. For instance, they pointed out that the parliamentary elections of November 1997 were not completely honest. They failed, however, to muster sufficient support to call for new elections.(11)

Despite the existence of many human rights groups, the authorities only recognized three multi-issue organizations: the Organisation Marocaine des Droits de l'Homme (OMDH), the League Marocaine de Défense des Droits de l'Homme (LMDH), and the Comité de la Défense des Droits Humains (CDDH).(12) The OMDH, most important of the three, made a wide range of demands on the monarchy:

End forced and arbitrary detentions, rehabilitate opposition forces that "disappeared" and accelerate the compensation of the victims' families.

Remove and declassify dossiers about former opponents of the political system who "disappeared" and cease all intimidation of their close relatives.

Reexamine the files on past use of torture and delve into cases that in the past were classified as death by suicide or natural death.

Limit the application of physical force against opposition elements.

Prohibit all forms of meddling by the Ministry of the Interior in the implementation of

justice, particularly in rural areas.

Reform the justice system, in consultation with attorneys, professors and human rights activists who are experts on legal issues.(13)

The combined efforts of such groups have brought significant results during the reign of Muhammad VI, such as payment of compensation to relatives of deceased political prisoners, as well as the reduction of the ability to apply physical force to prisoners. Owing to their démarche before the palace and the Yussufi government, Muhammad VI significantly curtailed the powers of the Ministry of the Interior, following the ouster in November 1999 of Driss Basri, its powerful and dictatorial minister. Still, the authorities and parliament have yet to declassify dossiers and totally end arbitrary arrests.

IslamiST Radicalism

Islamist groups criticized Morocco's monarchs and governments even more than did those advocating liberal democracy. They called for a return to traditions, a judicial system based solely or mainly on the Shari'a, and the Islamization of governmental and financial institutions. Modernists and Islamists did share two common interests, however. Both demanded more freedom of the press and the release of political prisoners.

Morocco's problems have provided opportunities for Islamist movements to arise and claim they possess the best and perhaps only solutions. These groups include the barely tolerated Jama'at al-Adl wal-Ihsan (Justice and Charity), founded and led by Shaykh Abd al-Salam Yasin; the legally recognized Hizb al-Adala wal-Tanmiyya (The Party for Justice and Development) headed by Dr. Abd al-Karim Khatib and Abd al-Illah Benkiran; and the clandestine Salafiya Jihadiya (Salafist Jihad).

Al-Adl wal-Ihsan (al-Adl hereafter) was founded in 1981 by Shaykh Abd al-Salam Yasin, a brilliant Islamic scholar and orator equal to the most dynamic Islamist leaders and thinkers in other countries. Yasin was born in the southern Moroccan countryside in 1928 and raised in Marrakesh. After having acquired a deep Islamic and sufficient French education, he worked in the 1960s and early 1970s as an inspector at the Ministry of National Education. Yasin knows several European languages and has written as many as thirty books on Islamic jurisprudence.

In 1974, Yasin made his political debut when he sent a 114-page letter entitled al-Islam wal-Tufan (Islam and the Deluge), to King Hasan II, admonishing him to hold firmly to the teachings of Islam and forsake the "un-Islamic" policies he had been pursuing. In the letter Yasin attributed

to the monarchy imperialism, decadent Westernization, and social injustice. He challenged the king to "get rid of his advisers and entourage (makhzan), seek the advice of the propagators of the da'wa (those who preach in favor of Islamic revivalism) after abolishing all political parties, establish an Islamic economy, and...pronounce repentance loudly and clearly."(14)

The shaykh's demands landed him in a psychiatric hospital-prison for the next three years. Upon his release, Yasin published the Islamic periodical al-Jama'a (The Group), setting the stage for the foundation of his movement. With the banning of al-Jama'a in 1983, he began publishing the daily al-Subh (The Morning). This newspaper was also banned and Yasin was sentenced to two years in prison. Though partly tolerated, al-Adl suffered from systematic police harassment. Scores of its members were arrested, tortured, and sentenced to long prison terms. Yasin was arrested again in December 1989 and placed under house arrest for the next decade.(15)

The government's repressive policy vis-à-vis al-Adl and its top leader notwithstanding, the movement survived. Indeed, contrary to the monarch's expectations, its influence expanded. It won considerable popular appeal after the 1991 Gulf War, mobilizing 10,000 demonstrators for an anti-American rally.(16) Al-Adl continued to organize cells as well as small Islamist charity and welfare societies providing social services, food, and medicine to the poor and arranging marriages.(17) These efforts enjoyed some successes,(18) and on that basis, Yasin claimed significant support for his movement.(19) In the 1990s, it also worked to organize Moroccan workers and students in France and even on some U.S. campuses.(20)

Since 1999, the movement's student department within Morocco has gained support in law, humanities and medicine faculties at various universities. Yet, Al-Adl's efforts to infiltrate the well-established militant Union Nationale des Etudiants Marocains (UNEM)--the largest student union affiliated with the USFP--failed for two basic reasons. The USFP was then in control of the government under Yussufi's premiership and managed to foil the attempt through diverse manipulative strategies. Secondly, the leftist forces within UNEM fought hard to expel Islamists. (21)

It is estimated that beyond its hundreds of thousands of supporters--many of them beneficiaries of al-Adl's charitable, educational, and recreational associations--the group's active membership in 2002 reached between 30,000 and 50,000. One mystery about this movement is the extent of its financial support from foreign governments. The relentless efforts to trace al-Adl's finances to Iran, Sudan, and Afghanistan notwithstanding, the Moroccan authorities have thus far been unable to prove any reliance on those countries. Its budget is known to depend largely on donations and membership dues or on Moroccan emigres to Europe and North America (each active member is obliged to contribute 2.5 percent of his income).(22)

Hasan II's death and Muhammad VI's ascendance to the throne only stimulated al-Adl to

increase its activities. This came about partly because its members sensed that the new monarch planned far-reaching social reforms contradicting Islamic principles, and also because of the new regime's readiness to grant greater freedom of political and cultural expression. The incentive to challenge the authorities over certain social reforms is best illustrated by the events following Yussufi's decision to take initial steps to reform the *Mudawwana*, the Code of Personal Status based on the Malikite school of Sunni Islamic law.

The government intended to revise the code by bestowing on Moroccan women greater equality with men. It called for a "Plan of Action for Women's Integration and Development" to address the issues of raising the age of marriage for girls from fifteen to eighteen; granting women a voice in Islamic courts to present their side in divorce cases; canceling the guardianship requirement for adult women; outlawing polygamy except in certain cases; and allowing women the right to half of their husbands' property after divorce, as well as to maintain custody of their children if they remarry.

All the Islamist factions in the country, with al-Adl in the forefront, were now determined to stage mass rallies against the proposed policy, particularly once it became known that women's and other non-governmental advocacy organizations were about to organize a demonstration in Rabat favoring reforms. On March 13, 2000, al-Adl and the legally-recognized Hizb al-Adala wal-Tanmiyya (al-Adala hereafter) launched a big rally in Casablanca to denounce the Yussufi government's "Plan of Action." Called the "One Million March," the Islamist manifestation proved far more successful (hundreds of thousands perhaps even a million participated), than the "Women's Day" counterpart in Rabat, which only garnered 40,000 participants.

Despite certain ideological differences between al-Adala and al-Adl, they collaborated in chartering thousands of buses and lorries to ferry supporters to Casablanca. The "show of force" between the Islamists and the pro-women rally was not only confined to women's issues. According to Ibrahim Ibrash, a political scientist at Rabat University, this was a card played both by the Islamists, and the pro-USFP government as well as other secularist and reformist groups. It served as a testing ground to determine the extent of grassroots support each group could muster. (23)

Among the hundreds of thousands of Islamist marchers, there were numerous veiled women who claimed that any reform granting women emancipation at the expense of the *mudawwana* would lead to the collapse of the family, destruction of Islamic values, and debauchery of every sort.(24) The Islamist rally strengthened the position of al-Adl despite Yasin's prolonged detention. Overwhelmed by the anti-reformist trend, the government chose to shelve its "Plan of Action" indefinitely.

Equally impressive was the September 2000 pro-Palestinian rally in support of the second

Intifada, to which al-Adl and other Islamist factions attracted nearly one million participants. It became the largest anti-Israel affair ever launched in the Arab world. A separate Palestinian solidarity event organized by the government attracted no more than several thousand demonstrators.(25)

Yasin was finally released in May 2000. Interior Minister Ahmad Midawi disclosed to parliament that he would have freedom of movement and speech. However, he would not be allowed to visit his supporters in prison, most of whom were university students. Moreover, al-Adl could still not present candidates for parliamentary and municipal elections because it did not follow al-Adala in recognizing the religious and political legitimacy of the Alawite dynasty.(26) The movement was allowed to initiate peaceful rallies and social or charitable functions. Forbidden to disseminate its ideas in mosques, it relied on an extensive network of organizers, cassettes, the internet, and a limited circulation of publications.(27)

Yasin has consistently made known his utter distaste for modern economic and social values. He bitterly complained about "the arrogance" of the European Union and the U.S. economy. In striking similarity to Usama Bin Ladin and the Egyptian Shaykh Abd al-Rahman, Yasin attacked what he called the symbolic superiority of modern skyscrapers like New York's World Trade Center:

The modern age is in crisis. Let us not be deluded by what others have built, such as scientific skyscrapers strewn all around....For them, the human being has no meaning except the egoism of the strong, the wasteful consumption of the wealthy, the pleasures of the rich, and the death of the poor in Somalia, of starvation and civil war, or in Bosnia of annihilation, savage slaughter and ethnic cleansing....(28)

Nonetheless, his rhetoric fell short of condoning terrorism as a measure to demolish these symbols.

What specifically are Yasin's grievances with the Moroccan political system and where would he like to lead his country? It is no secret that, had al-Adl been permitted to take part in the September 2002 legislative elections, the movement would have attained an electoral victory reminiscent of the support won by Abbasi Madani's FIS in the Algerian elections of 1990-1992, or, at the very least, would have made substantial gains. Yasin did not conceal his hatred and distrust for the late Hasan II and regarded the governments in power since independence in 1956 as powerless, controlled behind-the-scenes by the pro-palace makhzan "shadow kitchen

cabinet."

In a memorandum of November 1999 about "The King of the Poor," the title bestowed on the new King by the Moroccan people, Yasin wrote that after the honeymoon of promises, harsh realities would remind the youth of its unenviable lot. Once parades and cavalcades would be over, "winged poetry will give way to the prose of unemployment and destitution." He contended that the makhzan, which under Muhammad VI never ceased to undermine the Yussufi government, hoped it could delete from people's memory decades of despotism and the torture of political prisoners at the Tazmamart dungeons. But the people would not forget the despotic rule of Hasan II, that "Godless" self-styled "Commander of the Faithful." Fooled for a long time by "a community of political schemers," the masses expected sweeping changes, not hollow words. The unemployed and drug addicts were fleeing the "ungrateful society" and the young only saw bleak economic prospects.(29)

What should the young King do? Yasin, who characterizes, almost affectionately, young Muhammad VI as "prince charming," highlighted several points. Muhammad VI had to obliterate illiteracy (53 percent of all Moroccans were illiterate), chronic unemployment, and raise the extremely low salaries paid to ordinary Moroccans. Yasin spoke of approximately 100,000 graduates of higher education--physicians, engineers, teachers, and technocrats--"brooding over their helplessness and deception in the local cafe." Basing his data on UN statistics, he remarked that Morocco in 1998-1999 was rated far behind neighboring Tunisia and Algeria; 12 million Moroccans lived below the poverty line, with less than 10 dirhams (one dollar) per day; almost three-quarters earned less than the guaranteed minimum wage of 1,600 dirhams (\$160) per month; and shanty towns proliferated at an alarming rate due to increased migration from rural to urban areas.(30)

Fighting governmental corruption was another issue broached by Yasin as a serious challenge to Muhammad VI. He referred contemptuously to the Ominum Nord Afrique (ONA), the leading Moroccan industrial conglomerate dominated by King Hasan and his closest confidants, which granted development project contracts to private entrepreneurs in return for hefty bribes. The royal family's control over the company was always complete, claims Yasin. It enabled Hasan II to amass as much as \$50 billion dollars, money that should be given to the people to reduce their nation's colossal public debt, which accounted in 1999 for nearly 36 percent of the GDP:

Nothing escaped the royal greedy attention--agriculture, (the) food-processing industry, the tourist trade and luxury hotels where the guests of our dear King (Hasan) were received. These were next to nothing before the fabulous wealth comprising, among others, banking, insurance business, sugar refineries, oil industry, financial engineering,

state-owned mining companies,... fishing, the chemical industry, printing, transport and textiles.(31)

Corruption had indeed reached dimensions that no Moroccan could ignore. One of the greatest corruption scandals in modern Moroccan history was the social security embezzlement scheme that came to light in 1999. According to a report submitted to the Moroccan parliament, the National Social Security Fund had lost \$4.3 billion over a period of thirty years due to mismanagement and embezzlement. This has been the fourth major financial scandal in recent years, which have cost the nation \$15 billion, an amount equal to Morocco's foreign debt.(32)

Equally important on Yasin's agenda when addressing demands to the new King was the growth of drug addicts. This dilemma, he believed, would not be solved as long as the avariciousness of drug magnates and the economic dependence of the peasants in the northern provinces on cannabis prompted the production and marketing of hashish and other drugs.(33)

Finally, Muhammad VI had to right a major wrong committed by his father: Morocco's prolonged secret complicity with Israel and "Zionist Jewry." In leveling this accusation, Yasin revealed (with some degree of accuracy) the contribution of Moroccan Jews living in Israel to the special links between Rabat and Jerusalem. Yasin distorted this to claim that Hasan's dependence on Jewish support locally and internationally transformed the nation's system of government into a "Judaocracy." This harsh portrayal of both the Jews and the monarchy resembled the contents of the "Protocols of the Elders of Zion," as evidenced in the following statement by Yasin:

Who does not know (King Hasan's) affection and respect for cosmopolitan Zionist Jewry? Have (the) Moroccan people not been astonished by the television show of rabbis blessing and praying for the "Commander of the Faithful"? The American press, namely The Washington Post, has disclosed how the CIA and the Mossad ensured the safety of the late King and how, in return for that, he bestowed his favors on his Zionist Jewish friends. As a sign of gratitude, the Jewish nation named seventy avenues and streets in Israel after the "dearly departed." (The) Zionist government and organizations led by Jews of Moroccan origin took part in the Israeli ceremonies dedicated to the "unforgettable friend." Declared friends of the Zionist Jews, Hasan spared no effort to please the "chosen people."

Muhammad VI should therefore disassociate himself totally from his father's policies of conniving against Islam, the Moroccan people, and their Palestinian brethren by turning his back on Jewish-American media tycoons.(34)

Yasin issued an implicit warning. The young king had to make a choice between his father's policies, a "depraved and pompous tradition," or break with that disgraceful past and "atone for the crimes he witnessed with obvious embarrassment." The removal by Muhammad VI in 1999 of Interior Minister Driss Basri, a Hasan appointee who put many Islamists in prison, could only be the beginning. The palace had to make changes based on the solid foundations of Islam.
(35)

Yasin dismissed all accusations that al-Adl intended to seize power through violent means. Although he did not rule out long-range ambitions, Yasin pledged that for several years al-Adl would continue to define itself as an educational and missionary association rather than a political party. If and when al-Adl chose to seek political office, the process would be devoid of violence: "We do not wish to eliminate anyone. We are the ones who are being punished by the authorities." Yasin also asserted that his organization had no links with Islamists beyond Morocco's borders.(36)

Unlike al-Adl, al-Adala is a political party whose leaders are prepared to participate in the political system and are allowed to do so. One of the party's main leaders, Abd al-Allah Benkiran, stressed this point in the September 2002 legislative election campaign: "We seek a gradual role for us in parliament...not a landslide that would cause fears among the pro-Western elite and opposition Islamists."(37)

Some regard al-Adala's leaders as moderates, but François Soudan, who has studied al-Adala's activities, believes that it is a wolf in sheep's clothing. He has shown that al-Adala is really two movements: the original moderate al-Adala, led by veteran Moroccan politician, Dr. Abd al-Karim al-Khatib, and the Islamist-oriented al-Tawhid wal-Islah, or, in French, Mouvement Pour l'Unification et le Réforme (MUR). Both groups merged in 1993 under the banner of al-Adala after MUR's Bekiran failed to merge with the Istiqlal party. After the merger, the MUR leadership rose to become the real force behind the unified al-Adala and contributed markedly to its Islamization.(38)

An al-Adala spokesman associated with the MUR faction, Mustafa Ramid, disclosed that his party would like Morocco to apply the punishments for criminals as decreed in the Qur'an, such as the cutting off of thieves' hands. Al-Adala also plans to enforce the Shari'a in all aspects of social and political life. Similarly, Abd al-Aziz Rabbah, a senior party activist, confessed that al-Adala intended to phase out the liquor industry altogether and shut down the nightclubs and bars that serve Moroccan-brewed beer. The party also evinced repugnance toward young women

wearing the latest Western fashions. Rabbah stated in no uncertain terms that:

What we will impose are good morals, good traditions, good practices. We do not accept that a woman goes out almost naked on the streets, it is immoral. (Amputation) should be "a last resort" for otherwise incorrigible thieves. We are not going to cut a small person who cannot find enough to eat.(39)

Perhaps the major beneficiary of the legislative elections of September 2002, the most democratic Morocco had ever witnessed, was al-Adala. In the November 1997 elections, al-Adala took 14 seats in the 325-seat lower chamber of parliament. In September 2002, when it became clear that the popular al-Adl was unable (and unwilling) to take part in the political process, al-Adala tripled its strength and reached third place after the USFP and Istiqlal, with 42 seats.(40)

However, al-Adala's election gains were not translated into political representation in the new cabinet. On October 9, 2002, Muhammad VI appointed as prime minister the politically independent Driss Jettou, a prosperous 58-year old entrepreneur known for his adroit commercial negotiating skills.(41) Despite the democratic elections, by virtue of the 1996 Constitution, the palace could still choose the prime minister and fill such key cabinet posts as Defense, Foreign Affairs, Justice and Islamic Affairs. The new government consisting of thirty-one ministers was largely dominated by the USFP (with 50 seats in Parliament) and Istiqlal (48 seats). Six other political parties were part of the coalition government: mostly leftist in outlook but also some conservatives loyal to the Palace.

That democratic elections in Morocco still suffer from significant shortcomings is best illustrated in the Jettou government's decision on April 22, 2003 to postpone elections scheduled for June 2003, including those for new chambers of commerce. This decision, adopted jointly with the USFP and Istiqlal ministers and deputies in Parliament, was politically motivated and bore direct relevance to al-Adala's political prospects. It appears that the latter made major inroads early on in preparing for these elections while the more secular parties failed to campaign sufficiently among Moroccan voters. To enable the major political parties that formed the government to gain more time for an effective campaign, Muhammad VI agreed to delay the elections until September 2003.

Assessing this decision, L'Economiste du Maroc observed that:

The fear of seeing al-Adala gain support by leaps and bounds and win over several major cities in the upcoming elections has its merits. In the opinion of many, this party would reap (political benefits) by exploiting the resentment in the Moroccan street against (America's) war against Iraq.(42)

The non-Islamist parties recalled the first Gulf War against Iraq in 1991, when al-Adl gained strength by promoting solidarity with Iraq against the American invasion, or the support garnered by FIS that same year in Algeria for much the same reason.

Ideologically, al-Adl and al-Adala are hardly distinguishable from each other when raising social and cultural issues or pressing the authorities to emphasize Islamic education. Both advocate a Shari'a-oriented social agenda, a total ban on alcohol, segregated beaches for men and women, and the establishment of Islamic banking.(43)

The same applies to the Arab-Israeli conflict. In fact, al-Adala often outbids al-Adl in its anti-Israel militancy, including unequivocal support for the Lebanese Hizballah. Two examples verify this point. First, in 2000, the party's Secretary-General Abd al-Karim al-Khatib reacted vigorously to then French Prime Minister Lionel Jospin's attacks on Hizballah terrorist acts against Israel. He sent Jospin a letter of protest accusing him of "lacking diplomatic tact" and of damaging France's otherwise positive image among Muslims, insisting that Hizballah's struggle is not terrorism:

(It is a form of resistance--the right of people to struggle against colonialism. (Your statements) are proof of your affection for and links to international Zionism as well as of your designs against the people of the Middle East.... We believe that the Islamic and national struggle in Palestine and southern Lebanon is part of a Jihad, a legitimate war, and we offer it our full support. If there is any form of terrorism (in the region) it is to be attributed to Israel, which occupies Arab and Islamic territories and engages in violence against civilians, killing children, women, and old people....

Such attacks on Hizballah, he added, would not only endanger French interests in the Arab world but might increase hostility toward the many Muslims living in France. He asked Jospin to retract his statement.(44)

A second example is intermixed with anti-American sentiments. *Al-Tajdid* (Renewal), al-Adala's daily newspaper, published an article in May 2002 that read: "They Use Our Money to Kill Our Children in Palestine." The aim of the article and of other types of attacks throughout 2002 was to initiate a campaign to boycott American products in Morocco, from Marlboro to McDonald's.(45)

Al-Adala made known its disapproval of Moroccan-based U.S. companies for "contributing to Jewish funds," and, in the words of Muhammad Yatim (one of the party's members of parliament), "We have information that McDonald's (headquarters) in... Illinois, pays substantial assistance to a Chicago-based Jewish charity." Physical harassment in Casablanca and Rabat against McDonald's customers led the government to stop the boycott, fearing it could harm the economy. The boycott coincided with Morocco's efforts to enhance its trade relations with the United States at a time when it sought to establish a bilateral commercial pact with the United States.(46)

On the social status of women in Moroccan society, al-Adl and al-Adala also share common ground. When questioned in May 2000 about his position on women, Yasin offered a vague response: "I wish for the woman to be granted her rights and I oppose a situation (whereby) women are dominated by men." Similarly, he refused to make clear his position on the March 1999 government "Plan of Action" over the *mudawwana*. Yet, practically speaking, al-Adl has opposed any such reforms.(47)

Al-Adala also opposed changes but it did encourage the participation of women in the party, including the charismatic, well-educated Bassina Haqqawi. After the September 2002 elections, four of its forty-two elected deputies were women. In a position paper just before the elections, al-Adala stated that during the early years of Islam, the *ulama* (religious clerics) and lay leadership had not contested women's involvement in politics.(48) Al-Adala concluded: "Women should play an important role in developing the (political community) and this does not necessarily signify negligence on their part of the vital role they play within the household. The Islamist party calls on its institutions to recruit women voters and activists."(49) But the document does not make any mention of social and judicial reforms on their behalf.

Whereas al-Adl and al-Adala insisted that their struggle against Western secularism would be non-violent and aimed at educating the public about Islamic virtues, several Islamist underground organizations chose a different path. Such was the case with the Salafiya Jihadiya (Salafist Jihad) group. Like al-Adl, it longed for the revival of the caliphate, but this, it said, could not to be accomplished peacefully. The Salafiya Jihadiya was influenced by external Islamist ideologies which called for the violent overthrow of the so-called "Jahili" regimes (referring to the pre-Islamic "unenlightened" period). Its spiritual heroes included the Egyptians Sayyid Qutb and Shaykh Umar Abd al-Rahman; Umar Mahmud Umar, the London preacher; and Usama bin Ladin.

(50)

Founded in the early 1990s by Moroccan volunteer fighters who returned home from the anti-Soviet struggle in Afghanistan, Salafiya Jihadiya was led by twelve men including Muhammad Fezzazi in Tangier, Umar Haduchi in Tetouan, and Zakariyya Miludi in Casablanca. On the eve of the September 2002 elections, when Salafiya Jihadiya had been weakened by large-scale arrests, it comprised as many as 400 zealous militants intent on martyrdom.(51)

Until his arrest in August 2002, Miludi, Salafiya Jihadiya's supreme commander, encouraged acts of violence against the police, drug dealers, and consumers of alcohol. Soudan notes that between 1992 and 2002, the group was strengthened and consolidated through careful recruitment in the large shantytowns, organizing into cells of three to four activists each, and receiving military training in apparently through al-Qa'ida. In Summer 2002, many of its activists and three Saudis were arrested in Casablanca, allegedly for plotting terrorist acts.(52)

Moroccan authorities reported in June 2002 that an airport security officer in Casablanca and two other Moroccans had also been arrested as part of an investigation into a suspected al-Qa'ida plot to attack U.S. and British ships in the Straits of Gibraltar and set off bombs inside Morocco. At least several of the Moroccans had been affiliated with Salafiya Jihadiya and were apparently trained in al-Qa'ida's camps in Afghanistan.(53) Upon being apprehended, they provided information to the authorities about the logistical help given to them by Salafiya Jihadiya and on the role of Moroccan Islamists abroad in forging Salafiya's relations with al-Qa'ida.(54)

The Moroccan government's claim that these Islamists were determined to become martyrs is an interesting phenomenon. Hitherto this practice was virtually non-existent in the Maghreb, not even among the extremist fringes of the Algerian GIA. The arrests, however, did not put a stop to the violence. In fact, the violence escalated. On May 16, 2003, a series of terrorist suicide bombings occurred in Casablanca. Twenty-nine Moroccans and European nationals were killed, not including a dozen Islamist martyrs. Jewish institutions, the Farah Hotel (where foreign tourists and businessmen stayed), and, among other places, a popular restaurant frequented by Europeans, were badly damaged by the bombings. At least 5,000 Moroccans were detained and interrogated by the authorities, assisted in the process by European and FBI terror specialists.(55)

According to information communicated by the Moroccan government, the terrorists belonged to an offshoot faction of Salafiya Jihadiya, called al-Sira al-Mustaqim ("The Right Path"). The suicide bombers ranged in age from 20 to 24, were unemployed, and dwelled in the Sidi Moumen, one of Casablanca's worst slums. After searching this neighborhood and the houses of the suicide bombers, the authorities uncovered written propaganda sermons of Abu Qatada, a religious leader living in London. The police also found instruction manuals on making explosives, which may have been provided by al-Qa'ida, and ingredients to manufacture them.(56)

Status of Women

The Moroccan 1996 Constitution stipulates that women are equal citizens to men in all aspects of life. In practice, however, women face discrimination even within the law. A good example of this pertains to family estate laws that are based on the previously mentioned *mudawwana*. Based on this Code of Personal Status, women inherit as a rule only half as much as male heirs. Moreover, even when the law provides for equal status, cultural norms often prevent them from exercising their rights. When a woman inherits property, male relatives tend to pressure her to relinquish her interests.(57)

Discrimination against women is more clearly reflected in matters relating to marriage and divorce. In order to marry, a woman is usually required to obtain the consent of her legal guardian, which in most cases is her father. This issue has been hotly debated by human rights, women's and other Moroccan advocacy groups since the 1990s and has led to demand for reforms in this domain.(58)

An equally pressing problem for reform is the divorce issue. Under Islamic law, a man can repudiate his wife outside the court and deprive her of their joint income and property. Alternatively, if a woman is determined to seek a divorce, she has few practical options. She may offer her husband money, yet the latter must agree to the divorce and can specify the amount to be paid, which is almost always quite high. She may also file for a judicial divorce if her husband marries a second wife, or if he abandons her. However, divorce procedures in these cases are protracted and legally complicated.(59)

By far, the most serious problem encountered by many women is spousal violence. The local press, country reports by international human rights groups, and data furnished by representatives of other non-governmental agencies, concur that acts of violence against women in Morocco is widespread. In the fall of 2000, a survey among young urban women across the country found that 75 percent expressed fear that their husbands would resort to violence against them. Of those interviewed, 35.8 percent claimed to have already been victimized.(60)

These findings are grimmer when applied to individual villages, cities or shantytowns. They clearly substantiate that complaining about violence remains a taboo in Moroccan society. Thus, in March 2003, a survey in Fez revealed that while 7 women out of 10 were victimized, 5 of 10 did not report it.(61) Conducted by the association Initiatives for Women's Rights and Protection, the study confirms that women sustained several different kinds of violence ranging from physical (49.5 percent), psychological (66.4 percent), sexual (26.7 percent), and material (16.7

percent). The study shows, moreover, that women aged 20 to 40 represented 63.9 percent of violence victims and, the younger the age at the first marriage, the worse the violence. The women's level of education was irrelevant since 40.3 percent of the victims received secondary and higher education.(62)

Though a battered wife has the right to complain to the police, in reality she would do so only if prepared to bring criminal charges.(63) While physical abuse is legal grounds for divorce, a Moroccan court would grant it provided the woman is able to present two witnesses to her abuse. This anachronism and the fact that spousal violence is treated at worst with utmost leniency, discourages most women from reporting acts of violence to the authorities.(64)

It is true that in the past twenty years more educated women have entered careers in law, medicine, education, and government service than previously--there are even women pilots. However, they still constitute a relatively small elite. Government reports indicate that, whereas male illiteracy was estimated at 41 percent in 1998, the illiteracy rate among women stood at 67 percent throughout Morocco (compared to 90 percent in 1960), with 89 percent illiteracy among women in the rural areas.(65) According to a May 2000 survey of women across the country conducted by the League Démocratique pour les Droits de la Femme (LDDF), a leading local women's rights organizations, only 41.4 percent of women completed their primary education, whereas 50.7 percent never enrolled in school at all. As for the number of years women frequented school, 39.7 percent never went beyond the primary school certificate, that is, five to six years, and only 15 percent completed all secondary school education leading to the baccalauréat.(66)

Politically, until the legislative elections of September 2002, women were largely excluded in the decision-making process. In Parliament, women's representation at the time was only 0.6 percent out of 325 in the House of Representatives (Lower House). The same applied to government, where only one woman served as minister-delegate (a junior-level, not full-fledged portfolio). To this day, only two out of 275 seats in the Senate are occupied by women, and at the municipal level, only 0.34 percent of counselors are women. In fall 2002, Morocco was at the bottom of the list of women active in government affairs, just below Djibouti, the Comoro Islands, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Kuwait and Saudi Arabia.(67)

In the final years of Hasan II's reign, a host of NGOs had lobbied before the Ministries of Education, Justice, Islamic Affairs and Waqf, Human Rights, Arts and Crafts, and Agricultural and Rural Development to uphold women's rights and bring about revisions in the mudawwana. Among the NGOs active in this domain were the aforementioned LDDF and the Union de l'Action Féminine (UAF). These organizations also provided shelters for battered women and taught basic hygiene, family planning, and child care.(68) Gradually, there are signs that the efforts of the LDDF and UAF were not completely in vain, although pressures originating from

Islamist and other conservative circles thus far have blocked reforms by the government. However, an increasing number of Moroccan women have felt confident enough to voice their opinions. Data published in 2003 by the Association Démocratique des Femmes du Maroc (ADFM) reports that more than 60 percent of women wanted the legal age of marriage for a young woman to be raised to 18, and an equal percentage of women favored the abolition of polygamy.(69)

It is noteworthy that the issue of women's inheritance rights within her family was never part of the government's abortive "Plan of Action". It was much too sensitive an issue for Moroccan society. Women's organizations also seemed to stir cautiously around it, preferring to engage in the somewhat less controversial struggle toward equality in property rights during divorce. Even Nouzha Skalli Benis, a feminist leader affiliated with the Parti du Progrès et du Socialisme (PPS), formerly the Communist party, upon addressing this point, stated: "We do not pose the issue of inheritance because there are many, many other things that need to be done for women without raising an issue like that."(70)

The legislative elections of September 2002 markedly improved the political stature of women in Moroccan society, with 35 women MPs elected to the Parliament's lower chamber of 325 members, or 10.8 percent. During the first half of 2002, women's organizations had pressed for greater representation in the upcoming elections. The UAF had demanded that all state and political institutions include at least 20 percent women. The UAF also reminded the political parties that their democratization policies ought not to be confined to state-society relations and should contend with gender relations.(71)

The UAF, LDDF and other women's associations had to compromise with the political parties and government and accept a quota policy of 10 percent for representation in Parliament.(72) However, compared to women's representation within the Parliament of November 1997, when only two women MPs were elected, both from the USFP, the results of the 2002 elections were nothing short of revolutionary. The new Jettou government, formed in October 2002, included one women minister and two deputy ministers (*ministres déléguées*).

This was also the first time a full-fledged female minister began to serve in the government cabinet. She is Yasima Baddu, an attorney from Casablanca and a member of the Istiqlal who was appointed Minister of Family Affairs, a new cabinet post created largely to deal with women's and children's issues. (73) The other two female cabinet appointees were Nezha Chekrouni of the USFP, a native of Meknès and a professor of linguistics, entrusted with problems encountered by Moroccans living abroad, and Nejma Thay Rhozali, Secretary of State at the Ministry of National Education in charge of battling illiteracy. She, too, is a university professor, specializing in Ethno-Semiotics.(74)

L'Opinion, the Istiqlal's French-language newspaper, has attributed part of this success to

women's associations, which have sprung up throughout Morocco since the late 1980s, and to diverse Moroccan NGOs that preached on behalf of equality in civil society.(75) The table below gives data only for women represented in the ten leading parties.

Women's Representation in the Moroccan Parliament: October 2002

<u>Political Party</u>	<u>Number of Seats</u>	<u>Women</u>	<u>% of Women</u>
USFP	50	5	10
Istiqlal	48	4	8.3
Al-Adala	42	4	8.3
National Independent Rally	41	4	8.3
Popular Movement	27	2	7.4
National Popular Movement	18	2	11.1
Constitutional Union	16	2	12.5
National Democratic Party	12	2	16.6
Front of Democratic Forces	12	2	16.6
Party for Socialist Progress	11	2	18.2

(Source: www.electionworld.org/election/morocco.htm)

Despite the electoral gains, the road to far-reaching political reforms remains an arduous one. Only 4 percent of Moroccan women are active members of political parties, according to a survey undertaken in February 2002. Only 1 out of 10 women are affiliated with the three dynamic labor unions--the independent Union Marocaine de Travail (UMT), the pro-Istiqlal Union Générale des Travailleurs Marocains (UGTM), and the USFP-affiliated Confédération Démocratique du Travail (CDT).(76)

Berber Unrest

Growing demands by the Berber population for greater cultural recognition of their heritage has weighed heavily on the monarchy and the political system throughout the 1990s and into the 21st century. In light of the Berber cultural awakening, some of its chief proponents insist that 60 percent of the Moroccan population claim Berber heritage. In addition to the "literary" written Berber, there are three Berber dialects--Tarrifit in the northern Rif Mountains, Tamazight in the Middle Atlas, and Tachelhit in the High Atlas. Whereas it is almost impossible to verify the veracity of the argument, leading experts on Berber culture contend that Morocco's Berber speakers, who are a predominantly rural inhabitants, constitute between 30 and 40 percent of the total population.(79)

The oft-repeated requests directed by Berbers toward King Hasan II to institutionalize the teaching of Berber languages in the schools led to a 1994 royal speech authorizing the necessary curricular changes. However, even before King Hasan's death the promises remained a dead letter, prompting Berber leaders to issue a warning that ignoring them may well divide Morocco in much the same way the "language war" between French and English speakers divides Canada. (80)

One privilege accorded by Hasan II was to allow official media broadcasts in Berber. Yet the broadcasts were only for limited periods each day. Doubtless, the delays in implementing the curricular reforms and allotting limited media time to Berber languages and heritage stemmed from the king's concern about hostile reactions emanating from the Islamists and other religious conservatives who were overwhelmingly Arab and who regarded ancient Berber patrimony as anti-Islamic. In June 1996, a number of Berber associations issued a communiqué petitioning the government to recognize their language as an official language and to acknowledge their culture as an integral part of Moroccan society. These associations criticized the government for refusing to register births for children bearing Berber names, discouraging the public display of the Berber alphabet, and intensifying the drive toward Arabization of names of Berber towns, villages, and historic landmarks.(81)

Likewise, the Berber associations resented that their youths were exposed, generation after generation, to the idea that Morocco is part of the Arab nation (umma al-arabiyya). Although Berbers were converted to Islam, their ethnic and linguistic purity has remained intact. Thus it would be naive to portray Morocco as Arab only and erase all the historic evidence that even after the Arab invasion in the seventh century, the Almoravid, Almohad, and Merinid Berber dynasties ruled the country for centuries.(82) Morocco, they claim, is Berber, Arab and African, whether the regime likes it or not. In reality, it is more of a Berber society "with a deceptive Arab veneer." The Berber heritage is what has made Morocco and the other Maghrebi states unique and different from the Arabs of the Middle East. Furthermore, "the Arab nationalism that the national media advocates is the real threat to our national unity, because of the anger and resistance that it creates (stirs) among millions of Moroccans."(83)

Of the three dominant Berber linguistic groups, the Amazigh movement--or the Tamazight speakers--emerged as the most vocal in seeking the government's acknowledgement of their cultural identity. In recent years, this movement has become well organized within its local communities in order to denounce the marginalization of Amazigh culture and language. Moroccan newsstands and bookstores in all the major cities are now filled with new magazines and other publications that provide articles about Amazigh culture.(84)

The controls on political expression have loosened since Muhammad VI ascended to the throne and Berber activist organizations have become better financed.(85) In March 2000, representatives of the Amazigh group submitted to the government a "Berber Manifesto." It called on the state to recognize Tamazight as a national language, teach Tamazight in schools, license a Berber television station, allot government funds to expedite development in historically neglected areas, and end restrictions on registering Berber names for their children.(86)

The turning point of translating promises into genuine concessions and reforms came in the wake of a speech by Muhammad VI on July 30, 2001, when he gave concrete expression for the first time to a "Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture." By a royal decree (*zahir*), dated October 17, 2001, the King gave birth to the institute and provided it with legal authority and adequate financial resources. Its mission was to promote, by every means possible, the conservation, distribution, and education of the Berber language and culture of Morocco. Besides collecting and preserving the numerous expressions of the Amazigh culture, the Institute's responsibilities would include the preparation of standardized curricular materials for the introduction of Berber into the schools.(87)

Conclusion

In an article in 2001 for *Jane's Intelligence Digest*, Stephen Ulph issued a perceptive pessimistic warning. For all the liberalization noises made by Muhammad VI, he wrote, "the trenches dug deep in Moroccan society through decades-long influence of corruption on the one hand, and the lack of progress on the other, will require the king's application in promoting reform to be nothing short of dynamic. Any faltering now, which may well be forced upon him by the regime's structural incapacities, risks exposing Morocco to Algeria's choice--a slide into autocracy or a military dictatorship."(88)

It may be that Ulph's concerns that Moroccan society is following in Algeria's footsteps are premature. Yet his suggestion that Muhammad VI dispense with the anachronistic makhzan, which still functions as a decision-making entity, is sound advice for future reformist plans to

completely overhaul the political system.

Hasan II has bequeathed to Muhammad VI, as well as to the Yussufi and Jettou governments, a most problematic inheritance. The new King is surely walking a tightrope, with the Islamists and a good portion of the militant Berber leadership emerging as the most dangerous elements threatening national coexistence and the political order. In all fairness, despite Hasan's cruelty toward his political opponents and the corruption that reined in Morocco since at least 1961, the road to reforms was laid in the final decade of his rule. Many of the NGOs and women's rights groups had their inception during Hasan's tenure. It is also erroneous to attribute Morocco's difficult transition toward democracy, a global economy, and greater social equality solely to Muhammad VI. The former King realized that the prolonged suffering of his people could pose a serious threat to his position and end in chaos. The reforms, including those proposed but yet to be enforced, and the signing of free trade agreements with the EU (in 1996), were geared more toward preserving the 400-year old Sharifian monarchy than in affecting visionary changes.

It is too soon to judge if Muhammad VI is more of a visionary than his father. Presently, at least, this seems to be the case. Muhammad VI's education is marked by a strong orientation toward Moroccan and Maghrebi economic interests. In 1993 he received his doctorate in law from the Université Nice-Sophia Antipolis in France, where he delivered a dissertation on the European Common Market and its relations with the Maghreb. But his apparent eagerness to change Morocco has yet to be put to the test. Unlike Hasan II, the new monarch has so far shown an acute lack of interest in the Arab-Israeli conflict and inter-Arab affairs. He even declined an invitation by the United States and Egypt to attend the June 2003 Sharm al-Sheikh summit that immediately preceded the U.S.-Israeli-Palestinian meeting in Aqaba. Some claim that he begrudgingly accepted his father's role of chairman of the al-Quds Committee: a body that formulates Arab policies on Jerusalem and its holy Islamic sites.

Like Tunisian President Zayn al-Abidine Ben Ali and Algeria's Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika, Muhammad VI tends to shun wider Arab regional politics. This orientation of the current Maghrebi leaders is diametrically opposed to their predecessors, from the 1960s through the 1980s. They are turning inward, attending to their Maghrebi and domestic challenges, preferring that the Arab states that are closer to the conflict bear the brunt of the responsibility toward bridging Arab-Israeli differences.

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