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COUNTRY PAPER ON MACRO-LEVEL DRIVERS

Drivers of radicalisation and violent extremism
in the light of state dynamics in MENA and the Balkans

MOROCCO

Khalid Mouna, Amina Er-rifaiy, Mohamed Fadil



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INTRODUCTION*

How do institutions think about the issue of violent radicalisation? By institutions, we refer to state and non-state structures. The development of violent extremism and the multiplication of terrorist groups, but also individuals that are ready to take action, whether as part of a group or in the posture of lone wolves, leads us to question the state and non-state policies and practices that seek to deal with violent thought.

If radicalisation is the upstream side of violent extremism (VE), violence is its downstream side, and it is this double game of extremism and violence that states must confront. To avoid any possible confusion, VE is not recent; it is the experiences that some states are having today in the face of this constantly changing recent phenomenon. It is the historical and political context that has changed because, in the face of VE, the government deals with radicalisation from five pillars: the religious pillar, the security and legal pillar, the socio-economic pillar, the strengthening of human rights and rule of law pillar, and finally the international cooperation pillar.

That said, extremism has become an issue for modern states, and Morocco is no exception. There are social boundaries and barriers between a way of thinking and acting, which refers to VE groups that adopt a different doctrine, and ideas perceived as threatening to social cohesion but especially to political stability. Certainly, radicalisation, especially the kind expressed through violence, seems to find a common definition in the academic field, a definition that emphasises above all the attitude of rupture of groups and individuals from society, the political regime and the religious framework. But this rupture is not perceived in the same way by states and institutions, even if states share the same standard of definition of violent extremism. Thus, in Morocco, a country where Islam is both the reference of the state as the religion of the king's subjects but also a political framework through which the Commander of the Faithful exercises his monarchical power, violent extremism even attacks the legitimacy of this royal institution.

Throughout the fieldwork period, the CONNEKT research team based in Morocco conducted interviews with different institutions active at the national level that address the issue of VE either as a field of speciality and expertise or as one of the aspects of intervention.

The key actors can be divided into two main types based on the nature of their programmes in the field of CVE in Morocco: state actors and non-state actors.

This report gathers the views of different actors involved in the strategy of prevention and fight against violent extremism in Morocco. The working technique was semi-structured interviews with representatives of these institutions as indicated below:

Number of interviews with state institutions	Number of interviews with civil society representatives
11 face-to-face interviews	6 face-to-face interviews
1 remote interview (by phone)	3 remote interviews (1 via the Google Meet application / 2 via phone recording application)

* Text translated into English by Sarah Sayarh.

- All interviews lasted 1 hour.
- During the whole phase of fieldwork, the research team followed and complied with the CONNEKT's ethics policies (particularly the consent procedure and the Data Protection Policy established by the Consortium) and the interviewees gave their consent to include their views in this report.

Other actors concerned with the problem of VE were identified. However, they tend to react in an indirect way by spreading their visions within institutions or national events, as well as in some publications reflecting on the phenomenon. An example is the Moroccan Center for Studies and Research, which presented evaluation reports on the religious situation in Morocco, adding the activity of its actors as a tool for deradicalisation.

Based on twenty-one semi-structured interviews, we present the results of a five-month investigation. This investigation was marked by several difficulties, which can be summarised as follows:

- The slowness of administrative procedures to respond to the interview requests.
- The reluctance of certain interlocutors to broach the subject of violent extremism, considered too sensitive.
- The difficulty in accessing official data in terms of the number of people arrested or tried under the anti-terrorism law.
- The lack of interlocution with certain key state authorities on the issue of radicalisation, thus a retention of information.

Despite these difficulties, several interlocutors were very helpful and showed great flexibility in their cooperation, starting from a multidimensional discourse analysis that takes into consideration the context of each interview, and the forms of interaction that structured it, and without locking into a pre-established model. The approach is based on the monitoring of a moving object that is the "discourse". The goal is to seek, through discourse analysis, the meaning that state and non-state actors attach to violent extremism and the way in which power structures frame it.

INSTITUTIONAL OVERVIEW

Since the 2003 Casablanca attacks, Morocco has experienced a dynamic mobilisation in the fight against violent extremism, both within the state and civil society. This mobilisation will gradually be translated into a two-sided institutional organisation. Firstly, the involvement of several public organisations or civil society, which already existed in this field by investing part of their resources and their fields of activity in this respect (scientific councils, councils of ulemas, human rights, intellectual and artistic associations, etc.). Secondly, the creation of organisations dedicated exclusively to the objective of fighting VE. The institutionalisation of Moroccan mobilisation on this subject will thus give rise to a whole landscape of organisations whose components and actors differ according to their institutional forms (administrations, associations, centres, observatories, groupings, etc.), their areas of intervention (religion, economy, education, human rights, etc.), their relationship with the state (public authorities, civil society authorities), the target of their intervention (the whole population, a specific part only of young people, children, people already involved in VE, etc.). We can thus categorise this landscape in two ways. One is the official policy of the state, while the other is the initiative of civil society.

The institutions involved in the fight against VE are varied and work in different fields, including official state institutions and some civil society actions. It should be noted, however, that all Moroccan institutions work on two main levels: the first level is the theoretical approach, and the second level is the practice through a daily activity schedule. The institutions involved in the programme to fight or prevent VE are divided into two categories:

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- 1) State religious institutions, which aim to guide religious discourse according to the model of moderate Moroccan Islam. The programme of the official religious institutions is first of all the religious advice in the different mosques and schools, as well as the theological training in centres like the Mohammed VI Institute for Training Imams, Mourchidines and Mourchidates (*Institut Mohamed VI de formation des Imams Mourchidine et Mourchidat*). Their activities are religious preaching sessions intended for different categories (youth, women and men), national and international conferences on the importance of the promotion of the values of tolerance and living together organised in particular under the control le Conseil supérieur des Oulémas, and the control of religious associations and Quranic schools since the attacks of 2003.
- 2) Civil society organisations (CSOs), which have an optional role in the fight against VE because they do not take the issue of radicalisation as a primary subject in their daily actions. Thus, their framework is limited in the overall state policy, i.e., they do not have great autonomy in the action related to security issues. In spite of the attempts of the Ministry of Education to reform the school curricula in the last few years, which stipulates an openness towards civil society, the actors note a limited impact of these reforms on the cooperation between civil society and the state authorities. We can observe the same result concerning the Ministry of Youth, which is not open to the subject and collaboration with civil society. The field survey showed that CSOs have a different agenda from that of state institutions. The associations target young people in their annual programmes, based on cultural and social training activities, especially in the urban areas.

The actions of civil society are therefore aimed at young people, namely: le Médiateur pour la démocratie et les droits de l'Homme, and the Nordic Center for Conflict Transformation, which aims to work on the training of mothers from the perspective of both gender and the enhancement of the role of the family in the protection of youths. The actors of the social organisations deal with VE at the micro level, as confirmed by our interlocutor: "For us it was the decision to work within the micro framework of what is called everyday peace and not within the framework of peace in crisis"¹.

RELIGIOUS STATE INSTITUTIONS

The religious framework within which the ideologues and actors of VE develop their arguments leads to that public religious bodies are the first to be challenged on this issue. The most influential of these bodies are the Ministry of Habous/Religious Affairs (*Ministère des Habous et des affaires islamiques*), the Higher Council of Ulemas (*Conseil supérieur des Oulémas*), and the Rabita Mohammadia of Ulemas (*Rabita Mohammadia des Oulémas*).

Ministry of Habous/Religious Affairs is a ministerial portfolio dedicated since 1955 to the management of everything that relates to Islam, the official religion of the state and the one practised almost by the entire population. The role and the margin of intervention of this ministry has been made more imposing since the launch of the restructuring of the religious field in Morocco with the enthronement of King Mohamed VI, but especially since the attacks of 2003, which implies that the fight against VE is now a priority.

Higher Council of Ulemas is a religious body created in 1981 to support the official religious policy of the state but which remained almost inactive until it was remobilised in 2000 when the new monarch launched the restructuring of the religious field. Moreover, a new dynamic was established in 2004 directly linked with the attacks of Casablanca and the conception of the role that the authorities of its kind must play in the fight against VE. Chaired by the king, through his religious title of Commander of the Faithful, the council deals exclusively with *fatwa* (the issuing of religious opinions in response to requests from believers). Its influence has spread throughout the country's regions through regional councils of ulemas.

Rabita Mohammadia of the Ulemas is a body of general interest created in 2006 at the initiative of King Mohammed VI in the context of the restructuring of the religious field and religious policy post-2003. Its declared mission is to promote the prescriptions of the Islamic *Sharia* according to the principles of the *wasati* Islam ("centrist or mainstream Islam") and moderation that embody the milestones of an open and tolerant Islam.

The work of these three entities is to put into perspective a Moroccan Islam through their regional, disciplinary or sectoral bodies of which the most imposing and reliable are the regional scientific councils, the schools and the religious institutes, such as:

- **Dar El-Hadith El-Hassania**: founded in 1964, and reformulated in 2005, it is a religious institution with the objective of training young people in *Sharia* and Islamic history so that they become theological specialists.

¹ In-person interview with the director of an international CSO, male, Rabat, 28 January 2021.

- **Mohammed VI Institute for the Training of Imams, Mourchidines and Mourchidates:** created by the Sharifian Dahir no. 1-14-103 of 20 Rejeb 1435 (20 May 2014). This institution trains imams and reinforces their capacities in the field of Imamat and religious guidance in order to enable them to acquire the methods and knowledge to accomplish their missions.
- **Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulemas** (*Institut Mohammed VI de formation des Imams africains*): founded in 2015 for African cooperation in spreading the values of tolerance and religious education and strengthening Islamic activities in the continent.
- **Moroccan Council of Ulemas for Europe** (*Conseil marocain des Oulémas pour l'Europe*): founded in 2008 to highlight the function of religion and the coordination between institutions that work in the religious arena at international levels, as well as the follow-up of Muslim communities in their daily Islamic practices.

In addition to these religious bodies that focus in a direct way on the fight against VE in Morocco, this issue involves, albeit indirectly, all institutions and administrations of the state, each according to its area of jurisdiction and expertise: the education and teaching sector (reform of school textbooks, promotion of scientific research on the issue...), the justice sector (the rehabilitation of people involved), the official bodies of human rights, especially the National Human Rights Council (*Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme*) (control of procedures, support for victims...), the official media, especially Assadissa (the sixth), the Mohammed VI channel of the Holy Quran and promotion of the figure of tolerant and open Islam.

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CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

Since 2003, civil society has been fully involved in the fight against VE. Associations working in the field of human rights, such as the *Association de Défense des Droits de l'Homme au Maroc (ASDHOM)*, the *Ligue Marocaine pour la Citoyenneté et les Droits de l'Homme (LMCDH)* and the *Forum marocain des droits de l'homme*, have made it a priority. Their margin of intervention is distributed on several levels, namely the control of security and judicial procedures, the legal accompaniment of victims in addition to awareness and activism in favour of ideas that are supposed to help confront the socio-economic sources of this extremism through the establishment of a democratic political system, the reform of justice, and the reduction of social inequalities. In addition, scientific, artistic, cultural, sports and other associations are also created in this atmosphere. In addition, political organizations not linked to the state, in particular political parties, have also demonstrated their willingness to get involved in this cause. Centres for reflection and awareness have in fact been created within some political parties. We cite as an example the centre al-Mizane (the balance) created within the Istiqlal party and directed by Mohamed Abdelouhab Rafiqui, a former Salafist actor and detainee on the sidelines of the 2003 attacks, and which is involved at all levels in the fight against religious extremism in Morocco.

The nature of their activities varies according to the diversity of the spaces where they are active and the sectors they target: working-class neighbourhoods, school spaces, youth spaces, universities, etc. However, all of these activities are generally based on the same mission, which is to raise awareness of the risk of youth involvement in extremist organisations and to promote the values of tolerance and openness. In spite of the multiplication of these bodies, one observes an omnipresence of the state, and the lack of coordination, as it was demonstrated during our field investigation.

MACRO-LEVEL CONTEXT IN MOROCCO

INSTITUTIONAL PERCEPTION OF C/PVE

Since the 2003 attacks and terrorist attempts in Morocco, the state has mobilised five pillars as part of the overall strategy to combat VE at all levels. The five pillars are: the religious pillar, the security and legal pillar, the socio-economic pillar, the human rights and rule of law pillar, and the international cooperation pillar.

The religious pillar

It is the main pillar for state action in the fight against VE. In this context, the state has officially launched reforms of the religious field in Morocco, including reforms that affect the institutions that play a theological role, especially the mosques that are closer to citizens. It is within this framework that the **Rabita Mohammadia of the Ulemas** occupies a central place. It is an institution founded on the objective of fighting and preventing VE from a religious approach. The action of this institution is divided into two main axes: the theoretical aspect, which aims at the analysis of religious discourse, on the one hand, and the deconstruction of concepts to shed light on the ambiguities of the religious text, on the other. This work is clearly visible in the publications of the organisation, especially the dissemination of the deconstruction notebooks “Dafatir Atafkik” in the official website.

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On the other hand, the Rabita has founded youth training centres for risk prevention, namely the Ajjal programme, which works primarily with young people, via their socio-cultural support within specialised training centres. For our interlocutor, this role is in addition to the efforts of the Superior Council of the Ulemas (*Conseil supérieur des Oulémas*) in the field of religious training: “the Rabita Mohammadia of the Ulemas is a scientific institution that has a scientific council composed of scholars, and its units include the unit of deconstruction of extremist discourse from the dissemination of publications (Dafatir Atafhik)”.²

The publications of the Rabita are disseminated with the aim of reconstructing the religious discourse and correcting the elements of extremist discourse based on unity, salvation, dignity and the purity of Islam. As our interlocutor explains, “the whole world is facing the radical discourse and trying to deconstruct it”.³

Like the Superior Council of the Ulemas, the Rabita also has regional offices, which organise meetings and lead religious debates. However, it is the Imam as a local religious leader in direct daily contact with the citizens who implements the state’s strategy.

The security and legal pillar

This aspect represents the main framework in the national project for the fight against extremism. In March 2015, Morocco created the Central Bureau of Judicial Investigation (*Bureau central d’investigation judiciaire, BCIJ*) with the aim of dealing with terrorism cases and territorial control of the country. The judicial

² In-person interview with the Head of La Rabita Mohammadia des Oulémas, male, Rabat, 2 February 2021.

³ (Ibid.)

work is also applied by the delegation of prisons in Morocco, through the application of the **Musalaha (Reconciliation) programme** intended for prisoners to train and reintegrate them into society. The *Musalaha* programme is divided into four areas: religious training, education, skills training, and psychological support.

The presence of these institutions is remarkable at the international level in terms of security, recognised as a “leading security experience” and the fight against VE and terrorism. From this recognition, Morocco has signed several conventions with other countries and especially the piloting of the **Global Counterterrorism Forum (GCTF)** launched in 2016.

The socio-economic pillar

In 2005, King Mohammed VI launched the **National Initiative for Human Development (INDH)** to fight against poverty and precariousness, particularly in fragile areas. The INDH programmes are mainly national programmes that provide financial support and monitoring of socio-economic projects of associations and cooperatives, as well as support for young project holders. This initiative works on the principle of territorial development to minimise the rate of poverty and social precariousness.

Other institutions are involved in development actions, such as the **Ministry of Women, Solidarity and Family**, which founded the Social Development Agency (**Agence de Développement Social, ADS**) that works at the local level with the promotion of programmes within the framework of regional governance. It is noticeable that these institutions do not work directly on the issue of VE. But the actors of these organisations consider that this type of programme can strengthen the role of young people in society in an indirect way, as the local coordinator of the ADS explained: “The issue of violent extremism is not considered in a direct way in the programmes of the ADS, but the variety of axes and aspects of interventions that we carry out to integrate young people in the social process and the valorisation of the sense of citizenship”⁴.

The human rights and rule of law pillar

Morocco has established a human rights protection body, the **National Human Rights Council (CNDH)**, which has become a kind of reference for the state to deal with reports from international NGOs that question Morocco’s respect for human rights. The human rights announced in the constitution are: keeping freedom and equal opportunities, banning all discrimination, parity between men and women, and the generalisation of the participation of young people in the process of social and economic development. Within this framework, the CNDH has produced a teaching guide for human rights education, as well as other actions on digital culture to fight against hate speech disseminated in the virtual space, in order to prevent the danger of propaganda from terrorist organisations. The CNDH also pilots several initiatives such as a model of state presence that indicates the application of the law from the perspective of respect for human rights, and the monitoring of visible changes at the national and international levels. In addition, it monitors the legal reform process. The CNDH has played an important role in the *Musalaha* programme developed by the General Delegation for Prison Administration and Rehabilitation (DGAPR), in cooperation with the Rabita Mohammadia of the Ulemas, the CNDH and experts.

⁴ In-person interview with the Head of the Agence de Développement Social (ADS), male, Meknès, 24 September 2020.

The international cooperation pillar

The establishment of new international strategies shows that the country seeks to position itself in the African continent. In this sense, Morocco has positioned itself as a peace mediator in Libya (Abouzzohour, 2020) and in Mali with the aim of increasing its value as regional security provider at the international level. Also in this regard, Morocco has recently inaugurated the Office of United Nations Counter-Terrorism and Training Program in Africa (Maroc.ma, 2021).

C/PVE EXAMPLES FROM INSTITUTIONAL PRACTICE

State institutions	C/PVE actions
<p>Ministry of Habous/Religious Affairs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination with religious institutions and annual planning of programmes for each institution. • The formation of partnerships with foreign institutions. • The permanent control of the actions established in the religious field in Morocco, notably the programmes of the mosques and the sessions of the religious supervision of the prisoners.
<p>Rabita Mohammadia of the Ulemas</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A theoretical programme: notebooks and reviews containing definitions of religious concepts and analysis of religious texts, organisation of conferences, religious supervision within prisons, as well as a programme adopted during the month of Ramadan. • A training programme: founding specialised centres for cultural training and supporting youths in several large cities (Ajjal Center), capacity building of youths, training of trainers in partnership with foreign institutions.
<p>Social Development Agency (ADS)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The training of young people in entrepreneurship, the initiation of socio-cultural spaces in the precarious spheres at the local level, supporting young project leaders, the training of members of associations and cooperatives.
<p>National Human Rights Council (CNDH)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Its work is directly related to human rights: monitoring and evaluation of public policies and harmonisation of legislation, parity and non-discrimination of the new generation, training of young people in the field of human rights culture.

We emphasise that these state institutions are committed to a national strategy but carry out their action plans within a hierarchical framework that takes into consideration the specificity of each territory.

Non-state institutions (CSOs)	C/PVE actions
<p>Observatoire marocain de Lutte Contre le Terrorisme et l'Extrémisme</p>	<p>An association founded directly after the Casablanca bombings in 2003, with the aim of preventing VE through the implementation of awareness activities aimed at young people.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The creation of committees that bring together young people of different categories to develop specific activities such as design workshops, plays and cultural seminars. - Participation in international and national conferences around the values of peace. - The evaluation of school programmes and the follow-up of the changes of the education system reform. - Presentation of recommendations for the enhancement of the role of youths in the political sphere.
<p>Nordic Center for Conflict Transformation</p>	<p>An international organisation founded in Switzerland operating in various African countries. Its main actions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OUM Action: this is a training programme for women and mothers to raise awareness about VE and the tools for protecting young people, and monitoring education within the family. • In Sahel Activism: This programme is globally linked to the issues of conflict in the Sahel region. • This organisation has also conducted research related to the issue of extremism with other foreign partners, as well as collaborative meetings with other organisations.
<p>Mediator for Democracy and Human Rights (Médiateur pour la démocratie et les droits de l'homme)</p>	<p>A national association founded in 2007 for the promotion of human rights in Morocco, its objectives are the defence of the rights and the follow-up of the course of transitional justice from the evaluation of public policies and the follow-up of the files of the prisoners.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The compiling of the reports of evaluation of the public policies. notably the degree to which the objectives of each state institution like the Ministry of Education are reached. • The evaluation of school programmes and the follow-up of the reform of the education system in Morocco. • The training of young people in the framework of international programmes on the culture of human rights. • Participation in the follow-up of the legal procedures of the prisoners and the treatment of the files. • Visits to prisons to support prisoners. • Drafting of recommendations based on reports for the reform of laws and legal articles and advocacy with legislators. • The organisation of conferences in terms of programmes of the association. • The insertion of young people in the various socio-cultural activities organised by the association.

COOPERATION BETWEEN STATE INSTITUTIONS AND CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANISATIONS

CSOs are also involved in the national approach to CVE. However, have different strategies in the absence of cooperation with the state. Thus, there is a disconnect between the work of these associations and the state. This is mainly due to the monopoly that religious institutions have on the subject. For their part, the actors show a great capacity to mobilise from a human rights approach and also organise meetings for young people. But due to lack of resources their actions remain limited.

Thus, to take the example of the *Observatoire Marocain de Lutte Contre le Terrorisme et l'Extrémisme*, which is developing a strategy to combat extremism and an action plan to prevent VE, its strategy is transnational in scope and it adopts plans to deprive extremist groups of the tacit support of their sympathisers, particularly among youths, and to immunise them against their abuses by broadening the participation of associative institutions in the process of sensitising groups to the regressive thoughts of terrorism. However, this strategy is hampered by the lack of trust between civil society and the state: "The restoration of trust between official and associative institutions has become a necessity in order to fight against VE and terrorism, especially since civil associations are the first interface close to the population, direct interlocutors with it, and a safety valve against all forms of extremism"⁵.

Thus, the civil society strategy is based on family-centred counselling programmes, focusing on individuals who have been convicted of criminal acts related to VE, as well as providing medical and psychological social and legal services to victims of VE, including victims of crime.

⁵ Webinar "Penser le radicalisme violent chez les jeunes au Maroc" organised by the Université Moulay Ismaïl (UMI) in collaboration with the Rabat Social Studies Institute (RSSI) and the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) in the framework of the project CONNEKT the 9th of March, 2021.

DRIVERS

The multiplication of state bodies in Morocco to combat radical violence is an exception in the context of the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region. The position of religion as the religion of the state and as a political asset of the monarchy allows it to exercise a monopoly on this subject. Thus, state policy consists of implementing what state actors call “an academic approach”. In order to establish an assessment of the impact of Moroccan institutions on the factors of violent extremism, we will follow the drivers identified by CONNEKT: religion, economic deprivation and territorial inequality, digitalisation, political grievances, cultural factors, and transnational dynamics.

RELIGION

The creation of religious bodies to deal with violent extremism is seen as a positive strategy, aimed at limiting the scope of Jihadist discourse within places of worship. This religious strategy works with a certain regionalism, which consists of creating local authorities and regional offices of the Council the Ulemas. These offices or the mosque preachers control Friday preaching. No leeway is left for imams to address other issues. Thus, imams must be politically neutral and preach only on behalf of the state. Other actors active at this level are the religious leaders *qyimin diniyin*, whose role is to provide literacy courses within the mosques and meet the needs of the faithful on religious issues. These leaders are mainly women graduates in Islamic studies, who preach for a so-called Moroccan Islam. Thus, the strategy consists of deconstructing radicalisation from a so-called gender approach, which targets women as being the pillars of the family. However, this omnipresence of the state in the religious field is built on security and scholarly foundations and is aimed at an informed and adult population. Within the framework of young people, the religious policy of the state seeks to develop the religious schools known as traditional⁶. The Quran Tablet — one of the methods of memorising the Quran in Moroccan Quranic schools — is in force in particular in the regions of Sousse-Massa and Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima. These two regions account for 47.91% of schools nationwide. Of these, 50.35% are in rural areas and 71.68% are managed by associations controlled by the Ministry of Habous/Religious Affairs.

In our interview with the expert and actor against violent radicalism Mohamed Abdelouhab Rafiqui⁷, he explained that the religious factor feeds extremism among young people. It is based on a religious understanding of the texts that has remained faithful to the interpretations established by the ancient jurists in a specific socio-political context. This makes it a motivation to nurture extremism among youths.

Even though economic, social and political factors have been, to some extent, one of the main drivers of the adherence to extremist ideology, especially the democratic setbacks in Arab countries and the sense

⁶ Documentary “The masters of Quran”, Project production: ANR ILM program “The teaching of Islam in Morocco (18th-21st centuries): Islamology and social sciences” (ANR-16-CE27-0015), coordinated by Sabrina, 2019.

⁷ Webinar “Penser le radicalisme violent chez les jeunes au Maroc” organised by the Université Moulay Ismaïl (UMI) in collaboration with the Rabat Social Studies Institute (RSSI) and the European Institute of the Mediterranean (IEMed) in the framework of the project CONNEKT the 9th of March, 2021.

of civilisational defeat that has driven up the shares of Jihadist movements, the influence of these movements remains limited, and it is not the main harmful dimension of extremism. For Rafiqi, the explanation of violent extremism finds its justification in the texts themselves. According to him, most of the young people who “drifted” to extremism lived in socially comfortable conditions, such as Fatiha Al-Majati, famous in the world of extremism and terrorism. She was distinguished in her studies, and speaks several languages, in addition to the fact that she was received and appointed by King Mohamed VI when he was Crown Prince as an outstanding student. Despite this comfortable position that Fatiha Al-Majati held at all levels, she preferred to join the Jihadist groups, becoming an emblematic figure and occupying leadership within ISIS.

Hence, the religious dimension is a fundamental factor that produces VE in Morocco and outside the country. These young people who join extremist organisations find themselves impregnated by the interpretations of the theorists of these groups by downloading texts, in which they exhort martyrdom as a means of expiation for all sins and faults. These texts are loaded, according to Rafiqi ⁸, with themes around sex, and what God is preparing for the martyrs regarding *Houris* in Paradise as a reward. The reason for this extremism in general is thus in texts produced in a political and historical context that no longer exists. This is the jurisprudence that still exists today and is taught even in universities in the departments of Islamic studies, and any talk about its historicity is accused of deviating from the sanctity of the text and exposing its owner to expiation.

ECONOMIC DEPRIVATION AND TERRITORIAL INEQUALITIES

After the 2003 attacks in Casablanca, economic factors and territorial inequalities were pointed out as factors of violent extremism. Thus, in 2005, King Mohamed VI launched **National Institute for Human Development (INDH)**. The INDH’s objective was to limit the areas of poverty and reduce inequalities in human development in Morocco. The INDH strategy is based on good local governance according to the World Bank reference. A large number of unofficial studies highlight the gap between the philosophy of the INDH and the reality of the programmes, especially in rural areas. Thus, these studies show that there is no positive and significant impact of the INDH on variables related to health, education and poverty reduction. On the contrary, with the new constitution of 2011, and the creation of regionalisation with 12 regions, new forms of territorial disparity have appeared. Of the 12 regions, three regions participate with 58.7% of the national wealth, namely the regions of Casablanca-Settat, Rabtat-Salé-Kénitra and Tangier-Tetouan-Al Hoceima. However, of the 1,500 Moroccans who have gone to fight in Syria and Iraq under the banner of ISIS, between 600 and 700 Jihadists are from the north of the kingdom, despite the economic development of this region since the reign of Mohamed VI. The presence of these Jihadists is most often attributed to the history of this region and its relationship to the reign of Hassan II, neglecting the perverse effect of this development on the emergence of socio-economic inequalities that lurks behind the macro development indicators of this region (Lamlili, 2015).

DIGITALISATION

The use of digital tools is a main element in the emergence of terrorist propaganda especially among young people, which is well marked in the presence of Jihadist groups in digital platforms and their hate

⁸ (Ibid.)

speech in different social networks for the purpose of recruiting adolescents (Hussein, 2017). However, this emergence is not always a result of a lack of digital literacy in the individual, as there is the possibility of strengthening it via the dissemination of content and also the mastery of its tools by manipulators as our interlocutor mentioned: “There are several manipulators, while the absence of digital literacy can integrate young people into extremist groups”⁹. So, state institutions must adapt to the new process of technology to complete its role of preventing and fighting against violent extremism, especially educational institutions.

POLITICAL GRIEVANCES

A group of interviewees confirmed that the “Islamist” movements in Morocco have indirectly impacted the orientation of young people’s ideas. In Morocco, the different Islamist currents reject radical ideas. According to our interlocutors, radical and violent ideologies are of foreign origin, which pushes young people to look for other forms of belonging to people who is victim of political violence, as is the case with the situation in Syria and Iraq.

The political parties have difficulty in gaining the trust of young people, due to the negative image of the political actors among the population. However, several political parties have special structures to welcome youths and women. Some political actions are done in partnership with state structures, notably the Ministry of Habous/Religious Affairs, for the sensitisation of youths and women. Our interlocutors consider that communication and education on human rights are means of protection against VE: “The party always works under the angle of freedom and the refusal of radicalism at the internal and external level via the training of young members of the party. The main areas of training are freedom, equality, and at the external level activities such as outings, discussions and seminars”¹⁰. We find that political parties do not really have programmes to fight radicalism. On the contrary, “left” parties use the term “radicalisation” to disqualify the Islamists just as the Justice and Development Party (PJD) uses the term “secularism” —to refer to atheism— to downgrade “leftist” parties.

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CULTURAL FACTORS

The field interviews allowed us to grasp the place of cultural factors in violent radicalisation. Indeed, the return to the past towards a glorious Islam among young people facilitates this radicalisation process. Thus, according to our interlocutors, the interpretations of the Quranic texts insist on the form and divert the substance. These are mechanisms used by certain ideologists of radicalisation. This ideology values the past over the present and eternal life over the present life, etc. It targets young people who are not in the same situation as the others, and who are not touched by the state discourse, because the official discourse is too academic or too far from their reality.

TRANSNATIONAL DYNAMICS

Radicalisation exposes Morocco at the international level because with its diaspora, particularly in Europe, which exceeds three and a half million, Morocco is subject to internal and external factors of radicalisation. This process of radicalisation, particularly violent, is carried out through migration

⁹ In-person interview with male representative from an academic institution, Fès, 18 January 2021.

¹⁰ In-person interview with male representative from a political party, Meknès, 11 September 2020.

channels. Thus, playing on its fundamental aspect of the believers, Morocco mobilises actions that transcend national borders in the form of “religious diplomacy” to European and African countries to deal with religious radicalism, and this through the training of imams. Thus, in 2008 Morocco created the **Moroccan Council of Ulemas for Europe** to preserve the cultural and religious identity of the Moroccan community living in Europe. In July 2015, the country established the **Foundation for African Ulemas**, which aims to unify and coordinate the efforts of Muslim Ulemas in the African continent. These strategies rely heavily on the monarch’s position as Commander of the Faithful, but also through the dissemination of an open and tolerant Islam based on Sufism. While Morocco has succeeded in its international strategy, the security situation at home and its distance from civil society do not allow for a positive assessment of its policy.

CONCLUSION

According to the definition of the political scientist Galtung and Höivik (2019), structural violence is any form of political and economic coercion that puts pressure on the potential of the individual and is related to unequal access to resources of education, health, justice, etc., as it is a type of violence produced by state institutions through a political system based on the exclusion and privatisation of state power by a limited number of actors.

In moderately open political systems, violence structures daily life, and institutions that are supposed to include youths have become tools of exclusion. Thus, the educational system in Morocco produces social exclusion instead of developing cognitive skills to help social integration, which explains the extremist tendencies of youths as one of the results of the state's failure to educate and integrate them into social life. In addition to the structural violence of the state, which remains faithful to its old approach of restricting the freedoms of opinion, thought and action, exposing large groups of society to exclusion, both economically and socially, the fight against radicalisation is locked in a security logic. However, the fight against violent extremism requires effective actions of a collective nature that bring together civil society, especially young people, through:

- Networking with CSOs, whether cultural, educational, professional or other, to set up programmes to fight extremism and terrorism in partnership with the state, provided that they also strive to fight against the permanent violations of human rights and social exclusion, which may be among the factors that encourage extremism.
- But also by starting from the state's support for civil society as a key partner in the fight against extremism and terrorism.
- Working on the investment in modern technological and social media in order to encourage communication with young people and to confront through these means everything that can quickly cultivate the culture of hatred and rejection of the other.
- To give young people the opportunity to contribute to local and national decision-making, whether at the associative or political level, so that they feel responsible for change and stability.
- Work towards the creation of regional and national youth councils to enable young people to participate in public political debate, thereby building their trust in official institutions, restoring their confidence and interest in political work, and promoting political participation rather than reticence.

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What drives youth to violent extremism? How can they turn from being “the problem” into “the key” for a solution? By engaging youth in the research, CONNEKT will raise young voices to become stakeholders in the prevention of radicalisation and violent extremism.

CONNEKT is a research and action project which analyses seven potential radicalisation factors among youth aged between 12 and 30: religion, digitalisation, economic deprivation, territorial inequalities, transnational dynamics, socio-political demands, and educational, cultural and leisure opportunities and evaluates them on three levels: transnational/state, community and individual.

Its aim is to establish a multi-dimensional map of drivers of extremism among youth in Egypt, Jordan, Tunisia, Morocco, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, North Macedonia and Bulgaria, and to identify the interplay between them. Based on the empirical research findings, the project will end up recommending tools and measures for the prevention of violent extremism from a social and community perspective both for the regions of study and the European Union.

Under the coordination of the European Institute of the Mediterranean, (IEMed), the project gathers a multidisciplinary Consortium involving 14 partners from MENA, the EU and the Balkans.



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