Introduction

ISLAMIST PLURALISM

"I don't like *other* Islamists," said the young Islamist. Mustapha, twenty-eight, was in the midst of his standard recruiting pitch.

"Some wear silly clothes—long black socks and even longer robes," he whispered in Arabic to the high school students beside him. I had to lean in to hear. "Who do you think was responsible for 11th September?" he asked. "Well, not them exactly, but people who look like them." Other Islamists are "sell-outs," he said, "just like their Muslim Brotherhood partners. The state says bark like a dog; they say, how loud?" Only *his* group, Mustapha insisted, one of the major Islamist movements in Morocco, was truly committed to political reform.

This was Casablanca in the decade before the Arab Spring, before outsiders were paying attention, before young Arabs were considered significant political actors or North Africa was deemed consequential. But here, before anywhere else, new Islamist rivalries were starting to take shape.

This book is about these emerging rivalries—rivalries that are transforming political systems across the Middle East and North Africa. It is about how overlooked developments in Morocco through the last decade can offer important clues to understanding this new competitive era of Arab politics. And it is most of all about people like Mustapha, the young activists who play a substantial role in Islamist movements, yet seem to disappear into the background in books written about them.[1]

When I first met Mustapha, I was standing outside a roadside café on the outskirts of Casablanca—an overpopulated commercial capital with little of the intrigue or romance of its cinematic rendering. I was on a preliminary research trip exploring Islamist strongholds, and Morocco was my first stop. I came here because even then, before the Arab Spring, both the largest opposition party in parliament *and* the largest opposition force in the country were Islamists.

It was early summer. The heavy desert sun overpowered a quiet coastal breeze. The air smelled of mint tea and car exhaust, of aftershave and charred corn, of seashells and backed-up latrines. Teenage boys hawked their wares: Marlboro packs by the cigarette, shoe shines by the shoe, and water by the glass. The picture on a small television inside the café alternated between a European football match from the night before and a

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documentary about Qurʾanic recitation. There was something here for everyone.

Mustapha—single, with two part-time jobs, a university degree, and two mobile phones—wore a grey hooded djellaba and yellow *babouche* slippers. A counterfeit Boston Red Sox hat shaded his bearded face. Tall, intense, and inquisitive, he is both a close and a fast talker: he pushes his face almost next to yours, and once he begins to speak, he rarely pauses to look up. He might occasionally punctuate a sentence by asking *fehamtee?* ("you understand?"), but he will seldom break for confirmation. In his spare time, he transcribes Celine Dion songs to practice his broken English.

His one real moment of rest comes on Fridays when, after mosque, after the midday *jumuʿah* prayer, he goes home—to his parents' house—to share a large plate of couscous with his immediate family. He eats slowly and carefully with his right hand, carving each bite into a small, sticky ball, always conscious of not taking too much for himself. He also slows down a bit late at night, when he likes to fall asleep to episodes of *Walker, Texas Ranger*, the 1990s series starring Chuck Norris that long aired on Saudi satellite television. "I like how he's tough but tender," he later told me. It is his dream to move out on his own and marry some day soon, very soon. He talks about women the way an uncle talks about his niece: with pride, affection, and detachment.

There is a part of Mustapha that misses the old days, the days before he and his friends were inundated with multiple choices: television programs, clothing, living spaces, even potential spouses. But he is conflicted in his nostalgia. He adores the multiple technologies at his fingertips, loves chatting with new friends, exploring different cultures and ideas, leaving his world without leaving his country. "I don't want to go back fourteen centuries, to the caliphate," he likes to joke, "what would happen to my mobile phones and my computer?"

Yet, Mustapha was certain about one thing: the task of recruiting potential Islamists used to be a lot more straightforward. He used to promise discipline, order, and a straight path to God, but there are many who offer that now. Clear lines once seemed easier to draw. His old sales talk, once crisp and convincing, used to revolve around the singular theme of sickness. He was "sick," he used to say, "of the status quo." Of Muslims being humiliated militarily. Of politicians promising change, but never delivering. Sick of being given "false promises over and over and over again." The problem he saw with bureaucrats—"the slaves of dictators" who won sham elections and dominated Arab politics for the last half century—was not simply their lack of faith. It was their lack of efficacy. Their impiety was a

proxy, a gateway: it led to corruption, to indolence and, ultimately, to dis-
appointment. These were the lessons of his childhood, the conclusions any
young person in his circumstances could be forgiven for drawing: that cor-
relation was tantamount to causation; that secular politicians simply made
bad politicians.

Mustapha did not have to look far for corroboration. One of his role
models, Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine, a onetime Sufi spiritualist with a long,
grandfatherly grey beard, once called non-Islamists "bestial" and likened
them to "Satan." Their policies, he said, were based on the "imported ideol-
ogies" of either capitalism or communism, were "poisoned by superficial-
ity" and by a "chronic disease of weakness."[2]

For Mustapha, the world seemed different now, and his adversaries
seemed different, too. He and his diverse Islamist counterparts were in-
creasingly encountering opposition from an unexpected source: each other.
He was not the only one who was taken aback by these developments.
Even after graduate training in the religions and politics of the Middle East
at Harvard and Oxford, and following service in the U.S. Peace Corps in
Morocco, I was still puzzled by the wrangling and backbiting I was wit-
nessing, by the level of enmity being saved for supposed brothers. Recruit-
ers like Mustapha once talked of an Islamic pact, of uniting all religiously
inspired activists under one solitary Islamic state. Now they barely spoke
to one another.

But why? Wouldn't it make more sense for them to cooperate? Their
shared goals would be easier to achieve; alliances would allow them to
reach wider audiences. They were all Sunni Moroccans, who recognized,
even if they sometimes rebutted, the central authority of the nation-state.
While there may have been minimal theological distinctions between
them, these distinctions were blurring. And they all appeared to desire a
more expansive role for religion in politics, a state ruled in some form by
Islam. Indeed, early Islamist writings often counseled a commitment to
unity, to sticking together in the face of oppression.[3]

For much of the last quarter of the twentieth century, cooperation here
was, indeed, the norm. The two main Islamist movements in the country—
Mustapha's group, the Justice and Spirituality Organization, or Al Adl wal
Ihsan (Al Adl), and their main rival, the political party modeled after the
Muslim Brotherhood, the Party of Justice and Development (PJD)—used to
send representatives to each other's meetings.[4] They also used to march
together, even issuing joint communiqués on issues ranging from Palestine
to prisoner abuse.[5] Yet, in both of their cases, they were now more likely to
forge alliances—to march arm in arm—with non-Islamists (those old Sa-

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tanists) than with each other. "We have *new* brothers and sisters now," Mustapha would tell me, with no hint of regret. A member of his rival group once described to me how he spent a portion of his university years trying to find common ground between Islamist groups. But he eventually gave up. "That was an impossible dream," he said.

What was happening to Islamism? The collective effort to apply Islamic teachings to the practice of politics could no longer be blithely conflated with terrorism; it could also no longer be assumed to be monolithic. Its varied proponents had moved from personal calls for piety to a sophisticated force in Arab politics, from purveyors of social services to political machines, from unwieldy umbrella movements to localized, plural forms of protest. Nonviolent mainstream Islamist groups had been gaining in popularity, but new power struggles also seemed to be making this shifting landscape even more complex to navigate.

It was apparent that I had many questions, and Mustapha suggested we share a glass of overly sweetened mint tea, his fifth of the day. "Moroccan whiskey," he called it, mischievously invoking the name of the country he hopes to lead one day and the alcohol he would never dare touch. By the time I left Mustapha, it was nearly dusk. I was drunk on sugar and my mind was racing. But I wasn't going anywhere. I set out the next day with a goal: to immerse myself in this puzzling new world—the world of competing Islamists.

I did not come to the topic lightly. I was wary of overstating discord, of writing Middle East politics through clumsily constructed binary oppositions such as secular/religious, moderate/radical, Sunni/Shiʿa, or fundamentalist/nonfundamentalist. It seemed as if such divisions could sometimes be manufactured merely by their continuous declaration. After all, the citizens and identities I had come to encounter were more intricate and intersecting than such blunt categorizations suggested.

And yet, to capture the politics of the Middle East and North Africa today and for the foreseeable future, one particular relationship seems almost inescapable: this is the dawn of the era of Islamist versus Islamist. It is only through finally focusing on the factions and fissures between and within Islamist movements—viewing them as complex, competing organizations and not as crude, coherent entities—that we can begin to uncover the shifting nature of the Islamist project itself. That was the aim of my research, and it is now the aim of this book.

This book is based on extensive ethnographic fieldwork among the young and divided Islamist rank and file in Morocco (including intensive participant observation, in-depth interviewing, and textual analysis)—the

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challenges of which I will uncover in the following chapter. It does not rely on the familiar framework of state-opposition relations. Instead, it begins to unlock the incipient industry of Islamism.[6] This is, at its core, a work of political sociology, informed, most of all, by scholarship in social movement theory, comparative politics, and the sociology of religion. But to make the material accessible to a wide variety of readers, I have also aimed to write in a lucid, narrative style. In my nearly four years in Morocco, I witnessed firsthand the development of political Islam in one place.[7] But these experiences also shed light on what is happening in other parts of the Arab world.

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This is the story of the future of political Islam as told by those already living it: young Moroccan Muslims. When I first met them, activists like Mustapha had no way of predicting that they would soon be given an opportunity not just to vie for power, but to hold it. Nobody did.[8] A textbook published in April 2010 as part of a series on the "Contemporary Middle East" included this sentence in its final paragraph: "It does seem clear that political change in Tunisia will not come about through some dramatic event that suddenly replaces the existing order with a new one."[9] Yet, astonishingly, that is exactly what happened.

By now, the tale of the Arab Spring is a familiar one. In December 2010, young people in Tunisia and then Egypt and then across the region, in different forms and phases, began to shake themselves free of the shackles of authoritarianism, chipping away at decades of repressive rule that was once deemed indestructible. After the protest signs were put away, after the revelry faded, after the horns of merriment stopped blaring in the streets of the Middle East and North Africa, a new Arab world was born. Except it didn't quite look the way everyone wanted it to.[10]

It became popular to proclaim, especially among Western political analysts, that the Arab Spring descended into a long "Islamist winter"—that moves toward freedom only managed to pave the way for ostensibly dark days of Islamist rule. *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer, for example, forecasted Islamism writ large as the "new totalitarianism."[11] And, at first glance, the evidence appeared straightforward enough: in nearly every Arab country where elections took place in 2011 and 2012— in Egypt, Tunisia, Kuwait, and Morocco—Islamist parties posted historic victories.[12]

Then, in the summer of 2013, the Egyptian military signaled that it had had enough: it deposed the government led by the party affiliated with the

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Egyptian Brotherhood and arrested the new president, Mohammed Morsi. And, soon, analysts began asking a new question: was the Islamist project dead in the water?

A fixation on this apparent "rise and fall" misses a more consequential story, however, one that scholars have yet to tell. Even as Islamists continue to expand across this contested region, intense struggles between and within their movements are mounting. Islamism is splintering. Nowhere in the Middle East or North Africa does a single Islamist group hold a monopoly on popular mobilization. Everywhere the dilemma confronting young Arab Muslims has become not *whether* Islamism, but rather, *which* Islamism.

This is still evident in Egypt, where at least fifteen Islamist parties materialized after the fall of Hosni Mubarak.[13] Even so-called Salafi activists—who once joined Al Qaeda in condemning political participation as unjustly appropriating God's work—have entered the electoral fray. In the Egyptian parliamentary elections of 2011, for example, they went head to head with the triumphant Muslim Brotherhood, ripping down their posters, poaching their members, and eventually placing a startling second. When the military initiated its coup in 2013, many Salafis even preferred to side with them over the Brotherhood. And the Egyptian case is now even more comparable to Morocco: with the country's largest Islamist movement again relegated underground as the vestiges of an authoritarian regime once seemingly on the wane now shows continued signs of endurance.

Thus, over the course of mere months, what was once a Moroccan anomaly—rampant Islamist infighting—suddenly became a regional reality. The age of competing Islamists is officially upon us. What will happen in this next phase of the Islamist movement? What will happen when Islamists have to compete not just with non-Islamists, but also with *each other*? How, in the face of new rivalries, will Islamists work to win the hearts and minds of Arab citizens? These are the questions driving this book, and the questions that are set to define the future of the Middle East and North Africa.

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The central argument of this book is that Islamist groups that emerge from this dynamic marketplace—from this wild, disordered arena of inter-Islamist contestation—will bear little resemblance to the Islamists of yesteryear.

To find out how, we first need to move beyond a tendency to conceptualize Islamist movements almost exclusively in relation to the state and not in relation to one another—to what the scholar of Islam, Bjørn Olav Utvik, calls "the wider Islamic environment that is their immediate habitat."[14] Re-

alities on the ground now demand a more fluid analytical framework: a move beyond a focus on Islamism *as* opposition and toward an approach that appreciates oppositions *within* the opposition.

We need to look not simply at the multiplicity of movements, but also at the force of their collisions—not simply at how they compare, but how they compete.[15] Examining movements in this way will allow us to see that they are shaped not just by structural constraints and conditions, by political openings and opportunities afforded to them from the state, but also by their relationships with each other.

Second, we need to recognize the Islamist movement for what it is: not a single, united, overarching mission, but rather a dynamic and complex amalgamation of competing organizations and orientations. Thus, despite calls to regard them as aberrant or somehow distinctive, Islamist groups are, at their core, complex social movement organizations and, like such organizations the world over, survival—self-preservation—is their primary aim.[16]

Competition has grown fierce because in order to expand, to increase, or even to maintain membership, each needs adequate commitments of time, skills, and money—and most of all human power. This intensifying race for limited resources—for relevance in the midst of rivalry—invariably propels them to change the way they do business, including how they attract new members, what messages they relay to them, and which members they target in the first place. Put another way: in order to continue to remain a viable competitor, to stay in the game, each Islamist rival has no choice but to respond to one another.

This race for resources is, above all else, a race to recruit. Despite the many differences among Islamist groups, there is one feature that characterizes them all: demography. Two-thirds of all Arab Muslims are under the age of thirty. Or as one activist once told me: in the Middle East and North Africa, "kulshi shabaab." Everyone is a youth. Put bluntly, young people are the new currency of political Islam—the coveted constituency that each movement requires for self-preservation.

What happens next contradicts much of what has been predicted. In the face of stiff competition and a scramble for similar pools of potential young recruits, Islamists do not necessarily try to "outbid" each other, to rush toward the extreme, to be one acute thing to one specific set of people. They also do not seek out a broad uniformity, to dilute the scope of religious authority so much so that they can be everything to everyone—trying to generalize their message to appeal to what political scientists call the "median voter."[17]

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Rather, something else is taking shape, something I call "Islamist pluralism." The movements I studied are working internally, even contorting themselves, to be as many things to as many different kinds of young people as possible, making room for a multitude of activists and multiple avenues to activism—all at the behest of those they seek to attract: young people. They are reshaping and reinventing, in short, to offer a place where new members can be *who* they want to be.

Some analysts still maintain that the fundamentals of Islamist recruitment have remained unchanged since the 1950s.[18] My research, by contrast, uncovered multiple forms of activism within these robust and layered organizations, especially with their varied political, social, and religious wings. A leading scholar of political Islam once sought to show how young Islamists were primarily "recruited by insistent mosque preachers, crude revolutionary pamphlets."[19] But very rarely are such preachers or even their texts the first ones to engage potential recruits. More often than not, the first people youth encounter are each other. And, contrary to public perception, young Islamists in this competitive milieu increasingly attract one another not by selling organizational rigidity—firm lines of hierarchy and control—but rather by promising and preaching personal choice, autonomy and freedom, by offering the ability to carve out what young people want: their own individual identities.

The lives of young people are simply too complex and too multilayered for all to follow reflexively the same path or even the same individual leader. Just as there is no such thing as the monolithic Islamist movement, there is also no such thing as the singular Islamist activist. We need to recognize their diverse and fluid identities, ideologies, backgrounds, personalities, and desires. Youth now have a multitude of choices, new opportunities to sample Islamic wares: trying one on for size before moving on, coming and going between groups as they please. A decision to join one movement is always embedded in a decision *not* to join another. Each young person sets her or his own course, constructing what "religion" means—and, in the process, challenging already fading monopolies of political authority and Islamic interpretation. Young Moroccan Islamists like Mustapha—actors for whom religion and politics were once considered almost congenitally intertwined—are now at the forefront of reimagining categories that were long deemed fixed.

In the end, Islamist pluralism is born out of strategic realities. When I confronted young activists with this heterogeneity, I was not met with denial or consternation or embarrassment. Instead, most embraced it. This is a sampling of some representative responses that I will expand upon in

later chapters: "Everything must be reinterpreted." Or "Yes, it's ok, it is something different for everyone." Or "This is just my own understanding." When considering a point of interpretation, one longtime Al Adl activist told me, "not everyone feels this way—you will find others in the group who think something different." "And that," he said, "is good." Mustapha himself once noted the efficacy of this tractability: "It is because of our multiple parts and approaches that we are successful."

By design, different identities not only co-exist within these organizations—they are *encouraged* to coexist. Their complex organizations make room for such internal pluralism; Islam itself allows for it; the competitive milieu demands it; and the diverse orientations of young people call for it.

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Thus, to understand how Islamists are responding to competition, we have to focus once and for all on those that their groups are fighting so intensely to attract: the youth that eventually become known as the rank and file, the foot soldiers, or the base. The chapters that follow will take us to Morocco to offer a close-up look at who they are, what they want, and who they do (or do not) listen to. The four sections of the book are meant to unfold like the peeling of an onion, carefully uncovering and unraveling various parts of their activism, and engaging and unwrapping assumptions that too often shroud our understandings of them and their movements.

Part I, "Relationships," is devoted to developing the proposition that Islamist movements cannot be understood in isolation—that, in short, all Islamism is relational. But before I go into the roots of the relationships between the two main movements in Morocco, I explore my relationship to each of them.

Chapter 1 looks at the methods and challenges involved in studying both legal and illegal Islamist movements up close. How does one go about engaging diverse rank-and-file activists and would they even talk to me? How also could I trust what I would be seeing or would be told?

Then, in chapter 2, I seek to understand how these movements have evolved over time, and, in the process, provide important background on the political and religious contexts of the movements in question. Why, for example, would an Islamist group that had previously exhibited little interest in forming a political body—and had formally rebuffed them and even decried their existence—suddenly move toward forming its own quasi-political party? These are similar questions to those being asked of Salafis in Egypt and across the region, for example, who long shirked the political arena, but suddenly embraced it in 2011. They are different actors in differ-

ent contexts with different histories, but common threads mark their behavior. Egypt in 2011 and Morocco in 1997 shared one connection: it was the year that the largest Islamist group in each country formed a political party—the Muslim Brotherhood's Party of Freedom and Justice (FJP) in Egypt and the PJD in Morocco.

The answers to understanding these evolutions lie not in a change of heart, but rather in a change in the competitive environment. I show that Islamist movements coevolve. To use a biological analogy, movements are less like organisms and more like species: alive, moving, and functioning not in individual isolation, but in strategic interaction within a wide ecosystem in which they develop alongside other beings.[20] Thinking about them in this way is helpful because it forces us to focus not just on big, broad strokes—their success or their failure—but instead on diverse movement activity, on the back and forth, on complex relationships that, in reality, tend more to ebb and flow, not rise or fall.

Next, the two chapters of part II—"Identities"—grapple with a central yet elusive puzzle of contemporary political Islam: what drives young people to join one Islamist movement *over* another? It is a deceptively complicated problem. For half a century, social scientists have studied why individuals would join social movements at all. For at least two decades, they have hypothesized about why they might join the Islamist movement in particular.[21] But these efforts have focused largely on only part of the equation: on what leads people to rise up in the first place, to give up their time and energy and sometimes freedom, especially when they could gain similar benefits simply by watching, by free-riding. To join or not to join—that has been the question.

But the multiplicity of actors, players, and contenders across the Middle East and North Africa now demand different kinds of questions. How, we must ask, do young Arab Muslim citizens navigate this changing landscape, where they choose among a selection of Islamist groups and often alternate among them? We will see that, contrary to popular assumptions, deciphering these puzzles is not as straightforward as retracing the paths of their parents or siblings or neighbors or even friends—or finding out who offered them the most generous good or service or even whose prayers or doctrines they most heeded.

In fact, these are new questions that can only be answered in new ways: by peering into and behind the places and faces that tend to be overlooked, at the parts of young people's lives that, in the words of political anthropologist Yael Navaro-Yashin and the sentiment of philosopher Walter Benjamin, often "escape formalized articulation, normalization, citation, sit-

ing."[22] I show in these two chapters that we cannot begin to understand what motivates young Islamists—what drives their decisions, what informs their politics—without understanding the textures of their daily lives. Their multiple experiences in the world around them shape how they seek to change that very world. The clothes they wear, the roads they live off of, the designs of their homes, the websites they look at, their shifting prospects of marriage, the sources of their news, the food they consume: it all matters.

This is terrain that is, admittedly, not normally traversed by policy makers or even most political scientists. It is a decidedly messier vantage point than that offered, say, by district-level voting data, raw polling numbers, or macroeconomic trends—or even by the cold texts of party platforms. But there is meaning to be found in what is too often dismissed as the mundane.

The chapters of parts III and IV investigate and reassess young Islamists' relationships with competing authorities—first with the state (part III) and then within their organizations (part IV).

The anthropologist Saba Mahmood has argued that Islamism has long been cast as a "historical anomaly" largely because it "frames its object as an eruption of religion outside the supposedly 'normal' domain of private worship."[23] Mahmood writes under the shadow of classic democratic and civil-republican theory, with its normative assumptions of secular-liberal politics.[24] Yet, in Morocco and, for that matter, many Arab states, the eruption of religion outside the private sphere is far from abnormal. To the contrary, an eruptive *absence* of religion in *public* space would itself constitute a "historical anomaly." As the theorist of religion Talal Asad has noted, even within supposedly secular states, the state is constantly faced with the function of defining and crafting and regulating the religious domain. The state, according to Asad, is never "that separate."[25]

Many Arab regimes have explicitly sought—for their own benefit—to define, craft, and institutionalize Islam "outside" the realm of the private. It can be said with some confidence, for example, that, since its inception, the modern Moroccan monarchy has sought to do just that. In part III— "Shadows"—I explore the reach of the king's religious authority in a globalized age, an age of unprecedented competition, antagonism, and rivalry. How do young Islamists relate to the authority of this modern Arab state? And, how, in turn, does such a state exercise its supposedly vast authority in a variegated world—a world where a ruler's voice is only one among many, a world where authority itself is necessarily multiple?

The answers, I argue, lie not simply in deciphering state policies but also in looking at how they are understood—in uncovering the multiple

social worlds in which young people and the state interact. To this end, this section is devoted to analyzing numerous such encounters—including Islamist group gatherings, meetings, and conventions held in homes, cafés, city halls, official state buildings, instances of police action, and diverse applications of administrative law.

In the final part of the book—"Individuals"—I turn my attention to the internal dynamics of Islamist groups. Here, I look closely at who young Islamists listen to or do *not* listen to within their organizations, at who they might look to for direction, and at how they make sense of those who are purportedly guiding them. To answer these questions during my field-work, I wanted to move past a reliance on the isolated pronouncements of movement elders or the talking points of movement elites. It is difficult to assess how religious authority is constructed, for example, when the only data being analyzed are the words of clerics themselves.[26]

Such a methodological approach and its reliance on religious texts only manage to reify the perception of young people as disempowered by-standers. It is tantamount to studying a sermon, even listening to it up close, but not talking to audience members afterward to find out what they were thinking or how they interpreted the words being uttered. It is also equivalent to imagining a sermon being delivered to an empty room or, if the room is full, assuming everyone in the audience digests the ser-mon wholesale.

Instead, I chose to listen to activists making sense of the world around them, not merely others envisioning the world for them. To borrow the terms of anthropologists Gloria Raheja and Ann Gold from a different con-text, I aimed to "listen" to, not just "watch" the voices of young activists.[27] And, by doing so, my goal is to make the subtle yet significant point that the pronouncements of old men in grey beards are no more important than the voices of young activists in blue jeans, djellabas, and multiple mobile phones.

The diverse stories of mobilization we hear—and the organizational charts drawn by members that we will examine—belie predominant ac-counts of Islamist movements: of uniform submission, of undue deference paid to certain figures, of Weberian charismatic authorities hovering above all, of the "wise leading the blind."[28] A reference book on Islamism, for ex-ample, declares this as fact: "The rank and file member does not enjoy free-dom of opinion."[29] Another describes a "cult of personality devoted to their general guide."[30]

The chapters that follow reclaim the role of young activists as think-ers—and important ones at that. They are neither blind followers to those

supposedly directing them nor passive spectators to events unfolding around them. Far from being absent from the process of organizational change, they are on its front lines, continually crafting ideas and socializing others to them. Confronting competition for similar supporters, every young recruiter becomes a reinterpreter; every individual Islamist becomes an independent interlocutor. And through these dynamic interplays of ideas, new models of Islamist activism are born—from the bottom up and the inside out.

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I want to pause for a moment to clarify my terms. What, the reader might ask, does "Islamist" even mean? I remember one of the first times I considered this question. It was late one afternoon in Rabat, and I remember it because it was cloudy and wet. The streets were empty. The stores were late in opening up from the lunchtime siesta. Rabat, like most places with near perfect climates, does not quite know how to manage in the rain. The only person around was a newspaper vendor. Merchants like him arrange dozens of publications on the ground, often on a makeshift sheet; this spot had a large umbrella above it to keep it dry. People just hover. They stare, sometimes for hours, at the magazines and newspapers, peering at the pictures, the bold letters, the black and white print. Headlines and cover stories are particularly important in these publications—for these are often all the passerby will ever see. As I stood among the crowd, waiting for the city to wake from its slumber, one magazine cover in particular managed to catch my attention.

The banner headline was provocative and, in retrospect, prophetic. In bold Arabic type it read: "What Will Islamists Do If They Gain Power?" Its language was deliberate—and revealing. It employed the Arabic plural of "Islamist": *Islamiyyūn*.[31] Large, overlapping photos of *two* men jumped out from below the bold typeface. Even on a single newspaper cover, no one group occupied the page. Pictured were the leaders at the time of the two main Islamist groups in the country: Abdessalam Yassine, the founder and "spiritual guide" of the banned and illegal Al Adl (Mustapha's movement) who died in December 2012; and Saad Eddine El Othmani, then the head of the legal and electorally included Party of Justice and Development or PJD. Both men had beards, though Yassine's was longer, scragglier, and greyer. (Othmani became the country's foreign minister in 2012.)

As we will see, there are other groups, even within Morocco, but like the newspaper that day I focus here on the two largest ones.[32] PJD, as noted earlier, was formed as an outgrowth of a movement inspired by the Mus-

lim Brotherhood model.[33] Like its Egyptian ideological prototype, the Moroccan Brothers also overcame early violent roots. A top Al Qaeda thinker (Abu Musa al-Suri) once even referred to the 1970s group that gave rise to PJD as a "paradigmatic Jihadi group."[34] But its members, many who have risen to the rank of government minister, cling to the conviction that change is most effectively pursued from within the political system. This has been the party's hallmark, beginning with (or, indeed, as a basis for) its licensed admission by Moroccan authorities into the electoral process in 1997.

Al Adl, on the other hand, complicates casuistic categorizations of religio-political activism. It is illegal but nonviolent, repressed but thriving. Its members boycott elections, but are also politically engaged. Officially formed more than three decades ago, its founder, Yassine, was once a prominent Sufi spiritualist leader. And, while the group is organized in part like a traditional Sufi brotherhood, it also functions like a modern political party, replete with a political wing (or "circle"), official spokespeople, compound organizational charts, internal elections, and multiple websites. It has not shied away from calling for the—nonviolent—overthrow of the Moroccan regime and for an entirely new system of government. It remains today the largest single opposition force in the country.[35]

When I use the term "Islamist Movement," I do so to refer to groups such as these. I use it, in sum, just as the vast majority of the citizens of the Middle East and North Africa do: to signify the individuals whose largely nonviolent efforts to engage or participate in the political process, usually in the form of political parties and movements, are guided or animated by Islam or Islamic principles.[36] Despite their diversity—and despite their vast grievances with the postcolonial Arab state—these actors nonetheless accept and function within the authority of such states. And even though not all take part in elections—some boycott them and others remain illegal—all recognize the political process itself as legitimate or, at the very least, lawful. Such activists increasingly come in the form of conventional politicians, bureaucrats, legislators, and current or wanna-be parliamentarians.[37]

The members of groups such as the ones in Morocco or *Ennahda* (Renaissance) in Tunisia, *Islah* (Reform) in Yemen, or the Muslim Brotherhood–linked parties in Egypt or Jordan need no modifier; they are simply Islamists. To proceed otherwise would be deceptive: it would imply that the majority of Islamists are today violent. Instead, it is those who eschew politics or still employ arms that require the caveat of a modifier.[38]

ISLAMIST PLURALISM

To complicate matters even more, the umbrella terms "Al Adl" or "PJD" or "Muslim Brotherhood" do not by themselves come close to capturing the varieties of activism associated with their numerous allied associations and movements, the complexity and dynamism of which I will disentangle in part IV of the book.

Some, no doubt, will take issue with the label "Islamist" itself. Some consider it a Western invention. But I adopt it here largely because the activists I lived among employed it—and often proudly. "A Muslim," in a formulation more than one articulated, "is simply a person who performs rituals." But an "Islamist," on the other hand, is "someone who strives to establish a state based on Islam."[39] "We're not just regular Muslims," I would also often hear with pride, "we have a project and are doing our best to implement it."

Thus, I am not focusing here on violent extremists—the global Jihadi movements of the Al Qaeda or ISIS type—who exist squarely outside the realm of the modern nation-state and who condemn as apostates anyone who engages politically with such a state. I am also not focusing on militants, such as Hamas or Hezbollah, who experiment in electoral politics, but simultaneously engage in violence. Such groups have straddled the line between national liberation movements and full-blown domestic insurgencies.[40] And even though they now often play outsized roles in local governance, it remains largely impossible to disassociate them from their military wings, which still plan and plot terrorist operations.[41] Simply put, regardless of how some might continue to mislabel them, such movements do not represent the mainstream of political Islam.[42]

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My arguments took shape, inductively, in the cities, houses, secret gatherings, and public protests of Morocco, but they can also help us think about the development of political Islam elsewhere.[43] I want to spend the remaining pages of this chapter dispelling frequent misconceptions about the North African country and addressing a question that many readers will no doubt be pondering: What can Morocco tell us about the rest of the Arab world?

When the novelist Paul Bowles first caught a glimpse of Morocco in the 1930s, he became convinced it was a "magic place."[44] The Moroccan government long ago embraced this fantasy, selling itself as a bastion of calm in a troubled region, the Arab world's model of reform.[45] Yet, for all that the Moroccan regime has done to hold itself out as inimitable, political de-

velopments over the last three decades there have shared much in common with its neighbors.

This was the job description that could have been applied to most of the region's leaders, including Morocco's: an authoritarian leader with almost total control of the institutions in the country, one who has built a repressive police apparatus, which engages in torture, and curbs press freedoms, peaceful demonstrations, and active political oppositions; has paid mere lip service to the pervasive problems of corruption, cronyism, unemployment, and socioeconomic inequality; and, despite the rhetoric of reform, has constructed weak legislative bodies with limited governing authority.

Every index of Arab governance (including those by Transparency International, Freedom House, World Bank, and the Arab Human Development Report), rank Morocco not as outstanding, but as decidedly average or even below average.[46] Contrary to the fantasies of Moroccan exceptionalism, reform in the country has stalled for much of the last decade. While Morocco has often been spared the political unrest of some of its neighbors, national elections in 2007 and 2011 were noteworthy not for who voted, but for who abstained. Intentionally spoiled ballots reached their highest level in Moroccan history. If one counted those blank or spoiled ballots, that total would easily represent the largest vote getter, surpassing any party.[47]

It is no coincidence, therefore, that the word most commonly used by Moroccans to describe the governing elite is *makhzen* or warehouse—for the bulk of the power of the country's major institutions has remained tightly stored within its confines. Secret U.S. State Department cables released by WikiLeaks in 2010 accused the Moroccan government of profound corruption and "appalling greed." The documents expressed in writing what most citizens already suspected: "major institutions and processes of the Moroccan state are used by the Palace to coerce and solicit bribes."[48]

Some might rightfully note (as I pointed out earlier) that the king of Morocco maintains a powerful religious role, and claims direct descent from the Prophet Mohammed, but so too does the king of Jordan. And, for that matter, Hosni Mubarak, the Assad family, and the presidents of Algeria, Iraq, Yemen, Tunisia and most every leader in the region (not the least of which the Saudi royal family) went to great lengths to control and dominate the religious sphere, sometimes even engaging in what one scholar cleverly called "prophet sharing."[49] Thus, the myth of the "secular" Arab autocrat was never quite so. Throughout the last half century, the constitutions of Egypt and even Tunisia long declared Islam as the official religion of the state; Egypt's even prescribed Islam as "the main source of legisla-

tion."[50] In fact, in a comprehensive survey tracking government regulation and favoritism of religion in the Middle East, Morocco ranked statistically in the middle of all Arab states.[51] Moreover, as I show in part III, Islamism is policed in Morocco less by the force of the king's religious aura than by varied social mechanisms available to most leaders.

To be sure, much has been written about the differences between Arab kings and presidents, between monarchies and republics. The systems of rule certainly influenced which authoritarian leaders were deposed from office in 2011 and beyond (it is undoubtedly easier to banish a president than a monarch, especially one such as Morocco's whose family has ruled in some form since the seventeenth century). And it is also true that monarchies, bolstered by the confidence of the throne, made slightly more room for opposition actors to emerge. But, in the end, regime type had little impact on the ways citizens living in these countries experienced reform—or lack thereof.[52]

Morocco also does not represent an economic utopia in its region—just as it does not represent a political one. Throughout the 1990s and 2000s, many economists and policy makers touted North Africa's economic progress. "Today," wrote one glowing economics professor in August 2010, "less than nine per cent of Moroccans are considered 'poor,' compared to 16.2 percent a decade ago." This particular adulatory piece was entitled: "Morocco's Economic Model Succeeds Where Others Fail."[53]

But the African Development Bank has shown how poverty in Morocco and throughout North Africa is more complex than such figures suggest. Many statistical studies rely on outdated definitions of poverty; and seemingly low absolute numbers obscure vastly unequal distributions of wealth within and between regions. Daily life in Morocco, as we will see, regularly illuminates these incongruities: one sees slums next to mansions, panhandlers outside five-star hotels, and, in Rabat, unemployed medical students on daily hunger strikes in front of the ornate, cordoned-off parliament building.[54]

Morocco, like its North African neighbors Tunisia and Egypt, remains stuck as an emerging economy where resources are scarce, but labor is abundant. And, despite mostly top-down liberalization efforts of the 1990s and 2000s, certain structural factors continue to depress a still struggling labor market. Economic turmoil in the nearby Euro-Zone has affected an increasingly interconnected Morocco: tourism revenues, the need for migrant laborers in Europe, and the amount of remittances being sent are all down. Due largely to improving healthcare standards, fertility has slowly decreased, but not before the years between 1990 and 2010 produced what

has been called "the greatest labor force pressures from young male and female workers" in the country's history.[55] Indeed, the increase in education among women ironically has added even more stress to an already distended labor force. This is true even while female labor force participation in the Arab world remains among the lowest in the world.[56]

One additional point: Morocco is also not immune to terrorism. On April 27, 2011, to use but one example, a student walked into my office and asked if it was safe to study in Morocco. "Definitely," I said. The next day seventeen people were killed in a suicide bombing in Marrakesh's main square, at a popular café that I had frequented dozens of times. (Fortunately, the student still planned to go.) The deadliest attack in recent memory occurred on May 16, 2003, when suicide bombings across Casablanca killed forty-five people over four locations: a tourist hotel, a Jewish-owned restaurant, a European consulate, and a Spanish social club. It has come to be known as Morocco's 9/11. As they are in Iraq and the Arabian Peninsula, Al Qaeda affiliates in North Africa are still active. In September 2013, for instance, Al Qaeda of the Islamic Maghreb called upon all Moroccans to wage jihad.

Of course, in the end, there is no such thing as an archetypical Arab state. All possess distinctive political, historical, economic, social, and cultural characteristics. But if the Arab Spring demonstrated anything, it was that the Arabic-speaking countries to the west of Egypt demand more of our attention. The main countries of the Maghreb—Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya—have consistently been understudied, overlooked in favor of the more recognizable or seemingly significant countries of the region, such as Egypt, Syria, Jordan, or Lebanon. Yet, the events in North Africa in 2010 and 2011 that spearheaded both widespread regional reform and tumult prove that the Maghreb can no longer be ignored.