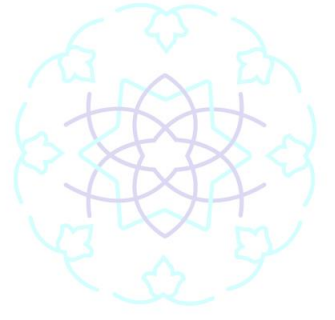




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THE MEDIA AND THE MEDIATION OF RELIGIOUS DISCOURSE IN THE MOROCCAN PUBLIC SPACE

Mohamed EL MOUDEN¹

“Religious opinion has often proved to be more powerful than the state”.

(Bertrand Russell. 2011 : 127)

Abstract

Based on this definition of the notion of mediation or mediatisation and its functions, and based on the central concepts of this process, such as transformation, contextualisation, framing the news, the media as actors, etc., we start, in this article, to observe how religion is mediatised in the Moroccan public space. Therefore, a mediatised religion is one that has undergone transformations in its praxis due to the fact that it has passed through the media. No one can deny the transformations that the praxis of Islam in Morocco has undergone due to the intervention of different types of media in the production of religious symbols and meanings, and in their consumption in Moroccan society, that is, due to the mediation or mediatisation of religion. Among the consequences of the mediation of Islam in Morocco are certain aspects linked to certain religious behaviours.

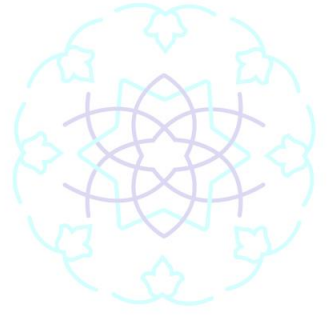
Key Words: Mediation, Morocco, Power, Public Sphere, Religion, Religious Public Opinion

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MEDYA VE FAS KAMUSAL ALANINDAKİ DİNİ SÖYLEMİN ARABULUCULUĞU

“Dini görüşün devletten daha güçlü olduğu çoğu kez kanıtlanmıştır.”

(Bertrand Russell. 2011 : 127)

Özet

Bu makale, arabuluculuk veya medyalaştırma kavramının tanımı ve işlevlerinin yanı sıra dönüşüm, bağlamsallaştırma, haberleri çerçeveleme, aktörler olarak medya vb. gibi sürecin temel kavramlarına dayanarak başlamaktadır. Fas'ın kamusal alanında dinin nasıl aracılındığını gözlemlemek amaçlanmaktadır. Dolayısıyla medyatik bir din, medyadan geçtiği için pratiğinde dönüşümler geçirmiş bir dindir. Fas'ta farklı medya türlerinin dini sembollerin ve anlamların üretilmesine ve bunların toplumda tüketilmesine, yani arabuluculuk veya medyalaştırmaya müdahalesi nedeniyle İslam pratiğinin, geçirdiği dönüşümleri kimse inkar edemez. dinin. Fas'ta İslam aracılığının sonuçları arasında, belirli dini davranışlarla bağlantılı belirli yönler vardır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Arabuluculuk, Fas, Güç, Kamusal Alan, Din, Dini Kamuoyu





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Introduction

No one doubts the obvious impact of the communication and information era, which has been installed as a consequence of globalization, on Moroccan society and its public space. The most decisive impact of this era has been felt in the reorganization of this space, the redistribution of power and the recreation of new relations and new forms of producing discourse and expressing ideologies or positions in the public arena. In short, the information and communication era has brought about structural changes in the different domains of Moroccan life, in the economy, society, culture and even in the forms of communication and knowledge.

In this era, there is no longer anyone who can exclusively control the industry of values or meaning, or univocally weave the identity or cultural, ideological or religious references of Moroccan society. All actors in society, explicitly or implicitly, now have the capacity to make their beliefs and ideas more visible references. The general image of Moroccan society is no longer limited by the typical parameters set by the official or dominant power. No one can exclusively take over the production of discourse and direct public opinion. With the entry of Moroccan society into the new era of communication and information, and in particular the new technologies, a new reality was created in which it is very difficult for the official power to maintain its dominance and control over information and communication, knowledge and know-how. This era has brought about a major transformation in the way power itself is structured. The "old rituals" no longer work, but new, purely communicative and informational processes are necessary. There is no longer a single power that classifies perceptions and behaviours, but several powers of different ideologies, some of them previously silenced by the official and single power, competing for leadership in the public space. Who thought that the day would ever come when the official power would lose so much strength in the eyes of public opinion, and those black holes it tried so hard to hide through manipulation and repression would be laid bare in broad daylight? With the new communication and information technologies, Moroccan society has been able to unmask the scandals of the authorities; for example, everyone has seen those

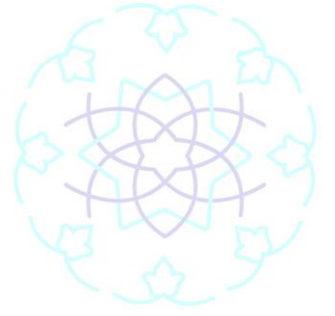
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videos on the corruption of some gendarmes, videos that would not have been seen before the era of communication and information, when the official power established absolute control over the flow of information. The communication era paved the way for all sensibilities and ideologies to enter the Moroccan public space and paved the way for what we are experiencing today (as I write these lines): popular revolutions, not only in Morocco, but throughout the Arab world (Majdoubi. 2011).

Religion in The Age of Communication and Information in Morocco

Religion in the era of communication and information that reigns in Moroccan society today has acquired a new presence and a new visibility, which is manifested through new forms of structuring and mediatization. With the new communication and information technologies, religion in Moroccan society has become more diversified and there is more internal competition between the different religious formations: official, popular, Islamist, Salafist, secular... to win over public opinion and to highlight their visibility and to acquire religious leadership, which is built through communicative mechanisms in the information and communication society that exists today in Morocco. The Moroccan religious scene is saturated with "new religious leaders", whose leadership is based on the communicative and informational power they have acquired. Morocco's official power has found itself, in this era, faced with different religious references and ideologies that intertwine before its eyes, because different discourses and interpretations of religious values share the same public space.

Religion in this era, on the other hand, takes on the appearance of modernity by embracing new technologies and inhabiting the virtual world. Religion has realised that the media are increasingly decisive in promoting values and fostering presence and visibility (Hoover.2006:3). Religious content has found in new technologies new communicative possibilities with a very powerful rhetorical charge. Virtual religious spaces have appeared on the public stage, religious rituals have been reconstructed on the internet, making them accessible to everyone, such as the appearance of online fatwas of different religious references. Different religious ideologies

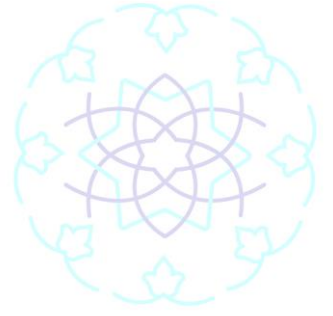
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created their own media to make themselves known to public opinion, and to highlight their differences in the face of increasing their favorable image in social and political perception. (Esparcia. 2011.)

In Morocco, in the age of communication and information, there is a strong connection between religion and the media, so much so that the media became an integral part of religious life (Hoover. Op. cit.). Moreover, it was through the media that the mosaic of the Moroccan religious map became known, with the cast of different leaders and different ideologies, some in conflict with each other and others allied.

Media Identity, Culture and Religion in Morocco

In a society such as Morocco's, religion is the fundamental reference through which elements such as identity and culture are manifested. The majority of Moroccans are Muslims, at a percentage of more than 97%, compared to 3% for other religions, such as Judaism and Christianity. Therefore, all the discourses produced by the different institutions of this society will be conditioned by this component (religion) either as ideology or as content.

Communication and information as an institution in Moroccan society is one of the sources of the production of discourses, therefore, the discourses of this institution (the media) will be conditioned in the causes of their production, in their formations, in their manifestations and in their effects by the religious element. This element manifests itself directly through religious content and ideology, or through other elements such as culture and identity.

In the history of communication and information in Morocco, there has been a great interest in cultural and identity issues. Reflection on these two thematic axes in Moroccan media discourse confirms the predominance of religion as an internal element in culture and identity. Since the first Moroccan media productions, which coincided in time with the colonization of

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Morocco¹, there has been a growing interest in raising questions of identity and culture as elements threatened by colonization and, more specifically, by French colonization, which wanted to impose a decree that threatened Morocco's cultural identity, the Berber *dahir*. The Moroccans understood that the French colonial administration wanted to disperse Morocco and break its cultural unity. For their part, these media, at the time, developed a media discourse to resist colonial ambitions that aimed at the cultural unity of Morocco, and which was based on turning Moroccan identity and culture into an ideological reference to resist colonization through media discourse. In the Moroccan media's treatment of the issue of identity in this colonial era, religion was never far from these issues, but rather religion and its values served to reinforce them, thus turning the media discourse into a source of resistance to colonialism in the eyes of Moroccan public opinion.

At the time of Moroccan independence and with the legislative construction of the country, the issue of identity, culture and religion emerged again in Moroccan media discourses, which became involved in the national debate on Moroccan identity and how it was to be reflected in the country's constitution. And on this occasion, religion again emerged as the main element underlying proposals on how to reflect identity and culture in Moroccan legislation.

The same media interest in cultural and identity issues was established with the efforts to formulate a Moroccan political and social model, in a context of competition for power and dominance between different political formations of the various ideologies of the political spectrum, Islamist, Liberal or Salafist. In these debates, manifested in Moroccan media discourses, issues such as identity and culture re-emerge against the backdrop of religious power, which was rooted as an ideological and ethical reference in Moroccan culture and in the country's identity. They thus became the dynamisers of political conflicts in the struggle for power, which, in the case of Morocco, were the political forces dominated by the *Makhzen*, other secular and

¹ This period coincides with the birth of journalism in Morocco, which devoted all its media efforts to fighting against the colonization of the country.

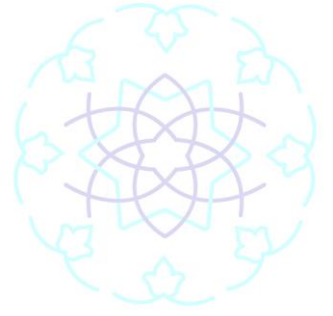
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third Islamist forces, as well as a source of debate for the domination of education and philosophy and thought from a critical approach based on an original structure of modernity or other questions such as identity in relation to otherness, etc....

Each ideological group wants its concept of culture, identity and therefore religion to reign in society, so the Moroccan media have reflected this struggle in their media treatment of this debate, offering their spaces throughout their history to reflect on the question of identity and culture, and in none of these media productions on these two issues has religion been absent as content or as ideology, but has always constituted the backdrop to these debates. The history of media discourse on identity and culture was directly or indirectly linked to religion as a fundamental element in the fabric of Moroccan society, present in all its debates in various fields. The presence of religion in the different aspects of life in Moroccan society is reflected in the great interest that the Moroccan media have taken in this element (religion), which also appears when they deal with the two thematic axes of identity and culture.

The Mediation of Religion in Morocco

Mediation" as a critical and analytical term in communication studies and media sociology has emerged as a consequence of analyzing "the intervention of the media and specifically of communication technologies in all public and private spheres"(Moya and Vázquez.2010:75-96). Some reflections on mass communication have identified mediation with the media's capacity to bring about modifications and changes in popular perception and in the construction of meanings and values (Lassen, Strunck, Vestergaard. 2006:19). According to Bauer and Gaskell (2000:24) , mediation, which leads to different objectives and is realized through a complex process of transformation, is based on a process based on information that is realized through different steps such as selecting, translating, editing, reducing or expanding. These stages in the operation of information / or mediation can cause a recontextualization, which means the construction of new meanings and new values of the same mediatized content. The term recontextualizations, used by critical studies (Moya and Vázquez. Op. Cit.: 19), opens our reflection on the nature of media

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and the communicative process. In principle, it should be mentioned that the media are socio-cultural mediators and, as Martin Barbero states: "today the function of mediator is performed by the mass media" (Martin Barbero. 1987: 44), and specifically with the emergence of the consumer society and mass culture. Mediation is also conditioned by various actors behind the media or communication technologies, such as media ideology, politics, economics, culture, all of which interfere in the process of mediation and lead to recontextualization. Moreover, Bauer and Gaskell (Op. cit.: 96) themselves suggest that mediation is a kind of framing of news based on selecting approaches and frames to present certain content or information. All of this is rooted in transformation as the goal of mediation or mediatization.

In short, mediation refers to the transformative practices involved in different fields of activity (Moya and Vázquez. Op. cit.: 85) by the media and new technologies.

On the basis of this definition of the notion of mediation or mediatization and its functions, and on the basis of the central concepts of this process, such as transformation, contextualization, framing the news, the media as actors, etc., we set out to observe how religion is mediatized in the Moroccan public space. Therefore, a mediatized religion is one that has undergone transformations in its praxis due to the fact that it has passed through the media.

No one can deny the transformations that the praxis of Islam in Morocco has undergone due to the intervention of different types of media in the production of religious symbols and meanings, and in their consumption in Moroccan society, that is to say, due to the mediation or mediatization of religion. Among the consequences of the mediation of Islam in Morocco are certain aspects linked to certain religious behaviours.

In this context, the 2007/2008 report on the state of the religious question in Morocco notes that the media, and more specifically television, became the first source of religious information for Moroccans, especially for the youth category, before the mosque, and consequently, there has been a growth in Moroccan consumers of religious content in the media and religious websites and more specifically those specialising in the *Fatawa* (2009: 73). According to these data, the

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fact of religious mediation has given the media a powerful impact in terms of providing more religious information than mosques, as well as giving the presenters of religious content in the media more prominence than traditional actors, such as imams in mosques.

As part of the process of mediation or mediatization of Islam in Morocco, the media have been able, through their interventions in the production of religious discourse, to have an impact on certain religious and cultural behaviors of Moroccans. In this context, the report highlights the role of the religious media, led by television, in the expansion of the hijab phenomenon among women in Moroccan society. (Ibid:70)

Another aspect of the transformation of the religious behavior of Moroccan citizens is that religious actors themselves adopt the media or new technologies for the dissemination of their discourses, as the audience is not the one present at the meeting place, in a mosque or school or any other similar place, but in the unlimited and borderless space of the virtual world, so that these actors now adapt their discourses and rhetorical strategies to the new technologies and with a new notion of audience that is more diverse and universal².

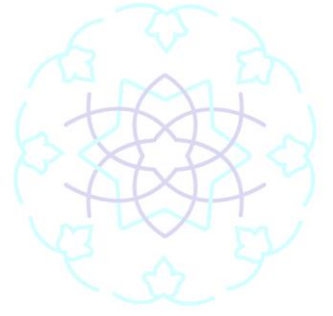
Mediation, in some cases, takes on a sense of control and domination. This is what happens with the mediation of religious discourses produced by the Moroccan state. In this context, the Ministry of Habus and Religious Affairs has set up television screens in Morocco's main mosques, through which the ministry broadcasts its religious discourses through scholars or imams who are in line with the state's official religious ideology. With this mediation, Morocco's official authorities have been able to control the dissemination of religious values and promote their meaning and ideology, thus undermining the authority of religious actors who promote other

² Most of the well-known imams in Morocco have been able to create their own websites to communicate their religious discourse beyond local spaces. In this context, we can take as an example the website of the Khatib (the Imam who leads Friday prayers) Abdellah Nahari. See: <http://www.nhari.net/>



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meanings and interpretations of religious values that could be opposed to those that the official authorities seek to promote in public spaces such as these.

Among the aspects of media intervention in the process of mediating religion in Morocco is the recontextualization of the values and symbols of Islam in Moroccan society. One of the factors that deeply touches the process of mediation or mediatization and conditions the function of recontextualization should also be mentioned. This factor can be defined as the media's action as social actors (Barbero, Op. Cit: 2) representing various religious, political, and cultural ideologies.

The intervention of the media as actors affects the construction of representations of religious meanings (Barnett. 2003: 54). During the media production of these values or meanings, the media ideologies create new contexts, therefore, this production within these conditions leads to a recontextualization of religious values, and with it appears these values linked to new contexts of perception and reception.

This happens in the Moroccan reality through the different perceptions of the same religious values after the fact of mediation. The different media, during their intervention in the mediation process, provide new contexts through the use of different types of semiosis (Lassen, Strunck, Vestergaard. Op. Cit:19), which makes these religious values manifest themselves with different perceptions and representations. For example, the phenomenon of the hijab in Morocco has been mediated by the different Moroccan media with their different ideologies and the result was the steering of public perceptions of the hijab towards various and sometimes conflicting connotations and representations.

For the official power, the mediation and mediatization of Islam and its values in Morocco by the various media of different ideologies has led, according to the report on the religious situation in Morocco (2009), to these mediatized values, specifically by religious television stations, "to be placed outside the official domain of the state, and therefore the state will not be

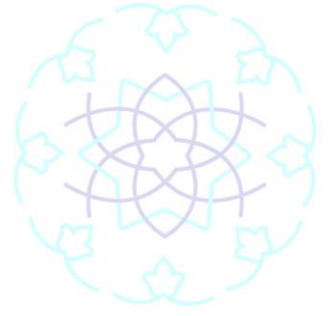
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able to control the production of values, which is facing strong competition due to the rise of satellite channels"(2009. Op. cit. 74).

In the case of Moroccan society, among the consequences of the mediation of religion and the recontextualization caused by the media of different ideologies is the chaos of values. In this context, the same report stresses that "the question of Fatwa has experienced problems in recent times because of its plurality and the difficulty of channeling it into a single theological current, which places public opinion in a complex situation of reception. (Ibid: 75).

On the other hand, new technologies and the reach of the digital domain and the internet have shaped the mechanisms of the mediation of religion. In the Moroccan public space, religious behavior has emerged as a result of the adoption of new technologies, and there has been a new reconstruction of religious spaces in the virtual space.

Mediation allows the media, technological and virtual space to become the place par excellence for the production of religious events, praxis and discourses, which are transformed into media elements that further bind public opinion and effectively move the masses.

The mediation of religion has ultimately had an impact on the construction of religious meanings, symbols and values in the Moroccan public space, highlighting the interpretative diversity and ideological references that shape the Moroccan religious scene, and at the same time allowing the different religious actors to make their own ideologies visible, It has thus caused the official power to lose its predominance and centrality and thus its ability to control the production of religious values, and to impose a single religious reference or at least certain unilateral conceptions, such as, for example, those concerning the perception of the religious in political issues, such as the relationship of religion and politics or the role of religion in the system of government.

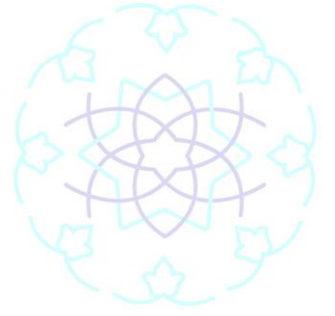
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Islamic Media and The Creation of Religious Public Opinion

Various disciplines have shown great cognitive and analytical interest in the term "public opinion", and specifically in the relationship between media and public opinion. From political science to psychology, sociology to communication (Crespi. 2000:19), a very considerable amount of theoretical and analytical effort has been accumulated to provide a conceptual definition of this term and its functions. The involvement of different disciplines in addressing the concept of public opinion has led Jürgen Habermas to propose an interdisciplinary treatment of the term (Habermas. 1981:37-39), while Irving Crespi strove to find the commonality between all the definitions that the concept of public opinion has acquired in different disciplines and in the history of human thought, stating that "the only point of the definition on which there is consensus is that public opinion has to do with conflict and disagreement as to how public issues should be resolved" (Crespi Op. cit. 20). Perhaps the context of this research requires following the development of the term public opinion from two specific approaches: power and communication, since our interest is to verify the religious media's commitment to the formation of religious public opinion in a context of struggle between official and unofficial ideologies, in order to achieve a certain power, political or religious, in Moroccan society. These two approaches make us very interested in Otto Baumhauer's definition of public opinion, when he considered that "public opinion is the product of the transformative process of information introduced into the open system of the climate of public opinion" (Monzón.1987: 136) . This definition gives a certain power to information in the formation of public opinion, which brings to mind the role of the media in the formation of public opinion. The most frequently cited real-life example of this is the media's impact on American public opinion in the Vietnam War. And this is what we intend to observe in the case of the relationship between the religious media in Morocco and the formation of religious public opinion.

On the other hand, the definition that links public opinion with power, whether political or religious, as in our context, is that of Hans Speier, who considers it to be

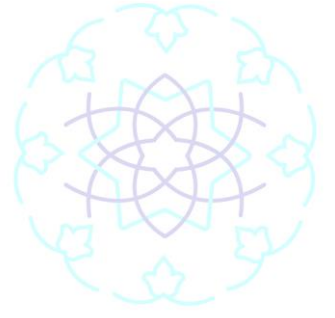
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"opinions on matters of interest to the nation expressed freely and publicly by people outside the government, who claim to have the right to have their opinions influence or determine the actions, persons or structure of their government" (Speier.1969:56.).

This definition coincides completely with what is happening in the reality we are studying, since it is the case of ideologies that are not represented in the official power and that try through the media to fight to emphasize their presence in the public opinion, even to make an effort so that their ideas or ideologies can influence and determine actions, that is, to acquire a certain power.

Religious forces and the state or official power in Morocco have shown in different political, religious, social or cultural attitudes that they are aware of the importance of dominating public opinion, since according to Marx and Engels, public opinion represents the predominance of a social class (Dader. 1992:21). This is why each party aspires to dominate this public opinion by adopting the different strategies they believe convenient to achieve this objective.

Although our effort is aimed at dealing with the media's efforts to construct religious public opinion, we should first deal with the characteristics of this public opinion, the importance of which justifies the media's efforts to dominate it through its construction.

Bertrand Russell in his work "Power, a new social analysis", although he speaks of religious opinion and not religious public opinion, nevertheless gives us the keys to highlight what distinguishes religious public opinion. In this context Russell states that "religious opinion has often proved more powerful than the state". (Russell. 2011: 127). Thus, the dominance of religious public opinion guarantees a great tool for attaining or maintaining power. Religion or the religious in a society such as Morocco's represents a vital dimension of consciousness and identity, as the source of its power is its high capacity to move social masses, which justifies this implicit or explicit struggle for dominance between the different political and religious forces in Moroccan society.

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Moreover, the struggle to control opinion, or at least to influence it through the media, is rooted in the importance the media are currently gaining in the social, political, religious and cultural life of Moroccans, as they have become the main sources of information and knowledge for them in the age of communication. This importance of communication and information in Moroccan society justifies the efforts of the various political and religious actors to choose the media as an effective channel for the purpose of shaping public opinion. In this context, the media scene has become a space of competition for all actors in society to control, dominate or win the favour of religious public opinion.

In short, the formation of religious public opinion in Morocco through the religious media has been the objective of all official or opposition political and religious forces in order to dominate this opinion and at the same time extend the scope of their domination. Moreover, the link between Moroccan public opinion and religion has made the religious dimension one of the most decisive fields for the formation of public opinion and the formulation of its agenda (Maxwell E. McCombs. 2004: 62.).

Religion as Media Content in Morocco

Morocco's media history shows that religion and the media have gone hand in hand, albeit in different ways. This relationship intensified with the growing role of the media in Moroccan society, given its great capacity to build convictions and conceptions as well as to shape the religious and cultural identity of society. (Hoover. Op. cit.: 2)

The religious content in the Moroccan media has manifested itself in different aspects according to the stages of Moroccan media history, the political ideology of the media and its position vis-à-vis the official power. In this context, we can distinguish four ways of promoting religious content according to the classes and media and their ideology as well as their position vis-à-vis the official power. One of these classes is the religious media, which we will leave for the section on religion as media ideology.

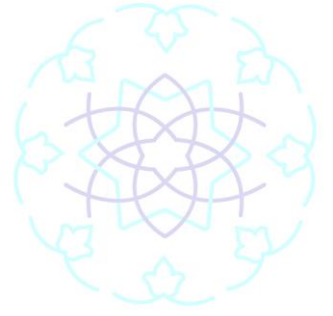
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The media before Moroccan independence and religious content

At this time, neither the Moroccan people nor their political class, who were under French and Spanish colonization³, were able to establish a media activity involved in expressing their situation and aspirations. The majority of the media in Morocco at that time were hand in hand with the colonial authorities, and especially the French authorities completely cut off any possibility for Moroccans to acquire a media outlet. Marshal Liotti, head of the French colonial authorities in Morocco, says:

"We must maintain our absolute and complete power because it is the basic element of our strength. We will never allow Arabic-language newspapers to compete with us, because if these newspapers are published among the rebels, they will not only encourage them to resist us but will weaken our means of communication". (El Ouazzani. Undated.)

The French authorities established in Morocco a radio station called "Radio Al Maghreb" which was founded in 1928, but they totally ruled out religious programmes (Behdoude.1991) from its media content, although later they allowed the inclusion of some religious content when it had competition, within the colonial media agenda for Moroccan listeners, from other radio stations such as the Spanish "Radio de Ishbilia" (Radio de Sevilla) which was broadcasting at that time programmes with Arabic content: news, music... etc. This circumstance allowed religious content to be incorporated into "Radio Maghreb" in 1939: (Ibid. 39). However, demonstrations were made by Moroccans against the programming of religious content on this station, who considered that a radio station run by the colonial authorities was a radio station designed to carry out French colonial propaganda, and that religious content should not be broadcast there. With the intervention of the Sultan of Morocco, Mohammed V, in 1941, the

³ The Spanish colonial authorities allowed Moroccan nationalists to publish their media activities from the Protectorate area. Moroccan nationalists to edit their media activities from the Spanish Protectorate zone (the northern part of Morocco), but only those (the area of northern Morocco), but only those directed against the French Protectorate. against the French Protectorate.

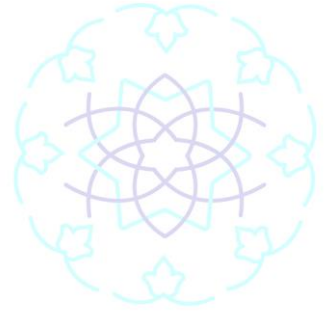
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Qur'an was allowed to be broadcast for half an hour a day, after Moroccan officials joined the radio. In 1947, it was separated from the French station and Moroccan listeners returned to listen to it. Religious content on "Radio al Maghreb" reached 14.3% of the total radio content at that time. This was the first time that Muslim religious content was used in a media outlet in Morocco. Religious content was adopted to respond to the demands of the Moroccan people to listen to a radio that represented their cultural and religious values.

Religious content in the state media and in the Moroccan organic press

After Morocco gained its independence, the state became involved in establishing its media apparatus, with television and radio being the main media representing official Moroccan power. And since religion has always been a sensitive issue and a pillar on which one of the main aspects of the legitimacy of official power is based, the state has always been determined to control this issue in the media (as in other aspects such as mosques, school education and other institutions) through the production of religious content that responds to the need to keep this field under absolute control. This strategy has been maintained since Morocco gained its independence until the last years of Hassan II's reign. Most of the religious content or programs of the two official media, Moroccan television and radio, were devoted to preaching and guidance. The religious programme most remembered by Moroccans, produced by television, is the so-called "Ruknu al Mufti" (Corner of the ulema who dictates fatwas). It offers topics on issues such as Asalat (prayer), Azakat (a type of tax contribution), inheritance, Ramadan etc... and its contents are never controversial, as they never deal with politics, government or similar issues. Other types of religious content offered in the same public media were: Quran reading, coverage of the monarch's religious activities, religious celebrations, films and series dealing with the history of Islam and its different historical figures, such as the biography of the Prophet etc.

From the Moroccan state radio, religious radio content such as the interpretation of the Koran, broadcast in the early hours of the morning and produced by the famous Moroccan scholar Shaykh El Mekki Nasiri, founder of the nationalist newspaper El Nuevo Marruecos during the

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Protectorate in 1937 (Micouar. L ,2016) has remained fixed in the memory of Moroccans. The same Moroccan national radio station produced other religious radio content such as the live broadcast of the Friday prayer and the five calls to prayer of the day, as well as preaching and guidance programs and others dealing with the biography of the Prophet and his sayings or the lives of his companions and famous people in the history of Islam and radio serials on historical Islamic events, as well as the broadcast of religious music during Fridays and religious festivals.

The Moroccan organic press, for its part, has devoted part of its space to religion as an element of its journalistic content, although this space varies according to the political ideology of the party that each newspaper represents, and according to its position towards the official power.

Two were the most dominant organic newspapers on the Moroccan journalistic map since the years of the country's independence, a conservative one called "Al-Alam" (The Flag) belonging to Hizb al-Istiqlal (the Independence Party), and a leftist one called Al Ittihad Al Ichiraki, the Arabic newspaper of the political party Al Ittihad Al Ichiraki li al kouat Achaabia (The Socialist Union of Popular Forces). In these two newspapers, which were the most influential in Moroccan public opinion⁴, the treatment of religion, within the media content offered daily to Moroccan readers, has always been linked to the political ideology of the newspaper and its party, and also to its religious ideology. Therefore, we find two different spaces in the two newspapers where religion appears as media content: more extensive in one (Al Al Alam newspaper) and more reduced in the other (Al Ittihad Al Ichiraki newspaper). The left-wing party's newspaper does not treat religion as a main subject in the daily media consumption of Moroccan society, such treatment is justified by the newspaper's secular ideology, while the conservative Al Al Alam newspaper offers religion as the main content of its readers' media consumption, devoting more space to it through different journalistic genres, such as news,

⁴ Precisely in the period before the seizure of political power in 1998 and before the emergence of the independent media. the emergence of independent media.

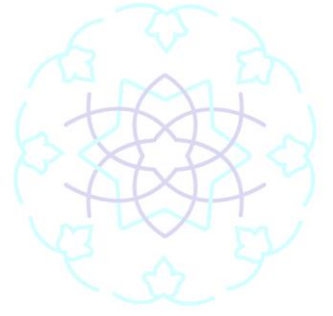
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opinion, analysis, reportage, etc., as well as in different frameworks, such as culture, politics, religion, thought, etc. The conservative newspaper's interest in religion as content reached its peak with the creation of a weekly supplement called "AL fikr Al Islami" (Islamic Thought) which is delivered with the newspaper every Friday.

This journalistic space promotes religion with an intellectual touch. In the ideological report issued at the twelfth congress of the Al Istiqlal party in 1990, the justification for the creation of this religious supplement can be found. This report considers the supplement "Al fikr al Islami" as an official representation of the Istiqlal party's thinking on the subject of religion. This party adheres to the Islamic faith from the Salafî thought drawn by its leader 'Allâl al-Fâsî (Al Meghari. 2010: 245). The religious supplement of the conservative newspaper deals with different topics of Islamic thought, religious issues of the Muslim community in Europe, as well as comparative studies of religion. In the 5 May 1995 issue, the "Al fikr al Islami" supplement of the newspaper Al Al Alam, different topics appeared, reflected in these titles: "The war of extremism in France against Islam", "the banning of the Moroccan authorities on the book of the Islamic preacher Yusuf al-Qaradawi", "the intervention of justice to ban an anti-Jewish use of the Bible": The Zionist lobby's fear and hatred against Islam", as well as topics linked to culture and religious thought, such as: "the history of the human being", "the Koran and scientific research" and "Islamic philology and the Moroccan experience in Islamic studies". In the following issue of the supplement, i.e. issue 19 of May 1995, other religious themes appeared, such as 'Chechen resistance', 'the Koran and scientific research' and 'human sciences between secularism and Islam'. Religious topics appeared not only in the Friday religious supplement, but also in the daily pages, through different journalistic genres: news, reports, opinion, etc. In turn, the leftist newspaper Al Ittihad Al Ichiraki, by virtue of its ideology, reduced its journalistic space devoted to religious content and everything it published in this regard was always based on a critical perspective of thought, or gave voice to Islamic experiences that coincided with the ideology of the newspaper and the political body that runs it. While Al Alam, for example, covers news and gives journalistic treatment to Islamic areas or Muslim minority issues such as the

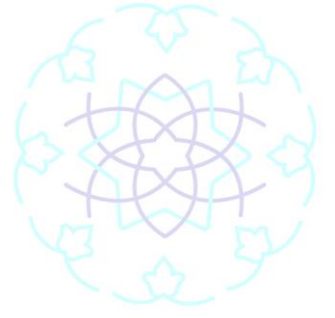
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Chechen cause, Al Ittihad Al Ichiraki, guided by its ideology, gives more space to areas such as Latin America, paying attention to the experiences of the left in this continent. This leftist Moroccan newspaper has never published a special supplement dedicated to religion, although in some religious commemorations, such as in the month of Ramadan, they expand the space reserved for religion a little more and offer contents on history, characters, books, or thinkers of Islam, seen from the ideological perspective of the newspaper and its political organ.

Religious content in the independent Moroccan media

With the birth of the independent media in Morocco in 1997 (Majdoubi. 2010: 31 -34), a new media source was created for the production of journalistic discourses independent of the official Moroccan institutions that traditionally control their production, such as the political institutions of the official power or the traditional political parties of the opposition, such as the Moroccan socialists (Al Ittihad Al Ichiraki li al kouat Achaabia) and the Istiqlal party⁵, as well as the official religious and cultural institutions. The independent media have been able to create a new media agenda marked by the emergence of new issues that could not be addressed before, such as the monarchy, political Islam, etc. These media have been able to promote new approaches to the daily affairs of Moroccans in the political, religious, cultural, and social fields, and thus the production of new media discourses that challenge the traditional ones set by the official power, which used to delimit the field of Moroccan journalism. The Moroccan independent media have created their own information policy, and this has been visible, for example, in the way they have presented religious and other social, cultural and political content to Moroccan public opinion. Just as these media have been able to approach subjects that were previously taboo, such as the monarchy, they have also been able to cover religious subjects that were previously untouchable, just to cite one example of the most controversial religious subjects, such as political Islam.

⁵ In the last years of Hassan II's reign, and within the framework of the so-called alternation government, i.e. when these two parties have taken over the government.

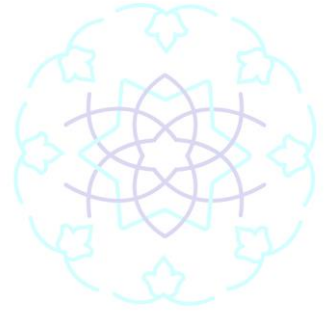
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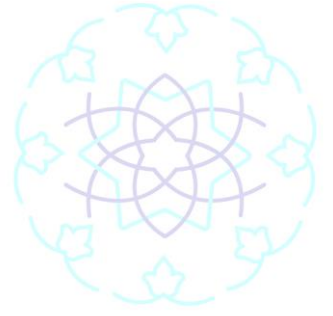
The media, and specifically the Moroccan independent press and magazines, have offered a new approach to the issue of political Islam that was deliberately ignored by the official Moroccan media or by the organic press circulating in the same orbit in terms of their perception of this issue. Part of the independent press has been allowed to offer different versions of the Moroccan Islamic movements and their religious leaders, who were invited to express their opinion without these independent media being ideologically in favor of them, than those that appear in other Moroccan media (official and organic). The independent media have been able, through their treatment of religious content of this nature, to impose another version on the journalistic and political discourse on the conflict between the official power and the opposition forces of political Islam, and even to expose the lack of credibility of the official journalistic discourse on these issues.

The primary media source for Moroccan public opinion on this and other issues is the independent media. This difference made by the Moroccan independent media in terms of their journalistic discourse on religious issues, and specifically on political Islam, has led the Moroccan official power to launch a censorship campaign against these media and to limit their ability to practice journalism through different types of interventions: economic and financial, judicial, etc.

Religion as a content in the independent Moroccan media appears freed from the classificatory model promoted by the official power, which, through its official and organic media, promotes religion as a media content that the Moroccan public opinion must relate to certain faces and not to others.

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Conclusion

The mediatization of religion in Morocco is a media phenomenon that has gained prominence on the political, social, and religious scene in the North African country for several reasons:

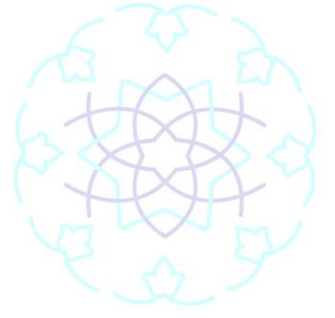
- a) The growing role of the media and new communication technologies in Moroccan society, and the convictions of religious actors of the role of the media in the transformation and movement of the masses, as well as in the dissemination of ideology or values among public opinion.
- b) The growing presence of religion and its role in Moroccan society, which is manifested in various aspects of religiosity: more women wearing hijab, the increase in the number of young people attending mosques, greater social and political consumption of religious content.
- c) The context of 11 September 2001 and the global and local strategies that were adopted by the state to combat radical ideologies led to Islamic and religious media becoming a communicative necessity to carry out objectives of domination and control.
- d) The advent of new technology and the impact of the information and communication age offered religious forces oppressed by the official power a perfect medium for the dissemination of their ideology, discourses and values outside any kind of control by this power, which until then had limited their access to traditional media such as television, radio, press, etc. The new technologies have brought them freedom of expression and freedom of expression. New technologies have given them freedom and means.

Secondly, religion has become more present as content and as ideology and culture thanks to the mediation of the media, while the Islamic media have gained greater recognition as mass media, obtaining greater social and religious impact in a society such as Morocco. The Islamic media are becoming increasingly influential in terms of public opinion creation in this



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country and social mobilization, but also in the political arena. This phenomenon reflects both the struggle for political power and the expansion of the "religious fact" as a socio-cultural process in Morocco.

The Islamic media were created in the consciousness of religious and political actors, as well as in the mind of official power, as a means of struggle for domination or against domination. Therefore, both strived to invest in the possession of media, because it meant for them the possession of power.

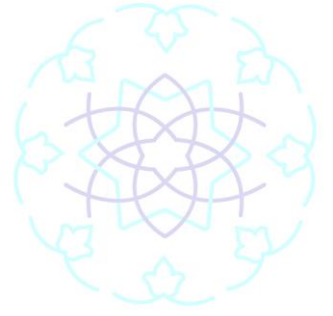
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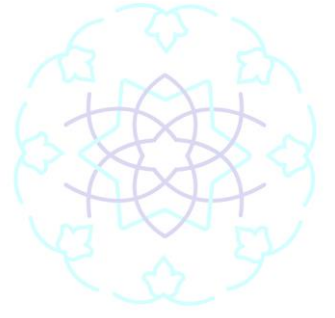
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