ISLAMS IN MOROCCO AND MOROCCAN ISLAMIC MOVEMENTS

Najah Mahmi, PhD
Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah University, Morroco

As a constituent of Moroccan socio-cultural identity, Islamic religion provides Moroccans with a major sense of collective identity that unifies them and strengthens their social ties, reducing socio-cultural and even political differences and clashes. However, it increases difference sensibility towards the notions of group and belonging, especially that in- group/ out- group taxonomies are omnipresent in any conceptualization of religion. In this regard, my speech revolves around the pluralistic dimension of Moroccan Islam incarnated in a variety of organizational and institutional embodiments of Islam through Islamic movements, each of which suggests a different mode of religiosity and a specific political agenda.

The aim of my speech is to investigate the socio-cultural and political dimensions of Islam and Islamism in Moroccan society, as an example of Islamic Arab societies which witness more or less the same religious turmoil, especially with what has been known in the Arab world- namely Tunisia, Egypt, Libya and Syria- as "the Arab Spring" which has embodied multiple expressions of anger, revolution and violence, resulted from a compilation of historical circumstances, the specificities of which differ from one country to another and in which overlap several parties that try to defend the legitimacy of their stances and demonstrate sovereign rights to rule. This has developed into a kind of sectarian war that has started with the criterion of being either with or against the regime to end up with other criteria of tribal, religious, and ideological affiliation which correlate with power and hegemony. A striking example in this respect is the rise of the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) which has proved, till now, extreme violation of human rights and portrayed a distorted image of Islam throughout the world.

In my intervention, I present some of the beliefs and teachings of Islam and argue for the confusion between 'orthodox Islam' and 'popular Islam' on the part of an important majority of Moroccans. This intensifies religious confusion in Moroccan society that converges with another confusion caused by the hesitation of Moroccans about whether to stick to their historical heritage or incarnate "modernity".

I deal also with the issue of the proliferation of Moroccan Islamic movements fortified by the unstable religious social state in the country, and the divide among Moroccans in regards to their reactions towards Islamism, waving from 'with', 'against' and 'neutral'.

The central question of my speech is which Islam is valid, the Islam of common Moroccan Muslims as they believe and practice, or that intended by Islamists? In other words, is Moroccan Islamism legitimate? If yes, which mode of Moroccan Islamism is the most legitimate? Which Islamic movement should one trust? Why? And, to what extent? How would that serve the future of Morocco in particular and the Middle East in general?