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“Religious Dimensions of Democratization  
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**ABSTRACT**

“Morocco’s State-Sponsored Women Religious Guides (*murshidat*)  
and Scholars (*‘alimat*): Re-conceptualizing Female Religious  
Authority and Activism in Contemporary Morocco”

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The recent political upheavals in the Arab world were marked by women’s significant presence in struggling for democracy alongside men. Muslim women activists in Morocco have similarly gained legitimacy in the context of the Arab Spring. Islamic political groups have strongly advocated gender equality, and social justice within an Islamic paradigm, in order to foster the image of a modern and democratic country based on an Islamic ideal. This introduces new spaces for contention, taking into consideration that following the 2003 Casablanca bombings, Morocco has taken a series of measures to absorb the growing momentum of political Islam. One such measure has been to restructure the religious field, by means of reforming and controlling the dynamics of religion in Morocco; this was primarily marked by a significant entry and deployment of women in the religious field as religious leaders and scholars. These state-trained female religious authorities offer spiritual counseling and religious instruction to different social segments. Therefore, they redefine parameters of religious authority and define a new model of activism which aims at cultivating collective pious conduct within the society and thus contribute to a comprehensive social reform. Hence, this paper explores the intricate dynamics and religious expressions of women within the religious sphere in Morocco and in the light of the current social and political changes and within the framework of the global struggle for democracy, gender equality, and human rights. I examine how these women construct authority as religious leaders, and the impact they have on their audience(s) and on the wider community, and how they endorse the authority of the state to control the dynamics of religion in Morocco and curb voices of individuals or groups that operate outside of official Islam.