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Moroccan Youth and Political Islam

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Abstract

As elsewhere, “young” Moroccans do not constitute a coherent, uniform or isolated unit. The place of religion in the City is renegotiated at the junction of ‘internal’ and ‘external dynamics,’ in a battlefield where frontiers, issues, and players are continually moving. It is within this framework that problems and arenas are constituted, and that even “young” people position and reposition themselves in the process.

Furthermore, as everywhere, the perception of injustice is not sufficient in and of itself to provoke a passage to collective action. Finally, Moroccan young people do not have a greater concern to build God’s City on Earth than the older generations. Admittedly, they have been more exposed to the mediums of Islamist socialization. There is surely a generational effect which remains to be studied. Despite this, there is not an Islamist steamroller. Moroccan “youth” are subject to the same cleavages that run throughout the global society.

The Promise and Menace of Youth

Youth in North Africa and Middle East represented a promise of change in the post-independence period until being depicted as a menace (Bennani-Chraïbi and Farag, 2007). Since the years following independence they have represented the “dangerous classes.”¹ In Morocco youth are both the victims of the “failure of the state” and globalization, and rebels confronting the hegemony of American empire. Youth use Islam as a form of identification and action. The attacks in Casablanca on May 16, 2003², as well as the role played by Moroccans during those of September 11, 2001 and March 11, 2004 in Madrid, have contributed to a mixed image of youth, Islamism and violence. These constructions are echoed in academic literature.

Since the independence of Morocco in 1956, research and analysis on youth has been carried out essentially using quantitative surveys. During the 1960’s, youth were seen as fundamental actors in history. Echoing theories of modernization and development, youth were characterized as being “modernist” and avant-garde in struggles against the “resistances to tradition” (Adam, 1962, p. 163). The “spearheads for change,” youth distinguished themselves from the older generation by rejecting polygamy and by their “westernized” cultural preferences. However, in a famous study on rural youth, sociologists Paul Pascon and Mekki Bentaher (1969) qualified them as “conventional” and unquestioning of the social order, particularly with regard to the family and the position of women. At the same time, they considered youth as “the motor of society” as young people were becoming numerically important. Yet despite being better educated, they were more destitute, more exploited than adults, and were engaged in a generational conflict with their “retrograde elders” of the “patriarchal society.” During the decade of 1980-1990 the perspective was inverted. From then on, the numerical weight of youth was greater than it had ever been in the past. The

¹ Pascal Ménoret (2007) used the expression “dangerous classes of globalization”.

² These attacks occurred simultaneously in several places in Casablanca (Restaurant, hotel...). They were attributed to kamikazes, belonging to the Salafiyaa Jihadiyya, close to the Qaeda. There were 45 deaths (33 civilians and 12 kamikazes).

unemployment of university graduates was recognized on the political agenda as a public problem (according to the 2004 census, the youth unemployment rate was 26%).

From the 1980s the “return of the religious” began to worry the elite who feared that dissatisfied youth could become more receptive to political speeches with Islamic references. In this context, a survey was conducted on High School and University students by the Rabat Group of research and sociological studies. It concluded that a predominant feature of youth was a “re-traditionalization of mentalities” because of their positive attitude on issues such as polygamy and the place of religion in society (Bourqia et al, 2000). For example, 55.7% of those surveyed replied “lots” to the question, “how much weight should religion occupy in administrative and political life?” All these studies were strongly influenced by the dominant paradigms of the times. Furthermore, “youth,” meaning those under 30, were falsely homogenized.³

More recently, studies from the media and academia⁴ have played a role in restoring the idea of the diversity of Moroccan youth, albeit into two general groupings. Upon a suicide attack, or the dismantling of a “terrorist” group, the Moroccan “secular” press is alarmed by the “spreading Islamic fanaticism” throughout Moroccan society, and most notably among marginalized youth. However, at other moments, the globalized “youth” appears hip with “alternative music” festivals (Rap, RNB, Hip hop). Whereas Islamic movements denounce the “westernization” of Muslim youth, others rejoice that it is a protective barrier. An example of this polarization is demonstrated in a recent issue of a secular French language Moroccan newspaper, *Tel quel*.⁵ The front cover represents young men with the cool “Nayda”⁶ look, and a young girl veiled who turns her back to them. The title is “Morocco against Marock. The liberty of some offends others.” The article begins, “Some pray, others dance. Some dare, others accuse. And the cleavage is becoming wider... Will there be a clash soon?”⁷ The producers of meanings compete over images to their society at different moments of its trajectory.

In this contribution, I will look on one hand to what degree young Moroccans maintain a homogeneous relationship with political Islam and assess if they are really different from their elders in this domain. In order to reply to the question, I shall use the data from several qualitative surveys conducted in Morocco. In the last 20 years I have conducted interviews (varying between 90 minutes and 3 hours) which have systematically contained questions on religious aspects (Bennani-Chraïbi, 1994). Those interviewed were educated urban people, aged between 15 and 56 years old. I will specifically analyze the repeated interviews conducted between 1998 and 2007 with young people from Casablanca, aged between 16 and 28 at the time of the first meeting. When they were first interviewed, the vast majority lived in working-class areas and had a general education. All were single, some were high school students, others university students, and still others were unemployed. I met them near their schools, in youth community centers, in neighborhood associations, or during the electoral campaign in 2002.

By youth I refer to the phase of transition during which a person becomes more

³ Further to the 2004 census, those under 30 represented 60% of the population and the segment 18-24 constituted 14%.

⁴ The results of these surveys will be treated in the final section of the paper.

⁵ Hassan Hamdani, “Maroc contre Marock. La liberté des uns offense les autres”, *Tel quel*, n° 278, 16 to 22 June 2007, p. 42-48.

⁶ It is the name given to the artistic movement compared by some observers to the Spanish Movida.

⁷ *Marock* refers to a Franco Moroccan film, produced by Laïla Marrakchi, filmed after the attacks of the 16th of May in 2003 in Casablanca, which came out in 2005. It represents wealthy youth which attends the French Lycée in Casablanca and transgresses religious prohibitions. On one hand, it recounts a love story between a Muslim young girl and a Jewish adolescent. On the other hand, it suggests the “return of religion” for the heroine’s brother, which is a worry for her. This cinematic event provoked an extremely stormy public debate.

autonomous in the domains, for example, of housing (the fact of leaving the family home), on an emotional level (building a new family group by marriage or having a child), and at an economic level (integration into the labor market). It should be emphasized that with the phenomenon of extended youth, the thresholds are not necessarily simultaneous. For example, in Morocco, the average age for a first marriage has been pushed back; it is currently 26.3 years old for women and 31.2 for men.

First of all, I would like to show the diversity of the Moroccan political-religious scene. In quantitative surveys certain Moroccan youth express a favorable opinion concerning religion in politics, even supporting the “application of the *shari‘a*”. I will focus on this category of young people. Next, it is not evident that opinions translate to political actions. Political Islam is not a flag behind which the masses of young Moroccans would be ready to move as one homogenous and united group. I will present data questioning the idea that “youth” are necessarily more sensitive than their elders to political speech with an Islamic reference.

The Moroccan Political and Religious Sphere: A Battlefield

It has been often underlined that the Moroccan religious arena is fundamentally dominated by the monarchy. However, the religious “legitimacy” of the Moroccan monarchy is not “natural” but has been the product of struggle, work, and a process of “naturalization” (Hammoudi, 2007). In Morocco a complex “religious field,” to use Bourdieu’s concept (1971), has enabled the Moroccan religious arena to be perceived as a terrain in which a whole series of players (monarchy, religious scholars (*‘ulamâ*), brotherhoods, political actors, etc.), compete in the appropriation and interpretation of religion (Tozy, 1999).

As some historians remind us (Burke, 1972; Berque, 1982; Laroui, 1977), attempts by the monarchy to control the religious field date to the late 19th century. The domination imposed by the French Protectorate (1912-1956) slowed the competition (Zeghal, 2003). However, since independence, the monarchy has applied itself to constructing hegemony by subjecting all its potential competitors to division, clientelism and dominance. More precisely, concerning religion, the King has tried to subordinate the *‘ulamâ*.

In the 1970s the Islamists’ questioning of the royal monopoly on religion⁸ led King Hassan II to reassert control of the religious arena. A series of measures including control over Friday sermons and the creation of the High Council of *‘Ulamâ*, were taken in the early 1980s to restrict the progress of any spontaneous religious movement. Later, in a style comparable to that adopted to deal with the leftist opposition, the monarch also set about to co-opt a group of Moroccan Islamists.⁹ The parliament of 1997 included nine Islamist deputies. At the beginning of his reign in 1999, Mohammed VI liberalized speech which benefitted many players and revealed the presence of ‘self-proclaimed’ preachers and *‘ulamâ* who were produced en masse by the various establishments created under Hassan II (Zeghal, 2003). Moreover, in September 2002, acknowledged Islamists became the third largest parliamentary force.¹⁰ Although the new King had given the impression that he was no longer playing his role as Commander of the Faithful, the attacks of May 16, 2003 led him to attempt to regain this status. It is on this basis that he presented his draft reform of the Code of

⁸ This is a counter-elite which intervenes in the political field by making an ideological reference to Islam.

⁹ After consultations that began in the early 1990s, the members of the al-Islam wa at-Tawhid (Reform and Uniqueness) movement were integrated by Dr. Khatib, a close associate of the palace, into the Popular Constitutional and Democratic Movement (PCDM), an empty shell he had been leading since 1967. Following the general elections of 1997, the party was renamed the Justice and Development Party (JDP) in 1998.

¹⁰ The Justice and Development Party won 42 seats in parliament. Nevertheless, in a spirit of self-limitation, it only presented candidates in some constituencies. In 2007, it became the second force in parliament.

Personal Status to parliament¹¹ (*Le Matin du Sahara*, 11th October 2003). This act subsequently led to intense polarization led by feminists.¹² The Code was adopted after a reframing influenced by the concept of the *ijtihad* (interpretation in God's way). This brief outline shows that the Moroccan political and religious arena is very fluid and remains a battlefield. Its frontiers, players, and issues have not been determined once and for all and continue to be contested and negotiated. Throughout the reign of Hassan II, this struggle for hegemony over the production of religious meanings which take place at the sites of the mosque, law, media, and education establishments, had repercussions. It contributed to the shaping of an image of "official Islam."

From a legislative point of view, Islam, the State religion, is one of the fundamental principles of the monarchy. This was confirmed in 1962 by article 19 of the Constitution: "The King, *amir al-mu`minin* [Commander of the Faithful], supreme representative of the nation, symbol of its unity, guarantor of the stability and continuity of the State, shall ensure respect for Islam and the Constitution. He is the protector of the rights and liberties of the citizens, social groups and communities". Nevertheless, religious legislation has essentially inspired the Code of Personal Status of 1956, drawn up in accordance with the Malikite rite. On the other hand, proven adultery (*zīna*), public drunkenness, and non-observance of the fast, apostasy, and anti-religious propaganda, constitute disturbances of the peace and are punishable under penal law.

On a completely different level, school books are another important carrier of the official ideology of the Kingdom. The curriculum analysis carried out by Mohamed El Ayadi gives a particularly revealing insight into this. On the basis of an analysis of nine school books dealing with Islamic education, the Arabic language and literature until the 1995-1996 scholastic year, he shows that "the religious discourse in school is not a simple presentation of religious dogma but an idealization of a religion [...], by means of an appeal to glorification and apologetics" (El Ayadi, 2000, p. 117). This discourse presents the Islamic system as the best, by putting it in competition with the West and even communism. The scriptural sources (the Koran, the *Hadīth*¹³) are sometimes accompanied by doctrinaire texts produced by influential Islamic thinkers such as the Egyptian Sayyid Qutb (1906-1966), or the Pakistani Mawlana Mawdudi (1903-1979).¹⁴ Repudiation, polygamy, the "natural" pre-eminence of the head of the family, wearing of the *hijāb* (veil), the separation of opposite sexes on the beach are among the practices that are justified and idealized. On the political level, it emerges that "Islam is a totalizing religion" (*al-islām dīn ash-shumūl*), and that it is both "religion and State" (*dīn wa dawla*). However, it is also stated that "the political values appreciated by humanity today have long been proclaimed by Islam" (*Idem*, p. 133). This is particularly related to democracy and human rights. At the transnational level, Arab and Muslim unity are promoted and division is decried. Moreover, Islam and Muslims are frequently portrayed as being victims of various "conspiracies," and as having been so throughout history. This vision

¹¹ The most important points were: raising the age of marriage from 16 to 18 for both men and women; abolition of matrimonial guardianship over a woman and her duty of obedience to her spouse; the possibility of making marriage contracts; the establishment of joint responsibility for the family; a limitation on repudiation and polygamy; the possibility for a woman to ask for a divorce; the care for children being made a prerogative of both parents; and protection for children born out of wedlock.

¹² The "National Plan of Action for the Integration of Women into Development", initiated by the feminine movement, was proposed by the Secretary of State for Social Welfare, the Family and the Child of the alternating government under the left-wing leader Abderrahmane Youssoufi.

¹³ Sayings attributed to Prophet Mohammed.

¹⁴ Malika Zeghal recalls that Mohammed V left the domain of education in the hands of both the "modernists" and the *'ulamā* (Zeghal, 2003, p. 9). But it seems that religious education was totally entrusted to *'ulamā*. This situation is currently changing. Following the example of the Charfi reform in Tunisia, a reform of educational system occurred in Morocco in 2000.

of Islam spread by school books does not seem to be in total contradiction with that of the Islamists.

Today, the two principal Moroccan Islamist factions follow a reformist tradition and condemn the use of violence. The Al-‘Adl wa Al-Ihsân (Justice and Benevolence) group forms a junction between mysticism and contemporary political Islam (Tozy, 1999). It has opted for the education of the masses, refusing co-optation into the official political scene. The Justice and Development Party (JDP) resolved to integrate into the system. It recommends a kind of Islamic democracy under the umbrella of the monarchy, in a pragmatic and “open-minded” perspective. Moreover, its leaders prudently declare not to claim a monopoly on representing Islam. They aspire to occupy the platform of the official opposition, regarding both the social and political problems of the country (violations of human rights, social injustice, unemployment) and also when “the Islamic features of the country must be preserved”. Indeed, one should not forget the religious discourse of the “self proclaimed” *‘ulamâ*, who are sometimes close to the groups responsible for attacks like those of May 16th. It is also important to emphasize the importance of the Islamic satellite television channels, often quoted by my interviewees.

This short summary would be incomplete without mentioning the political, associative, and cultural actors who have no Islamic reference, but also play an important part in the configuration of Moroccan “Muslim politics.”¹⁵ They indeed contribute to its heterogeneity and to the number of dissonant voices. Moreover, this arena is far from being closed to what occurs outside its geographical borders. Neither the government nor its opponents are indifferent to what the American State Department may think, to the possible reaction of the foreign media, and to the support or the withdrawal of international organizations.

If I have taken the time to set the arena, it is firstly to show that there are many hegemonic narratives about Islam, but there is no standardized production of Islamic meanings. It would be remiss to leave out the “ordinary” actors (the ones I interviewed), and dissociate them from this scene to which they have differential access and do not perceive uniformly. Nevertheless, I do not imply complete determinism, nor insinuate a boomerang effect between the meanings circulating in the Moroccan religious arena and the representations of those interviewed.

Youth And The “Confusion” Between Islam and Politics

When one extols the virtues of the presence of religion in the city, how are its boundaries and modalities drawn? The implementation of the *sharia* (religious law) does not mean the same thing to each individual. Likewise, the positive a priori assumption regarding this law does not automatically refer to the same content. Furthermore, when a student at the Faculty of Law states, “As we are Muslims, we cannot refuse something that is in its dogma,”¹⁶ one must not immediately deduce that he wants to abolish interest rates, cut off the hands of thieves, or stone adulterous women. Behind the same declaration of principle, several constructions of meanings are possible.

In my sample, the hard-liners are represented in two ways. There are first those who sympathize with Islamic movements such as the JDP or Al-‘Adl wa Al-Ihsân, and more generally those who could be termed as “ordinary Islamists,” that is to say, those who share a similar vision of the world without necessarily translating it into political affiliation or commitment. For both of them, Islam is total and the principle of *ijtihad* (authority to interpret religious questions). This allows religion to adapt through the course of time and to

¹⁵ According to Dale Eickelman and James Piscatori (1996), it is not necessary to have Islamic references, nor even to be a Muslim to be in “Muslim politics”.

¹⁶ First-year student, born in 1975, interviewed in 1998.

acclimatize to all environments. From their point of view, the “grey areas,” the legislative “loopholes” of the *sharia* are indicative of a great deal of flexibility in legislative matters. Lastly, this process of interpretation must be progressive. It is necessary to convince rather than impose.

Secondly, there are interviewees who maintain weak religious practices and are distinguished by a high degree of accommodation, pulled between several “programs of truth” (Veyne, 1982). During the course of our discussions, they sometimes advocate a strict Islamization imposed from the top, while also expressing regret at being born Muslim! They present themselves as products of a corrupt society, eaten away by “debauchery” and decadence. In other words, Muslim male interviewees consider that if they consume alcohol or hashish, if they chat up girls coming out of school, it is the fault of society. In order for them to individually reform themselves, the State must safeguard their morality: close bars; veil women; prevent them from exhibiting their charms; apply “the laws of God and not those of the slave” in courts, in banks, in “all areas.” Furthermore, in order to reconcile with themselves and society, these young people feel the need for a ‘totalizing’ structure (embracing all aspects of their life) that would be imposed from above.

An intermediate position consists of considering the *sharia* as an ideal, while noting the obstacles that face such a project. Firstly, some emphasize that Morocco is part of an international system and cannot opt for an Islamist economic approach in the context of globalization. In the same spirit, suppression of interest rates, closure of bars, as well as the eradication of cannabis production – which are all sources of revenue required for the survival of the country – would plunge the kingdom into an even more critical crisis. Also, the high levels of poverty and unemployment in Morocco do not provide favorable conditions for the implementation of the law of God, or the harsh *hudûd* punishments, (amputating the hand of a thief, stoning adulterous women, etc.), an argument which is shared by the Islamists of the JDP and the Al-‘Adl wa Al-Ihsân.

The minimalists state that the *sharia* is already implemented. For them, the issue consists of progressing on a path to democracy that preserves the “fundamentals of Islam” (*at-tawâbith*). They define democracy in terms of respect for differences and pluralism, and advocate that others establish a democratic system based on the Islamic principle of *shûra* (consultation),¹⁷ a concept that is used in a vague, fluid manner and carries different meanings. Some interviewees consider the profession of faith as the “zero grade” of the belonging to the nation. The national motto, “God, homeland, king” implies, in the words of one interviewee, “respect the dimension of Islam, the State religion, and respect its fundamentals: there is only one God and the religion of God is Islam.” Dissent is legitimate, as long as there is a consensus about the Islamic credentials of all the players. For others, the conditions for observing the “fundamentals” are not related with the intrinsic qualities of community members, they are in relation to external characteristics. Morocco is a Muslim State through its own constitution. The presence of a Commander of the Faithful at its head represents a sizeable guarantee that Islam will be protected and propagated in society. Institutions such as the state television announce prayer time and broadcasts religious programs.

Lastly, the country's “Islamicness” is sometimes reduced to an individualist conception of religion in which everyone can freely make his or her own choices. A whole set of comments support this position. As stated by interviewees, “The *sharia* is implemented with or without them [the Islamists]: there is the bar and the mosque. On the day of the last judgment, all will be judged according to their acts”; “religion must not be imposed”; “each one must try to reform oneself”; “I like people who are religious for themselves.” These

¹⁷ It should be remembered that according to the analysis of school books carried out by El Ayadi (2000), the *shari‘a* contains in its essence the principles of democracy, human rights and social justice.

statements suggest that religious practice and the sacred are relegated to the sphere of private life, to a direct, unmediated relationship between the individual and God. In the sample observed, there appears a real diversity behind the affirmation of the necessity of implementing the *sharia*. On another level, I will show that some respondents adhere to a principle of the active presence of religion in the political scene, a position which has plural manifestations.

The Gap Between Religious Ideals and Religious Practice

In social movement theory, the distance between the spread of ideas and their crystallization into collective action is far. According to the approach developed by William Gamson (1992), three dimensions of collective action frames should be articulated: the existence of feelings of indignation when faced with “injustice”; “identity” which designates the constitution of an “us” in opposition to “them” in relation to values and interests; and “agency” which is the feeling of being able to settle the problem by collective action. On the other hand, mobilization occurs at the intersection of several variables located in space and time (local, national, transnational) through “recognition circles” (Pizzorno, 1986). In other words, the inscription of different actors in the same “political opportunity structure” does not necessarily produce a similar impact.¹⁸ Of fundamental importance is the way actors perceive the world. Social movement theory throws light on the diversity of paths and the variability of intensity with regard to identification and political commitment. I shall illustrate this point by giving some profiles of “hard-liners” from my sample.

Mahfoudh was 28 years old at the first interview (1998). He was living in the same popular area in which he was born and belonged to the first generation of his family born in the city. After studying physics and chemistry for two years at the university level, he became a technician. He presented his trajectory as a continuity: his was a conservative upbringing in a neighborhood “still” soaked in religious values, and especially by the spirit of solidarity. He claimed to have an “Islamic orientation,” but expressed worries about religious “extremes.” He read publications on Islam from Morocco and elsewhere in the Arab world. He especially admired Youssef Al-Qardâoui¹⁹ who, according to him, considers democracy as compatible with *sharia*. On the other hand, he disapproved of violent groups as well as movements like al-‘Adl wa al-Ihsân who “exclude the others” (he met some of them at university). Convinced by the necessity of legal, organized and gradual action, he identified himself in the ideas of the JDP. One of his friends introduced him to Mustapha, a teacher of Arabic literature who was especially active when their area was flooded two years earlier. Mahfoudh had already seen him in the mosque. When Mustapha ran as the JDP candidate for the legislative elections of 1997, Mahfoudh campaigned with him. On this occasion, he had the opportunity to admire him more closely. When provoked by adversaries who unfairly treated him like a “terrorist,” Mustapha stayed calm and dignified. Once elected, Mustapha founded a social development association and Mahfoudh “naturally” committed himself to it. In the frame of this association Mahfoudh met other members of the JDP. In 2002, he converted his sympathy for the JDP into party membership. In this case, several circles and experiences consolidated (readings, friends and neighborhood circles, electoral campaigning, and association), without being experienced as a break either with the familial background or with the national and political

¹⁸ According to theories of process, the actors’ resources are not sufficient to explain the occurrence of a mobilization: it is necessary to take into account the “expansion of political opportunities”. Concerning this concept of “structure of political opportunities”, see for example Sidney Tarrow (1994). The concept was criticized, essentially because there were not intermediate variables, which allow understanding how actors perceive the opportunities and transform them into actions (Fillieule, 2006).

¹⁹ Famous Egyptian *‘âlim*, former companion of Muslim Brothers, he has excellent relationships with the monarchies of the Gulf.

context since the JDP enjoyed legal legitimacy. Before his commitment to the Party, Mahfoudh already had political markings. But his political orientation materialized only after micro-experiences grounded in ties of action and trust. In this case, Mahfoudh experienced a strong identification with actors in a movement that was articulated to a feeling of being able to change the situation through collective action. But this articulation between ideas and commitment is far from systematic.

Khadija was 26 years old when I first met her (2002). An accountant, she is from the same social and geographical background as Mahfoudh. The charismatic Mustapha was her teacher and played a central role in her adolescent life. Thanks to him, she abandoned love stories in favor of religious books. Under his influence she adopted the headscarf. When Mustapha was a candidate in the 1997 elections, she gave him her vote. When he founded the association in 1998, she, along with her high school friends, joined him. She recognized herself as having an “Islamic orientation,” but under the influence of her parents, expressed mistrust towards “politics.” By “politics,” she meant both the official and underground movements. In the frame of the association, she became more politically sophisticated. For the first time, she took part in demonstrations (first against the reform of the Code of Personal Status in March 2000 in Casablanca and then in support of Palestinians in April 2001, in Rabat). These forms of participations constituted an interlude of socialization. In the initial stages, the interest was aroused by the events and discussions preceding collective decision making. The later experience of demonstrations, the atmosphere, the slogans chanted, were all elements that contributed to uphold and unify a distinct vision which was unfocused and vague up to that point. Even so, during the elections of 2002 she left her ballot blank (Mustapha was not a candidate in her constituency). She was not ready to transfer the faith she had in a person involved in the JDP to the whole party. Moreover, she was convinced that a large distance separated the world of ideas from the world of action. In 2007 she once again left her ballot blank because she did not personally know any candidate. Once again, she did not give her voice to the JDP. Following her experience in the association, she observed that the JDP members’ were “good people” but not sophisticated enough politically, that “we don’t do politics only with good intentions.” She formed this opinion while observing the association’s break-up which she attributed to a lack of experience and of “long distance vision.” Furthermore, she expected that members of government should exhibit “sophistication in all fields” and efficiency in developing the country which included struggling against unemployment and corruption; it did not matter what their ideology was. Once she left the association, she stopped being interested in “politics” and even stopped following the news. She justified this decision by saying, “As I am not in position to bring any solution, I don’t need to get worked up about it. If I can offer something, I do it; if it’s far from me ...”

Khadija was influenced by her former teacher and her involvement in the association, but in a precise field: what she framed under the “social” label (in the promotion of the Islamic Moroccan family, in solidarity at the neighborhood level and in solidarity with Palestinians). These experiences contributed to increasing her political sophistication, without making her want to engage directly in politics. Her relationship to politics seems close to what Nina Eliasoph observed in some American associations: “They wanted to care about *people*, but did not want to care about *politics*. Trying to care about people but not politics meant trying to limit their concerns to issues about which they felt they could ‘realistically’ make a difference in people’s lives” (Eliasoph, 1998, p. 12-13). For Khadija, there was a lack of political identification and of “agency” on the national level.

Ali, a 16 years old high school pupil in 2002, expressed a great interest for politics. His socialization was particularly heterogeneous as he kept a distance from any single political commitment. He was critical towards both transnational and national political scenes

which he thought exhibited strong feelings of injustice. According to him, “the United States of America exerts a strong pressure on the Muslim world; they support Israel; they kill our children and our old people”; “the big fish devours the smallest.” On the national scale, he rejected the monarchy and considered it as monopolistic and dictatorial – at least under the rule of Hassan II – and as very expensive for the country. His model was a democracy like France, but soaked in “Islamic values.” He describes his position saying, “I am an Islamic democrat. We must take the positive things from democracy: freedom of expression, of circulation... [In the spirit of] Islam, group interest comes before individual interest. [...] If I observe that you are on the wrong path, I intervene.”

He shaped this vision of the world after moving through different circles. He was the youngest child of a large family and recalled his drunkard brother-in-law and his brother who dreamed for a better life in the Western World. He particularly admired another brother-in-law, a graduate in religious law, who frequented several Islamist groups without tying himself to any one in particular. Ali also attended summer camps organized by different Islamic groups. In this frame, he listened to lectures given by their leaders and closely mixed with members from these groups. Despite these experiences, Ali did not identify with any one Islamist Moroccan movement. He globally associated them to *khubzawiyya* (opportunism moved by the quest for bread),²⁰ by opposition to [the Salafiyya] *Jihâdiyya* from elsewhere. Indeed, he felt admiration for Osama Ben Laden who “defies those more powerful than him” and who “abandoned palaces for caves.” At the same time he disapproved of civilians attacks. If Ali developed a strong feeling of injustice, his identification remained diffused and hindered by mistrust towards all Moroccan political actors. Moreover, he was not convinced he could remedy the situation: “According to me, if you want to make the *jihâd*, make it in your own ideas. If there is some one stronger than me, I am not going to fight him; I will stay hidden at home, until the day I will reach his level.”

Mistrust is sometimes expressed towards the self. Such was the case of a group of male adolescents (17 years old on average) I met during the spring of 2002, in front of a girl’s high school. They used to meet every afternoon to chat up the girls. They had the same feeling of injustice as Ali about transnational conflicts and legitimized the *jihâd*, defined as a defensive war act against those who attack Muslim majority territories. Furthermore, they had just taken part in high schools strikes in support of Palestine. Nevertheless, they did not have faith in themselves:

“[Our relation to religion is] very marginal... Few of us pray, even though praying is a foundation of religion. To tell you the truth, all of us lie. [...] Do you know what striking means for us? It means not studying from Monday to Monday [laughs]... Sincerely, it isn’t solidarity [...] making the *jihâd*, not being afraid of death, submission to God... [...] Nobody from our group is ready for the *jihâd*... Killing oneself isn’t easy. You need strong self-confidence, faith in your homeland.

- No, sorry, some people do want to go to heaven ...

- So what, even a junkie wants to go to heaven, but we have not the faith, the strength of faith, we haven’t been raised in it.

- I, I want to go [to the *jihâd*]²¹...

- You, you want to go! Do you think your mother is going to let you go?

- I swear she will encourage me...

- She should tell you to go to the port to jump [the frontier]²²...

²⁰ The root of the word is *khubz* (bread); it means opportunism moved by the quest for bread.

²¹ This aspiration could appear in front of television; but it could also develop during gatherings. Several high school pupils reported that enthusiasm was so strong during demonstrations they took part in, that some young people felt ready to go to *jihâd*, in order to support their Palestinian « brothers ». Of course, this state of mind does not systematically materialize.

- If your mother loves you, do you think she would accept to let you die? [...] You do not have the strength of faith which would push you to go. Personally, I am not a true believer. We are too attached to material goods, to here below (*dunyâ*).”

Conscious of the disharmony in their discourse and of the variety of their “programs of truth,” the majority of these high school pupils asserted their preference for ‘life’s pleasures’; they expressed with derision, their weak self-esteem. In this case too, there is a big gap between supporting an ideal and passing to action.

A year later, I met one of these high schools pupils, who was considering the *jihâd* as the only possible weapon for Palestinians. The attacks of 16th May 2003 constituted a turning point for him, an intense moment which contributed to transform his frame of values. The violence stopped being abstract, virtual, only watched on television, once it entered his physical space. Terrorized, he finished by rejecting the whole idea of martyr operations, even those conducted in Palestine²³.

Thus, beyond the identification with formal political Islam, there are many degrees and materializations of Islamic identity. Furthermore, the socialization of this youth has not occurred once and for all: it is in process. It remains to be seen whether these configurations and attitudes are particular to young people.

The Young and Old: a Congruence?

During fieldwork I did not observe any real cleavages between the youngest and the oldest of my sample regarding the relations between politics and religion, political commitment and non-commitment. A recent representative survey conducted with 1156 persons spread over the 16 regions in Morocco, gives a more precise vision (El Ayadi, 2007). First, the family appears as the main locus of socialization. Next, contrary to what was asserted by the media and by some academic studies, it seems that “the assertion of religious values and practices is a general phenomenon, which concerns all categories: age, social and economic” (*Idem*, p. 105). Moreover, according to this survey “the Islamist expression is an undeniable reality within youth [...], it is not the majority, nor more pronounced than in the other categories of age. [It] is nevertheless more radical among a minority of young people” (*Idem*, p. 160). The following tables illustrate these results by numbers.

“In your opinion, should religion guide only personal life, or also political life?” (El Ayadi, p. 161)

	Only personal life	Also political life
18-24 years old	26 %	28.8%
60 years old and more	23.4%	17.9%

“Do you agree or not with the Jihâdist Movement?” (El Ayadi, 2007, p. 163)

	Agree	Do not agree
18-24 years old	21.8%	31.4%
60 years old and more	9.7%	20 %

At the level of declared intentions, the religious action within the associative frame is valued by all age categories. Nevertheless, concerning the segment of 60 years old and more, it comes in first position (23.4%); and, for the 18-24 years old, it is in third position (15.7%), after charity associations and human rights (*Idem*, p. 159).

²² Jump (*hregu*) refers to crossing illegal frontiers, in particular using small boats.

²³ It is not a general case. After this event, some people considered that this kind of attack was only legitimized in Palestine (not in Morocco, nor elsewhere in Western countries).

In fact, the variable of education seems to be more deterministic than age. Effectively, the answers of educated people converge, whatever the age. They contrast with non-educated people who answer the question concerning politics and religion, with high rates of “do not know”, “indifferent” (*Idem*, p. 174).

Conclusion

I have endeavored to show that the plurality of religious reference, a taken for granted feature of the global North, also exists in Morocco, a country situated in the Middle East region. As elsewhere, “young” Moroccans do not constitute a coherent, uniform or isolated unit. The place of religion in the City is renegotiated at the junction of ‘internal’ and ‘external dynamics,’ in a battlefield where frontiers, issues, and players are continually moving. It is within this framework that problems and arenas are constituted, and that even “young” people position and reposition themselves in the process. They may identify themselves as “Muslim youth” by their support of Palestinians or involvement in other “Muslim causes.” Their “imagined community” is revealed by conflicts where Muslims are in a weak position. They could also assert an “Islamic” political orientation. “Muslim youth” is neither a transparent or monolithic category nor an explanatory variable. The context and meaning of Muslim youth always need to be clarified.

Furthermore, as everywhere, the perception of injustice is not sufficient in and of itself to provoke a passage to collective action. Action comes about as the result of a particular type of socialization, involvement in networks, and experience in micro-events which allow ideas to translate into actions. Finally, Moroccan young people do not have a greater concern to build God’s City on Earth than the older generations. Admittedly, they have been more exposed to the mediums of Islamist socialization. There is surely a generational effect which remains to be studied. Despite this, there is not an Islamist steamroller. Moroccan “youth” are subject to the same cleavages that run throughout the global society.

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