Religion's Role in Identity Construction of Urban Moroccan Youth: We've God it Wrong

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Abstract

What is the role of religion in the construction of identity among urban Moroccan youth? This study uses phenomenography via interviews and discourse analysis to examine how religion and non-religion are both a part of young Moroccan believers' and non-believers' identity constructions. Eight interviews were conducted with religious and non-believing undergraduate students from Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, Morocco. Participants ranged between the ages of 18 and 23. Through the methodology of phenomenography, the data collected became the basis for determining how interviewees conceptualize the world. Participants' concepts of religion's contributions to identity were categorized and subcategorized to reach conclusions that can be applied more broadly across similar Moroccan demographics.

Keywords: Non-believer, believer, phenomenography, conceptualize, collective

identity

Introduction

Non-belief in Morocco carries legal and social implications. The Humanists International report of 2016 documented familial cases of violence, as well as struggles in educational, social, and professional life.[1] Some non-believers experience psychological guilt, withhold their identities from family and friends, are kicked out of their houses, forced or urged to wear *hijaab*, or cut off from family money.[2] Although the Moroccan constitution was amended in 2011, protections in the religious sphere were not added. Although an early draft of the 2011 constitution referenced 'freedom of conscience,' it was removed after being challenged by Islamic movements.[3] In a Muslim country, how many people could be affected by this?

In 2018, the non-partisan research network Arab Barometer interviewed 2,400 Moroccans on varying issues, including religion. Thirteen percent identified as non-religious. Moroccans between the ages of 18 and 29 were 44

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[1] *Freedom of Thought Report 2016*, Humanists International, 2016.

[2] dew-is-me, 'r/Morocco - Atheists of Morocco,' *reddit*, accessed January 29, 2020.; Ibn Warraq, *Why I Am Not a Muslim* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2003).; Ka0laiz, 'r/Morocco - Atheists of Morocco,' *reddit*, accessed January 29, 2020, https://www.reddit.com/r/Morocco/comments/bic2p3/atheists_of_morocco/.

[3] Alessandro Balduzzi, 'Atheism in the Arab-Islamic World (with a Focus on Morocco),' *Atheism in the Arab-Islamic World (with a Focus on Morocco)* (2015).

percent more likely to identify as a non-believer (76 percent) than those over 60 (32 percent), and Moroccans with a university education or a secondary degree were 20 percent more likely to claim non-belief.[4] Theoretically, Moroccans can pick their religious identity. Non-believers who choose to embrace their identity may encounter negative legal and/or social ramifications in practice. What is the role of religion in the social construction of self-identity among urban Moroccans? The aim of this work is to present new empirical evidence regarding this question, using phenomenography to interpret how religious and non-religious Moroccan youth conceptualize themselves.

Literature Review

In contrast to the idea of a sacrosanct cultural identity imbued within oneself, identity is an ongoing, adaptable process, constructed via societal participation.[5] This engagement is typically experienced in educational systems and made up of 'various social, cultural, and historical factors.'[6] Psychology academics Gomez-Estern, Amián, Sánchez Medina and Marco Macarro claim that social identity is 'an individual self-assignment in a set of descriptive categories that are infused with personal meaning.'[7] The participatory nature of cultural identity construction shows agency in individual development.

Regarding cultural traditions and rituals, Ramadan is observed, Moroccan family law is mostly derived from *Sharia*, and the concept of family honour (typically in the form of women's reputation) is still largely upheld. However, unlike in some Muslim countries, alcohol is tolerated (although not legally allowed to be sold to Muslims) and there was an attempt to legalize hashish production for medicinal purposes, as well as repeal Article 490 of the Moroccan penal code, which would decriminalize pre-marital sex. Officially, Morocco accepts the practice of other faiths. Still, Article 220 of the Moroccan penal code states the illegality of attempts to shake Muslim faith or proselytize, while Article 222 lists imprisonment between 3-6 months and a fine for anyone known to be Muslim who violates Ramadan fasting in public.[8] Other articles add to the restrictions on Muslim-alternative discourse via sanctions on media, political parties, group gatherings and freedom of speech more generally.[9] Therefore, non-believers do not casually participate in public spheres for various reasons. For those 'subject to discrimination and exclusion from mainstream society, the

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[4] *Morocco Country Report*, Arab Barometer, wave V. (2019): pp. 13-14.

[5] Beatriz Macías Gómez-Estern et al., 'Literacy and the Formation of Cultural Identity,' *Theory & Psychology* 20, no. 2 (2010): p. 231.; Jim Mckinley, 'Critical Argument and Writer Identity: Social Constructivism as a Theoretical Framework for EFL Academic Writing,' *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies* 12, no. 3 (March 2015): p. 190.

[6] Mckinley, 'Critical Argument and Writer Identity': p. 190.

[7] Gómez-Estern, et al., 'Literacy and the Formation of Cultural Identity': p 232.

[8] *Morocco: The situation of people who abjure Islam (who apostatize), including their treatment by society and by the authorities; the repercussions of a fatwa of the High Council of Ulemas condemning apostates to death, including the reaction of the government (2016-April 2018)*, Canada: Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2018.

[9] *The Freedom of Thought Report 2016*, Humanists International, 2016.

experience of entering a participatory space can be extremely intimidating... their participation may be viewed by the powerful as chaotic, disruptive, and unproductive.'[10] Generally, even low-key gatherings are avoided as 'non-believers are a notoriously individualistic constituency that is hard to organize, partly due to the social stigma and isolation associated with rejecting religion.'[11]

Scholars such as Erickson (1968), King (2003), Sauder (2005), and Stuber (2006) have acknowledged that college students are an important group to study for numerous reasons. Pivotal to this research, are the facts that adolescence is a core developmental stage in the 'search' for identity and university is a socially formative time, with students actively viewing and participating in the dynamics and rules of inclusion and exclusion. Not only are college students internalizing social constructions, but they are also the generation in charge of dictating the near future's norms and social processes.[12]

King (2003), Fulton (1997), Marcia (2002), Oppong (2013), and Hunsberger, Pratt, and Pancer (2001) published works relating to religion's role in the formation of self, and all asserted that, though there is much scholarly work on the general topic of identity, there remains little work exploring the interaction between religion and identity construction.[13] Moreover, much of the limited scholarship on religious identity formation comes from Western sources. Sumerau and Cragun studied non-religious Americans and their relationship with their construction of moral identity analysing how many of their participants argued that their sense of value, worth, and character emerged because of their departure from religion. Their respondents used past and present experiences with religiosity to argue conformity, obedience, and prejudice are prevalent in religion, and the respondents' interactions with religious people oftentimes encouraged them to seek meaning from alternative sources.[14]

The work of Guenther, Mulligan, and Papp is similar to Sumerau and Cragun's, but their focus was on the role of atheism and religious doubt in establishing collective identities. They examined how the non-religious would 'other' and highlight differences between religious figures and religious leaders. Examples of differences may include ideas of proper 'morality, fairness, and

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[10] Andrea Cornwall and Vera Schattan P. Coelho, *Spaces for Change?: the Politics of Citizen Participation in New Democratic Arenas* (London: Zed Books, 2007): Pg 13.

[11] Taner Edis, 'Finding an Enemy: Islam and the New Atheism,' Ruqayya Khan, Ed., *Muhammad in the Digital Age*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2015): Pg 174.

[12] E.H. Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis*. New York: Norton, 1968.; Pamela Ebstyne King, 'Religion and Identity: The Role of Ideological, Social, and Spiritual Contexts,' *Applied Developmental Science* 7, no. 3 (2003): p. 197.; Jenny M. Stuber, 'Talk of Class': p. 286.; Michael Sauder, 'Symbols and Contexts: An Interactionist Approach to the Study of Social Status,' *The Sociological Quarterly* 46, no. 2 (2005): pp. 279-298.

[13] King, 'Religion and Identity': p. 197.; A.S. Fulton, 'Identity Status, Religious Orientation, and Prejudice,' *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 26, 1–11 (1997).; B. Hunsberger, M. Pratt, & S. M. Pancer, 'Adolescent Identity Formation: Religious Exploration and Commitment,' *Identity: An International Journal of Theory and Research*, 1, (2001): pp. 365–386.; James E. Marcia, 'Adolescence, Identity, and the Bernardone Family,' *Identity* 2, no. 3 (2002): pp. 199-209.; Steward Harrison Oppong, 'Religion and Identity,' *American International Journal of Contemporary Research* 3, no. 6 (June 2013): pp. 10-16.

[14] J.E. Sumerau and Ryan T. Cragun, ''I Think Some People Need Religion': The Social Construction of Nonreligious Moral Identities,' *Sociology of Religion* 77, no. 4 (2016): p. 386.

rationality.'[15] The research of Sumerau and Cragun along with Guenther et al. is important because it contradicts certain data points in my own research, pointing out the necessity for studying religious identity formation in the context of other regions. This may also add to the scholarly body of what Charmaz and Dunn and Creek discuss as identity dilemmas: non-believers in religious societies may feel their identities conflict with society's normative expectations, which can lead to a still relatively unexplored field of consequences.[16]

In summation, the current study seeks to fill the gap in the literature in the Moroccan context. Literature confirms that studying identity formation in adolescents is important. It supports the idea that there is little scholarship on the relationship between religion and identity construction, even though academics see this as something worthy of exploration. Many of the studies conducted in this field have been Western-focused, and the research is at odds with the findings of this study. Research related to the Middle East and North Africa has shown a high contrast between Western and Eastern societies' beliefs in the ability to be moral and non-religious, which may potentially create identity dilemmas in non-conformists. This research will use Western literature as a roadmap for analysis but will pay close attention to the detours Morocco's differences take.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

Sociology of religion is multifaceted and pluralistic, and a researcher must take specific care to evaluate variables such as 'the political, social and other agencies' which coincide to create socially relevant data that corresponds to individual religions.[17] Since even a homogeneous group may interact with variables in diverse ways, it is important to strike a balance between interviewee diversity and similarity. The participants chosen were young, urban, Moroccan students from the same university. The interviewees invited to participate in the project were students of Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane, a public, non-profit university in Morocco. I conducted individual interviews in English with five non-believers (male) and three believers (two female, one male) over a one-month period. My participants were undergraduate students who ranged in age from 18 to 23. Due to this topic's sensitivity, and the fact that I am known at AUI, I used Western names to avoid any speculation or perceived connections about the identity of my participants. Some of the participants were referred to me and some were known through personal affiliation. I asked open-ended questions in loosely structured interviews to determine the participants' views of their own

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[15] Katja M. Guenther, Kerry Mulligan, and Cameron Papp, 'From the Outside In: Crossing Boundaries to Build Collective Identity in the New Atheist Movement,' *Social Problems* 60, no. 4 (2013): 457-75.

[16] Kathy Charmaz,'Identity Dilemmas of Chronically Ill Men,' *Sociological Quarterly* 35 no. 2 (1994): pp. 269–88.; Jennifer Leigh Dunn and S. J. Creek, 'Identity Dilemmas: Toward a More Situated Understanding,' *Symbolic Interaction* 38, no. 2 (May 2015): p. 261.

[17] Christos N. Tsironis, 'Concept-Centric or Method-Centric Research? On Paradigm War in the Interdisciplinary Study of/ Research on Religion,' *Annual Review of the Sociology of Religion*, 2012, pp. 45-67.

relationships with Islam and their perceptions of the relationship between Islam and Morocco.

I chose to use loosely structured interviews to avoid making as many assumptions as possible about the importance or relevance these concepts had in the minds of participants.[18] Because of COVID-19, my interviews were done via video chat, using the application Microsoft Teams. This allowed the participants to remain in a place of their choice and comfort, which lent the informal interviews a legitimacy not typically afforded by meeting in a public space.

I took a phenomenographic approach. Phenomenography is a fairly recent methodology with origins in the 1970s that has been primarily applied to education and predominantly employed in Western countries by Western academics and in Western contexts.[19] This approach is qualitative and seeks to analyse the varying ways specific humans in specific circumstances' experience, conceptualize, perceive, and understand various kinds of phenomena.'[20] Phenomenography relies on the idea that people understand 'phenomenon, concepts, and principles' in a 'limited number of qualitative ways.'[21] Phenomenographers largely explore pre-reflective levels of consciousness (via interviews in this case) in order to explore the participants' established way of conceiving, experiencing, perceiving, understanding and relating to the world.[22]

It is important to understand that phenomenographic research collects data from individuals, but the analysis is focused on the collective experience. In application, this means that individual transcripts are not interpreted in isolation, but rather they are read in relation to the group of transcripts as an aggregate, i.e., 'in terms of similarities to and differences from other transcripts or meanings.'[23]

On Being Moroccan

The first four predetermined interview questions regarded how participants saw themselves in relation to Moroccan society. The questions did not mention religion deliberately to determine whether interviewees associated Moroccan identity and society with religion independently. Regarding the first question, 'what does it mean to be Moroccan?', being Moroccan was mainly

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[18] Scott R. Harris, 'Studying Equality/Inequality: Naturalist and Constructionist Approaches to Equality in Marriage,' *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography* 32, no. 2 (2003): pp. 200-232.; Jenny M. Stuber, 'Asset and Liability? The Importance of Context in the Occupational Experiences of Upwardly Mobile White Adults,' *Sociological Forum* 20, no. 1 (2005): pp. 139-166.

[19] Gerlese S. Åkerlind, 'Variation and Commonality in Phenomenographic Research Methods,' *Higher Education Research & Development* 24, no. 4 (2005): p. 321.; Margarida Abreu Novais, Lisa Ruhanen, and Charles Arcodia, 'Destination Competitiveness: A Phenomenographic Study,' *Tourism Management* 64 (2018): p. 327.

[20] John T. E. Richardson, 'The Concepts and Methods of Phenomenographic Research,' Review of Educational Research 69, no. 1 (1999): p. 53.; Åkerlind, 'Variation and Commonality in Phenomenographic Research Methods': p. 323.

[21] Ference Marton, 'Phenomenography — A Research Approach to Investigating Different Understandings of Reality.' *Journal of Thought* 21, no. 3 (1986): pp. 30-1.

[22] Ference Marton, 'Phenomenography — Describing Conceptions of the World Around Us,' *Instructional Science* 10, no. 2 (1981): p. 181.

[23] Åkerlind, 'Variation and Commonality in Phenomenographic Research Methods': p. 323.

conceptualized as an arbitrary social construct. For instance, many talked about being Moroccan in terms of geographic region and official state identification. Even though most participants contextualized themselves as Moroccan while answering, individuals usually spoke about what it means to be Moroccan from a distanced perspective. For instance, even when answering 'what does it mean to belong in Moroccan society?', seven out of eight participants did not use adjectives.

Although unable to describe Moroccan society, over half of the participants said they either are not representative of or do not feel they belong in Moroccan society. Some said they do 'feel' Moroccan when they are being confronted with their nationality, such as when they are abroad or watching a football match. Many claimed Islam and/or family heritage as their link to Moroccan society. A nineteen-year-old respondent said that she alternated between Saudi Arabia and Morocco for most of her life, and decided to settle in Morocco. Yet, despite friends and family living in Morocco, she considers herself neither Moroccan nor Saudi Arabian: she made the choice not to claim Moroccan identity. This information leads to the conclusion that urban Moroccan youth do not relate to a greater Moroccan identity. Interviewees could not directly describe what they view as a Moroccan identity, and half of them said they either do not feel that they belong to Moroccan society or they only acknowledge a Moroccan identity in situations where nationality is a uniquely defining feature (e.g. amongst other nationalities or sports team fans).

Social Description and Repercussions

The Moroccan state perpetuates a false sense of homogeneity. The state claims non-believers are inexistant, which leaves non-believers to wonder: if Moroccans are believers, what am I? While there are several notable atheists inside and outside of Morocco, such as human rights activist Ibtissam Lachgar, writer Hafid Bouazza, secular activist Kacem El Ghazzali, and journalist and activist Zineb El Rhazoui, it is interesting to note that Ibtissam Lachgar is the only one who does not have at least dual nationality. The idea of dual nationality can create the perception of a safety net for those who lead lives departing from the social standard. This safety net comes in the form of being able to leave if one feels endangered and the idea many Moroccans have that the lives of many other nationalities — especially Western — are less likely to be threatened due to potential repercussions. This can be shown in the case of Imad Eddin Habib, founder of the Council of Ex-Muslims of Morocco. Habib blogged about his beliefs and was outspoken about his atheism in Morocco until 2003 when the police began searching for him and he was forced into hiding. His parents said they would turn him in if he attempted to return to their home in Casablanca.[24]

Wandering from Expectation

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[24] Yasin, Sara. 'Moroccan Atheist Imad Habib Hiding from Police,' September 17, 2019.

Because the state promotes religious homogeneity and has attached national identity to religious identity, those who fall outside of the designated purview see themselves as unique. Both non-believing and believing interviewees held religious beliefs outside of these promoted orthodoxies and were affected by this divergence. This explains why participants were quick to distance themselves from 'Moroccans.' However, they still consistently used the pronoun 'we,' even when discussing notions unrelated to their beliefs. When I asked participants about their relationship to Morocco, they rejected a Moroccan identity, but when Moroccans became the subject in relation to something, they unconsciously grouped themselves as Moroccan.   It appears that when participants are given the choice to identify as Moroccan or not, they deny a claim to national identity. The reasoning behind this may be interpreted in many ways. Participants may feel 'a moral universalism' (all humans are the same), a comment on individuality ('I'm just me'), or a rejection of their interpretation of Moroccan identity.[25]

Religion Regulates Social and Legal Relationships

Maintaining Control

All participants perceived religion in Morocco as a regulator of social and legal relationships. The data showed that participants conceptualize religion in Morocco as a largely political and unifying force. Three out of the five non-believers did not reference religion only as regulatory, but specifically as monitoring what would otherwise be a less civilized society. This extreme vocabulary is an objective reflection of the severity of the language participants used. To elaborate, non-believing respondents said: Morocco is a Muslim country '...so we don't devolve into barbarianism or whatever…'[26]; and Moroccans are not 'educated enough to respect each other' and therefore the participant is '...very happy there is religion because otherwise, we'd be killing each other in the streets.'[27] Three out of five non-believers used strong language while one of the three religious respondents used similar language when she commented that if Sharia was not applied in Morocco'...it would be a chaos in society among Moroccans.'[28] Other interviewees held similar beliefs about religion's role in politics, but with less weighted lexicons.

In Comparison

This information should be juxtaposed with findings of previous research. As mentioned in the literature review, a study performed by Guenther, Mulligan, and Papp focused on the role of atheism and religious doubt in establishing

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[25] Steve Fenton, 'Indifference Towards National Identity: What Young Adults Think About Being English and British,' *Nations and Nationalism* 13, no. 2 (2007): 335.
[26] Tim, interview by author, online, April 5, 2020.
[27] Noah, interview by author, online, April 3, 2020.
[28] Hannah, interview by author, online. May 2, 2020.

collective identities. They found many non-believers highlighted differences between the beliefs of themselves and religious leaders, in areas such as: 'morality, fairness, and rationality.'[29] My work clearly does not reflect these findings. Both believers and non-believers associated religion with keeping Moroccans moral and fair and maintaining socially acceptable behaviour. It is important to note that the participants were talking about Moroccans *specifically* and did argue that other countries can maintain secularism. However, non-believers also said they would prefer a secular state. Further work should be done to identify the chasm that lies between believing Moroccan society depends on Islam and a secular society would be more progressive, tolerant, and desirable. In summation, these findings indicate that Moroccan youth conceptualize religion in the state as a regulator of social and legal relationships. This notion undermines a sense of the global versatility of Western research on religion and identity formation.

Information regarding non-religious Americans and their construction of moral identity (gathered by Sumerau and Cragun) showed the non-religious associate religiosity with conformity, obedience, and prejudice.[30] These notions were not voiced as actively by the non-believers as the believers. The two groups came together in the idea that older generations use religion in a way that produces feelings of prejudice, obligation, and unquestioning conformity. Both groups viewed these outcomes negatively.

Inducing Apathy

Earlier, I claimed identity dilemmas may lead to a widely uncharted field of consequences; this research has encountered some of those consequences.[31] In terms of Morocco, the first addition to this work is that both non-believers and unconventional believers in religious societies can feel their identities clash with social norms and expectations. Moroccan youth who are believers or non-believers feel a clash with generational expectations. This has led non-believers specifically to a level of apathy: every non-believer used the term 'care,' usually to label their indifference or their family's indifference towards the participant's non-belief. The need to make their apparent disinterest known deserves to be researched further. Due to the openness of the interviews and the obvious amiability towards me, the interviewer, the harshness with which they claimed their apathy was jolting.

Religion and the Generational Gap

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[29] Katja M. Guenther, et. al, 'From the Outside In': p. 471.

[30] J.E. Sumerau and Ryan T. Cragun, ''I Think Some People Need Religion': The Social Construction of Nonreligious Moral Identities,' *Sociology of Religion* 77, no. 4 (2016): p. 386.

[31] Kathy Charmaz, 'Identity Dilemmas of Chronically Ill Men,' *Sociological Quarterly* 35 no. 2 (1994): pp. 269–88.; Jennifer Leigh Dunn and S. J. Creek, 'Identity Dilemmas: Toward a More Situated Understanding,' *Symbolic Interaction* 38, no. 2 (May 2015): p. 261.

The participants interviewed had binary worldviews which can most succinctly be summarised as collectivist tradition versus autonomous modernity. Tradition and culture were juxtaposed with modernity and globalisation. The differences transcended the focus on religion and extended to areas such as language, appearance, ritual, and the social expectations. Regardless of background, interviewees discussed religious conservatism as tradition and religious freedom as modernity. Both sets of participants noted requiring religious clothing as traditional and aesthetic freedom as modernity. Believers and non-believers saw many of Morocco's social expectations and rituals as constricting and associated them with tradition, as opposed to emphasizing their beliefs of individualism, which they argued is modernity.

Islam and Moroccan Islam

All the religious interviewees made mention of their elders' generation being religiously inflexible. In the context of the state, this attitude is logical due to relatively recent changes in Morocco's narrative of an official Islam. Today in Morocco, mosques are the only officially sanctioned places of worship and are regulated by the Ministry of Religious Affairs (MRA).[32] Friday sermons are managed by the Ministry of Religious Affairs and 'they are prepared in advance and delivered by imams on behalf of the king himself.'[33] Morocco promotes a well-defined official Islam.

My interviewees were all born after 1995, so from childhood onward, my participants were raised on the idea that being a Moroccan Muslim meant holding a specific set of beliefs — an 'official' set of beliefs. The thought might go that Moroccans follow Moroccan Islam. If you do not follow Moroccan Islam, then you are not Moroccan. This feeling may be amplified when Muslim believers want to enter the public space and find that mosques and their messages in Morocco are monitored by the government and preach the same distinct message.[34] The irony is that Moroccan Islam has historically been used as a way of curbing extremism, but marginalization leads to radicalization, and Morocco is effectively marginalizing Muslim believers who do not practice the official Islam. Of course, being radical does not necessitate a negative extremism, but rather a dramatic departure from the norm, which is clearly present in the idea of religious individualism presented by my interviewees.[35] Although they broadly comply with duties and expectations (religious and other) imposed on them by Moroccan society and their families, participants renounce applying an

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[32] Any donation given to either build or renovate a mosque also passes through the MRA.; Naureen Chowdhury Fink and El-Said, H., 'Transforming Terrorists: Examining International Efforts to Address Violent Extremism,' New York: International Peace Institute (May 2011): p. 12.

[33] Ibid.

[34] One of my participants said she does not go to mosque because: 'mosque doesn't feel right to me...I don't feel like it gives me any added value...it's all about politics'; Dahlia, interview by author, online, May 3, 2020.

[35] Religious participant Turk argued this himself, stating: 'I think I have a more … radical idea about Islam than they [my family] do...and when I say radical, I mean the mystical aspect of Islam.'; Turk, interview by author, online, April 19, 2020.

identity on their own time, when they are in control of their private thoughts and actions.

Individual vs. Collective Identity: Social Expectations

Moroccan youth conceptualize a generational gap regarding social expectations; they perceive older generations as more conservative and socially intrusive than younger generations. Young Moroccans argue they have laissez-faire attitudes while older generations do not. The subheading of this portion puts individual and collective identity in opposition because the participants did not leave room for cooperation or coexistence in their statements.

Dahlia mentioned the notion of *hshuma*. The Moroccan notion of *hshuma* carries a set of cultural conventions that deal with one's honour in the eyes of the public. Maintaining honour has historically been a core component of North African societies. *Hshuma* can be ascribed to gossiping, wearing shoes on carpet, having pre-marital sex, smoking hashish, and a myriad of other things. The weight of the perceived infraction varies by factors such as sex, location, and nationality. Deviant or *hshuma* acts are constructed by negative societal labels which are conferred 'by the audience, which directly or indirectly witnesses them.'[36] If my interviewees truly adhere to 'live and let live' philosophies, they effectively disable the importance of 'public honor' and thus, *hshuma*. This is incredibly significant. Neutralizing the potency of public honor will not necessarily make people feel they can perform acts considered *hshuma*, but it would begin to destigmatize many acts presently being carried out in secret. Moreover, it is a direct condemnation of certain societal understandings and expectations currently in place.

Implications of Alienation

Moroccan youth do not think they have the power to change Morocco or freedom to express themselves. The result is a fatalistic generation that sees life in Morocco as predetermined and life abroad as the alternative. The qualitative data matches the quantitative: the Arab Barometer interviewed 2,400 Moroccans in 2018 and found that 70 percent of Moroccans aged 18-29 wanted to emigrate as opposed to 22 percent between the ages of 40 and 49, and less than 10 percent for those over fifty. Over sixty percent of secondary or university degree holding Moroccans wanted to migrate.[37] Youth have deterministic perceptions which must come from somewhere, and with such a large portion of the demographic agreeing, these notions are not bound to fade on their own.

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[36] Kai T. Erikson, 'Notes on the Sociology of Deviance,' *Social Problems*, no. 9 (1962): 308.; Maratea, R. J., and Philip R. Kavanaugh, 'Deviant Identity in Online Contexts: New Directives in the Study of a Classic Concept,' *Sociology Compass* 6, no. 2 (2012): 103.
[37] *Morocco Country Report*, Arab Barometer, wave V. (2019): p. 11.

Conclusion

It should be recognized that only two out of eight of my participants were women. Both identified themselves as religious, came from wealthier backgrounds, and wore hijab. There is not a great disparity between the number of women who do and do not wear hijab at AUI, although there are noticeably more unveiled women who engage in the university's available social activities and public meeting places. This is to admit that this research should have included more voices of women — especially regarding non-believing women — and not just women, but those who choose to wear hijab as well as those who do not. This is in no way a suggestion of devoutness on the part of those who wear hijab, but rather an indicator of other social factors. The study would have benefited from more male Moroccan believers. It is noteworthy to mention the difficulty I had in finding people at AUI who felt confident identifying as Muslim; hence my believing participants were all referrals. For non-believers, I had over twenty potentials in my mind immediately with women less represented than men, but present.

Religion affects the everyday thoughts and actions of Moroccans to the extent that it transforms the identities and worldviews of believers and non-believers. Moreover, non-believers remain impacted by religion regarding how they navigate their political and social beliefs. The narrow definition the Moroccan government allots to Moroccan Islam causes identity dilemmas and mental rifts in the lives of believing and non-believing urban Moroccan youth. My interviewees' conceptions of what it means to be a non-believer is drastically different from prior work in the largely Western literature. Furthermore, the conception of what it means to be a young Muslim in Morocco is radically different from the desires of the state and the practices of older generations. By responding to questions about identity formation, urban Moroccan youth vaguely conceptualized what it means to be Moroccan but were clear they saw religion as a regulator of social and legal relationships and religious generational differences.

Moroccan youth are unable to describe what it means to be Moroccan; across all interviews, adjectives were seldom given. One would think an indescribable society would be a place where anyone could belong, but that is almost the opposite of the participants' realities. Both sets of interviewees were quick to disassociate themselves from Morocco, with non-believers emphasizing that they do not feel connected to society. Interviewees generally comply with what they see as social duties, but they take issue with large swathes of generational practices they see as restrictive, as seen by their rejection of *hshuma*, desire for personal freedoms, and disinterest in how others might use that freedom. Following many of the standards set by family and society but wandering from expectations led them to identity dilemmas. There is not a defined set of repercussions regarding identity dilemmas, but they impacted the budding or developed cynicism in this study's non-believers.

One of the most surprising findings for me was the solidarity shown on the part of believers towards non-believers. Religious participants displayed no

hostility when they mentioned non-believers and oftentimes established that some non-believers are more moral, knowledgeable about Islam, and/or open to discussion than fellow Muslims. Non-believers did not refer to believers as often, but when they referred to their peers, there was no animosity.

The concept of a generational gap in Morocco is not new. However, this research was not directed at this issue. Because of the phenomenographic nature of this work, the generational gap became relevant due to the continuous importance placed on it by participants. The gap became one of tradition and modernity. Traditional, or older Moroccans, are seen as more: conservative, concerned with the affairs of others, inhibiting, judgmental, inflexible, and ignorant. Modern Moroccans are seen as the opposite. Mainly, their described modernity calls for personal freedom and only self-regulation of actions and beliefs.

I have struggled to describe the view of young Moroccans with terms more accurate than laissez-faire, individualist, blasé, live-and-let-live. This in itself is important because of the implications of not having a word to describe a way of life. My participants want an egalitarian social system where people are free to act without the judgement of their communities, while still caring about their communities: individuality without apathy. However, it is interesting to note that my participants who have secured or are trying to acquire jobs abroad did not specifically search for a country with these traits.

This research brought me in contact with various media used for various groups of non-believers. There are YouTube channels, Facebook groups, and forum discussion threads dedicated to non-believing Moroccans. On these sites, there are thousands of people discussing non-belief in Morocco and its affects on a myriad of topics including LGBTQIA+ issues, women's rights, environmental issues, etc.. While people are free to choose the language they post in, English is remarkably prevalent. Educated older generations are less likely to have difficulty understanding youth who speak or write in French, but code-switching with English presents new barriers.

The loss of the ability to clearly communicate and precisely understand has effects as plentiful as they are dangerous. Another consideration is how both atheism and English appear to cut across many youth demographics. In terms of change, the non-believers I interviewed want to live freely, and they are generally well-educated enough and well-funded enough that leaving Morocco does not seem unreachable. However, the state's biggest problem is not the people who are disenchanted and leave, but rather those who are disenchanted and remain. If my research were to say that the wealthy and educated Moroccan youth are leaving because they are disillusioned by the idea of a future in Morocco, then the problems of brain drain and the like would be the most prominent issue. Yet, this research shows that there may be a broader application. What is more, unlike my interviewees' failures to describe commitment or kinship with Morocco, members of these online "Moroccan" groups are cutting across many demographics: some posters are global but still want to be a part of these communities. At a minimum, this information has culture-changing and worldview-changing implications.

From the continuing Black Lives Matter movement, which has taken to the global stage, to the persecution of the Uighurs in China, the importance and relevance of identity politics is obvious. The impacts of identity politics in Morocco should not be regarded differently. Societal cynicism and disillusionment, the creation of groups where Moroccan youth can be Moroccan on their own terms, and a generational gap which globalization is fracturing further are threats to state, governmental, and social cohesion.