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COMMUNICATION AND EVERYDAY PERFORMANCE:
A Study of Post-Tradition in Morocco

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Dissertation Abstract

This dissertation attempts a study of the “nervous” processes which characterize communication and everyday performance in post-traditional Morocco. The thesis engages, conceptually and empirically, with theories of resistance as they relate to everyday life practices of subaltern communities. My objective is to study resistance in its concrete and performed dimensions. A central site where this happens is the public sphere, perceived not in terms of “ideal speech situations,” as Jurgen Habermas defines it, but as a set of spatial practices which is shot through with contradictions and conflicts. Likewise, my approach seeks to take away the category of community from the idealized and homogenizing form in which it is often couched and to tie it to the politics of everyday. By doing so, I hope to delineate some of the complex workings in which communal spheres mediate the emergence of subaltern groups and communities.

The dissertation is divided into two main sections. In the first section, I proceed with a historical study to recover the potential of resistance in the public sphere theory to show how the workings of this category is destabilized by the changes of the test ground and the practices of communities. I also describe some of the processes through which communication and everyday performance mediate the emergence of a collective ethic of solidarity. The second section deals with three case studies of communal spheres of informal association and representation: women’s hammam (the public bath), the café, and film. While the first two spheres allow for an observation of moments of concretized forms of the performativity of gendered public spaces and an emergent collective ethic of group solidarity, film is used as a sample of the visual arts analyzed in terms of the ways it mediates and reconstructs the performed resistance of communities in post-traditional Morocco.

This study crosses disciplinary boundaries and draws on ongoing debates in the areas of critical and social theories, communication and performance studies, and feminist theory. The objective is to open new borderlines in the debate on the performativity of the public sphere and alternative forms of social organization in the age of globalized capitalism and liberalism. This project finds its thread of coherence in the researcher’s commitment to the interests of disenfranchised groups and communities.
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In memory of my mother Lalla Zohra

To

My father Hadj Miloud

My wife Mona and my daughter Zeineb

My step-mother, my brothers and sisters

Hadj M'hamed Benjelloun and Hadja Khadija
Introduction:
Concepts, Methods, and Road-Map

This thesis seeks to engage, conceptually and empirically, with theories of resistance as they relate to everyday life practices of subaltern and marginalized communities in Morocco. My objective is to study resistance in its concrete and performed dimensions. A central site where this happens is the public sphere, perceived not in terms of "ideal speech situations," as Jurgen Habermas has defined it, but as a set of spatial and cultural practices which is shot through with contradictions and conflicts. Likewise, my aim is to take away the category of community from the idealized and homogenizing form in which it is often couched and to tie it to the politics of everyday life. In this, I hope to delineate some of the complex workings and processes in which communal spheres mediate the emergence of subaltern groups and communities.

The study is divided into two main sections. In the first section, I delimit the potential of resistance in the public sphere theory to show how the changes of the test ground and the practices of communities de-stabilize and de-centre the implications of this category. I also describe some of the processes through which communication and everyday performance mediate the emergence of groups and communities. The emergence I imagine is not mapped onto a specific space or social setting. Rather, community emergence, I argue, resides in moments of ambivalence, contradiction, indeterminacy, latency, and nervousness. Similarly, the emergent collective solidarity is simultaneously tactile and imaginary, concrete and imagined, real and insubstantial. Most of all, it is a hybrid of voices and noises and an amalgam of conflicting and contradictory practices which act as a subversive back talk to the homogenizing and hegemonizing dominant worldview.

In the second section, I analyze a sample of three communal spheres of informal association and representation: women's hammam (public bath), the café, and film. Women's hammam and the café are predominantly gendered spaces. The feminine space of women's hammam caters to an exclusively female community (except for boys who accompany their
mothers until the age of four or five) while the café is a predominantly male space. In a society where spatial division is structured along gender lines, these two sites allow the study of processes of communication and performance as they pertain to the everyday life of women and men. Similarly, film is not used as a free-floating sign but as a sample of the visual arts analyzed in terms of the ways in which it mediates performed resistances and reconstructs the contradictions and conflicts of everyday life.

Rather than proclaiming communal spheres as ideal speech situations, I maintain that they are shot through with conflicts and contradictions. Women’s hammam does not only mediate a subversive discourse and performance but can also reinforce the dominant patriarchal structure. Similarly, the café is simultaneously a space of sociability and association but also of power and control while cinematic reconstructions of everyday life struggles and resistances can bracket the emancipatory anticipations of groups and communities. However, while they confirm the premise that conflicts and contradictions are integrated signposts of the processes of communal emergence, communal spheres are primarily mediating sites of a real and imagined ethic of collective solidarity.

I have lived this project as a travelling subject tweaking the anxieties and restlessness its moments of roaming and stopping generate, unpacking the meanings of road-signs and signposts, scurrying towards shelter and away from cover, but never reticent to allow “thought [to make] its way through a labyrinth of voices, semi-voices, other people’s words, other people’s gestures” hoping that “[it] juxtaposes orientations and amid them constructs [its] own orientation.”1 As Antonio Gramsci has pointed out, it is important to realize that you are “a product of the historical process to date, which has deposited in you an infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory” and that, “therefore, it is imperative at the outset to complete such an inventory.”2

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This project is born out of a life-long fascination and admiration of the struggles and resistances of marginalized groups and communities in my country. It is a tribute to the forbearance and endurance of the poor women and men who celebrate life as they experience its precariousness. This study is also the beginning of an inventory of the cultural traces which mediate the identity of post-traditional subjects. As a child, I had to walk my mother to and back from our neighbourhood hammam every week, a fact which often ruined my Sunday plans and led me to resent this feminine space. Little did I know then how important those visits were to her. I experienced the café spatial practice at a time when political oppression was so stiff that café talk was an everyday precarious performance. My training at film criticism started at an early age when I was a regular at film clubs—a tradition that has died out since—where film projections were followed by debates in the presence of cineasts. In short, my own experience with the three spaces under study has turned this project into an exercise of remembering and forgetting, of association and disavowal, of ordering and re-telling. I grew up in a small town on the North-Western coast of Morocco where not much happened. Our school time was punctuated by café visits and the week-ends were characterized by outings to the cinema and the hammam. In a way, what books represented for bell hooks, the café, the cinema, and the hammam represented for me and for my home-town generation:

They were the places I could bring the broken bits and pieces of myself and put them together again, the places where I could dream about alternative realities, possible futures. They let me know firsthand that if the mind was to be the site of resistance, only the imagination could make it so. To imagine, then, was a way to begin the process of transforming reality. All that we cannot imagine will never come to being.¹

This project covers a lot of territory and explores roots and routes. It is a discovery journey that has taken me through various conceptual and methodological trajectories. It crosses disciplinary boundaries and draws on

ongoing debates and conflicting discourses both North and South. By introducing the descriptive concept “post-tradition,” I seek to broaden and extend the debate on social organization to the areas of informal association and everyday life communication and performance. The use of analytical constructs to analyze and explain the structural components of group organization is one of the most complex tasks undertaken by social theory. On one hand, analytical constructs are characteristically presented as ideal types, and as such, they are homogenizing concepts which may overlook the dynamism of relational interactions and associations which permeate the capillaries of everyday life. On the other hand, conclusions reached on the basis of explorations of particular structural components of societal organization (communication, culture, economy, technology, or political institutions) may not necessarily correlate with other aspects of social organization. Daniel Bell, for example, admits that his construct “post-industrial society” deals primarily with changes “in the social structure” which do not necessarily “determine corresponding changes in the polity or culture.”

Furthermore, there remains the problematic relationship between theory and praxis. Conceptualizations are as much constructions as they are descriptions. Their mediation is ambivalently suspended between a desire for change and the anxieties that a potential reshuffling of order and stability may generate. This ambivalence is mostly true of theories and constructs which attempt to articulate processes of change.

The concept “post-tradition” also purports to inscribe in the master narratives of Tradition and Modernity the contradictions of everyday performances and subaltern life-stories and worldviews. Post-tradition does not summon origin, purity, homogeneity or continuity. Rather, it is a process that is always-already in the making. Similarly, post-traditional communities are not self-contained or self-sealed groups. On the contrary, the post-traditional community is shot through with contradictions and power struggles both internally and externally. Thus, the task of the post-traditional researcher is not to conceptualize hegemonizing views of history but to document the fractured histories and life-stories of groups and communities as they surface in people’s everyday practices and performances. From this viewpoint, it is incumbent upon the post-

traditional researcher to be alert to the spatial and temporal particularities which produce everyday practices. Friendships, alliances, and emotional ties which build up in cafés or hammams, for example, can contribute to the emergence of collective solidarities among groups and communities. Likewise, gossip, humour, playfulness, brawls, pranks, and disputes which are all familiar scenes in the circumscribed space of the café and the hammam point out to some of the risks everyday performance and communication generate.

Similarly, a post-traditional methodological approach decentres the self-paralyzing divide between “high” and “popular” culture. From a post-traditional perspective, culture becomes a seamless ebb and flow of endogenous practices and exogenous leisure experiences, of performed resistances and ceremonial rituals, and of conjured up identities and anticipated possibilities. Kathleen Stewart’s definition of the culture “on the side of the road” and of the task of its researcher gives a feel of the nervousness and indeterminacy which characterize post-traditional culture and the anxieties post-traditional researchers experience:

Culture in this account is a space of imagination, critique, and desire produced in and through mediating forms. It is not something that can be set “straight” but it has to be tracked through its moves and versions, its sites of encounter and engagement, its pride and regrets, its permeabilities and vulnerabilities, its nervous shifts from one thing to another, its moments of self-possession and dispersal. Nor is culture in this sense easy to re-present. I have used every trick I could imagine to catch the reader up in the dialogic provisionality of its “truths” including dense descriptions with amassed details, direct polemics, reproduced stories, realist assessments and romantic interludes, evocations and exegeses, seductions and confessions, and direct appeals to the reader to “picture” this and “imagine” that.\footnote{Kathleen Stewart, \textit{A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an “Other” America}, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996, pp. 9-10.}
To Kathleen Stewart's list of "tricks," I would add "the wisdom of intuition" which conjures up points of view, voices, noises, gaps, overstatements, fantasies, litanies, and lyrics that permeate the heterogeneous text of everyday life. The wisdom of intuition was explained to me by one of my café informants in the parabolic story of a judge who had to decide in a case in which the plaintiff had no witness to support his claim that the defendant refused to pay back a loan he had given him. In his turn, the defendant maintained that he had never borrowed any money from the plaintiff. To settle the case, the judge ordered the plaintiff to go to the fig-tree under which he claimed to have lent the defendant the money and ask it to see if it could confirm his claim. He then asked the defendant to sit by his side and proceeded with other cases. After a while, he turned to the defendant and asked him if he thought the plaintiff had got to the fig-tree yet. Surprised by the judge's unexpected question, the defendant responded that his friend could not be back before dusk. When the plaintiff returned, the judge asked the defendant to pay back his loan or be sent to jail. To my informant, the judge had the wisdom of intuition. In the course of the interview, I had the opportunity to witness an instance of my informant's wisdom of intuition. He had made a statement earlier to the effect that the café ambiance was slightly strange that evening. I did not take note of his comment until four under-cover agents stormed the place and arrested two customers who were using a table inside. As I advanced in my research, I moved "the wisdom of intuition" to the top of the list of "Intellectual Craftsmanship" that C. Wright Mills recommends for the stimulation of "the sociological imagination."

I have also used the concepts "communal sphere" and "communal emergence" to ground my theory in the organizational structure of post-traditional society. The term communal sphere is used to extend the horizon of spatial and cultural practices to account for the contradictions and conflicts but also the organizing principles of communal forms such as geographical belonging, kinship, blood ties, and neighbourhood identity which are dominant modes of association in post-traditional societies. In addition, the concept communal sphere highlights the emancipatory promises of a collective form of informal association and co-mingling.

Communal emergence is used as a descriptive concept to indicate the complex and ambivalent processes through which communication and everyday performance mediate a communal and collective ethic of solidarity. Following Raymond Williams' definition, I use the term "emergent" to emphasize the idea that "new meanings and values, new practices, new relationships and kinds of relationship are continually being created." Similarly, I take note of his statement that "it is exceptionally difficult to distinguish between those which are really elements of some new phase of the dominant culture and those which are substantially alternative or oppositional to it: emergent in the strict sense, rather than merely novel."1 I hasten to add that my interest here is neither in the dominant form of Community nor in the cultural capital it mediates. Working from the premise that communication and everyday performance bear the imprints of different layers of social structure, I seek to bring into relief the communicative and performative modes of representation of subaltern communities whose resistance to marginalization, at times, manifests itself in playful subversive expressions, and at other times, in mere reproduction of the dominant worldview.

As stated earlier, this project crosses disciplinary boundaries and draws on ongoing debates in the areas of critical and social theories, communication and cultural studies, and feminist theory. The conceptual structure of this project started taking shape when I became acquainted with the works of the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas. Habermas's reconstructed version of historical materialism has contributed to an important shift in the orientation of critical theory research. His rejection of an orthodox view of history as a totality and the mode of production as the primary mover of social relations has mediated an interest in everyday life politics and societal projects for emancipation. However, Habermas's subordination of gender issues, his exclusive interest in the bourgeois public, and emphasis on the conceptualization of a homogeneous consensus ordered by the principles of rational-critical debate bracket the potential of emancipation that is latent in his theory of communicative action and project of society. Yet, as Seyla Benhabib has noted, I have proceeded with the conviction that what is needed is not only a critique of Habermas's

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social theory but that "as feminists we should also enter into a dialectical alliance with it" to develop a "critical model of public space and public discourse."¹

The extension of the debate on the public sphere to alternative models of public space has mediated the shift of the test-ground from the advanced capitalist society -which is Habermas's interest- to the post-traditional form of organization. Mikhail Bakhtin's model of plebeian space underlines the importance of non-official spheres in the perpetuation of the folk's cultural practices and provides an alternative view of communication and everyday performance. However, I have also argued that the plebeian sphere is also shot through with conflicts and contradictions and has, therefore, to be problematized rather than idealized. The contributions of post-bourgeois and feminist theories of the public sphere (Negt and Kluge's "proletarian sphere" (1973), John Downing's "alternative public realm" (1984, 1988), and Nancy Fraser's "ethic of solidarity" and "subaltern counterpublics" (1986, 1992) have mediated my revisionist reading of the public sphere and its organizing principles. From this perspective, it has become possible to problematize the traditional binaries of public versus private, general or common concern versus private interest, and more importantly, to argue that spheres -whether bourgeois or plebeian- can not be considered independently of one another. By introducing the concept communal sphere, I further enhance the importance of relating public spheres to the general politics of spatial production and everyday communication and performance.

Similarly, by focusing on and enhancing the "nervous" process of communication and everyday performance, I have sought not only to part with functionalist and utilitarian interpretations of communication which bracket human interaction and discourse in terms of "use," "gratification," "effect," and "rational debate" but also to negotiate the complex task of delineating the conflicting trajectories which mediate the emergence of communities. In this process, noise, silence, interruptions, gossip, rumour, curses, oaths, profanities, improprieties, ribaldry, pranks, jokes, dance, spatial proxemics, body performance, and notions of sociability,

conviviality, intimacy, friendship, and bonding all create a heterogeneous tapestry of sound and image which makes up the processes of communication and everyday performance.

Moreover, though I maintain that conflicts and contradictions are integrated parts of the communicative process, I do not focus on crises or conflicts but rather on the ceremonial and ritual celebrations which characterize the performance of subaltern communities. In this respect, I have drawn on the works of Richard Schechner (1995), Deborah Kapchan (1994, 1996), Baz Kershaw (1992), Victor Turner (1982, 1986), and James Carey (1990). My approach, as I argue throughout, seeks to enhance the role of the ceremonial and the ritual in the mediation of an ethic of collective solidarity. The sites I explore confirm the hypothesis that change potential can also be mediated through subversive celebration and performance and not only through conflict and confrontation. By introducing critical social theories of Moroccan historians and sociologists (Abdellah Laroui, Mohamed Abed al-Jabri, Abdelkebir Khatibi, and Fatima Mernissi), I have tried to open new borderlines in the research project of critical theory. The underlying thread which has informed my interdisciplinary approach is a commitment to the cause of marginalized communities and to the principles of critical theory as outlined by Douglas Kellner:

[...] while there is no unitary Critical Theory, I will suggest there are features which define it in terms of method, presuppositions and positions. From the beginning to the present, Critical Theory has refused to situate itself within an arbitrary or conventional academic division of labor. It thus traverses and undermines boundaries between competing disciplines, and stresses interconnections between philosophy, economics and politics, and culture and society [...] This project requires a collective, supradisciplinary synthesis of philosophy, the sciences and politics, in which critical social theory is produced by groups of theorists and scientists from various disciplines working together to produce a Critical
Theory of the present age aimed at radical socio-political transformation.¹

While the methodological approach adopted in the first section is historically oriented, the nature of the case studies in the second section requires that I adopt an overall critical hermeneutics which combines thick description, interpretation of action, critique of action, and social semiotics (especially in the case of film study). In the course of my fieldwork research, I have had to trust my “wisdom of intuition” in the selection of the most appropriate methodological strategies to the issues raised by the thesis. Thus, I have had to make use of questionnaires, participant observation, intensive and unstructured interviewing, focus groups and one-to-one interviews. I have had also to rely on secondary sources, newspaper articles, personal recollections, and oral histories for the collection of the data dictated by the design of the case study. In the introductory section of each case study, I provide a more detailed account of the research techniques used and the problems encountered.

In the course of my study of the café space, I have had to deal with the problems that ethnographic research usually generates. Informants were generally either not available for interviews, skeptical about the objectives of the research design (especially café owners and managers), or, at times, suspicious of the “real” motifs of the researcher himself. I dealt with each situation in the light of the immediate context available. Sometimes I apologized and moved on to other café users or to a different café; at other times, I spent hours explaining the objectives and implications of research but, most of the times, informants were generally understanding and willing to cooperate. In the film case study, I encountered a different kind of problems. Moroccan films are not available at video stores because, as it has been explained to me by managers, they are not commercially successful. In fact, I found out that while video store managers had no problem pirating international films, they thought it extremely unethical “to make money at the expense of national film production.” A video club owner explained to me that he would “feel very bad” if a Moroccan filmmaker or producer visited his store and found his pirated films on sale. For the three films

analyzed in the last chapter, I had to go to the cinema five consecutive times to see "Good-Bye Fair" and I managed to get the other two films through friends.

The case study of women's hammam has been the most difficult and the most problematic to deal with. As a male subject, women's hammam is not accessible to me, a fact which makes my knowledge of this feminine spatial practice exclusively dependent on the reports of my informants and the data gathered by women researchers. I can claim neither the vantage point of "thick description" nor the possibility of verifying the reports of my informants. In addition, even conducting interviews proved to be a very complex and difficult task. On one hand, Moroccan women are very protective of the privacy provided by this space and, consequently, they are legitimately concerned about letting out information which relates to their performance in their most private public space. On the other hand, the researcher himself found it very difficult to interview female informants about their hammam performance. More specifically, I found out that I could interview only acquaintances, friends or relatives. At another level, I had to grapple with the issue of whether or not it was ethically acceptable for a male researcher to study an exclusively feminine spatial practice. I settled this problematic by extending the design to the position of women's hammam in the general politics of gender relations and Moroccan spatial production and distribution. In fact, this feminine spatial practice is an integrated part of the cultural traces which make up the myriad identities of post-traditional Moroccan subjects. In the imaginary of the Moroccan male, the feminine space of the hammam is treasured as a world of fantasies and erotic desires. In Moroccan francophone literature, for example, women's hammam is used as a generative space of creativity. Similarly, much of women's discourse inside the hammam is concentrated on the male, a fact which highlights the ambivalent position of women's hammam as a refuge of childhood memories, erotic phantasms, and a spatial manifestation of women's resistance in a patriarchal structure.

It must be also noted that I do not claim that the study of these three spheres provides enough evidence or warrants the legitimacy to extrapolate generalizations on Moroccan society as a whole. As Clifford Geertz has put it:
The notion that one can find the essence of national societies, civilizations, great religions, or whatever summed up and simplified in so-called "typical" small towns and villages is palpable nonsense. What one finds in small towns and villages is (alas) small-town or village life.¹

The underlying objective of this study is to locate change potential and possibilities of emancipation and liberation in post-traditional Morocco. The case studies are used to detect aspects of this potential and possibilities, but also the contradictions and indeterminacies which make up everyday life communication and performance. Further research is needed to verify the premises and hypotheses advanced here and to extend the scope of spatial settings to be studied.

Chapter 1, "Post-Tradition as an Everyday Practice," traces the moment of emergent post-traditional communities in the fleeting and indeterminate space in-between the triadic sites of Tradition, Modernity, and Post-Modernity. A revisionist reading of the three Grand Narratives demarcates post-tradition as a process that resists purity and homogeneity and celebrates ambivalence, transgression, and risk-taking. This chapter also establishes the concept post-traditional society as a descriptive category of emergent mode of organization where the focus is on subversive everyday performances through which communities seek to negotiate a space of emancipation from inherited practices and resistance to hegemonic modes of globalized worldviews and lifestyles.

In chapter 2, "On the Construction of the Public Sphere: History as an Absent Cause," I attempt a reconstruction of the historical conceptualizations of the public sphere. The chapter begins with an analysis of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's proposed "social contract" to argue that the early articulations of the public sphere theories which accompanied the nascent nation-state legitimated the subordination of women and the poor and naturalized their exclusion from participation in public debate and deliberation. The chapter proceeds to discuss dominant models of public space, especially as articulated by Stuart Mill, Hannah Arendt, and Jurgen Habermas. Alternative theories of the public sphere are also explored here.

Mikhail Bakhtin’s model of the plebeian sphere, I argue, must be approached through a feminist perspective so as not to assimilate gender to class relations. The chapter ends by underlining the contributions of post-bourgeois theories (Negt and Kluge, John Downing, and Nancy Fraser’s) to a more emancipated form of the public sphere but also by maintaining that the concepts “community” and “communal sphere” are, historically and contextually, more appropriate for a study of communication and everyday performance in post-traditional society.

Chapter 3, “Communal Emergence and the Ethic of Collective Solidarity,” examines the processes through which communication and everyday performance mediate the emergence of post-traditional communities. I proceed first with a reconstruction of the concept “community” and the complexities which its theorization generates before I attempt a conceptualization of the post-traditional community. I contend that post-traditional communities invest simultaneously in vertical and horizontal imaginings. The vertical communion of the post-traditional imagined community is always already implicated in the horizontal reality of the community, playing out its contradictions, reordering its relations, and opening up borderline spaces for communities to emerge. In this respect, I underline the importance of spatial and temporal mediation in the production of post-traditional communities. Eventually, the point is made to the effect that community emergence is imagined in the form of a communal ethic of solidarity and inscribed through the media of ritual liminality, subversive hybridity, and may develop into direct political action.

Chapter 4, “Communication in the Hot Steam: The Hammam, the Public Sphere, and Moroccan Women,” examines the processes through which communication and performance in women’s hammam mediate the emergence of a spirit of collectivity. I argue that the ambivalence which characterizes the construction of this feminine space must be analyzed in light of the dominant politics of spatial production and distribution, gender and power relations, and the circumscribed performance of women in “open” public spaces. From this viewpoint, I contend that the spatial practice of women’s hammam acts as a communal sphere where women celebrate their gender privacy, rejoice in body performance, and empower themselves through intense participation in lateral communication and
networking. Through an analysis of North African male francophone literature, the chapter explores how women’s hammam has also functioned as an imaginary outlet for male erotic desires, anxieties, and frustrations. The chapter ends with a reflection on the future of this feminine space in light of the social and structural changes affecting post-traditional Morocco.

Chapter 5, "The Moroccan Café: Performing Resistance in the Public Sphere," discusses the processes through which informal association and unconstructed co-mingling in cafés mediate the emergence of group solidarity. A point is made to the effect that café mediated communities are imagined in the space in-between the public and the private, the explicit and the implicit, the dominant and the alternative, and between performance and spectatorship. Café etiquette and strategies of sociability foreground the café as a liminal space where communication and performance often mediate a subversive playfulness. The chapter also maps the relation between the café and other public spaces as one of negotiation, contestation, and reconstruction. Cutting across these arguments, I contend that subalternity and resistance are not naturally mapped onto specific spatial practices. Rather, the café institution emerges as an ambivalent site where solidarities are built but also as a nexus where social contradictions are played out and power relations are reproduced.

Chapter 6, "Post-Traditional Aesthetics: The Moroccan Film and the Politics of Everyday" examines the contribution of cinematic expression to the debate on post-tradition and the anticipated project of an emancipatory society. Post-traditional aesthetics is used as a descriptive category to differentiate the nascent aesthetics from political and commercial cinemas. The emancipatory thrust of post-traditional cinema, I argue, mediates individual and collective desires and anxieties and reconstructs the ambiguous and ambivalent practices of everyday life. The chapter begins with a reconstruction of the politics of Arab and African film production and a study of the aesthetics of their political cinemas before I focus on Moroccan film industry. Eventually, I examine a sample of post-traditional cinema and discuss the contribution of post-traditional aesthetics to the ongoing debates in post-traditional Morocco.

In a brief conclusion, I summarize the significance of this project in relation to the changes and transformations occurring in post-traditional Morocco. I also delimit some of the contributions of this study to the
conceptual body of critical theory and cultural studies. I conclude by underlining some of the areas where further research is needed in order to better understand the historical orientations of post-traditional Morocco.

Figure 1. The way to the café experience: A Café competing for recognition with a museum, a showroom and a library.
Chapter One:
Post-Tradition as an Everyday Practice

In 1992, I attended a lecture given by Jacques Derrida at the Faculty of Letters, Rabat, Morocco. Abdelfattah Kilito, a Moroccan critical and cultural theorist, anticipated the mood of the lecture by humourously remarking that introducing Jacques Derrida was a task he never knew how to handle accurately. Kilito’s remark was more than justified. For two hours, as he dismantled the intellectual, aesthetic, and moral implications embedded in the concepts of Love and Friendship in the Western philosophical and literary Canon, Derrida displayed the power of post-structuralism and deconstructionism in recovering the ‘deferred’ meanings left on the fringes of the text.

As we walked our way through the crowd after the conference, a colleague who was himself a former student of Michel Foucault, joked that Derrida’s thought-provoking investigations were a ‘luxury’ he personally could not afford. In what could be taken as a self-justifying statement, he noted that though most of the texts referenced by Derrida were shelved in his library, it never dawned on him to invest his research time on topics such as “love” or “friendship,” which, given the Moroccan social reality, would likely be viewed as a “frivolous” intellectual exercise.

At an immediate level, the concern voiced by my colleague speaks to the role of the intellectual, the relationship between the university and the world out there, and the legitimacy of academic discourse, especially in its post-structuralist and fragmentary manifestations, in representing the daily struggles of the people. However, at a more theoretical level, what is at issue is the entire project of Modernity, the viability of its discourse, and its relevance to the social and cultural lifeworlds in non-Western societies. In fact, the same concern has been expressed by a number of Arab and African intellectuals. The African critical theorist Denis Ekpo, for example, has articulated the controversy surrounding the relevance of post-modernism to the African reality in the form of a rhetorical question:
Thus when such a being [the man of the post-industrial West] settles for the intermediate, the paradoxical, the strange and absurd, it is probably because he bears no more resemblance to the man as we know him, especially here in Africa; he is a post-man whose society, having overfed him and spoilt him, has delivered him over to irremediable boredom. Nothing therefore, stops the African from viewing the celebrated postmodern condition a little sarcastically as nothing but the hypocritical self-flattering cry of overfed and spoilt children of hypercapitalism. So what has hungry Africa got to do with the postmaterial disgust and ratiocination of the bored and the overfed?¹

As Ekpo argues, Africa and most countries of the South have encountered and been defeated by Western civilization.² This explains, in great part, why the project of Western Modernity, which has been communicated through the colonial enterprise, has met with strong opposition from indigenous cultures. This historical reality is a key element in the understanding of the dynamics which characterize the quest of non-Western societies for their collective identities and their relationship with the West and its project of Modernity. Abdallah Laroui, a Moroccan historian, has underlined the importance of this historical detail:

If you are not fortunate enough to be geographically inaccessible to the invading Europe so as to start your reforms in time, that is before Europe finds the technical means to prevent you from doing so, you will inevitably meet tremendous difficulties. The smallest reform will then require incommensurable effort, will, and perseverance. A rite, a habit, a costume, so easy to change at first, will later acquire an incredible sentimental value and will practically become

² I will be using the terms “West,” “Western,” or the “Occident” as a geographical entity to refer to Europe (and more specifically Western Europe) and North America and as an epistemological category which defines the thought, the history, the culture, the ideas, and the lifestyle perceived to characterize the civilizational identity of this geographical entity.
unchangeable. Costume, as history has taught us, has not stopped changing for centuries, and all of a sudden, when changing it becomes an urgent matter, it acquires the status of a sanctified symbol which no one dares alter. When society is not facing any danger, nothing is immune from change, and when it is facing a mortal danger, everything becomes sacred and the grand-children show more zeal in their attachment to the past than their grand-parents. Who hasn’t expressed amazement at this paradox?¹

In addition, the post-colonial era has coincided with an unprecedented advance in communication technologies which has made of the world a “global village.” In his “Preface” to The Global Village, Bruce R. Powers explains Marshall McLuhan’s distinction between “visual space,” which he considers the defining mode of Western thinking, and “acoustic space” which he sees as the most outstanding trait of the Oriental world. Powers then argues that:

The two value systems have interpenetrated each other for centuries, certainly when passed from hand to hand in slow print form. But, now the acoustic and the visual are separately slamming into each other at an explosive speed of light. Electric flow has brought differing societies into abrasive contact on a global level, occasioning frequent worldwide value collisions and cultural irritation of an arcing nature, so that, for instance, when a hostage is taken in Beirut an entire nation on the other side of the world is put at risk. McLuhan said, “in the last half of the 20th Century the East will rush Westward and the West will embrace Orientalism, all in a desperate attempt to cope with each other, to avoid violence. But the key to peace is to understand both systems simultaneously.”²

To begin with, McLuhan's distinction between the Western visual and the Oriental acoustic modes of thought carries an Orientalist resonance since it foregrounds the Western institutionalized thinking against the Oriental intuitive worldview. In addition, Powers' metaphor of the two cultures "separately slamming into each other" as well as his example of the hostage-taking incident in the Middle-East harness the myth of the Orient as "a threat." However, McLuhan's point of simultaneous understanding and integrated consciousness is worth considering. The extensive cross-border flow of people, goods, artifacts, and images between North and South (though, in reality, one would be closer to truth talking about a one-way flow from the North to the South than about a fair and balanced exchange) has brought different value systems face-to-face in an unprecedented way. In addition, since Europe's projects over the last three centuries have all claimed the principle of "universality," the concept of "simultaneous understanding" becomes, in theory at least, a relevant enterprise. Yet, simultaneous understanding must not be another pretext for the purpose of homogenizing cultures and silencing dissident voices. On the contrary, this endeavour can only be legitimized if it contributes to the opening up of new spaces where differences can be celebrated and where the voices of the disenfranchised can be heard.¹

Though my research project is primarily focused on a sample country from the South, my overriding objective in this chapter, as it is throughout my thesis, is to strive towards the ideal of "simultaneous understanding" of

¹ I would like to insist here that the "simultaneous understanding" I am advocating does not stem from a romanticized or idealized vision of the world which sees the divide between North and South as having originated from sheer "misunderstanding" which can easily be remedied. On the contrary, I am fully aware of the historical, economic, and political variables which have led to it in the first place and of the current interests at stake which urge interest groups in both poles to maintain the status quo. I share the opinion of E. P. Thompson who argues that "[any] historian of labour is only too well aware of the self-interest and the class-bound apologetics which can always find reasons why the poor should stay poor." E. P. Thompson quotes Bernard Mandeville who bluntly states that: "It is impossible that a Society can long subsist and suffer many of its Members to live in Idleness, and enjoy all the Ease and Pleasure they can invent, without having at the same time great multitudes of People that to make good this effect, will condescend to be quite the Reverse, and by use and patience inure their Bodies to Work for Others and themselves besides" (Bernard Mandeville, The Fable of the Bees, Hardsmouth, 1970 ed., pp. 292-293). Thompson, then, goes on to argue that Mandeville's text "has not lost its force today: it is the hidden text of the discourse between North and South" (E. P. Thompson, Customs in Common, New York: The New Press, 1993, p. 14).
different cultures and conflicting practices. Also, while my first interest is in the politics of everyday life and everyday performance of groups and communities, I have deemed it necessary in this chapter to attempt a theory of the society under study for a better understanding of the dynamics in which culture is produced and consumed in Morocco. My aim is to adopt a revisionist view of tradition, modernity, and post-modernity so as to open the debate into new directions and to bypass the paralyzing binarism in which these concepts have often been entangled. This revisionist approach will eventually allow a reassessment of the public sphere concept as it has been articulated by Western philosophers.

In this chapter, I contend that the moment of community emergence lies in a third space between the triadic sites of tradition, modernity, and post-modernity. This is the site of post-tradition which I will strive to define. By the end of this chapter, I will be using the concept “post-traditional” in reference to the type of social organization which characterizes Moroccan society. Though I hope that its general contours will become more visible as I proceed, I must reiterate the fact that I use post-tradition as a descriptive concept and I do not claim that it can possibly clarify all the ambiguities and complexities endemic to social organizations.

This chapter will have three main sections. First, I will attempt a general review of some of the main arguments which have been used by Western theorists in their attempts to define modernity, modernism, post-modernity, and post-modernism. Second, I will attempt a synthesis of the debate on the issues of tradition and modernity as it has been articulated in the thought of some influential Moroccan intellectuals. The point I will be making is that both sides either remain caught in the honey-combed complexities of definitions and ramifications of the projects of modernity and post-modernity, as is the case with Western philosophers, or they simply adopt a scripturalist position which remains intrinsically elitist in its attitude to culture, as in the case of the majority of Moroccan intellectuals. Finally, I argue that the view of post-traditional society I proclaim is neither homogeneous nor self-contained but one whose process is always in the making. It is my contention that this view allows a glimpse of groups and communities engaged in power struggles and makes it possible for the researcher to analyze moments of resistance in their performed and concretized dimensions.
A. Defining Forms of Social Organization

One of the thorniest issues social scientists have to deal with is the definition of concepts which seek to define forms of social organization or social relations. This is due to two major reasons, at least. First, analytical concepts which seek to describe how millions of people relate to one another and organize themselves are helplessly homogenizing because of the generalized view they seek to impose and which generally tends to overlook or obliterate the particularities of geography, regional histories,
customs, local politics, and cultural practices within the same country, let alone an entire region. Second, the problem has to do with the conflictual histories which the concept itself develops because of the accumulated interpretations and definitions it is subjected to and whose implications vary depending on the ideological perspective from which it is approached. Thus, it may be fair to state that any analytical concept which seeks to define the form of organization of an entire society or bring all its practices under one heading can not do justice to the form or practices described.

So far, even if I have hinted to the fact that the terms modernity, modernism, post-modernity, post-modernism, and tradition are very problematic, I have been using them as if the reality of such “projects” or “conditions” was not a debatable issue. In fact, “postmodernism” has often been taken nominalistically rather than in reference to a real substance. However, at this stage, I would like to maintain this assumption, not because I believe in or doubt their viability, but simply because the debate on this issue is beyond the scope of this thesis. As a matter of fact, this is a question which one is likely to come across in most of the literature which deals with modernism or post-modernism. Hal Foster (1983), for example, starts the “Preface” of the book he has edited on post-modernist culture by asking the following set of questions:

Postmodernism: does it exist at all and, if so, what does it mean? Is it a concept or a practice, a matter of local style or a whole new period or economic phase? What are its forms, effects, place? How are we to mark its advent? Are we truly beyond the modern, truly in (say) a postindustrial age?1

In The Condition of Postmodernity (1992), David Harvey writes in the “Preface” that he cannot remember exactly when he first came across the term post-modernism: “I probably reacted to it in much the same way as I did to the various other ‘isms’ that have come and gone over the past couple of decades, hoping that it would disappear under the weight of its

own incoherence or simply lose its allure as a fashionable set of 'new ideas'.”¹ In the introduction, he then asks the now familiar questions:

So what is this postmodernism of which many now speak? Has social life so changed since the early 1970s that we can reasonably talk about living in a postmodern age? Or is it simply that trends in high culture have taken, as is their wont, yet another twist, and that academic fashions have also changed with scarcely a ripple of effect or an echo of correspondence in the daily life of ordinary citizens? [...] No one exactly agrees as to what is meant by the term, except, perhaps, that 'postmodernism' represents some kind of reaction to, or departure from, 'modernism'. Since the meaning of modernism is also very confused, the reaction or departure known as 'postmodernism' is doubly so.²

Similarly, Steven Connor (1992) summarizes the controversies which the debate on postmodernist culture has generated:

Above all, they focused on the question of whether or not the term 'postmodernism' offers an adequate representation of the objects and practices of contemporary culture. The questions which were asked were: does postmodernism really exist, after all? Is there a 'unified sensibility' running across and between all the different areas of cultural life (Jurgen Peper)? Does postmodernism unjustly limit or prematurely curtail the 'unfinished project' of modernism (Jurgen Habermas)? Is there anything new or valuable in the alleged 'postmodernist breakthrough' (Gerald Graff)? In other words, does postmodernist culture exist and if so (sometimes even if not) is it a 'good thing' or a 'bad thing'?³

² Ibid. p. 7.
Finally, in this sample list of some of the controversial issues which the 
debate about post-modernism has set off, I would like to quote Andreas 
Huyssen (1986) who has insightfully argued that unless the debate takes a 
new direction away from the dichotomous relationship between modernism 
and postmodernism, attempts at mapping post-modernism will not be 
helpful. In The Great Divide, Andreas Huyssen (1992) argues that:

In much of the postmodernism debate, a very conventional 
thought pattern has asserted itself. Either it is said that 
postmodernism is continuous with modernism, in which case 
the whole debate opposing the two is specious; or, it is 
claimed that there is a radical rupture, a break with 
modernism, which is then evaluated in either positive or 
negative terms. But the question of historical continuity or 
discontinuity simply cannot be adequately discussed in terms 
of such either/or dichotomy. To have questioned the validity 
of such dichotomous thought is of course one of the major 
achievements of Derridean deconstruction. But the 
poststructuralist notion of endless textuality ultimately 
cripples any meaning of historical reflection on temporal units 
shorter than, say, the long wave of metaphysics from Plato to 
Heidegger or the spread of modernité from the mid-19th 
century to the present. The problem with such historical 
macro-schemes, in relation to postmodernism, is that they 
prevent the phenomenon from even coming into focus.¹

In what follows, I attempt a reconstruction of the analytical concepts of 
modernity, postmodernity, modernism, and postmodernism. The first 
problematic which must be underlined is the distinction between 
modernism and post-modernism as aesthetic movements and modernity 
and post-modernity as types of social order. The first pair defines types of 
artistic production, consumption, and criticism while the second pair is 
used to describe the processes of the social and cultural life-worlds as they 
relate to the worlds of economy, politics, and technology and their

¹ Andreas Huyssen, After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism. 
manifestations in people's everyday practices. The Mexican poet and essayist Octavio Paz locates the golden age of modernist art between 1830 and 1930 in the city of Paris. He writes nostalgically of this era:

The community of aesthetic ideas and ambitions of artists and poets was the spontaneous result of a historical situation that is not likely to be repeated. Between 1830 and 1930 artists formed a society within society or, more exactly, in confrontation with it. The rebellion of artistic communities against the taste of the Academy and the bourgeoisie manifested itself, brilliantly and consistently, in the critical works of a number of poets: Beaudelaire, Appolinaire, Breton. I have mentioned only French poets because the phenomenon occurred most strikingly and most decisively in Paris, which was the center of modern art during those hundred years. These poets were not only the voice but the conscience of artists [...] After the Second World War the focal point of world art shifted to New York [...] The most serious consequence was the change in the social situation of artists: in New York the art galleries, closely connected to the great economic network, direct and promote artistic movements (and at times invent them), dominate museums, and have appropriated the functions that once belonged to critics [...] The great rebellion of art and poetry began with Romanticism; a century and a half later artists had been assimilated and integrated into the circular process of the market. They are just another part meshing with the rest of the financial train of gear wheels as it goes round and round.¹

Octavio Paz's periodization brackets modernist art in the age of European colonialism, the accelerated pace of industrialization, the growing hegemony of capitalism, the development of the bourgeois public sphere, the institutionalization of new relations between artist, producer, and the public, and finally between the two World Wars. As Paz states, such a historical moment is not likely to be repeated. The economic, political,

ideological, cultural, and technological transformations which the European scene witnessed during this period metamorphosed the social lifeworld and generated as much apprehension of as much hope in the paradigm shift in human knowledge and relations. Modernist art was as much a reaction to those changes as it was an attempt to cope with them. This is what explains the modernists’ self-proclaimed mission to serve “a true priestly function,” as Saint-Simon put it.¹ This is also what accounts for the modernists’ relentless quest for a mode of representation which could construct the world coherently and in a monolithic language. However, and here is one of the ironies which underline the mission of modernist art, the obsession with a coherent and homogenizing view of the world has not only revealed the impossibility of this project but, more importantly, it has consequently led to the severance of aesthetic judgment from social reality and the institutionalization of the binary opposition between high art vs. popular culture. This last point is of importance because it bears directly on the thesis of this project since it addresses the issue of the role of the intellectual and the legitimacy of social science research.

In his turn, David Harvey maps out some of the defining principles of modernist art as follows:

Modernist art has always been [...] what Benjamin calls ‘auratic art,’ in the sense that the artist had to assume an aura of creativity, of dedication to art for art’s sake, in order to produce a cultural object that would be original, unique, and hence eminently marketable at a monopoly price. The result was often a highly individualistic, aristocratic, disdainful (particularly for popular culture), and even arrogant perspective on the part of cultural producers, but it also indicated how our reality might be constructed and re-constructed through aesthetically informed quality. It could be, at best, profoundly moving, challenging, upsetting, or exhortatory to many who were exposed to it (Harvey, 1992, p. 22).

¹ “It is we, artists, who will serve you as avant-garde. What a most beautiful destiny for the arts, that of exercising over society a positive power, a true priestly function, and of marching forcefully in the van of all the intellectual faculties in the epoch of their greatest development!” (quoted in David Harvey, 1992, pp. 19-20).
It is this canonized dichotomy of high art vs. mass culture institutionalized by modernist art which Andreas Huyssen calls the ‘Great Divide’ and which he sees as an essential element for the historical understanding of modernism.¹

In addition, this dichotomy has not only excluded from consideration the everyday practices of marginalized groups and minorities but has simultaneously dismissed non-European artistic productions from global recognition. The modernist claim to the universality of the European value systems has validated the Eurocentric discourse of hegemony and dominance and legitimated the imperialist enterprise. Gregory Jusdanis (1992) describes the ideological workings of the European-oriented discourse in the sphere of literary criticism, but his argument is certainly applicable to other academic disciplines:

The fallacy lies in masquerading a particular ideology as universal. As a European-oriented discipline, literary criticism cannot evade its Eurocentric character. Western theories do not automatically have validity outside the traditions that produced them. Critics cannot presume that the development of the novel in Middle Eastern societies followed western paradigms, or that prose existed before the advent of modernity. In their attempt to draw parallels between both Europe and its past and Europe and its Other, researchers inevitably discover modern European concepts in epochs and settings that could not have produced them. Such Eurocentric

¹ “What I am calling the Great Divide is the kind of discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture. In my view, this divide is much more important for a theoretical and historical understanding of modernism and its aftermath than the alleged historical break which, in the eyes of so many critics, separates postmodernism from modernism. The discourse of the Great Divide has been dominant primarily in two periods, first in the last decades of the 19th century and the first few years of the 20th, and then again in the two decades or so following World War II. The belief in the Great Divide, with its aesthetic, moral, and political implication, is still dominant in the academy today (witness the almost total institutional separation of literary studies, including the new literary theory, from mass culture research, or the widespread insistence on excluding ethical or political questions from the discourse on literature and art)” (Andreas Huyssen, The Great Divide, 1986, p. viii.)
and chronocentric practices have the effect of imposing upon the object of study a modern European orientation. \(^1\)

An exhaustive analysis of the repercussions of the Orientalist discourse and ideology on the post-colonial societies is beyond the scope of this study. However, it is worth underlining that this ideology must be opposed by counter-hegemonic discourses which would not only expose the Orientalist strategies of appropriation but, more importantly, could bring hegemonic systems face-to-face with liberating alternatives. What is needed, as the historian Jacques Berque has put, is "to multiply in the face of the Occident other possibilities of humanity, which would be very efficient, including at the industrial level." \(^2\) In other words, what is required is a revisionist view of the project of Western modernity and the opening up of possibilities for alternative projects of society.

So far, I have argued that modernism refers to the aesthetic mode of representation which has been dominant in the age of "modernity." At this stage, I need to clarify what is meant by the system of 'modernity.' Marshall Berman attempts an all-encompassing definition of "modernity":

There is a mode of vital experience - experience of space and time, of the self and others, of life's possibilities and perils - that is shared by men and women all over the world today. I will call this body of experience 'modernity'. To be modern is to find ourselves in an environment that promises adventure, power, joy, growth, transformation of ourselves and the world - and, at the same time, that threatens to destroy everything we have, everything we know, everything we are. Modern environments and experiences cut across boundaries of geography and ethnicity, of class and nationality, of religion and ideology; in this sense, modernity can be said to unite all mankind. But it is a paradoxical unity, a unity of disunity; it pours us all into a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and

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renewal, of struggle and contradiction, of ambiguity and anguish. To be modern is to be part of a universe in which, as Marx said, ‘all that is solid melts into air.’

One of the main points Berman makes against the theorists of postmodernism is that, in his view, the characteristics they associate with the postmodern condition are actually intrinsic to modernism. Berman attacks the viability of the distinction between modernism and postmodernism. The kind of modernism he defends has been called “low” or “popular” modernism. As David Harvey (1992, p. 10) has noted, Berman’s definition reinscribes the duality between “the transient, the fleeting, the contingent” and “the eternal and immutable,” which Baudelaire saw as the most outstanding characteristic of “modernity,” in the contemporary environment. In fact, the awareness of the paradoxical outcome of industrialization and modernization is at the centre of much of the controversy surrounding modernity. Marx has traced the anxiety secreted by modernity to the historical development of capitalism which has uprooted the social and cultural lifeworlds. Weber sees the “iron cage” which modernity has constructed as the logical legacy of Enlightenment thought and its excessive reliance on reason, science, and bureaucratic organization. In *Meaning and Modernity* (1986), Eugene Rochberg-Halton

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2 Here is, for example, the frequently quoted passage from *The Communist Manifesto*: “Constant revolutionizing of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation, distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier times. All fixed, fast-frozen relationships, with their train of venerable ideas and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become obsolete before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and men at last are forced to face the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men” (K. Marx and F. Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, Moscow, 1952, quoted in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 1992, pp. 99-100).

3 Bernstein has summarized Weber’s argument as follows: “Weber argued that the hope and expectation of the Enlightenment thinkers was a bitter and ironic illusion. They maintained a strong necessary linkage between the growth of science, rationality, and universal human freedom. But when unmasked and understood, the legacy of the Enlightenment was the triumph of [...] purposive - instrumental rationality. This form of rationality affects the entire range of social and cultural life encompassing economic structures, law, bureaucratic administration, and even the arts. The growth of [purposive - instrumental rationality] does not lead to the concrete realization of universal freedom but to the creation of an ‘iron cage’ of bureaucratic rationality from which there is no escape” (quoted in David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, 1992, p. 15.)
defines modernity in opposition to tradition and singles out the
dichotomizing nature which characterizes modern thought:

By 'modern culture' or 'modernity,' I mean that total
collection of mind which grew out of the West, which
manifests itself in specific and varied traditions in science,
industrialized society, in the social organization of institutions,
families, and individuals, in philosophy, art, and politics. I
mean the term in the broadest possible sense as a cultural
template of liberation from traditional ways of thinking,
believing, and acting - and later from tradition itself.
Modernity introduced valuable new ideas into the repertoire
of humankind, yet it is rooted, in my opinion, in underlying
dichotomous abstractions such as social versus individual,
traditional versus novel, fact versus value, conventional versus
original, that taken to their logical conclusions, lead to self-
annulling modes of thought and practice.¹

In his turn, Anthony Giddens (1992) locates the dynamism of modernity in
the system's ability to generate a "separation of time and space," the
"development of disembedding mechanism," and the "reflexive
appropriation of knowledge."² However, it is the notion of reflexivity which
Giddens considers the most outstanding characteristic of modernity:

What is characteristic of modernity is not an embracing of the
new for its own sake, but the presumption of wholesale
reflexivity -which of course includes reflection upon the nature
of reflection itself. Probably we are only now, in the late
twentieth century, beginning to realise in a full sense how
deeply unsettling this outlook is. For when the claims of reason
replaced those of tradition, they appeared to offer a sense of
certainty greater than that provided by preexisting dogma. But
this idea only appears persuasive so long as we do not see that

¹ Eugene Rochberg-Halton, Meaning and Modernity: Social Theory in the Pragmatic
the reflexivity of modernity actually subverts reason, at any rate where reason is understood as the gaining of certain knowledge. Modernity is constituted in and through reflexively applied knowledge, but the equation of knowledge with certitude has turned out to be misconceived. We are abroad in a world which is thoroughly constituted through reflexively applied knowledge, but where at the same time we can never be sure that any given element of that knowledge will not be revised.¹

For Giddens, “reflexivity” is the most decisive feature which distinguishes modern from traditional or oral cultures. In his view, reflexive knowledge in oral cultures does not go beyond the “reinterpretation” and “clarification” of tradition and “the routinization of daily life remains bound up with tradition in the old sense” (Giddens, 1992, pp. 37-38). However, this approach seems to subordinate the contradictions which characterize everyday cultural practices in both “premodern” and “modern” societies. In Giddens’ view, tradition is an obstacle in the way of the completion of the project of modernity:

To sanction a practice because it is traditional will not do; tradition can be justified, but only in the light of knowledge which is not itself authenticated by tradition. Combined with the inertia of habit, this means that, even in the most modernised of modern societies, tradition continues to play a role. But this role is generally much less significant than is supposed by authors who focus attention upon the integration of tradition and modernity in the contemporary world. For justified tradition is tradition in sham clothing and receives its identity only from the reflexivity of the modern (Giddens, 1992, p. 38).

From this viewpoint, a practice is sanctioned when it meets the requirements of rational knowledge. This line of approach displaces two

¹ Ibid, p. 39.
elements which are central to the understanding of individual behaviour and group organization. First, an exclusive focus on reason obliterates the contradictions which are part and parcel of the subject and simplifies the complex workings of human agency. Second, the exclusive reliance on the rational foundations of knowledge to explain cultural practices is not enough to account for the dynamic processes which accompany the formation of collective identities and group alliances. Moreover, as Iain Chambers (1994) argues, “reason” is an ambiguous and complex “metaphor” which “involves the transport, transformation and translation of some ‘thing’ in language,” a fact which problematizes the processes of the reflexively applied knowledge.¹ This realization should allow for a more compromising approach to individual and group everyday practices which would rely not only on the foundations of rational knowledge but on “other” knowledges as well:

For, if reason is more complex, always fractured, open, partial, partisan and incomplete, then we are encouraged to include the zones that its illumination obscures. We are encouraged to consider knowledges that inhabit the shadows, that lie in the shades of ambiguity. It is the difficult moment of letting go as old certainties are abandoned for the uncertain outcome of continual encounters in which all worlds and chronologies become unstable, subject to question and reformulating. To rethink your time and place within a culture, a language, an institution, a tradition, a set of histories, is to rethink the purpose, direction and limits of these very categories (Iain Chambers, 1994, p. 33).

Chambers’ reflection serves as a good transition to the discussion of the concept of “post-modernity” which is regularly juxtaposed to modernity. This is how Anthony Giddens defines post-modernity:

What does post-modernity ordinarily refer to? Apart from the general sense of living through a period of marked disparity

from the past, the term usually means one or more of the following: that we have discovered that nothing can be known with any certainty, since all pre-existing ‘foundations’ of epistemology have been shown to be unreliable; that ‘history’ is devoid of teleology and consequently no version of ‘progress’ can plausibly be defended; and that a new social and political agenda has come into being with the increasing prominence of ecological concerns and perhaps of new social movements generally. Scarcely anyone today seems to identify post-modernity with what it was once widely accepted to mean - the replacement of capitalism by socialism. Pushing this transition away from centre stage, in fact, is one of the main factors that has prompted current discussions about the possible dissolution of modernity, given Marx’s totalising view of history (Giddens, 1992, p. 46).

In his interpretation, Giddens highlights the issues which post-modernity “negates” but does not dwell on the possibilities it has opened up. In fact, post-modernity has upstaged the authority of the epistemological “foundations” of the Enlightenment thought, fractured the grand narrative of “history” and, finally, has shown that no version of absolute or universal “progress” can be legitimated. Jean-François Lyotard (1984) detects a renunciation of the claim to continuity, exactitude, and absolutism in the post-modern science:

Postmodern science - by concerning itself with such things as undecidables, the limits of precise control, conflicts characterized by incomplete information, ‘fracta’, catastrophes and pragmatic paradoxes - is theorizing its own evolution as discontinuous, catastrophic, non-rectifiable, and paradoxical. It is changing the meaning of the word knowledge, while expressing how such a change can take place. It is producing not the known, but the unknown.¹

The shift in the orientation of scientific knowledge and the perceived change in lifestyles and worldviews which characterizes modern societies is succinctly summarized by Terry Eagleton:

Post-modernism signals the death of such 'metanarratives' whose secretly terroristic function was to ground and legitimate the illusion of a 'universal' human history. We are now in the process of wakening from the nightmare of modernity, with its manipulative reason and fetish of the totality, into the laid-back pluralism of the post-modern, the heterogeneous range of life-styles and language games which has renounced the nostalgic urge to totalize and legitimate itself [...] Science and philosophy must jettison their grandiose metaphysical claims and view themselves more modestly as just another set of narratives.¹

In view of what has been argued so far, it is obvious that attempts to define the project of modernity, the condition of post-modernity or the shift in life-style and everyday practices remain conceptually incomplete. In fact, I take issue with Andreas Huyssen (1986, p. 183) who renounces the idea of defining "what postmodernism is" since the term "'postmodernism' itself should guard us against such an approach as it positions the phenomenon as relational" and since modernism "as that form which postmodernism is breaking away remains inscribed into the very word with which we describe our distance from modernism." However, it is worth mentioning that the structures of modernity (secularization, rationalization, nationalism, the nation-state, industrial capitalism, bureaucratization, parliamentary government and universal suffrage, individualism, the privileging of the future, and the dissociation of the aesthetic from the moral and political realms) constitute the historical material on which Western subjectivity legitimates its claim of being the absolute, unifying, and focal point of human civilization. Paradoxically, the same cultural experience is also

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¹ Quoted in David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity, 1992, p. 9.
mired by a history of colonialism, a reification of nature and the lifeworld, and a structural marginalization of women, the poor, and minorities from the channels of representation in the public sphere. It is this practice which backfired in the form of a postmodern tendency which decries the absolutism of the self-deified rational subject and has consequently opened the flood-gates for what Jurgen Habermas calls a "methodological enmity toward reason" that has characterized the Western philosophical discourse since Nietzsche.¹

Also, the "divide" postmodern aesthetics has generated is interesting not only because of its perceived ramifications on the structures of society and culture, but more so because of the historical conjuncture in which this debate carries. Because of its celebratory tribute to the local, the fragmentary, and the ornamental, the discourse of and about postmodernist strategies sends back to the ideological conflicts of the post "cold war" era and the struggle of groups and communities across continents to reposition themselves in a changing political and economic world map. The current intensive drive towards economic globalization and internationalization is matched only by the resistance put forth by minorities and the disenfranchised who draw on their shared ethnic, gender, linguistic, or spiritual bonding to create counter-hegemonic spheres where they can represent their collective identities.

In addition, there is truth in Giddens' statement that the current debate about the dissolution of modernity has been generated by the fact that postmodernity is no longer identified with what it used to mean, namely, "the replacement of capitalism by socialism" (Giddens, 1992, p. 46). The collapse of the socialist state and the relentless assaults on the welfare system, as well as the renunciation by the state of its historical role as a public service provider, combine to rejuvenate the debate about the viability of both economic liberalism and praxis philosophy. There is also truth in the postmodern claim that only a dismantling of master narratives (beginning with the most visible one: the nation-state) can create a space for the marginalized and the oppressed. However, the fact remains that participation and representation in the public sphere are largely determined by political, military, and economic powers. Moreover, the

unconditional belief in the power of a fragmented and dismembered approach to social reality can jeopardize all forms of unity and struggle. While well-meaning activists and theorists call for the decentralization of political, economic, and cultural powers, policy and decision makers are busy devising strategies to circumvent the risks of fragmentation and to turn the emergent political map to the advantage of capital holders.¹

The debate about postmodernist aesthetics has generated a stream of contradictory reactions from critics and theorists who stand at opposing sides of the critical spectrum. Habermas, for example, diagnoses Western “logocentrism” “not as an excess but a deficit of rationality” and explains the favorable reception of postmodernism (“with its wholesale rejection of modern life”) by “the fact that the efforts of praxis philosophy to reformulate the project along Marxist lines has suffered a loss in credibility.”² Fredric Jameson (1992), on the other hand, asserts that postmodernism is but the latest variation on the theme of accommodation and appropriation staged by a revitalized late capitalism. Jameson contends that only a reinvigoration of the Marxist praxis approach could counter the dis-membered style of postmodernism and the hegemony of capitalism.³

¹ Here is, for example, how a policy theorist reflects on the postmodern condition. Benjamin Schwarz, a senior fellow at the World Policy Institute in New York, traces the legitimacy of the American hegemony to the ability of the United States to preserve a stable world economy. In an article entitled “Why America Thinks it Has to Run the World,” he writes that: “Nearly everyone applauds today’s complex web of global trade, production, and finance as the highest stage of capitalism. But international capitalism may be approaching a crisis just as it is reaching its fullest flower. A genuinely interdependent world market is extraordinarily fragile. The emergent high technology industries, for instance, are the most powerful engines of world economic growth, but they require a level of specialization and a breadth of markets that are possible only in an integrated global economy. As US. hegemony continues to weaken, renationalized foreign and economic policies among the industrialized powers could fragment that economy.” (Benjamin Schwarz, “Why America Thinks it Has to Run the World” in The Atlantic Monthly, June, 1996, p. 102). Schwarz’s skepticism of the existence of a “genuine interdependence” between states is more than justified since the economic system that is expected to set the norms of collaboration is primarily driven by the spirit of competition for wealth and power. However, his call for the need of a strong and hegemonic superpower to keep ‘order’ and ‘stability’ in a fragmented postmodern economic reality should be taken by anyone engaged in any form of struggle and resistance as an evidence that the fight for a space of representation must not be limited to a mere call for decentralization and fragmentation. At best, such readings may challenge the authority of the power structure, but the historical fact remains that it has always been the groups in power positions which have the means to make their versions prevail.


The postmodernism I subscribe to is one of resistance which, as Hal Foster defines it:

arises as a counter-practice not only to the official culture of modernism but also to the 'false normativity' of a reactionary postmodernism. In opposition (but not only in opposition), a resistant postmodernism is concerned with a critical deconstruction of tradition, not an instrumental pastiche of pop - or pseudo- historical forms, with a critique of signs, not a return to them. In short, it seeks to question rather than conceal social and political affiliations.¹

Before reviewing the issues which the debate on modernity and postmodernity has generated among Moroccan intellectuals and how that bears on the structure of Moroccan social organization, I propose to review Habermas's reading of the project of modernity in the light of his theory of communicative action. Habermas is probably the strongest contemporary proponent of the project of modernity and his views have become influential in political, artistic, and academic spheres in both the North and the South. More importantly, the importance of the Habermasian philosophy lies in the fact that it offers an all-encompassing project of society which theorizes the spheres of law, ethics, aesthetics, science and communicative performance in everyday life. The thrust of his argument is that the negativist resentment against modernity is detrimental to the emancipatory dimension embedded in the project of modernity. His point is that the project of modernity, which originated in the Enlightenment thought, is not completed. Therefore, we should accelerate the processes of its implementation rather than undermine the possibilities of its completion. My objective is to proceed with a revisionist reading of the Habermasian project to open up new directions for the debate about modernity.

In a short article entitled, "Modernity - an Incomplete Project," Habermas pleads for the project of modernity by tying it up to the project of Enlightenment. Contrary to what postmodernists believe, Habermas argues that the project of modernity is not a "lost cause" but one that has yet to be completed. He retrieves Max Weber's reading of cultural modernity (which includes the spheres of science, morality, and art) and contends that aesthetic modernity has often been highlighted at the expense of the autonomous spheres of science and morality. Habermas's diagnosis reads as follows:

Each domain of culture could be made to correspond to cultural professions in which problems could be dealt with as

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the concern of special experts. This professionalized treatment of the cultural tradition brings to the fore the intrinsic structures of each of the three dimensions of culture. There appear the structures of cognitive-instrumental, of moral-practical and of aesthetic-expressive rationality, each of these under the control of specialists who seem more adept at being logical in these particular ways than other people are. As a result, the distance grows between the culture of the experts and that of the larger public. What accrues to culture through specialized treatment and reflection does not immediately and necessarily become the property of everyday praxis. With cultural rationalization of this sort, the threat increases that the life-world, whose traditional substance has already been devalued, will become more and more impoverished (Habermas, 1983, p. 9).

Habermas’s use of Weber’s idea of a project of society makes him, from the outset, view all spheres from the perspective of instrumental reason. On the one hand, the differentiation among spheres and the attribution of specific tasks to each one is a functionalist approach which tends to serve more the interests of “experts” than the general public. On the other hand, the differentiation seems to overlook the systematic hold of money and power which permeate all spheres and mobilize expert knowledge to maintain the status quo or serve the interests of the power structure. His premise that the three spheres should develop “according to their inner logic” is also an assumption which dismisses too easily the workings of power and interest conflicts (Habermas, 1983, p. 7). In fact, it is his unconditional belief in the “inner logic” of the project of modernity which explains his ambivalent attitude about the impoverishment and subordination of the life-world. On one hand, he admits that the system’s sophistication has been achieved at the expense of a subordination of life-worlds, a fact which he describes as “a matter of disturbing the communicative infrastructure of everyday life” (Habermas, 1983, p. 8). On the other hand, he explains this disturbance by the deterioration of “communicative rationality” and the penetration of the spheres of communicative action by “a form of modernization guided by standards of economic and administrative rationality - in other words, by
standards of rationalization quite different from those of communicative rationality on which those spheres depend”¹ (Habermas, 1983, p. 8). In his view, an accelerated process of rationalization would generate a reification of the lifeworld:

A reified everyday praxis can be cured only by creating unconstrained interaction of the cognitive with the moral-practical and the aesthetic-expressive elements. Reification cannot be overcome by forcing just one of those highly stylized cultural spheres to open up and become more accessible. Instead, we see under certain circumstances a relationship emerge between terroristic activities and the over-extension of any one of these spheres into other domains: examples would be to aestheticize politics, or to replace politics by moral rigorism or to submit it to the dogmatism of a doctrine. These phenomena should not lead us, however, into denouncing the intentions of the surviving Enlightenment tradition as intentions rooted in a ‘terroristic reason’ (Habermas, 1983, PP. 11-12).²

¹ Habermas’s argument, which he develops in his two volumes on The Theory of Communicative Action, is to abandon the philosophy of consciousness which, in his opinion, has characterized Western philosophy in the last centuries for a philosophy of language which guarantees the universal conditions for the achievement of understanding and rational consensus. David M. Rasmussen explains the assumptions which this paradigm shift entails: “The first assumption is that action can take two forms, namely, strategic action and communicative action. The former would include purposive-rational action while action aimed at reaching an understanding would be communicative. Communicative action is non-instrumental in the following sense: ‘A communicatively achieved agreement has a rational basis; it cannot be imposed by either party, whether instrumentally through intervention in the situation directly or strategically through influencing decisions of opponents’ (Yurgen Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, vol. 1, tr. Thomas McCarthy, Boston: Beacon Press, 1984, p. 287). Such an action has implicit within it a validity claim which is in principle criticizable, i.e., the person to whom it is addressed can respond either ‘yes’ or ‘no’ based on reasons. Communicative actions are in this sense foundational, they cannot, it is said, be reducible to teleological actions. If they were, one would be back precisely in the problematic of the philosophy of consciousness” (David M. Rasmussen, Reading Habermas, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, p. 27).

² In The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity (1992b), Habermas reiterates the same argument by maintaining that the “unmediated” transposition of specialized knowledge into everyday world jeopardizes the “equilibrium of the lifeworld communicative infrastructure”: “The unmediated transposition of specialized knowledge into the private and public spheres of the everyday world can endanger the autonomy and independent logics of the knowledge systems, on the one hand, and it can violate the integrity of lifeworld contexts, on the other. A knowledge specialized in only one validity claim, which,
However, there is also the possibility that the inner logic of the project of modernity itself lead to an "internal colonization of the lifeworld."\textsuperscript{1} The ever-growing capitalist modernization and the strategic intrusions of the systems of economy and state into everyday life have not only disrupted the communicative infrastructure of the lifeworld but have also led to a dehumanizing exploitation of peoples and communities and a systematic destruction of the environment.

In fact, a brief review of the concepts of communicative action and the lifeworld reveals that the possibilities for the completion of the project of modernity are more complex than what a philosophy of language could solve. In the second volume of \textit{The Theory of Communicative Action}, Habermas, following Parsons, proposes that we consider societies as "simultaneously" composed of systems and lifeworlds:

Every theory of society that is restricted to communication theory is subject to limitations that must be observed. The concept of the lifeworld that emerges from the conceptual perspective of communicative action has only limited analytical and empirical range. I would therefore like to propose (1) that we conceive of societies \textit{simultaneously} as systems and lifeworlds. The concept proves itself in (2) a theory of social evolution that separates the rationalization of the lifeworld from the growing complexity of societal systems so as to make the connection Durkheim envisaged between forms of social integration and stages of system differentiation tangible, that is, susceptible to empirical analysis. In pursuing these aims, I shall develop a concept of forms of mutual

\textsuperscript{1} For Habermas, the "internal colonization of the lifeworld" occurs when the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld is carried out on functional terms determined by money and power.
understanding [...] in analogy to Lukacs’s concept of forms of objectivity.¹

Habermas, then, attributes three aspects to communicative action. The first aspect is objective and has to do with the functional aspect of mutual understanding (transmission of cultural knowledge). The second aspect is one of coordination and is responsible for mediating social integration and establishing solidarity. The third aspect is subjective and relates to socialization in that it contributes to the formation of personal identities.² Communicative action “relies on a cooperative process of interpretation in which participants relate simultaneously to something in the objective, the social, and the subjective worlds, even when they thematically stress only one of the three components in their utterances” (Habermas, 1987, p. 120).

The lifeworld is “the horizon within which communicative actions are ‘always already’ moving” (Habermas, 1987, p. 119). Following the dictates of a formal-pragmatic approach, Habermas proposes that the lifeworld be viewed from the perspective of situations:³

Only the limited segments of the lifeworld brought into the horizon of a situation constitute a thematizable context of action oriented to mutual understanding; only they appear under the category of knowledge. From a perspective turned toward the situation, the lifeworld appears as a reservoir of taken for-granteds, of unshaken convictions that participants in communication draw upon in cooperative processes of interpretation. Single elements, specific taken-for-granteds, are, however, mobilized in the form of consensual and yet

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² This is how Habermas phrases it: “Under the functional aspect of mutual understanding, communicative action serves to transmit and renew cultural knowledge; under the aspect of coordinating action, it serves social integration and the establishment of solidarity; finally, under the aspect of socialization, communicative action serves the formation of identities” (Habermas, 1987, p. 137)
³ “A situation is a segment of lifeworld context of relevance [...] that is thrown into relief by themes and articulated through goals and plans of action; these contexts of relevance are concentrically ordered and become increasingly anonymous and diffused as the spatiotemporal and social distance grows” (Habermas, 1987, pp. 122-123).
problematizable knowledge only when they become relevant to a situation” (Habermas, 1987, p.124).

Habermas’s reading of the lifeworld from a situation-oriented perspective is weakened by the formalist-structuralist approach he adopts. From this viewpoint, the lifeworld is interpreted in the form of conflicting binaries. In addition to the initial binary opposition between systems and lifeworlds, Habermas introduces the oppositions between relevant and irrelevant situations, consensual and contested knowledge, actions oriented towards mutual understanding and actions oriented towards conflicts. Moreover, Habermas’s reading is also weakened by the implications of instrumental reasoning and functionalism he imposes on the lifeworld. The lifeworld seems to be ruled by a logic of randomness whereby the relevance of situations is determined by the emergence of “needs.” This interpretation displaces the issue of power struggle, overlooks the problematic workings of human agency, and does not explain who brings segments of the lifeworld into the horizon of situations or who decides on the relevance of particular situations. Moreover, Habermas does not consider the possibility that the understanding and consensus he desires may be carried out at the expense of the homogenization of economically, socially, and culturally weakened performers. This is why he eventually slips back into a non-committing form of idealism:

The lifeworld is, so to speak, the transcendental site where speaker and hearer meet, where they can reciprocally raise claims that their utterances fit the world (objective, social, or subjective), and where they can criticize and confirm those validity claims, settle their disagreements, and arrive at agreements. In a sentence, participants cannot assume in actu the same distance in relation to language and culture as in relation to the totality of facts, norms, or experiences concerning which mutual understanding is possible (Habermas, 1987, p. 126).

To approximate the ideal prerequisites which Habermas sets for it, the lifeworld must be rationalized. Though he remains ambiguous about how
the rationalization of the lifeworld could be carried out, his definition of this concept reveals that his ultimate objective is to get to the potential rationality embedded in the ideal system of language:

The concept [of a rationalization of the lifeworld] refers to trends in the alteration of lifeworld structures that spring from a growing differentiation between culture, society, and personality [...] [The rationality potential of action oriented to mutual understanding] gets converted into a rationalization of the lifeworld of social groups to the extent that language takes over the functions of achieving understanding, coordinating action, and socializing individuals, and thus becomes the medium through which cultural reproduction, social integration, and socialization take place (Habermas, 1987, p. 288).

Though I take note of the fact that the realization of such a project is conditional upon a simultaneous articulation of its processes at the discursive level, Habermas's exclusive reliance on the language system has a Hegelian ring to it since this reading implies that the conflicts and contradictions which characterize everyday praxis could be solved through a mere perfection of linguistic performance. In addition, even if one accepts the premise that the potential thrust of emancipation is embedded in language, one would still find it difficult to reconcile emancipation with instrumentalism.

The universalizing dimension which embeds the concept of the ideal speech situation is not only homogenizing but it also raises the issue of historical contextualization. In this case, it is not enough that speech situations strive to attain the prerequisite ideal but different societies are

1 "The project [of modernity] aims at a differentiated relinking of modern culture with an everyday praxis that still depends on vital heritages, but would be impoverished through mere traditionalism. This new connection, however, can only be established under the condition that societal modernization will also be steered in a different direction. The lifeworld has to become able to develop institutions out of itself which set limits to the internal dynamics and imperatives of an almost autonomous economic system and its administrative complements" (J. Habermas, "Modernity - An Incomplete Project" trans. by Seyla Ben-Habib in Hal Foster, ed., The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture. Seattle: Bay Press, 1983, p. 13).
expected to embrace the Western ideal so that they could set the required cultural traditions where the potential of the ideal speech situation could be approximated. This can only generate condescending and patronizing attitudes towards non-Western cultures, as in the following statement by Jack Mendelson:

The historical potential of the ideal speech situation for becoming the actual organizing principle of society can only come to fruition in a society which comes close to articulating it on the level of more historically specific and conscious traditions, for instance, the Western democracies of the twentieth century. While in a sense the ideal of rational consensus may be immanent in language *per se* and not simply an external standard, in most societies it is bound to remain unarticulated in the actual culture. It becomes politically relevant as an ideal to be consciously striven for only in societies which have begun to approach it on the level of their own cultural traditions.¹

In a way, though non-Western societies are not directly accused of being incapable of coming close to the potential of the ideal speech situation, they are blamed for not striving hard enough to set the necessary cultural traditions to approximate it. However, the fact is that in Habermas's theory, as Dieter Misgeld has argued, the distinction between "system" and "lifeworld" is misleading because "it detracts from the practical point of the theory and blocks reflection upon actual social situations in the relevant societies of our times."² Misgeld goes on to argue that societies can be analyzed only at the level of the systems-theoretical abstractions, before concluding that Habermas has no alternative but to subordinate the lifeworld to systems-theoretical abstractions so as to provide "objective knowledge" of society.³

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³ "Societies in general, i.e., general mechanisms for their maintenance and self-differentiation, can only be analyzed at the level of systems-theoretical. The concrete historical lifeworlds of particular societies cannot serve as a starting point for reflection on
Even in the case of Western societies, Habermas admits that the chances for the completion of the project of modernity "today are not very good" (Habermas, 1983, p. 13). In addition to the advance of capitalist modernization, Habermas's verdict is that:

with the decisive confinement of science, morality and art to autonomous spheres separated from the lifeworld and administered by experts, what remains from the project of cultural modernity is only what we would have if we were to give up the project of modernity altogether. As a replacement one points to traditions which, however, are held to be immune to demands of (normative) justification and validation" (Habermas, 1983, p. 14).

In Postmetaphysical Thinking, Habermas begins a chapter entitled "The Horizon of Modernity is Shifting" by admitting that philosophy, in its turn, may have become incapable of articulating the spirit of modernity:

And if an enterprise like philosophy, so very indebted to antiquity and its renaissances, really has opened itself to the inconstant spirit of modernity, which is oriented toward innovation, experimentation, and acceleration, could one pose a more far-reaching question: Has philosophy, too, succumbed to the aging of modernity, as for instance present-day architecture has? Are there similarities with a postmodern architecture that, with vaguely provocative gestures, is again turning to historical decoration and to the ornamentation that had once been condemned?1

Habermas, of course, means Western philosophy. After reviewing his interpretation of the project of modernity and the theory of communicative social development [...] Habermas subordinates the lifeworld approach to systems-theoretical arguments. In this case, the explanations sought after are not motivated by practical questions. Their point is to give objective knowledge of the society, or even of social reproduction in general, independently from any consideration of how this knowledge can orient our actions always taking place within particular societies" Ibid.

action he proposes as a strategy for universalizing consensus, the legitimate question to ask is how non-Western societies fair in the project of modernity. It is true that Western modernists do not hide the fact that this project is fundamentally a Western one. In the case of Habermas, for example, as much as he strongly objects to philosophy seeking replenishment outside its historical boundaries, he is also unequivocally certain about the geographical location of the land of redemption: “Who else but Europe could draw from its own traditions the insight, the energy, the courage of vision - everything that would be necessary to strip from the (no longer metaphysical, but metabiological) premises of a blind compulsion to system maintenance and system expansion their power to shape our mentality.”¹

This is certainly not the view of Stjepan G. Mestrovic, for example, who, in The Barbarian Temperament: Toward a Postmodern Critical Theory (1993), engages the project of modernity and holds it responsible for the “barbarism” which has invaded the Western lifeworld in this fin de siècle. Mestrovic argues that in The Theory of the Leisure Class (1899), the American sociologist Thorstein Veblen (1857-1929) detected in the American culture the signs of “the latter-day barbarism that would eventually engulf the entire Western world” but that his warnings were not heeded.²

However, what must be underlined is that non-Western societies, and for different reasons, have come to the conclusion that the project of modernity is not theirs. Akbar S. Ahmed (1992) has argued that while Western postmodernism has been fostered by the growing prosperity and stability which characterized life in the West in the post-Second War era, the Muslim world has had to deal with other realities:

The modern period had led Muslims into a cul-de-sac. Dictators, coups, corruption and nepotism in politics; low education standards; an intellectual paresis; the continuing oppression of women and the under-privileged and grossly

¹ Yurgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, 1992b, p. 367.
unequal distribution of wealth were some of its characteristics. The multi-national companies and their visible efforts in supporting what was seen as a corrupt elite, the large-scale migration from the rural to the urban areas and consequent social disruption in traditional life and the failure to build effective institutions of the modern state were other characteristics. Muslims were coming to the same conclusion as Giddens on the question of modernity (1990); they, too, saw it as 'a Western project'.

Yet, the Western debate on modernity is of primary relevance to non-Western societies for at least two main reasons. First, since modernity is a project of society, it is important to be aware of the possible types of social organization specific historical mechanisms generate, both at the level of systems and lifeworld. Second, because of the military, economic, political, and cultural hegemony of the West, non-Western societies are led, if not coerced, to duplicate the Western model for their own organization. The same debate going on in European and North American political, economic, and cultural spheres is also taking place in the Middle-East, Africa, and other countries of the South. In Morocco, for example, the issues of the public sphere, the role of the media and non-government organizations, the formation of civil society, the inefficiency of the bureaucratic system, and the corruption which dominates the political institutions of the state constitute daily topics for the media, café clienteles, public bath visitors as well as academic circles.

It is a fact that the ambivalent attitude with which the Western project of modernity has been received by non-Western people is largely due to the historical conjuncture in which most countries of the South have first encountered it (i.e. through the colonial enterprise). However, there is also the realization that the social transformations this project has entailed have disrupted the organization of the lifeworld in ways wherein only the interests of a very small elite are served while groups of the population remain marginalized. For Habermas, the project of modernity has been made possible by the emergence of the bourgeois class and the formation of

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a public sphere where issues and conflicts concerning general matters of society could be debated and resolved (I tackle Habermas's concept of the public sphere in a more exhaustive way in the second chapter). In non-Western societies now, the struggle for the establishment of a homogeneous and homogenizing public sphere to meet the pre-requisites of a national consensus would automatically mean the exclusion of more than half of the population. What the debate on the project of modernity and the current shift to a post-modernity in the West have sorted out is that attempts to homogenize and universalize social projects are likely to discriminate against weak groups who lack the means to make their voice heard. What is urgently needed, however, is an exploration of the social spaces where the formation, and de-formation, of groups and communities reveal processes of resistance to the dominant structures but also all the promises and contradictions which characterize the lifeworld. I share David M. Rasmussen's viewpoint that "[t]he project of modernity is a noble ideal. If conceived as a project of emancipation, as liberation from oppression, as the means of overcoming hidden, latent forms of domination, I am in agreement."1 However, can this be possible without an understanding of people's everyday practices? In short, can an elitist or scripturalist conceptual articulation be fair to all the contradictions and conflicting forces which characterize lifeworlds? Bearing these questions in mind, I now turn to analyze a sample of the contribution of Moroccan intellectuals to the debate on modernity.

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1 David M. Rasmussen, Reading Habermas, 1990, p. 96.
C. Modernity Made in Morocco:
An Old Debate in a New Millennium

In a recent issue of a Moroccan weekly newspaper, two articles in the “Society and Culture” section used the terms “tradition and modernity.” One article reports on a fashion show in Paris in which five Moroccan designers (four women and one man) presented their collections of the traditional Moroccan women costume. The reporter states that “modernity
and tradition were in perfect harmony that evening" and congratulates the designers for their successful combination of modernity and originality while preserving the specificity of Moroccan culture. The stereotype of the veiled and submissive woman made room for the image of a more self-confident and self-assertive Moroccan woman. However, at the bottom of the article, the journalist inserts a small text highlighted in a different colour and in which she rebukes the Moroccan male designer for using as a background music for his presentation a mixing of “very bad taste” since it brings together techno music and Qu’ranic verses. From her viewpoint, “it is not only because one defends the image of a tolerant and open country that one has license to experiment with the sacred.”

The other article tells of the difficulties of Moroccan cuisine as it struggles to adapt to the age of modernity. The author explains that, on one hand, Moroccans are not always keen on innovating their recipes since they perceive their cuisine as the space of a collective memory where “reminiscences of childhood tastes and colours [...] forge our identity and bring us together.” On the other hand, this cuisine is called upon to adapt to the requirements of European standards where the focus has shifted from taste to health. Wondering whether Moroccans will eventually part with their cuisine, and therefore their “soul and their sign-post,” the author concludes by admitting that “the topic at hand may draw a smile from the reader since Moroccans now have more urgent things to worry about than the future of their cuisine.”

The two newspaper articles hint to some of the most salient issues which the debate on modernity in Morocco often engages, namely the relation between modernity and tradition, modernity and the sacred, and modernity and the material world of everyday life. The author of the first article sees no harm in a “modernization” of Moroccan traditional costume and has no objection to the fact that the organizers deliberately chose foreign models to present the Moroccan collection. However, as soon as innovation, creation, and internationalization meddle with the symbolic world of the sacred, the threshold of tolerance is perceived to have been transgressed. In the second

article, the author eventually realizes that it would be practically absurd to ask the millions of Moroccans living under the threshold of poverty to worry about the future of their cuisine or its "modernization." For millions of people, "modernity" is synonymous with everyday struggle to provide for their families.

However, what the two examples reveal is the relentless struggle to simultaneously partake of the worlds of modernity and tradition. If in Western thought, as Giddens (1992, p. 48) has argued, "[t]he growth of European power provided, as it were, the material support for the assumption that the new outlook on the world was founded on a firm basis which both provided security and offered emancipation from the dogma of tradition," the case in the Arab world has mainly been how to reconcile the modern outlook with tradition. In this particular context, tradition is not perceived as a paralyzing dogma but rather as a system which supports a common sense worldview and outlines everyday conduct. To borrow a Javanese term that Clifford Geertz has explained, the idea is to make modernity and tradition "tjotjog."¹

Since the nineteenth-century Arab "Renaissance Movement," the philosophical and cultural debate has been dominated by two main trends of thought. At one end, the Salafi movement calls for a mere re-traditionalization of the lifeworld and the implementation of the normative model of systems set by the Prophet and the first Caliphs. At the other end of the pole, the "modernist" trend recommends a modernization of the lifeworld and an adaptation of the systems of the European modernity. However, while modernity in Europe began once the Enlightenment thought settled the issue of religion and relegated to the sphere of the individual subject's private rights and liberties, the symbolic world of religion has always been a central issue in the debate on Arab modernity.²

¹ Clifford Geertz explains this term as follows: "In the broadest and most abstract sense, two items tjotjog when their coincidence forms a coherent pattern which gives to each a significance and a value it does not in itself have. There is implied here a contrapuntal view of the universe in which that which is important is what natural relationship the separate elements have to one another, how they must be arranged to strike a chord and to avoid a dissonance [...] In its specificity, tjotjog is a peculiarly Javanese idea, but the notion that life takes on its true import when human actions are tuned to cosmic conditions is widespread" (Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, London: Fontana Press, 1973, pp. 129-130).

² I certainly do not view the foregrounding of religion in the debate on modernity from the same perspective as the self-paralyzing interpretations which blame it all on Islam and its inability to keep up with the structures of contemporaneity. Bassam Tibi's The Crisis of
This is because the genealogical origin of tradition in the Muslim world is rooted in sacredness since it sends directly to the Tradition of the Prophet (the Prophet's everyday 'sayings' and 'actions' were recorded and documented after his death and have come to constitute the second reference of authority after The Qu'ran not only for legislative matters but also for everyday conduct). Therefore, tradition not only extends back horizontally in historical time and space but also finds continuous regeneration and reinvigoration in the vertical symbolic world of the sacred.

The Moroccan philosopher Mohammed Abed al-Jabri (1995) has argued for a conciliatory ground between modernity and tradition in which the symbolic world of the sacred would not be undermined:

Modernity does not mean a rejection of tradition or a break with the past; on the contrary, it should rather be a re-examination of the ways in which we relate to tradition at the level of 'contemporaneity,' which in our case consists of joining the global progress. Modernity must seek the foundations of the theses it advances in its course, that of contemporaneity; it can not allow itself to turn into a "fundamentalism" held to inspirational sources.¹

Al-Jabri seems to be calling for the articulation of "a normative content of modernity" whereby "the inner logic" of both modernity and tradition are rewritten in light of the contemporary historical conjunctures. His contention is that while modernity must not be allowed to develop into

Modern Islam: A Preindustrial Culture in the Scientific Technological Age (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 1988) provides an excellent example of the latest variations on this theme. Tibi sweeps through the history of millions of people and centuries of civilization, discarding all previous literature, including that on Orientalism, and rushes to the conclusion that Islam is "a defensive culture in contemporary World society." However, the alternative he provides is nothing more than a reformulation of the principles of Modernization theory whose limits have been articulated time and again over the last fifty years. Tibi's book (which can be added to a list of other books with self-deprecating titles which claim to summarize the "crisis" and "predicament" of Arab societies) ends up rehashing a list of the benefits of industrialization, liberalism, and market economy without offering neither an insight as to how to go about that nor a vision which could articulate the ramifications of such transformations on the culture, the history, and the organization of Arab societies.

ahistorical systems of dominance, tradition, in its turn, must be submitted to a contemporaneous reading disciplined by the norms of analytical thought. This is the more important because, contrary to what a wide range of sociological interpretations hold, tradition is not a static fund of knowledge that is uncritically transmitted through generations but rather a gestational system of ideological and affective representations historically constructed to support the worldview of the dominant groups.

Noting the importance of the temporal dimension in any reading of modernity or tradition, al-Jabri (1995) draws attention to the fact that the interpretation of the past in the Arab world has been dominated by three major approaches. There is, first, the fundamentalist reading which conjugates the present and the future in the "past." The flaw in this reading is that the "past" it tries to define exists only in the collective affective imagination. The second approach adopts a liberal reading of the past and puts focus on the Western style of Modernity. This interpretation often ends up perpetuating the Orientalist fallacies. The third approach relies on a Marxist reading of the past and tries to evoke a dialectic between past and future. Al-Jabri criticizes this approach for using dialectics as an already approved method.¹

For a better understanding of the potential for the historical articulation of the Arab modernity, al-Jabri proposes an archaeological classification of the foundations of the Arabo-Islamic thought. In this respect, he locates three cognitive orders which seem to have shaped the knowledge system of the Islamic civilization: Information, Illumination, and Demonstration. The informative order, whose structure is built around the discursive sciences (law, grammar, rhetoric, and dialectic theology) relies on the Text as object and regulator of reason. In the order of Illumination, Truth is no longer sought through philological or judicial means but is believed to dwell in the heart. This order which has affinities with the European medieval scholastic tradition, structures the intellectual heritage of the Sufi philosophy.² The third cognitive order emerged in the wake of the

¹ Ibid., pp. 33-39.
² In a nutshell, the Sufi philosophy holds a transcendental view of the world and of reality. Through spiritual cleansing and meditation, the individual can free himself from the prison-house of the body and embrace the cosmic force which regulates and organizes this world. Sufis are usually hermits who renounce the material comforts of this world and retire from the society of men. The Persian philosophers and poets Jalal al-Rumi and Omar al-Khayyam are two prominent Sufi figures.
translation of Aristotle’s works into Arabic. This order follows the model set by the Aristotelian philosophy and foregrounds the rigour of analytical reason. Al-Jabri argues that the principles of the demonstrational order have been lost as a result of the numerous attempts by Arab philosophers to fuse the demonstrational model with the cognitive orders of information and illumination. Al-Jabri’s reconstructive philosophy seeks to undermine the assumption that tradition is an inherited block of patterns of thought and behaviour which presents social relations as a natural by-product of a sacred order. The view that eventually emerges is that tradition is a set of social practices which has been historically constructed through various levels of communication and interpretation.

Al-Jabri calls for a re-construction of the methods of knowledge production and transmission and the implementation of institutions which could level the injustices that permeate social relations. His argument is that only analytical thought and the ideal of collective democracy could mediate a transition to contemporaneity. In al-Jabri’s philosophy, modernity eventually becomes synonymous with a rational organization of the social and political systems and lifeworlds:

Modernity is first of all rationality and democracy. The only true modernist action consists of a rational and critical approach of all aspects of our existence - including that of tradition which is one of the most prominent and firmly entrenched in our culture. Our approach to tradition needs to be elevated to the level of Modernity if we are to serve modernity and give it a base in our ‘authenticity.’

Though he calls for a different approach, the Moroccan historian Abdellah Laroui also shares in the belief that the rationalization of both lifeworlds and systems is a mandatory step for the initiation of the project of modernity. While he admits that “the Maghrebian society has been

1 Abed al-Jabri, Introduction à la critique de la raison Arabe, 1995, pp. 29-30. It is worth noting that al-Jabri’s emphasis on reason and rationalism is justified by the distinction he makes between Western “irrationalism” and its counterpart in the Arab societies. His argument is that Western “irrationalism” is the culmination of an absolute rationalism (a by-product of radicalized systems of modernity) while “irrationalism” in the Arab world is primarily medieval (see pp. 28-29).
prepared only marginally for modernity," he also emphatically argues that modernity is not the exclusive monopoly of Europe. Larouï uses Magellan's discovery of the roundness of the earth as a metaphor to explain Europe's relation to its past and the relation of the rest of the world to the modern "idea" of Europe:

Europe's break with the past is consumed with Magellan who, though he returns to his point of departure, does so only after he has toured the world. With the success of circumnavigation, Europe discovers before others that the world is finite and, thus, becomes certain that, on this earth, no one would go further than it has gone. The psychological impetus of this discovery [...] is unquestionable. The first arrivals put the others in a dilemma: either to imitate the pioneers or to isolate themselves. However, since competition now carries in a closed arena, the second solution is foreclosed. Consequently, only imitation provides the possibility to escape the historical death. Yet, though imitation initially favours the first arrivals, it later turns against them.

Larouï's assertion is that Europe, or more specifically, the "idea" of Europe is synonymous with modernity and history. He goes as far as to argue that the adventure of the Occident is ultimately that of human history, a formula, he notes, which creates a "cruel ambiguity" because it makes obsolete the attempts of other peoples and at the same time empties the European experience of its own specificity. The fact is that while the rest of the world is left only with the possibility to imitate, in its turn, Europe cannot stop the "europeanisation" process which has been adopted and co-opted by other peoples and communities:

1 Abdellah Laroui, L'Histoire du Maghreb, Paris: Maspero, 1971, p. 154. The term "Maghreb" is traditionally used to refer to the countries located in the extreme North of Africa, namely Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Mauritania (the terms 'Maghreb' and 'North Africa' are used interchangeably. The term 'Maghreb' (literally the 'Occident') was given by the Arabs to designate the geographical location of this part of the Arab world vis-à-vis the Arab peninsula.
If Greece did not keep its art to itself and if Arabia did not preserve its language and its religion, then why would Europe, which defines itself as a historical process and conscience, reserve for itself the principles of individualism, legalism, and experimentalism? It targets the useful, the convenient, the comfortable, and at times, the just and the true. Who would refuse, and in whose name, such common values? Moreover, one could say: such values are nothing new (Laroui, 1993, p. 175).

However, Laroui is also aware that the contact of the Arab world with the idea of Europe was effected through the colonial and imperialist projects, a fact which has engendered an ambivalent attitude towards the project of modernity. This encounter has not only affected the social and cultural lifeworlds of the Arab communities but it also led to a fracture in their ontological identity. In addition, how would one negotiate the risk of alienation while importing the model of the European cultural revolution? How can a culture preserve its “authenticity” while it imitates another?

Laroui is a confirmed universalistic and his historicism makes him almost under-rate the importance of geo-cultural specificity. This is not to say that he believes that the European project of modernity is accessible for universal adoption since he is obviously aware of the specific historical process of the European modernity. His universalism, however, is perceived at the level of his interpretation and reading of what the European project of modernity is about. In Islamisme, modernisme, liberalisme (1997), he writes that “modernity does not mean more than the fact that some human groups want to generalize, across time and space, a sequence of events which occurred at a certain time and a certain place; is this the first time such a thing occurs?” Laroui, then, goes on to answer this

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1 Jacques Berque has compared the ramifications of colonialism and colonialism on the Orient to the effect of the original sin on the ontological identity of the Western subject: “Colonialism and expansionist capitalism have played in the Arab world, and the Orient in general, the same role that the original sin has played in our world” (Jacques Berque, Les Arabes d’hier à demain, Paris: Seuil, 1969, p. 47). In the same book, he also makes the point that “[the] dependent no longer views his past as a historical preface but as an ontological insult” (1969, p. 299).

question by affirming that modernization was introduced in the form of colonization not only in the Third World but, before that, this was also the way Europe first experienced it:

No exception to the rule. One could go further to state that modernization is born out of competition and struggle. This was also true for Europe in the fifteenth-century. Every country, so to speak, modernizes under the threat of its neighbour because, at one moment, it has to face up to a terrible dilemma: to change or to die (Laroui, 1997, p. 25).

One could obviously dismiss such a statement because of the historical determinist view it denotes. However, Laroui’s objective is to short-circuit the traditionalists who are likely to resist the project of modernity because of the colonial dimension associated with it:

To target a neutral definition of modernity which could save the traditional identity is to undo in an artificial way the real connections [between modernization and colonization]. Furthermore, even if one succeeds at the theoretical level, and which is very unlikely, one would still have to convince the ruling elite which is bound to yield only to facts (Laroui, 1997, p. 25).

For Laroui, the understanding of modernity must be mediated through a historicist approach. The institutionalization of processes whereby a society could reflect on its organization can be achieved only if the society becomes conscious of its historicity.1 However, it may be that, even when a degree of historical consciousness is achieved, the project of modernity could still be resisted, as is the case in the Arab world. For Laroui, this resistance is a logical reaction since the universalizing dimension of modernity inevitably generates an awareness of difference among the recipient groups:

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1 Ibid. p. 26.
It is not unusual that we witness today in our countries what one could interpret as a rejection or fear of modernity. On the contrary, this is what corresponds best to past experiences. It is a general law that economic rationalism be accompanied with a call for irrationalism at the level of sentiments and ideas. Universalization can not progress without simultaneously deepening the sense of difference and strangeness (Laroui, 1997, p. 26).

This is why Laroui argues that a distinction must be made between modernity as "a process" and modernity as "ideology," for then, it becomes clear that the processes of "modernization" and "traditionalization" are concomitant movements in every society:¹

Modernity as a process must not be confused with modernity as ideology. Neither is the social movement itself to be confused with the action of those who are conscious of it, analyze and single it out in order to criticize and block its process, for these are the traditionalists; there are also those who seek to accelerate its pace and expand its implementation, and these are the modernists [...] For a long time, reference has been made to modernity and tradition. However, this is a static vision. For a more dynamic vision, we need to speak of modernization and traditionalization, two concomitant movements in every society (Laroui, 1997, pp. 23-24).

To negotiate the homogenizing implications which his universalistic interpretation of modernity entails, Laroui prescribes the adoption of the Marxist approach and a historical study of the cultural lifeworld. His argument is that the Marxist praxis can mediate the homogenizing

¹ In L' Ideologie arabe contemporaine, Laroui uses the notion of "ideology" in three different meanings: "as a lagged reflection of reality because of the mental tools used, as a system which masks reality because it is either impossible or difficult to analyze, and finally, as a theoretical construction taken from another society and which does not totally correspond to reality but is in the process of becoming so, or more exactly, it is used as a model so that action could bring it to existence. It is mostly in this last meaning that the term ideology is used in this essay" (A. Laroui, L' Ideologie arabe contemporaine, Paris: Maspero, 1973, p. 8).
principles of the project of modernity and the historical particularities of cultures. In short, only in the sphere of Marxist praxis can modernity and local identities tjotjog. Furthermore, even the potential of alienation inherent in a traveling theory can be avoided by the adoption of the Marxist approach and methodology:

Marxism provides an ideology capable of refuting tradition without surrendering to Europe, of resisting a particular aspect of the European society without having to go back to tradition. In addition, unlike their liberal counterparts, Marxist intellectuals do not have to choose between subjective truth and popular belief since they have the possibility to reconcile both through praxis.¹

While the analytical system of Marxist philosophy provides the conceptual tools to negotiate an alternative space between modernity and tradition, the cultural lifeworld constitutes a privileged site for the study of the orientations of a society - that is whether the cultural production of its elite groups is mediating the processes of modernization or traditionalization. In L'Ideologie arabe contemporaine (1973), he writes in reference to Morocco:

Over the last ten years, the elite has shown a startling degree of political powerlessness and cultural sterility: to account for this situation, the researcher can focus either on the political or the social spheres; yet, one can also begin by exploring the cultural [...] words, images, notions, and syllogisms constitute a conceptual apparatus which can mediate an evaluation of the contemporary political and cultural productions in Morocco.²

Laroui is not interested in popular culture. What he means here is the production of an elitist culture. This conviction has led him to invest the intellectual with a primordial role in the modernization of society: "We can

not really understand the history of a society, decide whether it is modernizing or traditionalizing, if the action of this group [intellectuals] is not meticulously documented. More than that, Laroui does not seem to have any faith in the masses. The institutionalizing process of the nation-state is a narrative which can be written only by the national intelligentsia and must be imposed on the rest of the population. Laroui believes that the modernization of Europe has followed the same homogenizing process:

Inside every European country, modernity, like monotheism and patriarchy before it, was imposed on the majority of the population by a limited group. It is here where we find the mediator of social change, that is, the intelligentsia, whether it inspires or rules, and whether it is a political, military or religious intelligentsia. No exception to this rule.

It is true that Laroui has attempted a reconstruction of the socio-cultural production of the nineteenth-century Arab renaissance. He has also vehemently criticized the worldview perpetuated by the Salafi movement which sought to re-traditionalize the Arab society. He has also drawn attention to the case of minorities and the question of democracy. However, he remains uncompromising as to the inevitability of the homogenizing mission of the nation-state. More than that, he remains uncompromising even in the theses he advances. A. Saaf, a Moroccan political scientist summarizes the stylistic traits of Laroui’s writing as follows:

 [...] Laroui seems to define himself as the producer of strong theses, firm conclusions, closed synthetic truths, and already settled affirmations, where facts, ideas, and concepts are packed in ideal-types, with the self-assurance of one who has already judged, seen, and reflected on quite a few things. His writing does not betray the slightest hint of suspicion or trepidation, nor the smallest indication of hesitation, and not even the least sign of indecision. The substance of the demonstrative phase seems to have already been consumed

2 Ibid. p. 25.
before the text gets to its readers. Laroui holds a pedagogical relationship with his readers [...] 1

Abed al-Jabri and A. Laroui are predominantly scripturalists and elitists in their conceptualizations of the project of society they provide. They are more interested in the articulation of grand-narratives which address the needs of the state systems rather than the life stories which populate the lifeworld. They seem to make a clear-cut distinction between modernity as competence and modernity as performance. Al-Jabri attempts to recuperate the power of “reason” in its most abstract form to implement the utopian dream of the politically unified and technologically advanced pan-Arab state. However, rationality can not be severed from its cultural dimensions and even technology, contrary to a general assumption, is not value-free. 2

In his turn, Laroui holds that modernity is synonymous with the empowerment of the nation-state and the modernization of its institutions. From his viewpoint, this can be achieved only by a “differentiation” among the systems of the state, society, and culture, and the implementation of a “light bureaucracy” which would be “more technical, more efficient” to allow the emergence of “a true theory, [that is] positive, of the state as a rational organization of the collective action of a community.” 3 This is why he attributes an important role to the intellectual. However, one can not yet speak of the “intellectual-institution” in Morocco for the Moroccan intellectual community “is predominantly oral” and “what it produces in writing is very little compared to what it consumes in oral debate.” 4 In addition, as Feenberg convincingly concludes:

1 Abdallah Saaf, Politique et savoir au Maroc, Rabat: SMER, 1991, p. 34.
2 Andrew Feenberg convincingly argues that: “There is no such thing as a ‘pure’ technology, anymore than there is a ‘pure’ grammar. Technical competence, like linguistic competence, is realized only in concrete forms. Rationality in the most abstract sense is neither a neutral means nor is it specifically Western; like linguistic structure, it is a dimension of behavior and artifacts in every culture” (Andrew Feenberg, Alternative Modernity: The Technical Turn in Philosophy and Social Theory, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995, p. 222).
4 “An Interview with Abdelkader Chaoui” in “al-Ahdat al-Maghribia,” October 27, 1999, p. 6. My research on the Moroccan café confirms this statement. A number of my informants stated that the café remained one of their most favourite spaces for debate (see the chapter on the café).
Premodern societies do not need a praxis philosophy to tell them that the uses of rationality are always social at bottom. By contrast with modern societies, they invariably contrast each rational element, whether it be a game, a production method, an exchange, in symbolic systems, myths, and rituals that highlight social dependencies. Their technical processes seamlessly abstract natural objects from their original contexts, incorporate them under causal principles into some sort of device, and embed them in new social contexts. Abstraction from nature and social recontextualization do not appear to be separate in these societies, as they do in modern ones, but are so intimately bound up with each other as not to be easily distinguished. This intermingling of practices we would distinguish is not merely a limitation of simpler times, a "lack of differentiation" in Habermas's terms.¹

Feenberg's statement parts with the "deeply ethnocentric" Weberian view which brackets the culture of technology in the metaphor of an "iron cage" and "excludes the very possibility of a fundamentally different modernity based on another technological dissipation."² In addition, this should also lay to rest the oversimplifying claims of modernization theories which proclaim the Enlightenment-derived model as the only way to economic prosperity and the attainment of the good life. At the same time, we should also part with the totalizing meta-narratives such as pan-Arabism or pan-Africanism for they are at heart but disguised duplications of the homogenizing grammar of the cognitive system they attempt to subvert.

One way to open up new directions for the reflection on alternative articulations of forms of social organization is to shift the focus from the politics of governments and institutions to sites where the performance of everyday practices can be observed. In what follows, I look at some of the ways in which this methodological approach can be achieved. I argue that the form of social organization must not be viewed from the perspective of the meta-narratives of either modernity or tradition but must address the

stories of everyday practices which reveal far more complex contradictions than a homogenizing theory can account for. The point will be made to the effect that post-tradition does not summon origin, purity, homogeneity, or even continuity but that, instead, post-tradition addresses a process which is always in the making.

*Figure 5. The café a saint: An enshrined café in Meknes.*
D. Post-Tradition as an Everyday Practice

Modern social theory has generally shown a pronounced bias against tradition. This bias is legitimated by a dominant view of history as a progressive movement centered on the future. The opposition between tradition and its antonym modernity is not only semantic or epistemological but also existential. While the project of modernity strives to access a utopian form of social organization always in the process of making, tradition seeks to maintain a worldview based on patterns, customs, beliefs, and opinions inherited from the past and transmitted from generation to the next through oral communication. As Giddens has put it, "[i]nherent in the idea of modernity is a contrast with tradition."¹ The idea of modernity holds to a linear conception of time, a secularized form of the lifeworld, a differentiated interpretation of spheres of action and knowledge, and the organization of social relations around principles meant to privilege the interests of the individual over the group. By contrast, tradition favours a circular conception of time, an "enchanted" structure of the lifeworld, resistance to a differentiation among spheres of action and knowledge, and a type of social organization where group ties are more important than the autonomy of the individual. In a general sense, therefore, modernity and tradition are antithetical entities.

However, the bias against tradition has led to a homogenization of alternative forms of social organization and to a marginalization of the dynamics which define societies believed to be traditional. It has been a common practice in Western social theory to acknowledge the existence of other models of social organization only in so far as the latter sustain the legitimacy of the historical process Western societies have gone through. Durkheim (1965), for example, distinguishes between a "segmental" form of organization which he associates with premodern communities and the "functionally" differentiated societal system which characterizes modern societies.² Weber (1930) locates the transition from the premodern to the modern societal system in the emergence of a systematic process of

¹ Anthony Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity, 1992, p. 36.
rationalization which transforms and "disenchants" all spheres of life.\(^1\) Habermas (1987) argues that premodern societies are mostly distinguished by a "lack of differentiation" among systems while Giddens (1992) emphasizes the element of reflexivity which he defines as the outstanding aspect of modern societies. In the same vein, the notions "underdeveloped," "developing," "preindustrial," "premodern," or "traditional" which social theory has tagged to non-Western forms of social organization are all meant to legitimate the dominance of a hegemonic societal model. The concept of "modernization" can also be inscribed in the same logic in spite of Habermas's attempt to give it a "neutral" and "universalized" interpretation.\(^2\) E. P. Thompson makes a relevant point with respect to the arbitrariness inherent in the notions which seek to encapsulate social organizations within one category:

It has been a common complaint that the terms 'feudal,' 'capitalist,' or 'bourgeois' are too imprecise, and cover phenomena too vast and disparate, to be of serious analytic service. We now, however, find constantly in service a new set of words such as 'pre-industrial,' 'traditional,' 'paternalism' and 'modernization,' which appear to be open to very much the same objections; and whose theoretical paternity is less certain.

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\(^2\) Habermas has stated that the theory of modernization "performs two abstractions on Weber's concept of 'modernity.' It dissociates 'modernity' from its modern European origins and stylizes it into a spatio-temporally neutral model for processes of social development in general. Furthermore, it breaks the internal connections between modernity and the historical context of Western rationalism so that processes of modernization can no longer be conceived of as rationalization, as the historical objectification of rational structures" (Jurgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, 1992b p. 2). The modernization paradigm, which has been also called, in turns, 'Westernization' and 'Europeanization' has proved to be a failure. S. C. Dube summarizes the reasons for this failure as follows: "The principal reasons for the failure of the paradigm of developmentalism [modernization] are easy to identify. Both in the global and the national contexts the developmental process was bound to be unequal. In the international setting, it was weighed in favor of the rich and powerful nations which sought to maintain a barely disguised colonial relationship with the undeveloped countries. The contemporary North-South formulation raises the issues of inequality of resources and power [...] In the Third World countries themselves small centres have grown at the expense of a large periphery, which has remained impoverished and anemic. The dominant centres of power - economic and political- favor pockets of prosperity and deal with undeveloped areas as if they were their internal colonies" (quoted in Richard Schechner, *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, London and New York: Routledge, p. 199).
It may be of interest that whereas the first set of terms direct attention to conflict or tension within the social process, the second set appear to nudge one towards a view of society in terms of a self-regulating sociological order. They offer themselves, with a specious scientism, as if they were value-free. They also have an eerie timelessness. My own particular dislike is 'preindustrial,' a tent within whose spacious folds there sit beside each other West of England clothiers, Persian silversmiths, Guatemalan shepherds, and Corsican bandits.1

Another common assumption in social theory is the idea that the progress of societies towards the achievement of the utopian ideal of modernity is mainly impeded by tradition. In fact, the project of modernity can be read as a systematic dismantling and displacement of the institutions of tradition. Tradition has generally been perceived as the main obstacle to change. Traditional cultures, as Giddens (1992) has defined them, seem to operate within an enclosed spatio-temporal framework outside the modern consciousness and of which they themselves remain oblivious:

In traditional cultures, the past is honoured and symbols are valued because they contain and perpetuate the experience of generations. Tradition is a mode of integrating the reflexive monitoring of action with the time-space organization of the community. It is a means of handling time and space, which inserts any particular activity or experience within the continuity of past, present, and future, these in turn being structured by recurrent social practices. Tradition is not wholly static, because it has to be reinvented by each new generation as it takes over its cultural inheritance from those preceding it. Tradition does not so much resist change as pertain to a context in which there are few separated temporal and spatial markers in terms of which change can have any meaningful form (Giddens, 1992, p. 37).

This definition of traditional cultures might be valid for some isolated tribes which are cut off from the rest of the world. The fact is that even for societies where tradition is observed, as is the Moroccan one, the practice of tradition is generally mediated through self-conscious rituals. Traditional societies are not necessarily opposed to the idea of modernity. It is the historical conjuncture in which they have encountered it which has made them suspicious of its project. Laroui has made a point to this effect. He argues that when the process of modernization started in the nineteenth-century, tradition and modernity were not viewed as antithetical entities. On the contrary, there was even a feeling of bewilderment among the community of Arab thinkers as to the reasons which led to the emergence of the system of modernity in Europe when it should have first developed in the Arab world. Thus, there was a consensus on the issue that the Moroccan social system should improve and readjust its institutions by adopting the principles of modernity which were viewed as good, just, and rational. At this stage, "Tradition is not defined by opposition, negation or denial; on the contrary, it is hailed as being good because it is the way taken by the good, the wise, and the literate" (Laroui, 1997, p. 44). Therefore, up until that moment, Moroccan intellectuals viewed the principles of modernity as endemic to the values and beliefs of Moroccan culture.

However, by the end of the century, as the threat of the French Protectorate became more eminent, the consensus on the issue of modernity broke down and the acceptance of the Protectorate came to be viewed as an act of apostasy. At the same time, the early attempts to modernize the country were interpreted as a failure since they did not save the country from falling in the hands of the French:

It is when the modernist is, all of a sudden, prevented from acting by those who represent modernity, that is Europe, that he succumbs to the criticism of his adversaries [the anti-modernists or traditionalists] [...] As soon as colonization replaces reformation, because that is the historical sequence in Morocco as well as in the rest of the Arab world, the reformist is dismissed because he is automatically replaced by the colonial administrator [...] Nationalism, that is the desire to
preserve one's being, is naturally modernist before colonization and as naturally anti-modernist after it (Laroui, 1997, p. 46).

The colonial enterprise never meant the modernization of societies and peoples. In the words of Lyautey, the French general who headed the French administration in Morocco during the Protectorate, it "would be a mistake to transplant the organs of an old society into a new country." The objective of the colonial project was simply to establish "isles of modern civilization." 1

It is important to underline the role the colonial project played in the Arab world not only because it has given the traditionalists good reasons to oppose the process of modernization but, more importantly, because of the impact it has had on the psychology of the Arab individual. Jacques Berque (1969) has provided illuminating insights with respect to this point. He argues that, just like the ancient Greek, the Arab holds with nature and the cosmos a harmonious relationship which is mediated by intuition and spontaneity rather than power and domination. Though the ethics of Islam require that a pious exercise his reason to repress desires and instincts, the individual would still seek transcendence in the realm between the preordained and the unknown, the prescribed and the indeterminate, and between reason and intuition. The Muslim mystical philosophy, Sufism, has acted as a counter-discourse meant to liberate the individual from the restrictive interpretations of legal theology. Sufism provides an alternative method whereby the pious can surrender his being to the power of the cosmos through divine worship. Mystical philosophers and poets were reputed for being extraordinary improvisers who felt no inhibition shifting from a mystical topic on the Divine Power to the praise of the sensual beauty of a passer-by. It is this sense of immediacy between the spirit and the senses and the ecstasy derived from relishing sensual beauty while simultaneously renouncing it which defines the relationship between the Arab and Nature. The global concordance between the individual and the cosmos, Berque insists, shows "not only at the level of philosophical aphorism, or mystical intuition, but also in behaviour." 2

The colonial project disrupted this communion between the Arab and his environment, causing at the same time a fracture between the individual and the cosmos and between the individual and his being:

The traditional Arab is still a Hellenic. However, set at variance with the world, defied by the history of others, relegated to humiliating tasks, and thrown back into the silt, so to speak, he has become an infernal Hellenic (Berque, 1969, p. 47).

From this viewpoint, the obsession with the past and tradition is to be explained as an attempt to restore the state of communion and harmony between the individual and nature and between the subject and his being. The discord between being and nature has generated a state of anguish, Berque uses the Arabic word qalaq: “the Arab anxiety of modern times” which is an outstanding aspect of modern Arabic literature (Berque, 1969, p. 47). To deal with this unbearable state of discord and fracture, the Arab seeks the pleasure of communion in a “collective trance” which Jacques Berque detects in the Arab’s fascination with “thawra” (revolution). This longing for a “collective trance” can also be observed in the Arab’s everyday practices. Public baths and cafés, which I take as two case studies in this project, function as admirable sites of “collective trance” where body proxemics, noise, song, music, and smoke create an intoxicating ambiance wherein the individual simultaneously acknowledges and transcends the material limitations of corporal reality and immerses in the ethereal ecstasy of the crowd.

As a matter of fact, Berque has drawn attention to the importance of everyday practices in the Arab world. He has insistently argued that the “infernal Hellenic” is more likely to be observed in the stories of everyday life than in the meta-narratives of nation-states and their systems:

The traditional Islamic society offers itself as a compact globe where reason, transcendence, a universe perceived through the senses, a kind of visceral happiness, so to speak, [...] can be observed in everyday practice. We can still feel this Arabic colour of everyday life, no matter how strangers to it we have become, in the gesticulations of the lay people as much as in
the serenity of the wise. In such a system, or rather from this viewpoint, the concrete is no more than a symbol while the idea has a material taste. Neither the intellect nor the corporal is severed from transfigurating values. Despite an obsessive affirmation of divine transcendence, a world of solidarity, gratification, immediate exchange between the object and the person, and an alliance of everyone with everyone else is interwoven (Berque, 1969, p. 46).

Meta-narratives are too rigid to account for the paradoxical reality which characterizes life in a post-traditional society. Homogenizing and totalizing narratives have as pedagogical mission the marginalization of practices which "reason" can not accommodate. Social practices which may be dismissed for their subversive dimension of the logic of "differentiation" often hide the potential for emancipation. The fact is that "a culture is never an established or acquired fact; it is always a potential."¹ If anything, "traditional" societies are not as simple as classical social theory has often defined them:

Whoever calls a national culture [...] traditional, relegates it to the past. By contrast, whoever, in a modernizing country, opposes the performance in a sector believed to be modern to the stagnation in a traditional sector, prevents himself from perceiving the truth that the latter is not the residual, even if it is burdened by tradition, but the main and the fundamental. Thus, the problem facing any culture is to modernize without disavowing itself. These are the two terms required for progress and which have often been dissociated one from the other or frozen in binary opposition.²

The sociologist Paul Pascon (1971) has argued for the use of the concept "composite" in his definition of the Moroccan society. First, Pascon makes a point to the effect that there is hardly a society which meets all the

The term *composite* society -as opposed to a transitional society- where the power of the state and institutions are not under the control of the dominant mode of production, seems applicable to a temporary situation, or even to a sustainable one, of unstable equilibrium where the contradiction between the development of productive forces and the relations of production, on one side, and the level of institutional instances, social and judicial relations, on another side, is more and more important. It may be that this type of society does not

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1 "Historical societies, that is, real societies, are obviously incoherent, heterogeneous, and composed of various elements. At different levels of their social reality, we discover contradictory traits which are partly justified by an internal logic, partly by exogenous interventions, and partly by historical permanence through an intermingling with other types of social formation. Thus, it immediately becomes clear that it is impossible to construct a type of a real society without having recourse to 'history' and the 'environment' (and obviously to a history of the environment as well). Even for societies which have apparently been built on a *tabula rasa* -I have in mind the North-American society- or in the case of societies which have remained for a long time 'closed' -the nomadic tribes of Arabia or the Sahara, mountain communities-, the model of a pure society or an archetypal society is inadequate" (Paul Pascon, "La formation de la société marocaine" in *Bulletin économique et social du maroc*, No. 120-121, Rabat: Société d'Études Economiques, Sociales et Statistiques, 1971, p. 14).

constitute an economic system endowed with the specific laws of development since it can not theoretically break with the past and has constantly to negotiate and increase its composition. This is because, on one hand, the composite society 'works' for another system which confiscates its surplus and, on the other, the state no longer has the means to homogenize the society, that is, to liquidate and transgress the 'reversions' (Pascon, 1971, pp. 19-20).

Pascon's insight is very helpful in understanding the complex dynamics which organize social relations in Morocco. The concept "composite" highlights the reality that the Moroccan society is in the process of negotiating a space which would accommodate its traditional heritage and the complexities which modern life has generated. What I find even more interesting is Pascon's psychological portrait of the subject of the composite society. The following passage, though a bit long, is worth quoting because it pins down some of the prominent contradictions which the subject in a composite society has to negotiate in his everyday life:

The men who live in a composite society need to adapt themselves permanently to the complexities of the real world so that they could play their social roles. They belong to several societies at the same time [...] They constantly need to focus their will and desires on what they perceive as the dominant traits in their social lifeworld. They do this at individual and collective levels. The man who in the morning leaves home where his wife pays tribute to the spirits of their ancestors, hangs his silver dagger around his belt, the symbol of a free man and a sign of traditional nobility and honourable status, then gets on his motorcycle, a means of rapid transport, in order to meet a subordinate state employee susceptible of using his influence to get him an agricultural loan at an interest rate which is fixed in advance with the guarantee of a postponement of payment in the case of a natural calamity, a calamity whose possibility has been calculated by the laws of probability but which he will try to conjure up through the
invocation of the Divine power and, eventually, through a collective procession followed by the sacrifice of a bull, this lay man we find, more or less, all over the world, does not contradict himself. On the contrary, he is, throughout, logical and consistent because he has integrated the nature of the composite society in which he lives and bypasses its contradictions thanks to his continuous adaptability to all the exigencies of social life (Pascon, 1971, pp. 21-22).

The psychological behaviour of the composite subject which Pascon noted in the 1960's is still applicable to the Moroccan subject in the wake of the new millenium. This composite subject draws the legitimacy of his social status not only from his position as a property owner in a society which claims agriculture as its primary mode of production, but more importantly, his legitimacy is derived from his genealogical lineage. In addition, he is aware that his “honourable” social status can get him privileges only in his private sphere and immediate rural social context. As soon as the geographical setting changes, he changes strategies and adapts to the new situation. His social status does not entitle him to any privileges with the state institutions, and obviously, less so with the financial system of international capitalism. The case of this farmer also illustrates the psychological fracture which capitalism has inflicted on the subject of the post-traditional society. The relationship between this farmer and his land, which was most likely one of perfect harmony and accord, is now mediated through the banking institution. Through the provision of a loan, the bank can claim a share of the land’s crop and in case the loan is not paid back within the fixed deadline, the bank can even mortgage the property which, in most cases, has been transmitted from generation to generation through a system of inheritance. Unlike in the past when he had to worry only about the annual harvest, this farmer now has to live with the reality that he may even lose his property. Moreover, this post-traditional farmer is “more comfortable” “negotiating” with nature, which he tries to call on his side through a set of ritual practices, than with the banking institution.

Pascon’s concept of the composite individual has affinities with Morley’s concept of “the socially-split subject.” Morley argues that the social subject in modern societies can assume contradictory roles in different situations.
The same subject who is a trade-unionist and a feminist in one situation can turn into a wife-beater and a reactionary in other situations.\(^1\) The fact is that the concept of the composite society and the psychological portrait of the composite subject are weakened by a set of assumptions. First, this concept assumes that the contradictions which characterize the composite society coexist in a harmonious and peaceful way in both the organization of society and the psychological portrait of the subject. Second, the concept does not account for the see-sawing changes and restlessness which define the society it seeks to analyze; neither does it highlight the potential of emancipation characteristic of this society both in terms of modes of production and social relations. Finally, one could easily argue that the profile of the composite subject or the form of organization in which he performs are characteristic not only of southern societies but even of the “post-industrial” ones.

On the basis of the local and global dynamics in which contemporary Moroccan society is involved, and while taking into consideration the historical reality of the country and the aspirations of Moroccan people, I propose the notion of “post-tradition” both as a theoretical concept and a research method to approach the contradictions which define Moroccan society. I am aware of the legitimate objections which this concept invites since it could be dismissed as yet another term with the prefix “post” that does not explain much and which social and critical theories have provided us with over the last three decades. While I take note of the relevance of such criticism, I would like to stress a few points which redeem and validate the use of the concept post-tradition to study the complex societal system of the Moroccan society.

The fact that the prefix “post” may have been “overused” in Western social and critical theories is not reason enough to claim beforehand that it can not help to describe the processes of change which occur in social or artistic organizations and performances. In fact, as I have argued earlier, even though the concepts “post-modernism” and “post-modernity” have

\(^1\) Morley (1986: 42) notes that the subject is split not only psychologically (as in Lacan’s model of consciousness/unconsciousness) but also socially, a matter which complicates our understanding of subjectivity: “the same man may be simultaneously a productive worker, a trade union member, a supporter of the Social Democratic Party, a consumer, a racist, a home owner, a wife beater and a Christian” (quoted in Jim McGuigan, Cultural Populism, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, p. 136).
drawn contradictory responses as to their pertinence in describing the changes which have occurred in contemporary society, no analyst has denied the fact that the two concepts underline a changing reality in social systems and lifeworlds as well as different methods in observing these changes. Social and aesthetic theories have always had to deal with the problematic condition which their reliance on the language system to conceptualize social organization and artistic production inevitably generates.

However, it seems that in addition to the problematic at the discursive level, I have also to account for the incorporation of the prefix "post" which social theorists have traditionally prefixed to other terms to define the societal model in the most developed societies (such as in the concepts "post-modern," "post-industrial"). The inclusion of the prefix "post" here is deliberately meant to locate the Moroccan societal model in the space between the traditional system from which it has grown and the Western mode of organization which has developed on the basis of its own historical specificities. Thus, it follows that a post-traditional mode of organization is neither traditional nor modern; neither is it a combination of both. I have noted earlier that traditions themselves are subjected to changes and alterations that succeeding generations operate on them. I have also shown that the Western model of modernity does not necessarily stand as the universal archetype of social organization. From this perspective, the concept of the post-traditional society is used to refer to an emergent mode of organization and a type of social relations where the focus is on the strategies of struggle a society adopts to liberate itself from the dominance of stifling practices inherited from the past and resist the hegemonic hold of expansionist capitalism and its industries of exploitation and alienation.

The subject of post-traditional society is not a "composite" of a coherent mix but is, on the contrary, shot through with psychological, social, and cultural contradictions and paradoxes which she is unaware of or incapable of explaining and accounting for.1 More precisely, the post-traditional

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1 An example of the cultural contradictions which run through the post-traditional subject can be seen in the attitude of an informant who, in an answer to a question related to the films he would like to see, states that he prefers Arab films; immediately afterwards, he admits that his most favourite film is "Tarzan" (see F. Chevaldonne, "Le public de cinema dans les agglomerations minieres de Khouribga" in Bulletin économique et social du maroc, vol. xxv, no. 92, Rabat: Société d'études économiques, sociales et statistiques, 1973).
subject is to be viewed as a collective rather than an individual entity, a fact which initiates a shift in the paradigm of subjectivity rather than merely complicates it. The notion of the post-traditional collective subject can also mediate our understanding of some of the contradictions which run through the behavioural performance of groups and communities. One of the main characteristics of the post-traditional society is that resistance builds up in the most traditional spheres (the public bath and the traditional café are two cases I deal with in this thesis) while the most modern space of knowledge production and consumption can help sustain the most stifling residual traditions and practices (Moroccan mass media provide a good example of this reality).

This is not to imply that post-traditional society is somehow severed from the historical transformations which are affecting the globe. On the contrary, both as a condition and a practice, post-tradition is intimately implicated in the poetics of international affairs. At the economic level, the tentacles of global capital are closing in on the post-traditional societies: more international corporations are relocating in the countries of the South, development projects are primarily financed by international banking institutions, and the efficiency of Southern governments in attracting foreign investors is taken as a major criterion in the evaluation of the success of their policies. At the intellectual level, the intelligentsia in post-traditional societies is now predominantly constituted of an elite educated in European or North-American universities and institutes; even in the local universities, academic curricula are designed following the models used in campuses in Europe and North-America and, in most cases, the medium of education is a European language. In addition, mass media have introduced to the remotest villages new lifestyles and worldviews. All these variables combine to construct a palimpsest of symbols which engage the local culture in a dynamic relationship (either oppositional or conciliatory) with the impositions of global signs and problematize the post-traditional subject’s interactions with both tradition and (post-)modernity.

The practice of post-tradition also brings into relief the issue of agency. For the post-traditional subject, identity formation involves more alternatives. However, even if traditional structures have been weakened, the post-traditional subject’s freedom of choice is possible only within a negotiation process which engages the entire collectivity. Self-identification
entails neither an absolute autonomy of the subject nor a complete dependence on the external world. This is because the post-traditional subject’s position stems from her/his awareness of the importance of both cognitive and perceptive categories in the interpretation and articulation of her/his condition and the communal lifeworld. The Moroccan sociologist A. Khatibi attempts an articulation of the post-traditional subject’s condition by proposing what he calls the dialectic of a *penseé autre* (an-other-thought):

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\text{The thought of ‘we’ towards which we are drawn is no longer located within the Western metaphysical circle nor the Muslim theology, but at their margins. This margin is active [...] At the international level, we are more or less marginals, and we constitute a dominated minority. It is said that we are underdeveloped. This is our chance since this condition provides us with the opportunity to declare [make public] this transgression and to continuously support it against any type of self-complacency. Furthermore, a thought that can not be inspired by its poverty is always elaborated to dominate and humiliate; a thought which is not of the minority, marginal, fragmentary, and unfinished is always a thought of ethnocide. This [...] is not a call for a philosophy of the poor and its exaltation, but a call for a pluralistic thought which does not reduce others (societies and individuals) to the sphere of self-complacency. To disengage from such a reduction is, for every thought, and incalculable chance.}^1
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Khatibi’s concept of *penseé autre* highlights the divide between post-traditional practices and the homogenizing narratives, both Eastern and Western. The margins in which the post-traditional subject operates are located neither in the traditional theology of the East nor the universalizing narrative of the West. In fact, the displacement and decentering of totalizing discourses is a *sine qua non* condition for the emergence of post-traditional communities.

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However, the spheres of performance in the post-traditional society do not only engage the subject in a playful attitude but they also call upon her/him to take risks. In Khatibi’s experience, it is the subversive space of the penseé autre which allows him to transgress the medium he uses to communicate his thought. Reflecting on his condition as a Moroccan sociologist and cultural critic who uses French as a medium of expression, he asserts that his discourse must not be viewed as the vehicle of finished thought and predetermined meaning but as “a calling to mind” of a hybrid and undetermined “entity” which is yet to be:

In rereading myself, I discover that my most finished (French) sentence is a calling to mind. The calling to mind of an unpronounceable entity, neither Arab nor French, neither dead nor living, neither man nor woman: generation of the text. Wandering topology, schizoidal state, androgynous dream, loss of identity - on the threshold of madness.1

Khatibi’s “threshold of madness” connotes a playful transgression of the spatial and temporal constraints which preclude the emergence of the post-traditional subject. The subversive power of this transgressive moment lies in its resistance to any pre-written narrative which attempts to bracket communal emergence within the finite space and time of either modernity or theology. The emergent other-thought does not make any claims to a pre-determined form of lifeworld or a defined set of systems. It merely points to margins of resistance.

The reflection of a scholar from Nepal now based in the USA on her condition as a development researcher is representative of the bitter disillusionment the post-traditional subject is likely to experience in the process of her/his self-identification and identity reformulation:

Mesmerized by the glamorous notion of development, I was mentally slow to scale its ideological contours, to comprehend how development ideology is produced and reproduced, how

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it is propagated across space and through time, how it conquers the minds of native elites, and how it paves the path for a monolithic culture of materialism which stigmatizes poverty and the poor. Increasingly, it has dawned on me that my own development ideology odyssey served as an autopsy of how the imported discourse of development had possessed the mind of a national ruling class, and how such mindset had, in turn, played a major role in deepening the social roots of poverty - all, of course, in the name of development. This chapter is an account of the process of my own seduction. This is a self-reflective narrative, a wrenching dialogue with myself, based on my encounter with development as a young student aspiring to join the ranks of educated elites and the well-to-do. However, my objective here is not to write my own personal biography; this is rather a post-mortem of the body of development by a colonized mind, designed to serve as a research method.¹

The issue of gender relations reveals that everyday performance in the spheres of the post-traditional society carries more serious risks which can even be life-threatening. This is because the guardians of the traditional patriarchal structure take very seriously the playful strategies post-traditional discourse adopts and do not hesitate to use intimidating tactics to smother the emergence of post-traditional identities. The Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi has repeatedly denounced the “terrorist practices” of the traditional patriarchal discourse. In an article entitled “La conversation de salon comme pratique terroriste” [“Salon Conversation as a Terrorist Practice”], she tells of how, in the course of a friendly, conversation, the masculinist discourse can abruptly turn into a terrorist practice if it feels “threatened” by a feminist counterdiscourse. She also reports that she has often been terrorized by accusations that she is “totally

cut off from the reality of her society,” that she is “ignorant of Islam and the Tradition” or that what she says is “simply” plain “stupid.”

In Women in Muslim Paradise, Mernissi writes that the idea of this book came to her in the course of an experience with the terrorist practices of the patriarchal discourse:

The idea of this book came to me as a revelation one day while watching a television programme on religion along with a male colleague from the university [...] On the screen the Imam -a religious preacher- was plump and impressive in his white robes. He was describing what Paradise would be like for those who dutifully obey Allah’s orders. By the end of the programme my male university colleague was so excited about the manifold pleasures and delights that were promised to him in paradise that he upset his glass of tea all over his clothes. But I found that I could not share his excitement, since whatever made him happy about paradise, made me suspicious of my chances of achieving happiness there. My colleague could not understand why I was not as excited as he was. I started to explain what it was, and the more I tried to explain what was on my mind, the more I clarified my suspicions about my fate in paradise, the more serious and unexcited my companion became. By the end of my argument [...] my progressive university colleague was not only unhappy, but very menacing: “You know Fatima, I don’t think you should joke about these matters!” Suddenly, the voice was no more that of a colleague; it was the voice of authority -a mixture of parental and religious authority- I found myself resorting to childhood defense mechanisms: “But I was only joking!” I murmured. He answered immediately, without hesitation: “You had better be careful, Imams don’t like jokes [...]”

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The resistance with which the post-traditional subject meets can take even more alarming dimensions. The riposte of the guardians of tradition is more violent in the case of post-traditional female subjects trying to transgress the patriarchally delimited spatialized spheres as is “dramatized” in the tragic incident a Moroccan women rights activist was victim of in 1991. Touria Jebrane, a popular stage actress and outspoken critic of women’s condition in Morocco, was scheduled for an appearance on a highly rated television programme on the Moroccan cable channel 2M. The show was hosted by a woman journalist and was paradoxically called “L’Homme en question” (“The Man in Question”). Touria Jebrane was going to be the first female guest on this show which served as a platform for the debate of national social, political, cultural, and economic issues. Two days before the scheduled live broadcast, she was kidnapped and subjected to violent physical abuse. To make sure she would not make a public appearance in the near future, her kidnappers shaved her head: “That is the kind of treatment we reserve for women who dare assume a man’s role!,” she was told.¹

One of the important principles of post-traditional practices is the element of self-reflexivity. This characteristic allows the post-traditional subject to debunk two paralyzing assumptions. First, unlike the concepts post-modernism, post-colonialism, and developmentalism, the concept post-tradition displaces the West as a spatial and temporal referent in the historical reading of the communities in the South. On the contrary, post-tradition sends back to past and present practices and life experiences of communities and groups regardless of the itineraries which historical development in the West has taken. Thus, in theory, post-traditional consciousness should open up new directions for communities and groups to proceed with the articulation of their identity on the basis of their own histories and experiences even when they engage in the dynamics of a global interaction.

Second, the concept post-tradition decenters one of the founding arguments of the self-acclaimed guardians of tradition who insist on “the traditional assertion of ritual truth.” In fact, post-tradition does not negate the traditional heritage of people but simply calls for the recognition and

acknowledgment of liberating possibilities for the emergence of hybrid communities and practices. This orientation debunks the claims of both the native elites whose minds have been “possessed” by the imported discourse of development, to paraphrase Nanda Shrestha, and those of the traditionalists who seek to smother all possibilities for change and emancipation to maintain a status quo which marginalizes groups and communities. However, it is worth underlying that the hybrid manifestations of emergent communities do not a priori resolve the internal social contradictions and conflicts which tend to grow in intensity as groups and communities mutate in the emerging context. In fact, the importance of the post-traditional hybrid must be determined by the possibilities it generates for the emergence of more liberating practices and not the mere duplication of the existing structures of subordination and marginalization.

The works of Fatima Mernissi may be read as legitimate attempts of a post-traditional subject who proceeds by a reconstruction of traditional practices to disentangle the web of cultural and social symbols which have led to the marginalization of the Arab woman. In Islam and Democracy, for example, she analyzes the Prophet’s relationship with his contemporary Muslim women in light of the historical and social forces at play during the early construction of Islam and concludes that the inherited traditions which silence and marginalize the female voice are true neither to the spirit of the Text (the Qu’ran) nor to the Tradition of the Prophet. A series of interviews with Moroccan peasant and working women she conducted in the early 1970s unveil the picture of a social reality which belies the vision the dominant masculinist discourse perpetuates. The woman Mernissi depicts is not wealthy and subdued but strong, resistant, hard-working and, in the poverty-stricken areas, she provides for her husband and family.1 As Zakya Daoud puts it:

Access to public space and the right to employment are two fields of struggle where women can not compromise. The image of the harem woman, unproductive and secluded, has

never existed in reality, except maybe at a very restricted level [...] [The women Mernissi portrays] negotiate their survival day in and day out [...] They are forced to defend themselves and they know how to do it.¹

From the methodological perspective, the concept post-tradition decenters the self-paralyzing debate regarding whether “high” or “popular” culture should take center stage in the research area of cultural studies. Post-tradition shares with post-modernism its rejection of the practices of the Great Divide, “the kind of discourse which insists on the categorical distinction between high art and mass culture.”² However, unlike the post-modernist aesthetics, post-tradition does not focus on the behaviour of bourgeois consumers in the simulated world of late capitalism. Post-tradition takes as its central object of study the everyday performance of emergent groups and communities and their struggle to negotiate spaces within hegemonic economic, political, social, and cultural systems. This includes the interaction of post-traditional groups with exogenous leisure experiences and their reconstruction of endogenous practices which are well-rooted in the collective memory of the people.

One other main characteristic of the post-traditional approach is that it does not take its object of study as a closed system with self-regulating mechanisms and autonomous spatial and temporal references. This is because post-traditional practices interpellate various systems at the same time and problematize the notions of space and time. The café, for example, is simultaneously a public and a private space where debates on general matters and the construction of intimate life stories often fuse together. In the exclusively female space of the public bath, the narratives women weave are often based on their social experience with men. These narratives yield their meanings only when considered in the light of the dominant gender relations. Even family television viewing is to be read as a complex social enterprise that is informed by the spatial division within the family sphere, the economic status of the household, the educational background of family

members, the moral standards which regulate the parents/children relations, the historical relationship of the Moroccan viewer with the media in addition to the narratives which the viewers write on the margins of the television text.

To account for the diverse and often contradictory variables which inform post-traditional performances, the post-traditional approach views the world of everyday practices as a field of contestation and negotiation. In the words of E. P. Thompson, it looks at culture as:

...a pool of diverse resources, in which traffic passes between the literate and the oral, the superordinate and the subordinate, the village and the metropolis; [as an] arena of conflictual elements, which require compelling pressure [...] to take form as a ‘system.’ And, indeed, the very term ‘culture,’ with its cozy invocation of consensus, may serve to distract attention from social and cultural contradictions, from the fractures and oppositions within the whole.1

E. P. Thompson warns that the concept popular culture should be used with caution since popular culture is not a homogeneous and coherent composite. Garcia Canclini is even more sensitive to the power conflicts and internal contradictions which run through the body of practices we define as popular culture since he proposes that we speak of popular cultures rather than popular culture. In fact, I take Canclini’s remarks on the concept of popular cultures as relevant to the orientations of the post-traditional approach. Canclini is right to note that popular culture can not be defined “according to a priori essence” because popular cultures operate in a continual flux between the two spaces in which they are constituted:

(1) labor, familial, communication, and all other kinds of practices through which the capitalist system organizes the life of its members; and (2) practices and forms of thought that popular sectors create for themselves, to conceptualize and

express their own reality, their own subordinate role in the spheres of production, circulation, and consumption.¹

Canclini’s identification of the spheres in which popular cultures are constituted brings into relief the role of the material conditions in the structuring of people’s everyday life as well as the forms of reflection and communication which groups and communities develop for self-identification.

Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of the “habitus” is relevant to the understanding of the “embodiment” of post-tradition and the orientations of the post-traditional approach. By “habitus,” Bourdieu means a set of perceptions, aptitudes, and actions which is simultaneously structured by material conditions and generative of practices and habits which, in their turn, tend to reproduce and naturalize the material conditions which generated them in the first place. Without denying the presence of a strategic calculation which can orient their responses, Bourdieu foregrounds the informed spontaneity of habitus:

The conditionings associated with a particular class of conditions of existence produce habitus, systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is, as principles which generate and organize practices and presentations that can be objectively adapted to their outcomes without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary in order to attain them. Objectively ‘regulated’ and ‘regular’ without being in any way the product of obedience to rules, they can be collectively orchestrated without being the product of the organizing action of a conductor.²

Bourdieu is right to insist that the circularity inscribed in habitus is not generated by a mechanical force:

Because the habitus is an endless capacity to engender products—thoughts, perceptions, expressions, actions—whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioning and conditional freedom it secures is as remote from a creation of an unpredictable novelty as from a simple mechanical reproduction of the initial conditionings.

For the post-traditional researcher, the relevance of the notion of habitus is justified by the importance it attributes to the different agents which affect everyday practices: past and present, body and belief, common-sense and practical sense, possibilities and prohibitions, and individual and collective expressions.

Habitus, which invokes a sense of habit and custom, is not only a residue of consciousness but also an expressive form of the body which consciousness 'in-habits'. This is not a metaphysical assertion but a reality which concerns the lives of millions of those who suffer marginalization because of their gender, class or ethnic identity. In most cases, the body constitutes the cultural capital of these groups. The unskilled construction worker's visit to his neighbourhood café after a hard day's labour has a metonymic resonance in that a café experience may be the only "treat" this worker can procure the body which secures his livelihood. Similarly, the time and energy a woman spends in a public bath (a woman's visit to the public bath can take up to eight hours) to make herself desirable is an invaluable investment she makes since her body may be the only asset she has to accommodate her authoritative male partner. Body habits and performances, therefore, are not mere expressions of mind or consciousness but autonomous social constructions meant to ascertain the body in the material world that has shaped its identity and in which it performs. In this respect, Iain Chambers' remark on the necessity of devising an alternative

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1 Ibid. p. 55.
ethics of the body is an urgent need for the reconstruction of post-traditional groups and communities:

[...] we need an ethics that fully recognizes the body, previously considered as the site of error and evil; that recognizes its language, written across its surfaces in the alphabets of sexuality, gender and ethnicity; that recognizes its rites and rights, its multiple and differentiated histories. The plane is eventually the site of sense. In its desires, details and differentiation it also presents us with a zone of uncertainty; here are things that flee rational arrest. At the same time, it provides the ground for all those mentioned (and unmentioned) differences that condition the possibility of sense. There exists a 'reason' of the body, the unconscious, of the traces of memory, that continually signals something more: the body 'and its great intelligence, which does not say "I" but performs "I".' This is not to oppose the body to reason, but to indicate a territory which a previous reason was unable to recognize.1

In post-traditional society, the transition to a more equitable mode of social organization can only be mediated through an emancipation of the body. The emergence of new communities in Morocco coincides with the foregrounding of previously marginalized and disenfranchised bodies: the female body, the physically impaired body, and bodies of children and the poor. While the reinscription of the body in the spatial and temporal landscapes of community has made of it a site of contestation and struggle, it is also making it possible to materialize and personalize the injustices which marginalized bodies have long endured. For the researcher faced with "the problem of the participation of the mute, the severed, the preserved," the growing visibility of the body allows the insertion of the personal along with the political.2 In short, a new ethics of the body and its performances can debunk the claims of the guardians of tradition who have

relentlessly sought to keep the body behind cloistered walls or opaque veils as well as the proponents of a modernity that considers the body as a mere commodity to be sold and exchanged.

Figure 6. Performing resistance: Stage actress and women's rights activist Touria Jabrane in «An Angry Woman.»
Concluding Remarks:

I began this chapter with the anecdote concerning the relevance of certain research areas to the "reality" of the Moroccan society. At this stage, I want to reiterate the fact that post-traditional research must not be selective or discriminatory in the choice of its fields of interest. The task of the post-traditional researcher is to document and analyze everyday performances in the spaces in which they are produced. Decades of research focused on modes of institutionalized organization have led thinkers to overlook the potential of emancipation latent in people's everyday practices. Likewise, the foregrounding of the political at the expense of the cultural has gradually widened the gap between the conceptual constructs of the intelligentsia and the "lay" people's worldviews. In fact, the personal is political since it is shot through with identity politics whether it pertains to gender, class or race. More precisely, what I object to is not as much the over-valuation of the political over the personal as it is the perception of institutionalized politics as the only viable form of analysis. We need to abandon what Foucault has called "the repressive hypothesis."¹ Conversely, what is needed is an approach which highlights the role of culture as a site of struggle over meaning.

The foregrounding of the political at the expense of the personal and the private has also led to the underestimation of "the spontaneous philosophy which is proper to everybody."² For Gramsci, "spontaneous philosophy" is derived from "language itself, which is a totality of determined notions and concepts, and not just of words, grammatically devoid of content", "common sense," and traditions and folklore.³ What is crucial in Gramsci's definition is the contradictory character of common sense. As E. P. Thompson explains, the individual's "two theoretical consciousnesses" are derived from two aspects of the same reality:

³ Ibid. p. 10. I note here Jacques Berque's statement that "folklore is the infrastructure" (italics in original) (J. Berque, Les Arabes d'hier à demain, p. 210) or again, his proposal that the researcher investigate "the infinitesimal folklore in the interstices of urban space" (J. Berque, L'Egypte, imperialisme et revolution, Paris: Gallimard, 1967, p. 67).
on the one hand, the necessary conformity with the status quo if one is to survive, the need to get by in the world as it is in fact ordered, and to play the game according to the rules imposed by employers, overseers of the poor, etc.; on the other hand the 'common sense' derived from shared experience with fellow workers and with neighbours of exploitation, hardship and repression, which continually exposes the text of the paternalist theatre to ironic criticism and (less frequently) to revolt.1

The recognition of the contradictory character of common sense can contribute to a better reading of hegemony processes and an understanding of the "originality" of the precepts of common sense thought. Traditional philosophical systems have canonized reason and fetishized its structuring processes while the "untidy" workings of feeling and intuition have been deliberately ignored. The fact is that any conceptual coherence which does not take into consideration the contradictions in everyday practices is bound to remain a mere ideal construct removed from the reality of the people. The potential of emancipation lies not only in the systematic processes of sophisticated theory but also in the interstices of common sense thought and performances. As Arun K. Patnaik has argued, subaltern commonsense is a creative thought-process characteristic of subaltern groups:

Some rationalizations of [the subaltern groups'] subordination might have been constructed by themselves. Some dissent, discontentsments and counter-points might have been offered by the subaltern themselves. Such a thought-process could well be directly received by the subaltern groups from the structure/traditions proper, and not necessarily from the traditional intellectuals.2

1 Ibid. p. 11.
From this viewpoint, it becomes incumbent upon the post-traditional researcher to be alert to the spatial and temporal particularities which produce everyday practices. Friendships, alliances, emotional ties which build up in cafés or public baths generate an ambiance of sociability which, in turn, can contribute to the emergence of collective solidarities among groups and communities. Likewise, gossip, humour, playfulness, brawls, and fights which are all familiar scenes in the controlled space of the café and the public bath reveal some of the risks which performance in these two spaces entail and provide the researcher with an idea, be it limited, on the nature of the contradictions and power conflicts which run through society at large.

Post-traditional communities are also involved, though as a marginal power, in the globalization process which is restructuring the economic, political, social, and cultural map of the world. The expansion of mass media and culture industries, the global transmission of cultural symbols is creating a context where peripheral and subaltern communities have to interpellate the inherited conceptions which have shaped their worldviews and negotiate meanings embedded in the imported cultural commodities. Without minimizing the risk of cultural imperialism, it must be noted that the interpellation of imported cultural signs is also an expression and manifestation of agency. The hybrid cultural expression of post-traditional communities supports the claim that people make different things out of the same thing (Bhabha calls it the “difference of the same”).

This condition requires that the researcher build on the insights that post-modernist aesthetics has generated, especially in the area of identity formations. In as far as it foregrounds the legitimacy of diversity, pluralism, and the right to difference, the aesthetics of post-modernism has propelled to the front-stage narratives of minorities and disenfranchised groups. A new dynamics of change is already at work in post-traditional communities which are now called upon to negotiate their conditions at the margins of an imagined universalizing past and an institutionalized system of an-other modernity. For the researcher, the articulation of the emergent forms of

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1 This is how Bhabha puts it: “any change in the statement’s conditions of use and reinvestment, any alteration in its field of experience or verification, or indeed any difference in the problem to be solved, can lead to the emergence of new statement: the difference of the same” (Homi K. Bhabha, “The Commitment to Theory” in Jim Pines and Paul Willenmen, *Questions of Third Cinema*, London: BFI Publishing, 1989, p. 114).
organization in the post-traditional society should be bracketed neither within the scripturalist tradition nor the mire of the politics of government. The current task of the post-traditional researcher is to explain how everyday organization and performance relate to the on-going changes affecting the society at large, to interpret how spatial practices contribute to the emergence of new subject positions for individuals and collectivities and the implications they entail for both the individual and the collectivity, and more importantly, to conceptualize how individual and collective subjects use their everyday practices for the reconstruction of more liberating habitus.

The revisionist view of the systems of modernity, tradition, and post-modernity I have attempted in this chapter calls for a reassessment of the concept of the public sphere. The relevance of the public sphere concept to the on-going debate in post-traditional societies can be seen at more than one level. First, everyday performance requires a reconstruction of spatial production and distribution, and thus, a more progressive reading of the public sphere theory. Second, a dominant interpretation of the public sphere concept has been used for centuries to exclude groups on the basis of their gender, class, ethnic or social identities from the decision-making processes. Third, the globalization of the public sphere concept has made of it a prominent issue in the on-going debate in post-traditional societies ("al-majal al-aam", as the concept is called in Arabic). Last but not least, theorists in post-traditional societies tend to appropriate the public sphere theory without assessing the problematic the concept conjures up or nuancing the historical variables which have led to its emergence. Mehdi Abedi and Michael Fisher have made a point to this effect:

Notions of the public sphere and its allied terms -public opinion, the public or publics, publicity, and public culture-come from particular histories of political development in Western Europe, yet increasingly are inscribed in transnational arenas through global media politics, and legally are grounded through nations becoming signatories to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of the United Nations. It is worth
exploring the difficulties of translating such notions across linguistic and cultural boundaries.\textsuperscript{1}

On one level, the struggle for a space in the public sphere is not intrinsic to a specific society. An exploration of the processes through which cultures produce and reproduce themselves through an analysis of the notions of “public sphere” and “public” can contribute to a better understanding of how particular historical and political developments yield specific situations where people debate, negotiate, and construct their lifeworlds and systems. In addition, such an exploration can also provide insights as to how local cultures respond and negotiate issues debated in the international realm.

On a different level, however, the researcher must be aware of the risks embedded in a method which seeks to inject an idea into societies which do not have the same constitution as the environment in which the idea emerged. There is, for example, no a priori guarantee that the notion of the “public sphere” is the appropriate mechanism for the exploration of the processes through which the post-traditional culture reproduces itself. In his 1982 acceptance speech before the Nobel Prize committee, Gabriel Garcia Marquez made a statement in which he warned against the use of imported methodologies which homogenize local cultures more than they help in their interpretation:

It is understandable that the rational talents on this side of the world exalted in the contemplation of their own culture, should have found themselves without a valid means by which to interpret us. It is only natural that they insist on measuring us with the same yardstick that they use themselves forgetting that the ravages of life are the same for all, and that the quest for an identity is as arduous and bloody for us as it was for them.\textsuperscript{2}

\textsuperscript{1} Mehdi Abedi and Michael Fisher, “Thinking a Public Sphere in Arabic and Persian” in \textit{Public Culture}, vol. 6, 1993, pp. 219-220.

Since the publication of Habermas's seminal work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, the notion of the public sphere has become a dominant issue in the debates among academics and policy makers in post-industrial as well as post-traditional societies. In the next chapter, I start by looking at some of the early articulations of the public sphere concept. I take Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s notion of "the social contract" as a major reference of the first attempts at a conceptualization of the public sphere since, at heart, the concept of the public sphere is fundamentally a type of contract which regulates the debate on issues of general interest. I argue that Rousseau’s philosophical interpretation of the social contract is discriminatory and biased against minorities and the dispossessed. The displacement of the feudal absolutist sphere served primarily the interests of the rising bourgeois class which consolidated its hegemony through the institution of a new social model. The conceptual blueprint of Rousseau’s contract foregrounds an ideal power of the "general will" of the people while it further implements the authoritative rule of the patriarchal structure and the "natural" privileges of the propertied and educated. Likewise, I argue that neither the liberal (Stuart Mill), the agonistic (Hannah Arendt), nor the discursive (J. Habermas) models of public space accounts for the disenfranchised groups which are engaged in everyday struggles to make their voices heard. Habermas’s conceptualization of the public sphere, for example, rests on the notion of a homogenizing consensus. In an ideal public sphere, Habermas argues, reason and rational debate should prevail. Habermas’s interpretation marginalizes groups and communities whose arguments are embedded in their life stories rather that in the principles of a normative model of reason. I also analyze the model of the plebeian sphere, as set by the Russian theorist M. Bakhtin. This model is closer to the reality of marginalized communities which every possible opening to engage the dominant system and the culture it mediates. However, Bakhtin’s model does not account for power relations within the plebeian sphere, and more particularly those which relate to the gender issue. This is what I try to accomplish in the final section of the chapter by incorporating feminist theory.

While I take note of the helpful insights which such theories bring, I end the chapter with the statement that cultural processes in post-traditional communities may be better studied from the perspective of communal
spheres than the notion of the public sphere. The notion of the communal sphere will allow an analysis of Moroccan post-traditional society from the perspective of a historically justifiable mechanism. This procedure will also make it possible to analyze the social and cultural dynamics on the basis of people's everyday practices and performances. Finally, the study of communal spheres will also make it possible to account for the contradictions which accompany the emergence of communities and group solidarities.
Chapter Two: 
On the Construction of the Public Sphere: 
History as an Absent Cause

In the previous chapter, I tried to reconstruct the dominant concepts which describe forms of social organization. The concepts of "modern," "post-modern," "post-industrial," "traditional," and "premodern" have been explored. I have reached the conclusion that none of the above concepts can effectively account for the transformations occurring in Moroccan society. One category of those concepts (modern, postmodern or post-industrial) was devised to explain the changes which the Western societal model has gone through over the last three centuries and is, therefore, the product of specific historical conjunctures which do not necessarily apply to other types of societies. The primary function of the other category (premodern, traditional or preindustrial) is to classify and identify non-Western forms of social organization, and thus, no matter how genuine the researcher's intentions may be, such concepts can not be entirely dissociated from the relations of dominance and control which characterize the West's attitude towards other societies. My choice of the concept of "post-tradition" is legitimated by the need to emphasize the specificity of the historical trajectory of Moroccan society and the desire to keep a subversive and resistant attitude to the body of Western social science research.

I had the opportunity to rehearse the concept of "post-tradition" on an international audience in a paper I presented at a conference on "Local and Global Culture" in Rabat, Morocco, November 1999. A few Moroccan researchers expressed their reservations about the use of this concept on the ground that the term "post" seems to address a line of "fashion" in Western social science research. There may be some truth in this claim. However, I maintain that the extensive use of the term "post" by Western thinkers does not make it inaccessible to a non-Western researcher. On the contrary, the use of "post" in this particular context is to be read as an act of resistance rather than "alienation." As I read it, the concept "post-tradition" foregrounds the organizing principles which are specific to the Moroccan society and, at the same time, implies that the historical unfolding of the Moroccan social

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organization does not necessarily need to yield forms of organization similar to those which Western societies have experienced. Further, and most importantly, my interest is primarily in the emancipatory potential that is latent in post-traditional practices. As a general rule, concepts are constructed ideas/ideals and as such, they are residues of commitments and expectations but also of apprehension and suspicion. In fact, the reliance on “concepts” for the definition of forms of social organization and ways of life is an arduous and hazardous endeavour which needs further clarification.

The quest for justice and equality is as much a discursive struggle which seeks to construct, influence, and institutionalize conceptually and cognitively the structural transformations which affect human societies as it is a recognition of the conditions, symbolic and material, in which those transformations can be experienced. The construction of an ideal is in itself an act with manifold implications since it bears directly on the relationship between theory and praxis. Societies and cultures have historically drawn on their constructed ideals for self-identification and to bestow “meanings” on the systems that regulate relations among group members. Myth, magic, ritual, art, religion, science, and technology are examples of constructed ideals which have organized the lifeworlds and systems of human societies from the most isolated and nomadic tribes to the post-modern virtual and cybernetic communities.

The elusive nature of the constructed ideal is to be located not as much in the possibilities of the ideal’s materialization in the “real world” (that should not be surprising since the ideal/idea and the real/material have historically stood at opposite extremes) as in the unconscious implications it entails in the interpretation and communication of social reality. In this respect, it should be noted that one of the functions of constructed ideals is to legitimize the nature of current social relations and to homogenize conflicts and contradictions which are perceived as a threat to the stability of social order. Moreover, all theories nurse a germ of the ideal and utopian and the only way to bring the idealized theoretical threads to inform our understanding of the past, present, and the course of future cultural practices is to historicize theory, not in the sense of a mere enumeration of the contextual imperatives which helped in its shaping, but along the lines of Fredric Jameson’s revised formulation in which “history” is defined:
'not' as text, not a narrative, master or otherwise, but that, as an absent cause, it is inaccessible to us except in textual form, and that our approach to it and to the Real itself necessarily passes through its prior textualization, its narrativisation in the political unconscious.\textsuperscript{1}

As "an absent cause," history retains the tension that every act of textualization or narrativization involves and, that tension, it is worth emphasizing, is an offshoot of a politically conscious or unconscious attempt to accommodate social contradictions and to construct the nature of the relations of production in such a way that a set of particular interests is fulfilled.

It is from this perspective that I set out in this chapter to analyze some of the organizing principles which have informed the formation of lifeworld and systems in the Western society since the emergence of the nation-state. I will be looking more closely at some of the most influential conceptualizations of "the public sphere." As I have noted earlier, the concept of the public sphere and its derivatives have generated heated debates among academics and policy makers not only in Western societies but in countries struggling to define a more just form of social organization. Seyla Benhabib has summarized the implications of the debate on the public and the public sphere as follows:

The struggle over what gets included in the public agenda is itself a struggle for justice and freedom. The distinction between the social and the political makes no sense in the modern world, not because all politics has become administration and because the economy has become the quintessential public, as Hannah Arendt thought, but primarily because the struggle to make something public is a struggle for justice.\textsuperscript{2}


\textsuperscript{2} Seyla Benhabib, "Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Yurgen Habermas" in Craig Calhoun, ed., \textit{Habermas and the Public Sphere}, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992, p. 79.
However, a number of assumptions seem to underline this debate. First, discussions on the organizing social principles tend to take for granted the fact that justice and emancipation are intrinsic to the “public” and “public sphere” concepts and that what is required is the institutionalization of a structure capable of allowing the emergence of such a potential. Second, the homogenizing and hegemonizing potential in the dominant interpretations of those concepts is often ignored or overlooked. Even well-meaning theorists seem to overlook the fact that the visibility of some issues in the public sphere is often synonymous with the displacement of equally important issues from public agenda. As a matter of fact, there must be no preselection or hierarchization of the issues submitted for public conversation. Third, as articulated, the concepts of the public and public sphere displace the issues of power relations and means of production which are decisive criteria in determining who gets what on the floor for debate in the public sphere. As a result, groups and communities are excluded from participation either because they do not have the means to make their grievances heard or because they are unable to meet the requirements of a predefined normative model for debate. In addition, if we take into consideration the role of mainstream media in agenda setting, we realize how practically difficult it is for the disempowered to influence the course of public debate. Furthermore, in non-Western societies, the concepts of the public and public sphere are usually imported and consumed as irreproachable ideals of equality and justice.

My method of inquiry in this chapter integrates an interest in the specific articulations of individual thinkers and a concern in the general developments of the theoretical systems which sought to give meaning and shape to the emergent social structure of the nation-state. In the first section, I take the writings of the influential eighteenth-century French philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau as a primary reference to argue that the conceptualizations of the public sphere which accompanied the emergence of the nascent nation-state were predominantly informed by patriarchal and bourgeois ideologies, and consequently, remained biased against women and the poor. The emergence of a new economic system led to the rise of a new dominant social class which used the ideals of the public realm to protect its property and public approval to legitimize wealth accumulation.
In the second section, I adopt Seyla Benhabib's differentiation of the three models of public space. However, while I consider Hannah Arendt and Yurgen Habermas the main theorists of the agonistic and discursive models of public space, I take John Stuart Mill, rather than Bruce Ackerman, as the main spokesperson of the liberal conceptualizations of the public sphere. My choice of these three philosophers is justified by the wide and influential contribution they have made to the conceptualization of public space and public sphere theories.

In the first part of this section, I argue that Mill's liberal interpretation of the public sphere yields a theory of society which privileges the individual at the expense of communities. In fact, Mill's insights on the importance of the freedom of opinion are impaired by his unjustified fear of a tyranny of the majority and the horror of mass society. Overall, Mill's liberal theory is exclusively grounded in the subjective consciousness of the individual, and consequently, can not account for the collective interests of groups and communities.

In the second part, I argue that Arendt's interpretation of public space is largely homogeneous and exclusive. Arendt idealizes the Greek polis and attributes the decline of public space to the rise of the social realm. However, the clear-cut distinction between the public and the private realms on which Arendt's idealization of the polis rests is a homogenizing practice which privileges a small elite and marginalizes groups and communities because of their gender, race or class identities. In addition, in Arendt's reading, public space comes across as an arena where participants vie only for acclaim.

In the third part of the second section, I concentrate on Habermas's outline of the bourgeois public sphere to show that his theory is not only impaired by the overriding thrust of idealism in which it is framed but that the notion of consensus he advocates is predominantly homogenizing because of the exclusive criteria he sets for his model of debate. Habermas's insistence on the rationalist model and his ignorance of gender and class issues make his public sphere inaccessible to large segments of the population. In addition, his theory perpetuates the traditional distinction between public and private spheres and overlooks the importance of the playful elements of speech and

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performance in the construction and communication of lifeworlds and worldviews.

In the third section, I analyze the characteristics of the plebeian sphere as defined in the work of M. Bakhtin. I argue that Bakhtin's interpretation opens up new directions in the understanding of the politics of cultural practices and the mechanisms through which the disenfranchised groups in society develop and express their resistance to the dominant structure. Though the notion of the plebeian sphere is more helpful in the interpretation of the Moroccan spatial practices I consider in the second part of this thesis, I argue against any idealization of plebeian spheres since they are themselves shot through with contradictions. In fact, while plebeian spheres mediate the building up of group solidarity, they also reproduce the contradictions which characterize society at large.

In the fourth section, I explore some post-bourgeois alternatives of the public sphere theory. In this respect, I review Negt and Kluge's notion of the proletarian sphere and John Downing's insight as to the importance of the notion of public realm/alternative public realm as a site for the study of social contradictions. Here, I argue that the incorporation of the feminist perspective provides a better understanding of the dynamics which characterize plebeian spheres. In this respect, I consider Nancy Fraser's contribution to the debate on the public sphere.

Finally, I need to say that though I focus on specific works of the aforementioned theorists, I also incorporate the interpretations of other thinkers to highlight particular arguments. The objective behind this historical reconstruction of the public sphere theory is to show that the emancipatory potential in post-traditional practices may not, after all, be recovered by a mere focus on theories developed in a specific historical context. On the contrary, the contribution of post-traditional theory and performance to the struggle of marginalized groups is also to be sought for in the organic concepts of "communities" and "communal spheres." This last issue will be dealt with in the next chapter.

A. The Public Sphere as a Social Contract

Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *The Social Contract* (first published in 1762) constitutes a major attempt to construct conceptually a societal model (a new
“social contract”) which could facilitate the realization of the nation-state and the transition from a feudal to a “republican” mode of governance.¹ The fundamental problematic of the social contract, as Rousseau identifies it, is

[how] to find a form of association which will defend the person and goods of each member with the collective force of all, and under which each individual, while uniting himself with others, obeys no one but himself, and remains as free as before (Rousseau, 1978, p. 60).

This problematic is founded on an “ideal” which proposes to construct a system of institutions in which the desires of the individual subject and an imagined social will could develop a paradoxical partnership in which the “affirmation” of one is dependent upon the “negation” of the other and the rush to wealth accumulation could be mitigated by a consideration of the interests of the community.²

The implication of this condition demands an active involvement of individual citizens while at the same time presupposes a willingness on their part to alienate their desires in the face of a transcendent general interest. The “alienation” of the individual is viewed as a prerequisite for the affirmation of the “general will” (volonté générale):


² Hannah Arendt approvingly cites Gunnar Myrdal (The Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory, 1953) who claims that it was liberal utilitarianism and not socialism that invented the “communistic fiction” about the “unity of society.” Then, she goes on to argue that the “difference between Marx and his forerunners was only that he took the reality of conflict, as it presented itself in the society of his time, as seriously as the hypothetical fiction of harmony; he was right in concluding that the “socialization of man” would produce automatically a harmony of all interests, and was only more courageous than his liberal teachers when he proposed to establish in reality the “communistic fiction” underlying all economic theories.” Though Arendt’s hypothesis about the “origin” of the “communistic fiction” may be historically valid, the difference between Marx and his forerunners is certainly more than one of “courage;” the difference is to be located in the theorists’ radical visions of the approach to the societal system as a whole as well as in the choices and commitments they made in the ongoing social conflict and struggle (Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition, Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1958, p. 44).
Each one of us puts into the community his person and all his powers under the supreme direction of the general will; and as a body, we incorporate every member as an indivisible part of the whole" (Rousseau, 1978, p. 61).

The blueprint of Rousseau's social contract is underlined by its conciliatory tone which mostly seeks to preserve the coherence of the subject’s identity and property (to “defend the person and goods of each member”) without challenging the structural edifice of the “whole” which is delimited by the dynamics of material production and the nature of relations it generates.1 His is an attempt to prevent an anticipated division between the inner world of subjective consciousness and the material repercussions of the emerging new economic system. The growing conflicts and contradictions between the subject’s desires and wish-fulfillment and the accumulated frustration and repression the “logic of content” creates, would eventually lead to the fragmentation of the subjective experience and the atomization and abstraction of the inner world of consciousness.2 The fragmented postmodern narrative seems to be a logical consequence of the fracture already felt by the eighteenth-century subject.

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1 The notion of promise (give/fulfill/break a promise) is constantly present in the margins of the term “contract” (“contract” is defined in legal textbooks as “the legal enforcement of a promise”). Arendt makes the point that the faculty to make and keep promises serves as the “remedy for unpredictability, for the chaotic uncertainty of the future;” she then admirably argues that “[without] being bound to the fulfillment of promises, we would never be able to keep our identities; we would be condemned to wander helplessly and without direction in the darkness of each man’s lonely heart, caught in its contradictions and equivocalities - a darkness which only the light shed over the public realm through the presence of others, who confirm the identity between the one who promises and the one who fulfills, can dispel” (Arendt, The Human Condition, 1958, p. 237).

2 Fredric Jameson defines “the logic of content” as the overall conditions which define the totality of social experience and recover the historical objectivity of the text. The “logic of content” is a “combinatoire” which allows the coexistence of the separate signs which form the system including substance and form, base and superstructure, langue and parole, ideology and utopia, symbolic interpretations and modes of production, thought and performance, body and mind, individual experience and collective formations. In his own words, the “logic of content” is “the semantic raw materials of social life and language, the constraints of determinate social contradictions, the conjunctures of social class, the historicity of structures of feeling and perception and ultimately of bodily experience, the contemporal rhythms of historicity.” (Fredric Jameson, 1981, The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1991, p. 147); see also his Marxism and Form, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1971, pp. 327-359.
The concept of equality in Rousseau's public sphere marginalizes all types of conflict and contradiction which are inevitably generated in the process of the affirmation of the "general will." His social vision runs along similar lines to the ancient Greeks' in whose city-states, as Arendt phrases it:

To belong to the few 'equals' (homoioi) meant to be permitted to live among one's peers; but the public realm itself, the polis, was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others to show through unique deeds and achievements that he was the best of all (aien aristeuein) (Arendt, 1958, p. 41).

Rousseau is aware that the norms and conventions which the modern Europe is attempting to institutionalize are historically unprecedented. The elimination of the pyramidal view which imposes a uniform vision of society and the universe also implies that more space is created for the possibilities of contestation of the secular social order. However, Rousseau could still turn to the new sciences to support a theory that enforces social order. He seems to have found such a vision in the mechanical view of society which premises the State as the head of the societal system whose duty is to anticipate any emergent or potential social friction:

The general will is rarely the will of all, and the public force is always less than the sum of the private forces, so that in the mechanism of the State there is an equivalent of friction in machines, which one must know how to reduce to the least possible amount and which must at least be calculated and subtracted in advance from the total force, so that the means used will be exactly proportionate to the effect desired (Geneva Manuscript, Book I, chapter IV, p. 168).

The State builds on the principle of "the general will" to win legitimacy as the preserver of a frictionless social surface. Thus, the anticipated "general will" is transformed into a modern form of a collective ritual through which citizens anoint the emerging institutions of the nation-state. However, while the principle of the "general will" operates fundamentally at the level of a
perceived reality, the nation-state has historically proved to be very effective at developing procedural forms to coopt the existing material conditions, not only through its legislative and executive privileges but also through the use of disciplinary power, to anchor and administer its own interests. Moreover, its alliance with capital and the bourgeois class has led to the sedimentation of inherited loci of power and domination on the basis of gender, class, and race boundaries. The inhumanities practiced by imperialism and colonialism could now draw on the fiction of the “general will” for acceptance and legitimacy.¹

Rousseau’s paradigm is better read in light of the ideology of patriarchy, the dominant ideal of the eighteenth century Europe. While his proposed contract seems to presuppose an active participation of the public, it conceptualizes a public sphere that can materialize only at the expense of the fossilization of already existent inequalities in the private sphere:

For several reasons derived from the nature of things, the father and mother should not be equal; rather there must be a single

¹ Hannah Arendt traces the origins of imperialism to the political emancipation of the bourgeoisie and the growth of capitalist economy which the framework of the nation-state could no longer contain. She distinguishes between conquest and expansion. She argues that conquest has "a unifying principle" while expansion is a political innovation that came into existence with the emergence of the nation-state. However, in the case of a conquest, expansion which is "based upon a homogeneous population's active consent to its government ("le plebiscite de tous les jours") [...] would [...] have to assimilate rather than to integrate, to enforce consent rather than justice, that is, to degenerate into tyranny" (H. Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, San Diego and New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979, p. 125). In Curzon: The Last Phase 1919-1925 (1934), Harold Nicolson makes a similar point when discussing British policy in Egypt. He states that the “justification of our presence in Egypt remains based, not upon the defensible right of conquest, or on force, but upon our own belief in the element of consent. That element, in 1919, did not in any articulate form exist. It was dramatically challenged by the Egyptian outburst of March 1919” (quoted in H. Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, 1979, pp. 126-127). Edward Said, however, implicates the entire structure of the political and social European system by arguing that colonialism and imperialism should not be explained only by a commitment to profit; there was “a commitment in constant circulation and recirculation, which, on one hand, allowed decent men and women to accept the notion that distant territories and their native peoples should be subjugated, and, on the other, replenished metropolitan energies so that these decent people could think of the Imperium as a protracted, almost metaphysical obligation to rule subordinate, inferior, or less advanced peoples. We must not forget that there was very little domestic resistance to [the great Western empires], although they were very frequently established and maintained under adverse and even disadvantageous conditions” (Edward Said, Cultural Imperialism, 1993, p. 10).
government, and when opinions are divided, there must be a dominant voice that decides. Second, however slight the incapacitations peculiar to the wife are thought to be, since they are always an inactive period for her, this is sufficient reason to exclude her from privacy, because when the balance is perfectly equal, the smallest thing is enough to tip it. Furthermore, the husband should oversee his wife's conduct. Third, children should obey their father, at first through necessity, later through gratitude [...] Fourth, as regards domestic servants, they too owe him their services in return for the livelihood he gives them [...] I do not speak of slavery, because it is contrary to nature and nothing can authorize it (Geneva Manuscript, Book I, chap. V, p. 170).

Rousseau's vision does not incorporate a critique of the ideology of the inherited normative social model. The laws of the private sphere find legitimacy in the metaphysical "logic" of "the nature of things" which seeks to interpret social contradictions as an inevitable outcome of a hierarchical order imposed by "nature" (outside the sphere and influence of society). Thus, the implementation of the anticipated autonomous and liberated public sphere is generically bound by the asymmetric power relations that define its counterpart. Rousseau does not claim that the institution of the State should be structured upon the example of the family. While he allows the father to follow his "natural inclinations" and "consult his heart," he strongly warns the magistrate against following anything but "the public reason, which is the law" (Rousseau, 1978, p. 117). However, the fact is that he still writes under the unchallenged view that distinguishes between "individual maintenance" as the man's duty and "species survival" as the woman's task. As Arendt argues:

both of these natural functions, the labor of man to provide nourishment and the labor of the woman in giving birth, were subject to the same urgency of life. Natural community in the
household therefore was born of necessity, and necessity ruled over all activities performed in it.¹

Rousseau’s interpretation of the emergent social order remains an expression of the patriarchal ideal at the moment of its re-articulation into a bourgeois pre-capitalist society.

Walter Lippmann makes a similar argument when discussing the historical development of democratic practices in the US. His point is that there is a separation between the political which is institutionally administered and the cultural which remains the space of social contradictions:

The stereotype of democracy controlled the visible government; the corrections, the exceptions and adaptations of the American people to the real facts of their environment have had to be invisible, even when everybody knew all about them. It was only the words of the law, the speeches of the politicians, the platforms, and the formal machinery of administration that have had to conform to the pristine image of democracy.²

Lippmann seems to argue that the systems of modern society have played an important role in the implementation of the democratic principles. The implication in this view is that political systems and cultural life-worlds have not developed simultaneously and the cleavage between them hints to a subtle interpretation of public vs private. As I read him, Lippmann asserts that it is the state, through its various institutional branches (the judiciary, the political and the administrative) which distinguishes the public from the private. This strategy enables the state to enact patriarchal ideology and impose itself as the mediating code in the reconstruction and reorganization of social life.³

³ I am using “mediation” along the lines of Jameson’s interpretation where it is defined as “the invention of an analytic terminology or code which can be applied equally to two or more structurally distinct objects or sectors of being ... to restore, at least, methodologically, the lost unity of social life, and demonstrate that widely distant elements of the social totality are
A direct historical outcome of the clear-cut division between the spheres of the public and the private is that this division has further cemented the bias against the public woman. Since antiquity, men have buttressed the idea that visibility in the public space exacts a fierce and merciless struggle that can be detrimental to women's "good morals" and sense of "decency," ideologically constructed as prerequisites for a woman's "dignity" and "self-esteem." The framing of public debate in an ethics of masculinity prioritizes the spirit of power and competition in the life-world and restricts access to representation in the public sphere:

Study women [Rousseau proposes as an answer to a rhetorical question he asks about the possibility of understanding men]. This maxim is general, and up to this point everybody will agree with me. But I add that there are no good morals for women outside of a withdrawn and domestic life; if I say that the peaceful care of the family and the home are their lot, that the dignity of their sex consists in modesty, that shame and chasteness are inseparable from decency for them, that when they seek for men's looks they are already letting themselves be corrupted by them, and that any woman who shows herself off disgraces herself; I will be immediately attacked by this philosophy of a day which is born and dies in the corner of a big city and wishes to smother the cry of nature and the unanimous voice of humankind.¹

The woman is not only an-other "mysterious" being who needs to be studied, ordered, and categorized along the principles of the male's recognized system of knowledge; she is man's inseparable and dialectical counterpole whose existence is necessary for his self-recognition and self-identity. But Rousseau cannot allow her presence to take a material and visible form in public space for that could prove to be too risky a challenge for the male's constructed ego to deal with. In Emile, he explains that a woman's empire is "of softness, of

address, of complacency; her commands are caresses; her menaces are tears."

As Linda Kerber demonstrates:

This is not hyperbole: in Rousseau’s social order, women have moral and physical relationships to men, but not political ones, nor do women have substantial relationships to any women other than their mothers. Rousseau was explicit. The shift from the generic to the literal he occurs before The Social Contract has scarcely begun [...] After that obvious slight to mothers, Rousseau explained the General Will in specific, masculine terms; men alone were expected to display disinterested civic spirit. In Emile Rousseau took as self-evident that it is ‘the good son, the good father, the good husband, that constitute the good citizen.’

Seen in the light of the structural social transformations summoned by the aggressiveness of the emergent economic system, Rousseau’s opposition to women’s publicness and to the feminist philosophy can be read as an example of capitalism’s early maneuvering strategies to contain and co-opt the rising social contradictions. The sphere of the family to which Rousseau wants the woman withdrawn and where she would be within immediate access to the male gaze, constitutes the space where social contradictions originate, as the Marxist approach to history has shown.

3 Marx has stated that the modern family “contains in germ not only slavery (servitus) but also serfdom, since from the beginning it is related to agricultural services. It contains in miniature all the contradictions which later extend throughout society and its state” (quoted in F. Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, trans. by Michelle Barrett, London: Penguin Books, 1986, p. 88). Expanding on Marx’s argument, Engels explains that ‘[the] first class opposition that appears in history coincides with the development of the antagonism between man and woman in monogamous marriage, and the first class oppression coincides with that of the female sex by the male. Monogamous marriage was a great historical step forward; nevertheless, together with slavery and private wealth, it opens the period that has lasted until today in which every step is also a step backward, in which prosperity and development of some is won through the misery and frustration of others. It is the cellular form of civilized society in which the nature of the oppositions and contradictions fully active in that society can be already studied” (F. Engels, The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State, 1986, p. 96).
Once the horizon of Rousseau's social theory is put in perspective, the broader picture of the nature of "association" in the public sphere he calls for emerges as structurally biased because it does not seek a radical challenge of the dominant modes of social mediation (male-female relationships, class structure, and ethnic identity). On the contrary, his notion is embedded in an analytical system that remains largely obedient to the feudal mode of mediation which it seeks to codify and accommodate to the form of the developing economic system and the nascent institutions of the nation-state. The relentless efforts to separate the spheres of labor (male/female and public/private) would lead to the autonomization of the private sphere and ultimately to the establishment of what Jameson calls "generic discontinuities" which would show up in later bourgeois society in the form of the public and the private, the psychological and the social; one could add to these binaries, reason and feeling, science and poetry, modernity and tradition, and the perceived discontinuity between the Occident and the Orient.¹

Rousseau's theory of public life and the public sphere is not "intuitively" conceptualized. His articulation of the social contract is informed by a full awareness of the feminist agenda (as revealed in a previous quote where he derisively refers to the feminist philosophy as "this philosophy of a day which is born and dies in the corner of a big city"). It is no surprise he provokes the ire of his contemporary public women and is specifically singled out for criticism for his anti-feminist attitudes.² Once this historical reality is foregrounded, it becomes possible to argue that the wholeness which he posits as the unifying principle of the subjective individual components is informed by the utopian dimension of patriarchy. The growing social stratification carried out on the basis of class division, labor division, the separation of public and private spheres would all be reinterpreted along the lines of the ideology of patriarchy which relies on a clear-cut distinction of class, gender, and race in the process of the distribution of authority and power.

In fact, as the master narrative of the French Revolution begins to unfold, the struggle over representation, as witnessed by some of the early events of

² See Joan B. Landes, Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution, 1988, especially the chapter entitled "Rousseau's Reply to Public Women."
the Revolution, takes the front-stage. The Constitution of 1791 uses the boundary of wealth to distinguish between active and passive citizens, which fact automatically disenfranchises the majority of women, slaves, and the working class who are considered as "passive" citizens.¹ The participation in the political process becomes accessible mostly to propertied and educated male individuals who exploit every opportunity to cement the alliance between the ideological order of patriarchy and the new order of the nation-state. An incident in which market women stormed a meeting of the Revolutionary Republican women to protest the enforcement of the law of the cockade was politically exploited to unleash a backlash against the perceived threat of women's involvement in public life; on October 30, 1793, the government declared all women's clubs and associations illegal.² Women's interests were construed as a direct threat to the ideals of the Revolution and the Republic. Speaking on behalf of the Committee of General Security, Andre Amar argued that:

[Women's] presence in popular societies [...] would give an active role in government to people more exposed to error and seduction... [women] are disposed by their organization to an over-excitation which would be deadly in public affairs and that interests of state would soon be sacrificed to everything which ardor in passions can generate in the way of error and disorder. Delivered over to the heat of the public debate, they would teach their children not love of country but hatreds and suspicions.³

What is at stake here is the orchestrated attempt to block women and the feminist discourse from influencing the process of the discursive formation of the nascent national state while naturalizing the alliance between the

¹ Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations* was published in 1776 and the modern sense of the term "class," as R. Williams has shown, dates back to 1772 (R. Williams, *Culture and Society*, London: The Hogarth Press, 1958, p. xv).

² The law of the cockade was proposed by the Society of Revolutionary Republican Women, a radical group exclusively for women, and decreed by the National Convention on September 21, 1793. The proposition required that all women wear the revolutionary tricolor cockade in public (see J. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution*, 1988, pp. 139-144).

masculinist discourse and the emerging political, economic, and social systems. The appropriation of public discourse is also a monopoly of the modes and media of representation and, thus, a possible claim of the subject’s desire in relation to language.¹ The masculinist discourse’s incessant attempts to dislodge women’s voice from public space is also to be interpreted as the male subject’s disguised obsession with the discourse of “seduction” and femininity. Suppressed desires, as psychoanalysis and post-structuralist theory have shown, do not radically leave the system of language but rather stay on the frontiers of discourse and take on different guises, usually in the form of symbols, awaiting possibilities of resurgence and reappearance. What should also be noted is the fact that the dominant and triumphant system of signs never seeks the complete destruction of its oppressed and subdued object for it needs it for its self-recognition and self-identity. A dislocated feminine discourse annexed to the domestic sphere remains an accessible component for its masculinist counterpart’s continuous search for self-definition, self-invigoration and self-empowerment.

The struggle over representation that accompanied the formation of public discourse was framed in such a way that feminine was not opposed to masculinist discourse but to public discourse and public life. The ideological implication of this distinct has generated a series of hindrances which have stood in the way of women’s participation in public life. The importance of Action (praxis) and Speech (lexis) for political power was already known to the Greeks (Aristotle’s bios Politikos).² A group’s control of public discourse

1 Michel Foucault has made this point in relation to the strategies through which the authority of discourse manifests and defines itself: “the property of discourse -in the sense of the right to speak, ability to understand, licit and immediate access to the corpus of already formulated statements, and the capacity to invest this discourse in decisions, institutions, or practices- is in fact confined (sometimes with the addition of legal sanctions) to a particular group of individuals; in the bourgeois societies that we have known since the sixteenth century, economic discourse has never been a common discourse (no more than medical or literary discourse, though in a different way) [...] this authority is [also] characterized by the possible positions of desire in relation to discourse: discourse may in fact be the place for a phantasmatic representation, an element of symbolization, a form of the forbidden, an instrument of derived satisfaction (this possibility of being in relation with desire is not simply the fact of the poetic, fictional or imaginary practice of discourse: the discourses on wealth, on language (langage), on nature, on madness, on life and death, and many others, perhaps, that are more abstract, may occupy very specific positions in relation to desire) (M. Foucault, The Archeology of Knowledge and the Discourse on Language, trans. by A. M. Sheridan Smith, New York: Pantheon Books, 1972, p. 68).

and representation significantly determines the share of political power and influence it exercises on public policy. Some of the most prominent women feminists who were committed to the struggle for women's civil and political rights compromised their gender identity by rejecting women's language on the ground that it was incompatible with the rigours of public debate and public life. Mary Wollstonecraft, for example, whose *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (published in 1790) constituted a manifest for women's political and civil rights, was led to accept the male's theory that women's nature was different from men's and that women's language was not the appropriate mode of mediation in the public sphere:

I shall disdain to cull my phrases or polish my style; - I aim at being useful, and sincerity will render me unaffected; for wishing rather to persuade by the force of my arguments, than dazzle by the elegance of my language, I shall not waste my time in rounding periods, or in fabricating the turgid bombast of artificial feelings, which coming from the head, never reach the heart. - I shall be employed about things, not words! - and, anxious to render my sex more respectable members of society, I shall try to avoid that flowery diction which has slid from essays into novels, and from novels into familiar letters and conversation.¹

In this passage, Wollstonecraft shows that she has assimilated the politics of the male logos. She admits the superiority of argument over conversation and action over words, redeems utilitarianism and satirizes romanticism, and legitimizes rational discourse at the expense of flowery speech. Though Wollstonecraft did not intend by this statement a retreat from public debate, her legitimation of a discriminatory order of human thought and action shows that acceptance and participation in the public sphere and public debate is conditional upon the fulfillment of the requirements set by gender and bourgeois politics. After all, as Linda Kerber puts it, Rousseau's "general will" is "a concept without gender" constructed for male production.²

assessment of women's inheritance of the Enlightenment, Linda Kerber forcefully concludes:

We are left with an intellectual gap. The great treatises of the Enlightenment, which criticized and helped to change the attitudes toward the state, offered no guidance to women analyzing their relationship to liberty or civic virtue. Even Rousseau, one of the most radical political theorists of an age famous for its ability to examine inherited assumptions, failed to examine his assumptions about women. Ought a woman dare to think? Might a woman accept 'the loneliness of autonomy'? To be alone, in fact, was to be male; women were invariably described, even by Locke, in relationship to others. Condorcet occasionally imagined an autonomous woman, but for Locke, Montesquieu, Rousseau, and Kames, women existed only as mothers and wives. If Fred Weinstein and Gerard M. Platt correctly define the Enlightenment as the expression of “a desire to end the commitments to passivity and dependence in the area of politics,” women were not a part of this reform.¹

Seyla Benhabib reaches a similar conclusion which confirms the marginalization of women in the Enlightenment theories of the public sphere. She decries the gendered division of spheres of action which has legitimized social injustice against women. The Enlightenment vision of social organization was imagined along the lines of a world structure perpetuated by centuries of patriarchal hegemony and economic dominance. In Benhabib's own words: "[the] sphere of justice from Hobbes through Locke and Kant is regarded as the domain where independent, male heads of household transact with one another, while the domestic-intimate sphere is put beyond the pale of justice and restricted to the reproductive and affective needs of the bourgeois pater familias."²

By not radically challenging the opposition feminine versus public discourse, early women activists gave up a space, and consequently, a

determinate advantage to the male ideology to set the public agenda and shape public debate. This partly explains why, way into the nineteenth century, women would still be writing under male pseudonyms for their works to gain public acceptance.\textsuperscript{1} When the academic institutions formalized the division of knowledge through the process of autonomization of disciplines and the distinction between areas of research, women were mostly encouraged to specialize in literature, a discipline perceived as compatible with their sentimental nature. Moreover, even when literature was taken as an object of study, the positivist perspective which was the dominant approach in most universities wasted no time to domesticate what was perceived as a potential oppositional discourse by institutionalizing an explication de texte approach instead of the absolutist approach which constituted the normative model in literary publications and debates in literary salons.\textsuperscript{2}

Today, though there may be a difference in degree, women's participation in the public sphere is still hindered by numerous political, economic, legal, social, and cultural obstacles in both post-traditional and post-modern societies. The struggle for women's publicness and resistance to the nature of relations en-gendered by the nation-state (public vs private) still figures high on the feminist agenda of the women's movement. As J. Landes argues, it is "equally suspect" to either celebrate "post-modernity" or claim that the "modernity" "inaugurated in part by the French Revolution has 'not yet' exhausted its liberatory potential." Landes is right to call for a radical critique of the historical development of the public sphere for:

\begin{quote}
In the historically oriented critique of the public sphere [...] this claim can never be redeemed, for the women's movement cannot 'take possession' of a public sphere that has been enduringly reconstructed along masculinist lines. Accordingly,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{1} The French writer Aurore Dupin (George Sand), for example, did not only write under a male pseudonym but had also to disguise as a man to be able to attend the opera which was not open to the female audience (see James Winders, Gender. Theory. and the Canon. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1991, p. 65).

neither side in the debate between the partisans of a post- or an unfulfilled modernity can be unequivocally joined by feminists.\textsuperscript{1}

Seyla Benhabib makes a similar point when she argues that:

Any theory of the public, public sphere, and publicity presupposes a distinction between the public and the private. These are the terms of a binary opposition. What the women’s movement and feminist theorists in the last two decades have shown, however, is that traditional modes of drawing this distinction have been part of a discourse of domination that legitimizes women’s oppression and exploitation in the private realm.\textsuperscript{2}

For Benhabib, any struggle against oppression must begin by a redefinition of “what has previously been considered private, nonpublic, and nonpolitical issues as matters of public concern, as issues of justice, as sites of power that need discursive legitimation.” She points out that this legitimation is to be sought outside the liberal model whose claim to “neutrality” leaves it with little room to account for the women’s movement, the ecology movements, and new-ethnic identity movements which all “follow the same logic” (Benhabib, 1992, p. 84).

In this section, I have endeavoured to show that the social contract as conceptualized in the Enlightenment philosophy legitimized power relations along the lines of gender, class, and ethnic identities. My focus on the philosophy of Jean-Jacques Rousseau is justified by the influential impact his writings have had both on his contemporary and modern thinkers and decision makers. In Morocco, the term “social contract” -recurrent in the discourse of both government officials, trade unions representatives, and intellectuals- is often used to wield a homogenizing consensus. The objective of a historical reconstruction of the preliminary conceptualizations of the public sphere is not to enumerate the stages a theory of the public sphere has


been through. On the contrary, the purpose of such a reconstruction is to trace the injustices which lie embedded in the discourse on the public sphere and make them very visible so that our present and future commitments could be made without ambiguities. This is how the past can inform our present and future commitments. Feminists and social movements activists have called for a radicalization of the public sphere theory and the normative societal model it has generated. For post-traditional theorists, this task is of even greater urgency. The struggle over spaces of representation requires that prospective openings be sought in alternative models which can accommodate the needs of emergent communities and groups. In the section that follows, I look at dominant models of public space and public sphere.

Figure 7: Experiencing public space: Performance and spectatorship in a square in Marrakech.

B. Dominant Models of Public Space and Public Sphere

The concept of the public sphere automatically summons the image of a public space, a site between the private realm of the family and the institutions of the state where individuals, grouped as a public, could construct their identities and engage into debates about matters of general
interest. Jurgen Habermas's seminal work *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* has brought the concept of the public sphere center-stage in academic and policy-making debates.¹ Over the last four decades, the public sphere concept has been the subject of interpretations from different perspectives. In contemporary studies on culture, media, society, law, and philosophy, the public sphere has become an important site for the analysis of the public formation and organization via information transmission and exchange and deliberative debate. Though Habermas's theory has largely been criticized for its idealism, its emphasis on rationality and its exclusive concern with the bourgeois public, his analysis remains significant in that it has highlighted the importance of public space as a metaphorical site which mediates between the individual and the state and provides the opportunity for social and group conflict to be peacefully resolved.

Seyla Benhabib has sorted out three conceptions of public space which correspond to the Western political thought and which she defines as the agonistic, the legalistic, and the discursive. The conception of the "agonistic space" is in line with the "civic virtue" tradition of which Hannah Arendt's political thought is a representative. The view of the "legalistic" model of public space refers to the liberal tradition which Benhabib finds in the writings of Bruce Ackerman. The proponents of the legalistic model of public space, as Benhabib puts it, "make of the problem of a 'just and stable public order' the center of their political thinking" (Benhabib, 1992, p. 73). The third conception refers to "the discursive public space" model which Benhabib sees implicit in the works of Habermas. Benhabib's analysis leads her to conclude that:

Arendt's agonistic model is at odds with the sociological reality of modernity, as well as with modern political struggles for justice. The liberal model of public space transforms the political dialogue of empowerment far too quickly into a juridical discourse about the right. The discourse model is the only one that is compatible both with the general social trends of our

societies and with the emancipatory aspirations of new social movements, like the woman's movement. The radical proceduralism of this model is a powerful criterion for demystifying discourses of power and their implicit agendas. However, in a society where reproduction is going public, practical discourse will have to be "feminized." Such feminization of practical discourse will mean first and foremost challenging, from the standpoint of their gender context and subtext, unexamined normative dualisms as those of justice and the good life, norms and values, interests and needs (Benhabib, 1992, p. 95).

Though Benhabib's focus is restricted to the normative theory of Western political thought, I find interesting the distinctions she makes of the models of public space. In what follows, I borrow Benhabib's models of the agonistic, the legalistic, and discursive public space to analyze the works of Hannah Arendt, Stuart Mill, and Jurgen Habermas. My purpose is not only to show that the three models are at odds with the reality of the post-traditional society but to argue that, because of their exclusive framing, the three models can not possibly account for the complexities which characterize people's everyday performance. Benhabib's attempt to redeem the Habermasian model through the incorporation of feminist theory must not distract us from the substantial flaws which underline Habermas's conceptualization of public space, and which at bottom, has more affinities with the bourgeois liberal model than what Benhabib admits.

1. John Stuart Mill: A Liberal in the Public Sphere

The relevance of John Stuart Mill's philosophy to the conceptualization of the public sphere lies in his interpretation of liberty and defense of the freedom of individual thought and opinion. In On Liberty (originally published in 1859), Mill's concern is "civil, or social liberty: the nature and limits of the power which can be legitimately exercised by society over the individual."¹ Mill's biggest worry is not the tyranny of the state, for he

believes the European states have acquired enough political liberties and constitutional checks to shield themselves against the despotism of political rulers. More important for Mill is what he sees as a "tyranny of the majority" over the individual. The legalistic model of public space he constructs is an attempt to make "the fitting adjustment between individual independence and social control." He believes that he dividing line between the individual and society must be clearly drawn:

Protection, therefore, against the tyranny of the magistrate is not enough; there needs protection also against the tyranny of the prevailing opinion and feeling, against the tendency of society to impose, by other means than civil penalties, its own ideas and practices as rules of conduct on those who dissent from them; to fetter the development and, if possible, prevent the formation of any individuality not in harmony with its ways, and compel all characters to fashion themselves upon the model of its own. There is a limit to the legitimate interference of collective opinion with individual independence; and to find that limit, and maintain it against encroachment, is as indispensable to a good condition of human affairs as protection against political despotism (Mill, 1975, p. 7).

Mill locates three domains in which liberty must be preserved if society is to be free: "the inward domain of consciousness," "liberty of tastes and pursuits," and the "freedom to unite for any purpose not involving harm to others" (Mill, 1975, p. 16). As for freedom of opinion, he finds four arguments to account for its necessity: the only way for us to determine whether an opinion is true is to express it, even a wrong opinion contains some truth in it, the adoption of an uncontested opinion, even if it is the "whole truth," will be taken as a prejudice, and finally, the meaning of an uncontested opinion is likely to be lost or enfeebled (Mill, 1975, p. 64). The validity of an opinion is determined by its usefulness and since the "usefulness of an opinion is itself matter of opinion," the only way to legitimize the truth of an opinion is to allow the opinion to defend itself:

The usefulness of an opinion is itself matter of opinion - as disputable, as open to discussion as much as the opinion itself. There is the same need of an infallible judge of opinions to decide an opinion to be noxious as to decide it to be false, unless the opinion condemned has full opportunity of defending itself [...] The truth of an opinion is part of its utility [...] There can be no fair discussion of the question of usefulness when an argument so vital may be employed on one side, but not on the other. And in point of fact, when law or public feeling do not permit the truth of an opinion to be disputed, they are just as little tolerant of a denial of its usefulness. The utmost they allow is an extension of its absolute necessity, or of the positive guilt of rejecting it (Mill, 1975, pp. 27-28).

J. S. Mill’s liberal approach to the public sphere bears evidence of the limits of the philosophical vision of Modernism: “If all mankind minus one were of one opinion, and only one person were of the contrary opinion, mankind would be no more justified in silencing that one person, than he, if he had the power, would be justified in silencing mankind” (Mill, 1975, p. 21). His proposal for an unregulated public sphere downplays historical consciousness in favor of a subjective inclination that marginalizes and reduces the temporal and spatial determinants to the circumscribed horizon of the “now/here.” Articulated in the shadow of an assumed tyranny of the majority, Mill’s theory of society displaces material conditions and the type of relations they generate and foregrounds a quasi-metaphysical definition of truth:

It is the duty of governments, and of individuals, to form the truest opinions they can; to form carefully, and never impose them upon others unless they are quite sure of being right [...] complete liberty of contradicting and disproving our opinion is the very condition which justifies us in assuming its truth for purposes of action; and on no other terms can a being with human faculties have any rational assurance of being right (Mill, 1975, p. 23).
Mill's fear of a tyranny of opinion seems to stem from a concern to open up a space where minority voices, for example, can contest the will of the majority. However, his view that the legalistic mode, and its twin principles of neutrality and objectivity, should be upheld as warranty for the institution of justice and mediation of social conflicts overlooks the hegemonic dimension intrinsic to discursive representations. Moreover, his reading of discourse in terms of "good faith vs bad faith" rather than from the perspective of ideology and power relations generates a theory of justice that remains politically and ethically biased.

Moreover, the method he proposes to validate the truth of a claim remains tied up to a simplified approach to dialectics whereby the exposition of binaries is enough to produce the desired synthesis:

> Unless opinions favorable to democracy and to aristocracy, to property and to equality, to cooperation and to competition, to luxury and to abstinence, to sociality and individuality, to liberty and discipline, and all the other standing antagonisms of practical life, are expressed with equal freedom and enforced and defended with equal talent and energy, there is no chance of both elements obtaining their due; one scale is sure to go up, and the other down. Truth, in the great practical concerns of life, is so much a question of the reconciling and combining of opposites that very few have minds sufficiently capacious and impartial to make the adjustment with an approach to correctness, and it has to be made by the rough process of a struggle between combatants fighting under hostile banners (Mill, 1975, p. 58).

Mill's liberal marketplace of ideas is like a battlefield where opinions are in constant fight and struggle to prove their validity. However, at one level, such a utilitarian approach restricts the need for human communication and performance to argumentation and debate ignoring all other possible forms of everyday speech such as conversation, story-telling, gossip, chat, or play. At another level, Mill's interpretation constructs opinion as an abstract entity severed from the interests of its holder and the power relations which structure the community of participants. In addition, the abstract form of
compromise and reconciliation Mill imagines does not do justice to social contradictions. On the contrary, this form of compromise tends to serve privileged groups whose main interest is to preserve the status quo.

Mill can not conceive of radical alternatives to the concept of the public sphere. The limits of his project reside in his belief in a very simplified notion of truth. His vision remains centered around the idea that truth, and thus social stability and order, can be reached through a systematic juxtaposition of conflicting and paradoxical systems. The validity of a judgment is measured by the excess of quantitative information it provides rather than the historical reality it represents:

The [wise man’s] steady habit of correcting and completing his own opinion by collating it with those of others, so far from causing doubt and hesitation in carrying it into practice, is the only stable foundation of a just reliance on it; for, being cognizant of all that can, at least obviously, be said against him, and having taken up his position against all gainsayers [...] he has a right to think his judgment better than that of any person, or any multitude, who have not gone through a similar process (Mill, 1975, p. 25).

Likewise, “the real morality of public discussion” becomes a matter of:

not inferring these vices from the side which a person takes, though it be the contrary side of the question to our own; and giving merited honor to everyone, whatever opinion he may hold, who has calmness to see and honesty to state what his opponents and their opinions really are, exaggerating nothing to their discredit, keeping nothing back which tells, or can be supposed to tell, in their favor (Mill, 1975, pp. 65-67).

Finally, it is worth underlining that the limitations of Mill’s model are set not only by the organizing liberal principles with which he defines the public sphere but also by the flat out racist and prejudicial distinctions he makes between the Western subject and the “backward” Others who are not even worthy of consideration. He claims that:
we may leave out of consideration those backward states of society in which the race itself may be considered as in its nonage. The early difficulties in the way of spontaneous progress are so great that there is seldom any choice of means for overcoming them; and a ruler full of the spirit of improvement is warranted in the use of any expedients that will attain an end perhaps otherwise unattainable. Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement and the means justified by actually effecting that end. Liberty as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion. Until then, there is nothing for them but implicit obedience to an Akbar or a Charlemagne, if they are so fortunate as to find one. But as soon as mankind have attained the capacity of being guided to their own improvement by conviction or persuasion (a period long since reached in all nations with whom we need here concern ourselves), compulsion, either in the direct form or in that of pains and penalties for noncompliance, is no longer admissible as a means to their own good, and justifiable only for the security of others (Mill, 1975, p. 14).

Thus, in Mill’s philosophy, liberty and freedom are not universal human rights but the privilege of the Western individual. His defense of the legitimacy of despotism as a mode of government in dealing with “the barbarians” is a direct support of the colonial enterprise. Eventually, Mill’s conceptualization of liberty comes across as an abstract notion which is not grounded in social reality. Neither can it account for all the contradictions and power struggles which accompany the liberation of the public sphere. What is missing in the model outlined by Mill’s liberal theory is the conceptualization of the public sphere as a process. Liberty is not a privilege bestowed upon “the civilized” which they can use to perfect their skills of persuasion and argumentation. On the contrary, the liberation of the public sphere is an arduous struggle in which the disenfranchised groups and communities are involved. Contrary to what Mill believes, these
underprivileged groups do not see the “improvement” of their conditions through “free and equal discussion” but through a conflation of discursive styles and bodily performances and struggles. About one hundred years from the publication of Mill’s On Liberty (1859), Hannah Arendt makes a different diagnosis of the human condition in the modern age. In The Human Condition (1958), she argues that ours is an age in which “speech has lost its power” and the public realm has declined.¹

Hannah Arendt traces the rise of the public realm to the Greek “polis” which, “properly speaking, is not the city-state in its physical location” but “the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no

matter where they happen to be" (Arendt, 1958, p. 198). She posits speech and action as the founding principles of the human condition: "action and speech are surrounded by and in constant contact with the web of the acts and words of other men" (Arendt, 1958, p. 188). In the "polis," it is speech (lexis) which is privileged over action (praxis): "To be political, to live in a 'polis,' meant that everything was decided through words and persuasion and not through force and violence" (Arendt, 1958, p. 26). While the private realm is based in the household, the "polis" refers to the public or political realm. The public realm is the space of equality and freedom while the private realm is characterized by inequality because of the power and authority which the male head of the household enjoys. Equality and freedom in the public realm, as Arendt explains, are grounded in the subject's equality with one's peers and his freedom from "command." In the "polis," freedom means that one is free from the burden of worrying about the necessities of life and from ruling or being ruled by others. Conversely, the subject loses his freedom in the household because of the unequal relations among the household members. In Arendt's phrasing:

The 'polis' was distinguished from the household in that it knew only 'equals,' whereas the household was the center of the strictest inequality. To be free meant both not to be subject to the necessity of life or to the command of another and not to be in command oneself. It meant neither to rule nor to be ruled. Thus within the realm of the household, freedom did not exist, for the household head, its ruler, was considered to be free only in so far as he had the power to leave the household and enter the political realm, where all were equals. To be sure, this equality of the political realm has very little in common with our concept of equality: it meant to live among and to have to deal only with one's peers, and it presupposed the existence of 'unequals' who, as a matter of fact, were always the majority of the population in a city-state (Arendt, 1958, p. 32).

The "polis," then, is based on exclusivity. Slavery and property ownership relieve male individuals from the burden of worrying about material concerns and allow them to participate in the "polis" on an equal par with
their peers. On the contrary, the household is the sphere where material concerns are concealed and where the freedom of the male is jeopardized because of his authoritative position.

The exclusivity of the "polis" is characterized by the restricted number of individuals allowed to participate in it. Arendt believes that the Greeks knew that the expansion of the "polis" would entail the loss of equality and freedom. In this respect, Arendt seems to share Mill's fear of a tyranny of the majority:

The Greeks, whose city-state was the most individualistic and least conformable body politic known to us, were quite aware of the fact that the 'polis,' with its emphasis on action and speech, could survive only if the number of citizens remained restricted. Large numbers of people, crowded together, develop an almost irresistible inclination toward despotism, be this the despotism of a person or of majority rule (Arendt, 1958, p. 43).

The emphasis Arendt puts on the restricted number of participants in the "polis" and the importance of speech and action in this sphere is in line with her classification of the fundamental human activities into labour, the biological process which secures the survival of the individual, work, an artificially-constructed world through which the individual produces artifacts and commodities to bestow a "measure of permanence" on the futility of mortal life and the fleeing time, and action, the realm of political bodies and the "human condition of plurality" since it presupposes interaction among people. For Arendt, the decline of the "polis" is a logical consequence of the rise of society and the relegation of speech and action to the private sphere while simultaneously allowing material concerns to become the focal point of interest in the public realm.

From this standpoint, Arendt attributes the decline of the public realm to the rise of society and the emergence of a space which is neither public nor private. She believes that the rise of the social realm has led to an obliteration of the distinctive line between the public and the private spheres and, consequently, to the destruction of the "polis."
In our understanding, the dividing line [between the public and private realms, between the sphere of the 'polis' and the sphere of household and family] is entirely blurred, because we see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping. The scientific thought that corresponds to this development is no longer political science but 'national economy' or 'social economy' or Volkswirtschaft, all of which indicate a kind of 'collective housekeeping;' the collective of families economically organized into the facsimile of one super-human family is what we call "society," and its political form of organization is called "nation" (Arendt, 1958, pp. 28-29).

However, the social realm can also be interpreted as a more inclusive form of the "polis" whose premises are now accessible to hitherto excluded groups and communities. The distinction Arendt makes between the political and the social geographies of discourse is not warranted because social performance (including body performance) can carry acute political positions. Arendt obviously adopts an elitist interpretation of public discourse since her attitude implies that the effective functioning of the public sphere is possible only within restricted public spaces where a few men free from concerns about daily necessities can discourse and act to relieve themselves from "the futility" of human condition.

From this viewpoint, the "polis" is not as much a site where power relations are constructed and contested as it is "first of all," a "guarantee against the futility of individual life, the space protected against this futility and reserved for the relative permanence, if not immortality, of mortals" (Arendt, 1958, p. 56). It is also from this perspective that Arendt's anti-modernist stand is to be explained. For her, public space has been transformed into a social realm due to an infinite expansion of private and intimate issues. Likewise, instead of work and action, the modern individual life is now centered around labour and consumption, two activities which, rather than securing permanence and continuity, further highlight the "futility" of human condition. She sees no hope in the consumer society which, though it has allowed humanity to approximate the old "ideal" of universal equality.
and prosperity, has radically altered the fundamental principles of the "vita activa" of human life:

The easier that life has become in a consumers' or labourers' society, the more difficult it will be to remain aware of the urges of necessity by which it is driven, even when pain and effort, the outward manifestations of necessity, are hardly noticeable at all. The danger is that such a society, dazzled by the abundance of its growing fertility and caught in the smooth functioning of a never-ending process, would no longer be able to recognize its own futility - the futility of a life which 'does not fix or realize itself in any permanent subject which endures after [its] labour is past' (Arendt, 1958, p.135).

Arendt, though, is right to note that even the modern notion of leisure no longer corresponds to the Greek understanding of skhole. She explains that unlike leisure, the skhole of antiquity was not related to "spare time" or to the phenomenon of consumption. On the contrary, it was "a conscious 'abstention from' all activities connected with mere being alive, the consuming activity no less than the laboring."1 With the loss of skhole, it is the contemplative dimension of the individual that is overshadowed.

Arendt's critique is actually directed at the capitalist mode of production which tends to construct individuals as a mass of consumers. In a mass society, Arendt observes, the originality of individual behaviour gives way to a stunning form of conformism, a fact which leads to the loss of the capacity to see "sameness in utter diversity" (Arendt, 1958, p. 57). Arendt is right to argue that the common world can be maintained only by a plurality of voices and opinions. However, her claim that the rise of mass society "only indicates that the various social groups have suffered the same absorption into one society that the family unit had suffered earlier" is a homogenizing claim which overlooks the power relations between the disenfranchised and dominant groups as well as the struggle for visibility in which subaltern cultures are engaged (Arendt, 1958, p. 41). Contrary to what Arendt assumes, the social realm is not all-encompassing since it reproduces the contradictions

which characterize the private sphere and the dominant mode of production. Likewise, the distinction she makes between the social and the political does not hold since what is social is inherently political. Furthermore, even issues which pertain to the intimacy of the household have a political edge since they bear directly on gender and power relations and, thus, contest the organizing principles of society at large.

Arendt's reflection on the public space seems to juxtapose the alternative of having a more invigorating "polis" where few privileged individuals freed from all concerns about life necessities have the luxury to engage in contemplative activities to the reality of having a more inclusive sphere accessible to different groups and individuals even if this means the emergence of a mass of conforming individuals who labour and consume more than they work and reflect. However, what I find contradictory in Arendt's position is her insistence on viewing plurality, which she premises as a fundamental principle of human condition, from the perspective of a homogenizing and exclusive public sphere. The rise of mass society has not only led to a form of behavioural conformism but has also coincided with the emergence of a plurality of public spheres and publics. It is also in consumer societies where issues of gender, race, labour, citizenship, and the environment have gained more visibility over the last decades than they ever did in the past. In addition, the struggle for appearance in the public realm is not motivated by the existential desire to achieve immortality; neither is it driven by the force of human vanity to win acclaim and distinction among peers. The struggle for public visibility calls attention to the processes through which disenfranchised groups, through organizational work as well as everyday performance, seek to create new and better realities to improve their living conditions. It is this aspect which the Habermasian discursive model of public space proposes to analyze in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (first published in German in 1962). The influence this seminal work has had on academics and policy makers warrants its close reading. In the section that follows, I will be making the point that Habermas's idealization of the nineteenth-century bourgeois public sphere overlooks the injustices which were perpetrated against groups and individuals because of their gender, class or ethnic identities.
3. Yurgen Habermas: Homogenizing Consensus in the Public Sphere

Habermas's study of the historical formation and transformation of the bourgeois public sphere in Europe brings into relief a set of prerequisites necessary for the construction and maintenance of the ideal public sphere: the importance of an educated public, a normative model of rational and critical debate, full publicity of all matters that bear on the welfare and well-being of the public especially those related to the management of the state and its institutions, responsible and independent media free from pressure from either the state or capital and the need to maintain consensus and "an institutionalized fiction of a public opinion."¹

In an "encyclopaedia article," Habermas attempts a synthesis of his conception of the public sphere:

By 'the public sphere' we mean first of all a realm of our social life in which something approaching public opinion can be formed. Access is guaranteed to all citizens. A portion of the public sphere comes into being in every conversation in which private individuals assemble to form a public body. They then behave neither like business or professional people transacting private affairs, nor like members of a constitutional order subject to the legal constraints of a state bureaucracy. Citizens behave as a public body when they confer in an unrestricted fashion -that is, with the guarantee of freedom of assembly and association and the freedom to express and publish their opinions -about matters of general interest.²

² Jurgen Habermas, "The Public Sphere Theory: An Encyclopaedia Article (1964)" in New German Critique, vol. 1, No. 3, Fall 1974, p. 49.
In Habermas's conceptual outline, the emergence of the public sphere is conditional upon the existence of an "ideal speech situation" in which, in principle, the necessary conditions for an ideal public debate would be met:

The ideal speech situation is neither an empirical phenomenon nor a mere construct. But rather an unavoidable supposition reciprocally made in discourse. This supposition can, but need not be counterfactual; but even if it is made counterfactually, it is a fiction that is oppressively effective in the process of communication. Therefore I prefer to speak of an anticipation of an ideal speech situation. This anticipation alone is the warrant which permits us to join to an actually attained consensus the claim of a rational consensus. At the same time, it is a critical standard against which every actually realized consensus can be called into question and questioned.¹

However, as he has himself admitted, his articulation of the ideal public sphere is impaired by a confusion of the "ideal type" and "the context from which it was constructed," which fact results in self-paralyzing contradictions that weaken his constructed model of the bourgeois public sphere.²

The principle of "inclusiveness" which he rightly posits as one of the foundation pillars of the ideal public sphere is suspended by an emphasis on property ownership, education, and the male gender as prerequisites for admittance into the public realm and for a well-performing public sphere:

However exclusive the public might be in any given instance, it could never close itself off entirely and become consolidated as a

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² See Jurgen Habermas, "Concluding Remarks" in Craig Calhoun, ed., Habermas and the Public Sphere, The MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1992. Though he blames some of the problems in his study of the bourgeois public sphere on the limited research material and theoretical models available to him at the time of the publication of The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere in 1962, he nonetheless admits that "I can rightly be accused of having idealized what were presented as features of an existing liberal public sphere; I was at least not careful enough in distinguishing between an ideal type and the very context from which it was constructed. And I think it was due to this slight idealization that the collapsing of norm and description came into this book" (Habermas, "Concluding Remarks" in C. Calhoun, ed., Habermas and the Public Sphere, 1992, p. 463).
clique; for it also understood and found itself immersed within a more inclusive public of all private people, persons who -insofar as they were propertied and educated -as readers, listeners, and spectators could avail themselves via the market of the objects that were subject to discussion. The issues discussed became "general" not merely in their significance, but also in their accessibility: everyone had to be able to participate (Habermas, 1992, p. 37).

It is quite difficult to conceive of a participatory public sphere while the prescribed principles of admittance and accessibility are central to power control and social domination. It is true that the rise of a bourgeois class has led in the replacement of absolutist power and court-culture by a public sphere which answers more to public authority and public opinion than to the whims of absolute rulers. However, the bourgeoisie has never sought a radical dismantling of the pyramidal social order which is based on institutionalized hierarchy and individual competition. The feudal system which has benefited courtiers and land-owners is displaced to make room for the new social class that has wrestled political and social prestige because of its acquired economic power. Habermas seems to overlook the fact that the mediation of the bourgeois contract only replicates in public some of the most biased dissonances which structure the private sphere and which, because of centuries of domination and control, now seem "natural" norms of social behaviour. Moreover, his acquiescence to a limited and conditioned participation in the public sphere makes his critique of the demise of the contemporary public realm almost irrelevant since it is based on criteria similar to those he upholds as positive generators of the nineteenth century ideal public sphere. After all, regardless of the abundance of "tabloids" in today's information market, the tradition of "serious" and committed journalism is still observed, especially by alternative and community media activists.

Habermas's analysis of the concept of "publicity" is also weakened by an "unsophisticated" belief in a value-free notion of "public advertising." There is no doubt about the importance of this concept to the institutionalization of a rational and critical debate. It is his assumption that the psychological need for publicity can be explained through the economic structure and ideals of
the free-market which is problematic. The argument that the intellectual inquisitiveness of the educated bourgeois necessitates a regular and comprehensive flow of information and an exchange of debate with the "consequential" belief that reason would ultimately decide about the value and validity of the exhibited "commodity" simplifies the nature of the relationship between artist and public that the market has problematized. Jameson, for example, blames the market for the disintegration of the social institution that brought artist and public together and the commodification of art it has generated:

With the coming of the market, [the] institutional status of artistic consumption and production vanishes: art becomes one more branch of commodity production, the artist loses all social status and faces the options of becoming a poete maudit or a journalist. The relationship to the public is problematized and the latter becomes a virtual 'public introuvable.'

Stuart Mill, too, who is otherwise a fervent advocate of the liberal theory, warns against the risks of expanding the free market laws to bear on the social and cultural life-worlds. This is implied in his critique of the philosophy of Bentham:

A philosophy like Bentham's [...] can teach the means of organizing and regulating the merely business part of the social arrangements [...] It will do nothing (except sometimes as an instrument in the hands of a higher doctrine) for the spiritual interests of society; nor does it suffice of itself even for the material interests [...] All he can do is but to indicate means by which, in any given state of the national mind, the material interests of society can be protected; saving the question, of which others must judge, whether the use of those means would have on the national character, any injurious influence.

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1 Fredric Jameson, "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" in Social Text, Winter, 1979, pp. 136-137.
2 Quoted in Raymond Williams, Culture and Society, 1958, p. 57.
The notion of publicity is more problematic than liberal theories may suggest. The myth of "the invisible hand" which supposedly works in the shadows to uphold order and stability in the market is in reality the "hand" of capital and power whose primary concern is to maximize profit and mitigate the effects of anticipated crises. In the information market, the issue of publicity becomes even more complex. Studies in media and communication show that, despite the institutional sophistication and "democratic" intentions of the media industry, the translation of an event into news is a process that is still contingent upon circumstantial factors (national vs local priorities, temporal and spatial happening of the event) and "non-professional" variables which can be detected in the industry's ideological, political, and cultural biases.

John Dewey, an advocate of "free and systematic communication," acknowledges the vital role of publicity in the formation of a public:

There can be no public without full publicity in respect to all consequences which concern it. Whatever obstructs publicity, limits and distorts public opinion and checks and distorts thinking on social affairs. Without freedom of expression, not even methods of social inquiry can be developed.

However, he too warns against the limits of a free marketplace of ideas in generating a public capable of acting on the principles of positive freedom:

The belief that thought and its communication are now free simply because legal restrictions which once obtained have been done away with is absurd [...] No man and no mind was ever...
emancipated merely by being left alone. Removal of formal limitations is but a negative condition; positive freedom is not a state but an act which involves methods and instrumentalities of control (Dewey, 1927, p. 168).

Moreover, even from a mere economic point of view, the market undoes its own logic in dealing with public goods, of which information and knowledge are prime examples:

Public goods have the property that their use by one person does not exclude use by others. Many goods have this property: information, scientific knowledge, highways, lighthouses, national defense, parks. Whenever use by one person is at no cost to others, the marginal opportunity cost is zero and therefore the price should be zero. But the cost of production of knowledge, parks, highways, and so forth is greater than zero. There is no market incentive for any firm to supply costly goods for a zero price, and so they would never be supplied by the market alone. And yet such goods are clearly beneficial and wanted by individuals. They are also the physical infrastructure of community.¹

In economic discourse, public goods are defined as "externalities" to the market.² The ramifications of such market dynamics are profound on the living conditions of people in post-traditional societies. Public goods and services are favorite targets of organizations of international capital (the Monetary Fund Organization, the World Bank) and governments wary about

¹ Herman E. Daly and John B. Cobb, Jr., For the Common Good: Redirecting the Economy Toward Community, the Environment, and a Sustainable Future, Boston: Beacon Press, 1989, p. 51.
² Mancur Olson, for example, defines “public goods” as those that can be consumed by the entire community regardless of who has paid for them: “The common or collective benefits provided by governments are usually called “public goods” by economists, and the concept of public goods is one of the oldest and most important ideas in the study of public finance. A common, collective, or public good is here defined as any good such that, if any person Xi in a group X₁, ..., Xi, ..., Xn consumes it, it cannot feasibly be withheld from the others in that group. In other words, those who do not purchase or pay for any of the public or collective good cannot be excluded or kept from sharing in the consumption of the good, as they can where noncollective goods are concerned” (Mancur Olson, The Logic of Collective Action: Public Goods and the Theory of Groups, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1971, pp. 14-15).
"restructuring" their economies. Public education, public health, and public information are usually the areas that suffer the deepest budgetary cuts.

It is too early to assess the implications of the new technology on access to information and public formation. Umberto Eco has worded the effect of radio and television on the subject/consumer formation as follows:

What radio and television are today, we know - uncontrollable plurality of messages that each individual uses to make up his own composition with remote control switch. The consumer's freedom may not have increased, but surely the way to teach him to be free and controlled has changed.¹

In his turn, Fredric Jameson has called for a re-articulation of the public sphere to account for the new reality created by the advance of electronic media:

a profound modification of the public sphere needs to be theorized: the emergence of a new realm of image reality that is both fictional (narrative) and factual [...] and which now - like the former classical 'sphere of culture' - becomes semiautonomous and floats above reality, with this fundamental difference that in the classical period reality persisted independently of that sentimental and romantic 'cultural sphere,' whereas today it seems to have lost that separate mode of existence.²

Shoshana Zuboff, who has studied the impact of the computer technology in the limited space of the workplace, reports that the informing process has the double effect of granting managers more power but also carries the potential of enabling workers to counter the arbitrary authority of their supervisors. For this potential to be fully exploited, she cites two elements which are "absolutely necessary, though in the longer term not sufficient, to engender a new framework of relations:

One element involves egalitarian access to the emerging electronic text as it increasingly represents the full spectrum of organizational functioning. The second element involves the presence of a sufficient depth of intellective skill so that those who have access to data also have access to their meaning.¹

In addition to the cost of the computer technology, which makes it accessible only to an educated elite, what Zuboff calls "intellective skills," a new set of competencies ("abstraction, explicit inference, and procedural reasoning"), constitute another major obstacle which controls access and effective use of the computer technology (Zuboff, 1988, p. 57). Because of the high rate of poverty and illiteracy among their population, post-traditional societies stand to suffer the most from asymmetrical global distribution of knowledge and information.

One organizing principle in Habermas's theory of the public sphere is "rational consensus." At the surface level, his postulation is that arguments, counter-arguments and opinions compete in the marketplace of ideas and that, through understanding and agreement, the most "valuable" argument, that is the one that appeals to the interests of "all" the subjects involved in the debate, wins a "universal" claim to validity. However, at a deeper level, the interpretation of the notion of "consensus" generates controversial philosophical, ideological, political, and cultural implications which invoke legal and ethical issues. Because Habermas is interested in a form of "universal" consensus, he parts with the philosophy of consciousness (a subject-centered approach which pins the validity of a claim on personal identity) and develops a theory of communicative action which he constructs on the basis of the language system."²

² Habermas’s interest is more in the “ideal” intrinsic to the system of language than in the contextual or social use of language. Schutz (1989) defines language as a “quasi-ideal system of signs” for its ability to classify, appeal, and mediate social action while “always already” presupposed in the socio-historical context in which it is used: "In any case, one thing ought to be clear with respect to human society: the multiply-grounded forms of communication [inter-subjective, historical, social] in social action presuppose language as a quasi-ideal system, as the authority for classification, appeal, mediation. Language is the principle means for the social construction of every “human” reality; but it is also the chief medium for transmitting a particular, hence historically and socially already-constructed reality. From both vantage
For a rational consensus to be reached, Habermas argues that each claim must pass a validity test to certify its intelligibility (the claim must be understood by others), truth (the proposition it makes has to be true), rightness (that is performed within the shared normative rules the speakers have agreed upon) and authenticity or sincerity (the speaker must be sincere and trustworthy). In *Communication and the Evolution of Society*, he defines the procedure as follows:

The goal of coming to an understanding [...] is to bring about an agreement [...] that terminates in the intersubjective mutuality of reciprocal understanding and shared knowledge, mutual trust, and accord with one another. Agreement is based on recognition of corresponding validity claims of comprehensibility, truth, truthfulness, and rightness. We can see the word *understanding* is ambiguous. In its minimal meaning, it indicates that two subjects understand a linguistic expression in the same way; its maximal meaning is that between the two there exists an accord containing the rightness of an utterance in relation to a mutually recognized normative background. In addition, two participants in communication can come to an understanding about something in the world, and they can make their intentions understandable to one another.¹

As a matter of fact, the word “understanding” is “ambiguous” and it is so in more ways than Habermas admits. When viewed in the context of universal pragmatics which he seeks to define, his interpretation of the notion of “understanding” takes a “universalistic” tone which assumes a metaphysical “equality” among all members and participants. Habermas is obviously aware of the ramifications of this idealized interpretation of “understanding” and points, language is essential as a quasi-ideal system of signs; it is the presupposition for de-subjectivation, i.e., for the historico-social determination of the subjective orientation of the individual in his life-world. As a product of the we-relation, however, language is at the same time also always already presupposed in the intersubjective production of every historical social world” (Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*, Volume II, trans. by Richard M. Zaner and David J. Parent Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1989, 154).

the type of consensus it mediates. A version of understanding developed on
the assumption of a fictive equality among all the social actors is more likely
to generate a homogeneous and homogenizing consensus rather than a
rational one. In anticipation of such a possibility, he suggests that
psychoanalysis check against "false consensus" (consensus reached through a
'pseudo-communication'). However, while psychoanalysis can help uncover
certain types of oppression, it could itself be mobilized as a strategy to further
the hegemonic means of a group. Susan Faludi's Backlash (1991) documents
some of the ways in which psychoanalysis and its derivative psycho-therapy
were used in the 1980s to roll back the progress of women's liberation.1

Habermas's quest for a universal ideal of the public sphere has led him to
rely on many idealistic hypotheses to support his theory (ideal speech
situation, distortion-free dialogue, rational-critical consensus, free publicity), a
fact which calls into question the relevance of his theory to society and
culture. As Jack Mendelson puts it:

The historical potential of the ideal speech situation for
becoming the actual organizing principle of society can only
come to fruition in a society which comes close to articulating it
on the level of more historically specific and conscious
traditions, for instance, the Western democracies of the
twentieth century. While in a sense the ideal of rational
consensus may be immanent in language per se and not simply
an external standard, in most societies it is bound to remain
unarticulated in the actual culture. It becomes politically
relevant as an ideal to be consciously striven for only in societies
which have begun to approach it on the level of their own
cultural traditions.2

Schutz (1989) lists five pre-conditions which must be met for an action to be
unrestrictedly rational in the life-world, 1) the actor needs to know himself as
he is, 2) the actor would not merely have to know himself as he is now, but
also as he will be at some future time, 3) in order to act rationally, the person

1 Susan Faludi, Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women, New York: Anchor
also needs to know the world around him -(and that in which he will have to live in the future), 4) the person would have to be able to choose between competing projects as if the choice itself were not an event in his stream of consciousness and the fifth point concerns the action itself for the situation of choice in which there has to be a relief from the pressure of time and situation. Considering the five pre-conditions of the universal act, Schutz (1989, p. 68) concludes that the possibilities of practical reason are conditioned by spatial and temporal variables for “the actor is ‘always already’ in society and the act is socialized from the beginning:”

The actor’s nature, especially his temporality, as well as the nature of the reality around him, especially its temporality, set uncrossable limits to his knowledge. The idea of the unrestricted rationality of action remains what it is: an idea [...] The possibilities of practical reason are determinable only if the act [...] is measured against ‘what’ a concrete actor, a living person, can do in a concrete historical life-world and ‘how’ he can do it (Schutz, 1989, p. 62) (emphasis added).

In a similar vein, Benhabib (1986) argues against the claim that social action can be elevated to a level of abstract reason noting that, in the life-world, intersubjectivity is more often than not threatened by “real conflict situations” and has therefore to be viewed along the lines of conflict and resolution and not universalization:

the very step of ‘abstraction’ that leads [...] agents to engage in discourse, namely, the virtualization of the constraints of action, can only take place when such agents are willing to suspend the motivating force and content of these of real conflict situations. Discourses arise when the intersubjectivity of ethical life is endangered; but the very project of discursive argumentation

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presupposes the ongoing validity of a reconciled intersubjectivity (italics original).¹

Jameson (1991) examines the nature of action at the narrative level and underlines the paradox of the “subtext” and its ability to create the illusion of its autonomy and independence while in fact it is anchored in its immediate historical context. The paradox of the subtext is that:

[it] articulates its own situation and textualizes it, thereby encouraging and perpetuating the illusion that the situation itself did not exist before it, that there is nothing but a text, that there never was any extra or con-textual reality before the text itself generated it in the form of a mirage.²

Habermas has tried to anticipate the criticism of his idealized version of social action and has insisted that “language is also a medium of domination and social power; it serves to legitimate relations of organized force.”³ However, what emerges out of his conceptual model is a public sphere which remains largely tied to the post-bourgeois interest which seeks to homogenize and rule through a “fictionalized” version of “consensus.” In any case, his model does not offer a radical interpretation for the transformation of society⁴. On the contrary, he remains satisfied with the maintenance of an “institutionalized fiction” of public opinion to shield critical from manipulative publicity and public opinion from “non-public opinion:”

Within the framework of constitutional law and political science, the analysis of constitutional norms in relation to the

⁴ In fact, his definition of society remains tied to the principles of a homogeneous and conciliatory intersubjectivity rather than to the contradictions and conflicts which characterize group relationships: “I call society (in the narrower sense of a component of the lifeworld) the legitimate orders from which those engaged in communicative action gather a solidarity, based on belonging to groups, as they enter into interpersonal relationships with one another” (Y. Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, trans. by F. G. Lawrence, Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992, p. 343).
constitutional reality of large democratic states committed to social rights has to maintain the institutionalized fiction of a public opinion without being able to identify it directly as a real entity in the behavior of the public citizens" (Habermas, 1992, p. 237).

As a matter of fact, there is an irony that runs deep through Habermas's conceptualization of the formation of the public sphere. His approach, which he wants based on the scientific achievements in the study of language and the rigours of logic and analytical thought, ultimately converges into a form of "institutionalized fiction." He gives up the pre-condition of the inclusiveness of the public sphere and finds "a workable substitute of the public" sufficient for the institutionalization of an ideal public sphere: "[The critical] publicity, together with an addressee that fulfills the behavioral expectations set by it, 'exists' -not the public as a whole, certainly, but surely a workable substitute" (Habermas, 1992, p. 237). Habermas's notion of "institutionalized fiction" carries a Kantian ring. In his discussion of art production, Kant identifies the "ideal" work as one which conveys a sense of "disinterestedness" or that manages to create a "purposefulness without purpose." While a "disinterested" work of art can negotiate its existence through the constraints of time and space, its displacement from its spatial and temporal context blurs the economics of its social and historical production, and thus, limits its ability to influence their development. Terry Eagleton (1984) satirizes Kant's notion of "purposefulness without purpose" by calling it "lawfulness without law" and notes that it "describes the way the bourgeois public sphere functions. The success of this society lies in making ethical ideology appear less a coercive force than a 'principle of spontaneous consensus.'"1

Though Habermas's theory has been criticized at different levels, the concept of the public sphere remains relevant to studies that seek to explain the political, social, and cultural formations and transformations societies go through. There is a general consensus that the bourgeois public sphere is exclusive in that it is disproportionately biased towards a social and gender class which already enjoys economic, political, and social privileges. What is

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needed, as Benhabib has pointed out, is not only a critique of Habermas’s social theory but that “as feminists we should also enter into a dialectical alliance with it” to develop a “critical model of public space and public discourse.”¹ In fact, all models of public space need to be confronted with a feminist interpretation to denounce the bias which regulates gender relations in the public realm and to recover the emancipatory potential in alternative interpretations of public space. One way to proceed is to confront the theory’s ideal with liberationist aesthetics and test it against the everyday experience of the disenfranchised communities.

In the section that follows, I consider the spheres of plebeian culture as articulated by the Russian theorist Michail Bakhtin. The contribution of M. Bakhtin to the conceptualization of alternative public spheres is summarized in the following testimonial by Yurgen Habermas:

I must confess [...] that only after reading Mikhail Bakhtin’s great book Rabelais and His World have my eyes become really opened to the inner dynamics of a plebeian culture. This culture of the common people apparently was by no means only a backdrop, that is, a passive echo of the dominant culture; it was also the periodically recurring violent revolt of a counterproject to the hierarchical world of domination, with its official celebrations and everyday disciplines. Only a stereoscopic view of this sort reveals how a mechanism of exclusion that locks out and represses at the same time calls forth countereffects that cannot be neutralized. If we apply the same perspective to the bourgeois public sphere, the exclusion of women from this world dominated by men now looks different than it appeared to me at the time.²

¹ Seyla Benhabib, “Models of Public Space: Hannah Arendt, the Liberal Tradition, and Yurgen Habermas” in Craig Calhoun, ed., Habermas and the Public Sphere, 1992, p. 94.
4. Mikhail Bakhtin: The Spheres of Plebeian Culture

Bakhtin's in-depth study of the Rabelaisian world has revealed the importance of alternative spheres in the celebration of the cultural practices of the folk. These plebeian spheres existed in parallel, or rather, in the face of the absolutist sphere which gathered the Medieval aristocracy, the clergy, and the ecclesiastical elite. The importance of the cultural practices of the folk lies not only in the fact that they constitute a "counterproject" to the dominant interpretation of social reality and worldview but also in the universal character this project carries both in terms of scope and performance. Both Arendt and Habermas, as I have argued, depict performance in the public sphere as a contest in which victory is promised to the most persuasive participant. In Bakhtin's plebeian sphere, performance is all-inclusive in that it highlights the subversive role of the body, abusive language, oaths, curses, profanities, denigration, and pranks. Unlike the classical bourgeois public sphere which is characterized by seriousness and discipline, both in speech and action, the plebeian sphere has a festive and joyous character and thrives on ambivalence rather than clear-cut systems of differentiation. In short, the
fundamental contribution of plebeian spheres lies in their actualization of alternatives other than metaphysical contemplation, reason, or critical debate. Body performance in carnival time and the vernacular speech of the marketplace, for example, simultaneously highlight the earthly reality of the human being and create a festive spirit to respond to "the futility" of the human condition.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Mikhail Bakhtin explores the culture of carnival and its forms of ritual spectacles, comic verbal compositions, and various genres of billingsgate (curses, oaths, profanities, abusive language). These forms of folk culture create a sphere "outside" the world of officialdom:

They offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations; they built a second world and a second life outside officialdom, a world in which all medieval people participated more or less, in which they lived during a given time of the year. If we fail to take into consideration this two-world condition, neither medieval cultural consciousness nor the culture of the Renaissance can be understood. To ignore or to underestimate the laughing people of the Middle Ages also distorts the picture of European culture's historic development.1

The first characteristic of the plebeian sphere is its accessibility to all the people. Though it gathers mainly the plebes, it is also accessible to the elite from the upper social strata. As Bakhtin notes, the ecclesiastics and the clergy often leave the exclusive world of monasteries to join in the festivities during carnival time. Thus, within the plebeian sphere, hierarchical relations are temporarily suspended and participants take part in the festivities on equal terms. Unlike the sphere of officialdom which consecrates inequality among participants:

all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among

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the people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 10).

The plebeian sphere does not serve as a forum where the folk gather for play and ribaldry but, more importantly, it actualizes the ideal of universal access and democratic participation which neither the absolutist sphere nor the bourgeois public sphere guarantees.

The second characteristic of the plebeian sphere is that it obliterates the dividing line between the utopian ideal and the realistic. In carnival performance and marketplace festivals, the realistic and the ideal, the physiological and the spiritual, and the practical and the contemplative merge to form an all-encompassing world. Thus, the plebeian sphere demonstrates that the “futility” of human existence can be overcome not only through the serious “works” of a few public men but also through a festive perception of the world:

In the framework of class and feudal political structure, this specific character could be realized without distortion only in the carnival and in similar marketplace festivals. They were the second life of the people, who for a time entered the utopian realm of community, freedom, equality, and abundance (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 9).

The spirit of play, laughter, and joy the people manifest excessively during festivities not only reveals a side of human nature but also unveils the distorted aspect of the relations which avail in the official sphere and which are ruled by a spirit of conscious restraint and social snobbery. While the ambiance of the official feast is “monolithically serious” and laughter “alien to it,” the true festive character of the people is “indestructible” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 9). This is why, Bakhtin explains, the true nature of human festivity “had to be tolerated and even legalized outside the official sphere and had to be turned over to the popular sphere of the marketplace” (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 9).

In a study of the Moroccan female performers (“shikhat”), Deborah Kapchan draws attention to the two cognitive categories “matluq” and “hashumi” which define two oppositional behavioural performances, both in terms of body language and discourse. Somebody who is “matluq” is
“relaxed” and “easy-going” while a “hashumi” is “reserved” and “shy.” From the perspective of the dominant culture, “matluq” is synonymous with “transgressive” and “subversive.” The two oppositional performances are produced along the lines of gender, age, rank, and space distinctions. A woman who is “matluqa” runs the risk of being categorized as “loose” and “licentious.” Relationships between parents and their children, the old and the young, employers and their employees or directors and their subordinates are based on hierarchical relations of power, respect, and obedience. Within the uncompromising sphere of conventional morality which orders everyday life, relaxed or easy-going attitudes are not tolerated. In the sphere of the mosque, a “loose” behaviour is interpreted as a sign of disrespect for “the home of Allah” (the symbolic meaning of the mosque in Muslim theology) and is consequently considered a “sin” deserving punishment both in this world and in the after-world.

Festivities and celebrations help to “loosen up” temporarily the strict hierarchical order and uncompromising moral code which regulate relations in the Moroccan context. The festive spirit of celebrations and ceremonies provides group members with a space to engage in a more liberating experience and escape the rigid discipline which characterizes everyday life. For this purpose, female performers (shikhat) are hired to entertain the guests. The shikha, or rather the shikha’s body, acts as mediator between the world of seriousness and that of festivity and “looseness.” The mediation is not always easy because, even temporarily, the internalized system of values and behaviour is difficult to displace:

2 Kapchan has noted most of the occasions for which shikhat are hired: “For a large number of Moroccans, shikhat are an indispensable part of religious and national festivity: ‘if there aren’t shikhat, there’s nothing’ [...] They are called upon to entertain at festivals, wedding celebrations, circumcisions, naming ceremonies, and henna parties. These social occasions are for the most part ritual times as well as festive events. Shikhat divert attention from the private dimension of family rite to a festivity that is created for the express enjoyment of the guests (Kapchan, “Moroccan Female Performers Defining the Social Body” in Journal of American Folklore, 107 (423), 1994, p. 87). Kapchan has also insightfully underlined the subaltern world to which shikhat belong: “[A shikha’s] community is with other shikhat. They perform collectively, often in groups of three or four women, playing an array of small drums [...] singing and sometimes drumming with their feet on an overturned metal wash basin [...] They are usually accompanied by two or three male musicians who play the kamania (the fiddle, a men’s instrument), the lotar (a three-stringed small-bodied instrument also played by men) and the drums” (Kapchan, “Moroccan Female Performers Defining the Social Body” in Journal of American Folklore, 107 (423), 1994, pp. 86-87).
In performance, the shikha is engaged in an intense demonstration of physical and artistic prowess. The audience expects it, and the shikha is responsible for communicating it (Bauman 1977). To the extent that the shikha successfully lures her audience and captures the attention centered on her, a state of 'communitas' may be momentarily achieved, facilitated at times by musical climax or by the loss of self-centeredness that transpires in shared dance. The shikha, in this instance, becomes a 'liminar,' a facilitator of transition from one psychic state (hal) to another (Kapchan, 1994, p. 93).

In addition, recorded videos of ceremonies -it is now a commonplace practice for families to hire a photographer to take pictures and videotape the ceremony- provide an opportunity to measure the intense opposition between everyday life performance and the "loosened" performances tolerated on festive occasions. For months, the video, and especially the wedding video, is shown to visiting family members and friends, even if the latter were present at the ceremony.1 The video becomes a mirror through which performances are analyzed and interpreted. Video audiences often betray an astonishment at the "loose" comportment of guests during the ceremony. Their recurrent comments and exclamations reveal that festivities allow the individual to discover a new self-identity as well as new identities of other persons.2 However, what should be noted here is that the audience of this re-created festive atmosphere is predominantly female. Household males resent to watch ceremony videos in the presence of women and children because they are aware of the subversive power of "loose" performances which contrasts with the tone of seriousness and propriety on which their moral authority is based. Thus, festive celebrations fulfill their ambivalent function of being simultaneously acts of subversion and transgression which temporarily displace the dominant power relations which rule everyday life.

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2 "Who would've thought that X was such a skillful dancer? He is always shy and reserved. I never suspected that he could be fun!" is a commonplace exclamation on such occasions.
and rituals of renewal through which community members strengthen the bonds that tie them together.

A similar festive spirit rules in the plebeian spheres of the marketplace, the café, and the public bath. Bakhtin has underlined the importance of the special festive atmosphere of the marketplace. The popular-festive language and performance which reign in the marketplace create a sphere which stands in opposition to the spirit of morose seriousness preached by conventional morality and the culture of officialdom. In the plebeian sphere of the marketplace, speech improprieties are tolerated, performance etiquette is transgressed, and the worlds of the sacred and the profane are brought face to face with one another:

Abuses, curses, profanities, and improprieties are the unofficial elements of speech. They were and are still conceived as a breach of the established norms of verbal address; they refuse to conform to conventions, to etiquette, civility, respectability. These elements of freedom, if present in sufficient numbers and with a precise intention, exercise a strong influence on the entire contents of speech, transferring it to another sphere beyond the limits of conventional language. Such speech forms, liberated from norms, hierarchies, and prohibitions of established idiom, become themselves a peculiar argot and create a special collectivity, a group of people initiated in familiar intercourse, who are frank and free in expressing themselves verbally. The marketplace crowd was such a collectivity, especially the festive, carnivalesque crowd and the fair (Bakhtin, 1984, pp. 187-188).

The potential subversive dimension of the marketplace and the spirit of solidarity it mediates among the folk and the working class community has also been noted by E. P. Thompson:

[...] if the market was the point at which working people most often felt their exposure to exploitation, it was also the point - especially in rural or dispersed manufacturing districts - at which they could most easily become organised. Marketing (or 'shopping') becomes in mature industrial society increasingly
impersonal. In eighteenth-century Britain or France (and in parts of southern Italy or Haiti or rural India or Africa today) the market remained a social as well as an economic nexus. It was the place where one-hundred-and-one social and personal transactions went on; where news was passed, rumour and gossip flew around, politics was (as if ever) discussed in the inns and the wine-shops round the market-square. The market was the place where the people, because they were numerous, felt for a moment that they were strong.1

As I endeavour to show in chapters four and five, the public bath and the café perform similar functions. Their spheres are used for the celebration of subalternity and the perpetuation of a discourse that is largely subversive to the dominant culture of officialdom.

The resilient character and social articulations of the marketplace (suq) in the Middle-East have been underlined by the anthropologist Robert Fernea:

Much of the traditional behavior of the suq continues; tea is still served if the transaction is of importance or the friendship is valued. The customer in a hurry is an anomaly among merchants who may still value good conversation as much as higher profits and who criticize hustlers who are out to skin the unsuspecting visitor. Less obvious to the foreign visitor is that the suq is also a tightly packed center of human communication. Fact and rumour sometimes mix together in an extremely volatile fashion [...] Some observers have argued that the Teheran bazaar was the flash point of the public uprising in the Khomeini revolution in Iran. Opinions - about people and about politics - take shape in the network of communications in the suq; even the most severe government censorship cannot stand up against the whispered asides which pass from person to person in the suq.2

In his turn, Philip Schuyler underlines the underpinnings of performance in the Moroccan marketplace. Market performers range from musicians, comedians, preachers, herbalists, folk dancers, and storytellers, to fire eaters, animal trainers, and the notorious snake charmers. This array of performances grouped in the square of the marketplace and taking place at the same time creates a "tapestry of sound" which competes with "the profusion of goods, colors, characters, press of bodies, and the scents of mint and manure" for the senses of the visitor. However, the multiplicity of genres and representations does not impair the unity of performance in the marketplace. On the contrary, it highlights the invigorating plurality which defines the world of folk culture:

The performance as a whole is thus a kind of seamless, circular variety show. A comic routine interrupts song and dance, an invocation is used to mediate slapstick conflict, and music and ribald humor intrude on prayer. Almost every performer relies on the same basic repertory of devices; only the balance changes from group to group. Musicians make their pitch in the form of a sermon, just as preachers and storytellers often integrate songs into their performances, and punctuate their narratives with a slap on a drum. The mixture of elements helps the entertainers to engage the spectators and to keep them in suspense. Indeed, for many members of the audience, the sometimes scandalous comedy routines, and even the prayerful pleas for money, offer as much entertainment as the music itself. In short, while other media have usurped many of the traditional roles of market entertainers, the vitality and immediacy of their performances offer excitement that can be found in no other form (Schuyler, 1993, p. 279).

In the Moroccan suq, the sacred and the profane, body and wit, the material and the spiritual, comedy and tragedy, humour and reverence, prayers and

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oaths, blessings and curses, mime and pantomime, and imitation and parody compete while they co-habit to create a festive world which entertains, educates but also subverts and reinforces the contradictions which characterize society at large.

There is no doubt that "[festivity], ceremonial form, and the transgression of social boundaries are animated with the strongest possible feeling of solidarity and community affiliation." However, carnivalesque performance should not be idealized. The limited power of ceremonies and celebrations in changing the status quo must be kept in perspective. Richard Schechner (1995) has studied the political, economic, and psychological implications of six modern street performances "selected for their generic range and cultural diversity" on the dominant social order. Schechner's insightful conclusion is worth noting:

The popular street carnival-demonstration is actually a utopian mimesis whose focused, idealized, heated, magnified, and transparent clarity of consciousness dissolves once the show is over. But those involved in a festival of political desire too often deceive themselves into believing their utopian show will run forever [...] The carnival, more strongly than other forms of theatre, can act out a powerful critique of the status quo, but it cannot itself be what replaces the status quo. For the modern world, this much was made clear by Robespierre: the carnival indefinitely in power is the Terror (Schechner, 1995, p. 85).

In addition to the fact that carnivalesque forms may have lost the cosmic and utopian dimension which made most of their vitality in the medieval folk culture, as Bakhtin has pointed out, ceremonies and festivities have also been transformed into fetishized commodities that are exploited for profit maximization. Schechner has underlined the business and consumerist trend

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which is now the driving force of modern carnivals. With respect to the Spring Break carnivalesque performance at Daytona beach, Schechner writes that:

Sex, booze, and sun brings [the students] south, but the narrative action of Spring Break is compete and consume. Competition among brands for consumer dollars, the American way, is rearticulated as an endless series of contests” (Schechner, 1995, pp. 80-81)

Likewise, Garcia Canclini warns against the idealization of “fiestas.” He argues that while peasant “fiestas” celebrate the communal spirit which holds group members together, they are not always liberating or emancipatory. On the contrary, “fiestas” tend also to reproduce the dominant social contradictions:

The ‘fiesta’ prolongs daily existence to such an extent that its development reproduces society’s contradictions. It cannot become a place for subversion or egalitarian free expression, or if it does it is with reluctance, because it is not just a movement of collective unification; it duplicates social and economic differences [...] By benefiting those who are already better off and enabling them to earn even more through increased consumption, the ‘fiesta’ reasserts social differences and offers another opportunity of internal and external exploitation of the village. While it includes elements of collective solidarity, the ‘fiesta’ displays those inequalities and differences that stop us from idealizing Indian ‘communities’ and make us use this term with certain reservation when it is applied to such villages.1

In fact, emancipation and liberation are not mapped out on a particular space or cultural practice. Neither are equality and justice intrinsic to specific groups and communities. The nature of relations a cultural practice produces or reproduces is embodied in the communicative and performance process

itself which defines the practice. The process often involves strategies of dominance, subordination, contest, and negotiation. This is why cultural practices, even the most subversive ones, must be problematized rather than idealized.

In this respect, the hegemonic gate-keeping role of the state and its apparati must also be noted. Subversive and subaltern practices are often carried out under the eye of homogenizing systems which often intervene either in a coercive and manipulative way to restore social order and stability or through hegemonic processes which seek to impose a dominant view of social reality. In The Fall of Public Man, Richard Sennett refers to the ambivalent role the nineteenth-century café played in Europe. Unlike Habermas who idealizes the world of salons and coffee-houses, Sennett underlines the importance of the contradictions which ran through the world of the nineteenth-century low-class cafés and pubs:

When the café became a place of speech among peers at work, it threatened the social order; when the café became a place where alcoholism destroyed speech, it maintained social order. Condemnation of low-class pubs by respectable society has to be looked at with a jaundiced eye. While these condemnations were no doubt sincerely meant, most instances of the closing of cafés or pubs occurred not when riotous drinking got out of hand, but when it became evident that people in the cafés were sober, angry, and talking.1

Likewise, the Moroccan café is both a place of communal celebration and of control. It is a realm of congregation where people exchange information and debate issues which relate to their social reality and a favourite hang-out for swindlers, under-cover agents, and state informants. Café culture is praised for the spirit of conviviality and sociability it celebrates and denigrated because of its perceived role as a vessel of vice. In the Friday sermon in mosques, café culture embodies moral decay; in the partisan press, café talk is denounced for being the source of self-paralyzing rumours. However, in the course of my fieldwork research, I noted that visits to the mosque alternate

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with café stops. Cafés in the neighbourhood of mosques live according to the
temporal frame of prayers. Following calls for prayers, café terraces are
deserted as clients leave to do their prayers and soon after the prayer, cafés
welcome back the Muslims who have paid their religious duty. Similarly, the
café space is a favourite destination for journalists, writers, artists, and
students who seem to find inspiration in its noisy and disorderly ambiance.
The interface between the sacred world of the mosque and the profane realm
of the café space makes of the café an ambivalent space which escapes clear
categorization.

Another example of the hegemonization of folk cultural practices can be
seen in the appropriation of the symbolic capital of the Moroccan female
performers for ideological purposes. In fact, the female performers (shikhat)
em-body the ambivalent relation which the Moroccan dominant culture has
towards the festive-popular. Their life-style is the object of envy and loathing,
admiration and fear. As Kapchan has noted, society utilizes them for different
functions:

Shikhat have different functions in society: in breaching the
world of male power they become anomalous, and as anomalies
they become scapegoats - they epitomize the ‘fallen woman.’ On
the other hand, they exemplify feminine potential as
embodiments of independent and brave women, albeit outcasts.
The fascination of the majority of Moroccan women with them
bears this out. They are admired and feared, spoken of with both
awe and a conditioned disgust. They are women who, by virtue
of their physical expressions of emotional and physical liberty,
transgress the social codes of modesty. But although their
performance is socially sanctioned, their personhood is not.
Society both employs and rejects them. They stand for what
women can do and for what happens to women who choose to
do - that is, they stand for social exile (Kapchan, 1994, pp. 100-
101).

The social exile of the shikha is not radical and complete. Even in her exile,
the female performer renders a tremendous service to the ideology of the
dominant conventional morality. Her “liminar” mediation in festivities and
celebrations not only creates communal unification but also allows groups to release some of the pressure accumulated by the frustrations of everyday life.

For centuries, the shikhat have been an integrated component of the rituals through which farmers celebrate harvest time. When harvest is good, the shikhat share in the joy and festive spirit of farmers by singing the abundance and generosity of nature. A now notorious refrain in the shikhat’s songs is the line “Say after me, it’s a good year!” However, in the 1980s, the culture of the shikhat was the object of new appropriations. A weekly entertainment television programme which featured female performers was satirized by the opposition which saw in it a calculated attempt by the state to alienate mass audiences and divert their attention from the disastrous economic and social conditions of the country. Though the programme included a number of singers, comedians, and folk groups, the performance of the shikhat was singled out to stigmatize the government’s attempts at masking the truth about social reality. In fact, the shikhat’s refrain (“Say after me, it’s a good year!”) sounded atrociously out of sync with the social reality of the people since the country was severely hit by the drought which lasted throughout the 1980’s.

In this section, I have argued that Bakhtin’s model of plebeian space highlights the importance of non-official spheres in the perpetuation of the folk’s cultural practices and provides an alternative view of communicative performance. In the plebeian sphere, communication and performance are not regulated by reason only but reveal no less important elements which underline interaction among group members like laughter, pranks, jokes, song, music, dance, and noise. The festive ambiance of the plebeian space contrasts with the ambiance of seriousness which characterizes the official sphere. Likewise, the festive and merry plebeian discourse stands in stark opposition to the serious tone of the rational-critical discourse celebrated by Habermas. However, the plebeian sphere is also shot through with a number of contradictions. Relations of power and dominance are also detected in the spheres of the folk. Issues of gender, age or status are decisive in the type of relations which dominate in plebeian spheres. Further, the plebeian sphere is likely to reproduce the type of relations which characterize society at large. This reality should discourage any attempt to idealize the plebeian sphere. In the following part, I explore the contributions of some post-bourgeois
alternatives of the public sphere with more focus on a feminist reading of public space.

![Image](image.png)

*Figure 10. A female pedestrian walking in front of a café terrace: Can the veil protect from the probing gaze?*

C. Post-Bourgeois Readings of the Public Sphere

In *The Public Sphere and Experience* (1973), Oskar Negt and Alexander Kluge agree that the public sphere constitutes the “central element in the organization of human experience” but argue that the bourgeois public sphere has become so intricately linked to the capitalist mode of production that only a proletarian public sphere is now capable of carrying the hope of liberationist aesthetics.¹ They place an unconditional faith in the power of

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¹ Negt and Kluge list three conditions as prerequisites for the proletarian public sphere to emerge, “the interest of the producing class must be the driving force; a form of interaction must be created which can relate to specific interests in the realm of production to the entire society; and finally the inhibiting and destructive influences emanating from the declining bourgeois public sphere must not overpower the emerging proletarian public sphere. In all these points
economic determinism and historical materialism which they see as the defining principle of the human psychic experience, or what they call a "block of real life which opposes the profit-maximizing interest." They contend that human needs can not be diverted from their historical mission:

[it] is unlikely that in the long run [human needs] will be content with substitute satisfactions and allow themselves to be distracted from their own realism by any kind of reality principle in their search for satisfying relationships.\(^2\)

As a matter of fact, though their claim about an imminent disintegration of the bourgeois public sphere may be an overstatement, Negt and Kluge are right to underline the mutual link between the modes of production and the general concept of human experience:

The traditional public sphere, whose characteristic weakness lies in the mechanism of separating public from private, is today superseded by public spheres of industrial production which increasingly draw in the private realms, particularly the production process and the basic conditions of life.\(^3\)

John Downing, a media and social critic who has helped bring to prominence the pivotal role of alternative channels of communication in mediating social change, shares in the view of the public sphere as an "absent cause" that is accessible through struggle and the organization of oppositional "centers of concentrated communication." By stressing their role in the consolidation of an alternative public sphere for the under-represented and marginalized, he makes the point that the importance of alternative media

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2 Ibid. p. 66.
3 Ibid. p. 62.
does not lie in their ability to achieve a homogeneous social consensus as much as in their intrinsic possibility to mediate the conflicts and divisions which often threaten the spirit of solidarity among oppositional movements. Because they are meant to serve a disenfranchised public whose concerns are usually ignored and overlooked by mainstream news organizations, the task of alternative media is to facilitate lateral communication and contribute to the process of resistance-building under all kinds of conditions:

Self-managed media are not a curious little experiment for revolutionary culture-freaks. Their linchpin role becomes all the more obvious as we face the divisions among movements of the oppressed. These divisions are fostered by racism, imperialism, sexism, ageism, language, unskilled work vs skilled work vs career work vs clerical work, to name only the main ones. Lateral communication is a first, essential and very difficult step, if we are not forever pitted one against the other. Our shared understanding of the dynamics of exploitation and humiliation has to grow enormously in order to form any movement powerful enough to shake the power structure.

Downing cites as example women's movement which, through an effective use of self-managed media, has managed to develop "sensitivity" to women's "daily immediacies of oppression," an achievement which he rightly qualifies as "a gain, not only for the women's movement itself, but for the rest of us" (Downing, 1984, p. 22).

For Downing (1988), the problematic of public realm/alternative public realm offers better hope in understanding societal change than "untidy" issues such as class conflict, domination hegemony, discourse and legitimation which usually convey a "one-way, frozen pattern of communicative domination." This problematic opens up a wide horizon to address the social experience in its entirety, not only systems and organizations but also social reality as experienced in the form of feelings,

desires, anxieties and passions, what Edward Thompson calls a “half culture (and it is a full one half) [which] may be described as affective and moral consciousness.”¹

Nancy Fraser (1992) takes the issue of alternative public spheres to a critical edge when she argues that the existence of a multiplicity of publics, “publics” and “subaltern counterpublics,” as she proposes to call them, is necessary for a just and participatory democracy in both stratified and egalitarian multicultural societies. Her assertion is that the ideal of a participatory democracy can be approximated only in a more comprehensive public sphere which holds enough space for competing and contestatory voices. Subaltern counterpublics are particularly interesting for the “dual character” they manifest, especially in stratified societies:

On the one hand, they function as spaces of withdrawal and regroupement; on the other hand, they also function as bases and training grounds for agitational activities directed toward wider publics. It is precisely in the dialectic between these two functions that their emancipatory potential resides. This dialectic enables subaltern counterpublics partially to offset, although not wholly to eradicate, the unjust participatory privileges enjoyed by members of dominant social groups in stratified societies.²

The fact is that subaltern counterpublics hold a continuous dialectical relationship with society (“the public at large”). To the subaltern counterpublics, the ebb and flow of the social tide become either moments for self-empowerment and self-organization or openings for the dissemination of their ideas and subversive action. The "invisibility" of subaltern groups is by no means to be taken as a sign of social "effacement." In an article in which he outlines the uses of cultural theory, Raymond Williams argues that "cultural formations" are characterized by a similar pattern of "duality" which he finds in their ability to be "simultaneously artistic forms and social

² Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" in Craig Calhoun, ed., Habermas and the Public Sphere. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 1992, p. 124.
locations." Though internal conflicts remain an eminent threat to the organization and strength of subaltern counterpublics, the idea of the "duality" of their character, either in cultural or social movements, is to be seen as a mediating concept between cultural or political forms and messages and society.

The role Moroccan students movements and sports associations played during the French Protectorate in Morocco (1912-1956) shows some of the complex ways in which subaltern counterpublics can relate to the power structure and to society. Despite the segregationist policy of education the colonial administration adopted, Moroccan students, from different educational and social backgrounds (Islamic schools, vocational schools and French Lycées) organized themselves into cultural and sports associations across the country. In the 1920s, a clandestine association which called itself "Keepers of Truth" (Protéateurs de vérité), held its meetings in a library located in the traditional medina in Rabat. One of the founders of the association, Hassan El Ouazzani, reports about the activities of the association:

During the meetings, we talked about the problems of the day, read press reports in newspapers and magazines and discussed nationalist movements and the problems of liberty abroad. We tried to publish a magazine and use its platform to reach all the young Moroccan intellectuals and share with them our ideas and thoughts on the national question but the colonial authorities denied us the authorization. We had, then, to publish our articles in Tunisian, Algerian, and even Egyptian

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1 Williams writes that historical analysis of cultural formations reveals that there is "a remarkably extending and interpenetrating activity of artistic forms and actual or desired social relations. It is never only a specifying artistic analysis, though much of the evidence will be available through that, nor only a generalizing social analysis, though that reference has to be quite empirically made. It is the steady discovery of genuine formations which are simultaneously artistic forms and social locations, with all the properly cultural evidence of identification and presentation, local stance and organization, intention and interrelations with others, moving as evidently in one direction -the actual works- as in the other: the specific response to society" (quoted in David Peters Corbett and Andrew Thacker, "Raymond Williams and Cultural Formations: Movements and Magazines" in Prose Studies, Vol.16, No.2, August 1993, pp.91-92).
newspapers, especially those which reached and could be read in Morocco.1

Another association held its meetings at Café "La Comédie," in Rabat. This association, known as the "Comité d'Action Marocaine" (Moroccan Action Committee), produced an outline of political and cultural reforms which was submitted to the colonial administration along with a letter in which the committee made a pressing request to the effect that "the Moroccan people be given the freedom to express themselves in Arabic and French so that they could be within their rights to make public their grievances and their legitimate aspirations." The reform chart that was born out of the meetings at café "La Comédie" became the blueprint for the manifeste for independence which was published in January 1944, in which the leadership of the nationalist movement called for resistance and armed struggle against the colonizer.

The subaltern counterpublics which matured in the spaces of libraries and cafés had to survive internal organizational and ideological conflicts, resist the repression and persecution of the colonial authorities, and negotiate the limitations of the Moroccan social reality. In addition to the tight control of the colonial administration over public media, the Moroccan intellectual elite faced the problem of getting its message to the general public, which was predominantly illiterate and could not have been reached through print media anyway. It was from this perspective that sports associations functioned as an ideal space for interaction between subaltern counterpublics and the Moroccan people. Moreover, sports competitions were amenable to an ideological interpretation which hardly needed decoding to be appreciated by the general public.2 Soccer, for example, was viewed by the Moroccan public as an alternative sport and a game opposing Moroccan and French

2 Pierre de Courbetin (1914), a French sport theorist who is credited with reviving the Olympic games, defined the role sports can play in the modern colonial society as follows: "Sport is an eminent factor in colonial enterprises so much so that colonizing without a vigorous preparation constitutes a dangerous imprudence" (quoted in M'barek Zaki, "Les associations nationales d'étudiants de jeunesse et de sport de la période colonialisiste (1912-1956)" in Noureddine ElAoufi, ed., Signes du présent: La société civile au Maroc, approches, Rabat: SMER, 1992, p.121).
teams became a battlefield for competing emotions, ideologies, and political aspirations:

A victory of the Moroccan team over the French was perceived in the popular mentality as a political triumph, a fact which increased people's self-confidence and consolidated their belief that liberation was within reach. Moroccan citizens viewed their sport champions as representatives who expressed their aspirations. They celebrated their victory with explosive joy and profound nationalistic sentiments despite the presence of French troops who usually encircled the stadiums where competitions took place.1

The historical context of 1912-1956 in which the Moroccan resistance movements and associations operated was undoubtedly a decisive factor which reflected on their organizational structure, self-management and interaction with society. The colonial presence helped the leadership to put aside their ideological and political differences and made the general public more receptive to the message of liberation and freedom. In the post-independence era, those associations and movements were subject to the same structural and organizational changes which the entire social system underwent. Resistance and oppositional movements typically renew their visions and ideological platforms in the wake of a fundamental national or international historical shift.

However, the transformations subaltern counterpublics and oppositional movements go through are also signs that they operate within a field which extends beyond the boundaries of a dialectic interaction with social locations and ideological and organizational norms. Subaltern counterpublics are better viewed as operating within the horizon of a historical spectrum which is determined by national and global historical conjunctures. Though it does not always play out in favor of democratic and egalitarian ideals, the

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historical spectrum is a latent site for emancipation which helps what Fraser terms "weak publics" become "strong publics."

Fraser provides an insightful reading of the concept of "civil society." She argues that the expression usually yields itself to two different interpretations. From one perspective, a "relatively uninteresting" one, "civil society" is defined from the perspective of capitalist economy, and is used as a claim to legitimize "a system of limited government and laissez faire capitalism" on the ground that it is "a necessary precondition for a well-functioning public sphere" (Fraser, 1992, p.133). From another viewpoint which is often perpetuated by bourgeois interests reads "civil society" as an autonomous public (neither economic nor administrative) to which the state is accountable. Fraser's assertion is that the bourgeois conception of the public sphere desires a sharp separation of civil society and the state to promote "weak publics" "whose deliberative practice consists exclusively in opinion formation and does not also encompass decision making" (Fraser, 1992, p.134). Fraser opposes the notion of "weak publics" to that of "strong publics" which came into existence with the emergence of parliamentary sovereignty. The problematic of "strong public" and "weak public" constitutes a "democratic advance" because:

as the terms [...] suggest, the force of public opinion is strengthened when a body representing it is empowered to translate such 'opinion' into authoritative decisions. At the same time, there remain important questions about the relation between parliamentary strong publics and the weak publics to which they are supposed to be accountable. In general, these developments raise some interesting and important questions

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1 Over the last two decades, religious groups and movements have demonstrated that grassroots organizations and campaigns can be effective in bringing weak publics to decision-making positions (see, for example, Ralph Reed, Active Faith: How Christians Are Changing the Soul of American Politics, New York: The Free Press, 1996, reviewed in The New York Times' Book Review by Tom Wicker, July 28, 1996, p.14). Reed advises more “cultural and moral suasion” and a focus on the election of local representatives, judges, and school boards to effect the passage of state laws that are favorable to the agenda of the Christian Coalition. The Algerian Islamic party attempted the same strategy in the 1992 legislative elections but the elections were annulled. In Morocco, it has taken religious groups less than a decade to move out of almost total anonymity to a position where they are short of a few votes to become a majority on the board of the National Union of the Moroccan Students (UNEM).
about the relative merits of weak and strong publics and about the respective roles that institutions of both kinds might play in a democratic and egalitarian society (Fraser, 1992, pp. 134-135).

Fraser’s interesting reading stops short of showing how weak publics can transform themselves into strong publics. Viewing the relationship between counterpublics and society from a dialectic perspective only may not offer enough possibilities to transcend the “duality” that is intrinsic to dialectics. The Moroccan subaltern counterpublics, for example, were able to organize themselves into cultural and sports associations because they capitalized on the historical dynamics which defined the relationship of the colonial regime of France not only towards its colonies but also vis à vis its European competitors. The colonial authorities could not prohibit cultural associations for fear of being viewed by the “indigenous population” as propagators of backwardness and regress. Because the French were involved in an intensive competition against the English for the “acculturation” of Egypt, they could not ban an Egyptian theatre troupe from touring Morocco in the 1920s despite the colonial administration’s awareness of the “subversive” nature of the ideas and messages the troupe was disseminating across the country.

Moreover, in an age when capital is claiming control of the world’s geography through international trade agreements, global systems of banking, information and media, oppositional movements and counterpublics fighting for the implementation of the ideals of freedom, equality, and justice should also think of their struggles as acts which carry both local and global significance. Fraser is right to argue against the bourgeois claim which restricts the public sphere debate to "matters of general concern" and "common good" for, as she points out, it may be that the only way for the less powerful groups to make sure their needs and interests are heard is by bringing in issues of self-interest to public debate. Similarly, counterpublics would stand to benefit from a mutual circulation and dissemination of their communities’ self-interest at the local, domestic, and international levels. Furthermore, it is a self-paralyzing thought that which claims that the decisions made by a bank in Paris, London or New York affect the structure of the international banking system and the course of world economy while a women’s movement organizing to struggle for freedom and equality in a
small corner of the world is “irrelevant” to the struggles for political, social, and economic emancipation being undertaken in the cosmopolitan cities.

Concluding Remarks

In this chapter, I have discussed some of the problematic issues that the theorizing of the public sphere raises. I have argued that the liberal, the agonistic, and the discursive models of public space are neither inclusive to
account for the needs of the disenfranchised, nor comprehensive to shed light on the complex actions and interactions social groups and communities perform. I have also argued that the plebeian sphere must be approached through a feminist perspective so as not to assimilate gender to class relations. In fact, the plebeian sphere must be problematized rather than idealized in order to sort out the conflicts and contradictions which characterize group gathering and interaction. I have underlined the contributions of Negt and Kluge, Downing, and Fraser because they theorize emancipatory social change and foreground liberationist aesthetics.

Assertions which claim the demise and death of the public and the public realm must not jeopardize the struggle of the oppressed to make their voices heard. The notions of the public and the public sphere are not only spatial and ideological metaphors; they also constitute some of the most appropriate concepts of social theory which historicize the development of liberating practices and give meaning to people's daily struggles. I propose that the "public sphere" be viewed as "an absent cause" available only through historicization, that is through a textualization which is vigilant about the quasi-ideal historical system which produces it. This view has the advantage of cutting across the historically finite visions, such as Habermas's, in which the public sphere is conjugated in the past. This approach will also make it possible to read through the binary oppositions of public vs private and high culture vs popular culture to put into relief the historical dynamics involved in spatial production and distribution. My assumption here is that, no matter how linguistically competent an actor/speaker is, access to spaces of communication is socially, economically, culturally, and politically controlled. Viewing the ideal as a "cause" foregrounds the objectives of resistance, struggle, and commitment to a liberated form of social

1 Habermas (1992) blames the media for what he calls a "re feudalization" of the public sphere while Arendt holds the rise of society and the nation-state responsible for the disintegration of the public sphere: "The rise of society brought about the simultaneous decline of the public as well as the private realm. But the eclipse of a common public world, so crucial to the formation of the lonely mass man and so dangerous in the formation of the wordless mentality of modern ideological mass movements, began with the much more tangible loss of a privately owned share in the world" (Arendt, The Human Condition, 1958, p. 257). Arendt's assertion is that the emergence of a social class which has displaced the notion of family and the substitution of the privately (family) owned property by the nation-state territory have alienated the public and sealed the demise of the public sphere. Arendt then goes on to state that the new technologies and globalization have led to a "world alienation" making it more and more difficult for individuals to identify with the national territory.
organization. Though it can not pretend to hide its idealistic intentions, this view is redeemed by the fact that it is not interested in outlining a blueprint for the bourgeois ideal, but one which addresses the needs of the oppressed and disenfranchised.

The public and the public sphere are better approached through the notions of communication and everyday performance with which they are interlaced. From this perspective, it becomes possible to delimit the specific social, political, economic, and cultural characteristics of each public and each public sphere and locate the dynamism of their relation to the wider horizon of the historical spectrum. Within the broader perspective of communication and everyday performance, the public and public sphere could be recast within the more complex organizational, institutional and aesthetic maps of contemporary societies. The globalization of communication media may have brought publics closer in that they allow disparate groups to share simultaneously in the experiences of learning, information gathering, and image consumption. However, the network of international communication has also highlighted the asymmetric distribution of wealth, power, and knowledge among local groups and between nations and societies. In their contemporary formation and articulation, publics and public spheres also come as contextualized entities bracketed by the weight of the historical definitions of modernity and/or tradition and the unfolding of the postmodern contemporaneity. Habermas's is mostly in line with the modernist view which finds it ethically acceptable to mobilize (homogenize) communities under the leadership of an elitist group. Bakhtin's contribution is important because it foregrounds the importance of plebeian spheres as gathering sites of marginalized and subordinate groups. Fraser is more sensitive to the diversity intrinsic to social organizations, especially gender, race, and class differences. Her definition of publics and subaltern counterpublics is to be interpreted as a call for a social commitment to the cause of the disenfranchised.

However, despite their emancipatory potential, the various interpretations of the public and the public sphere take up additional dimensions when the case involves post-traditional societies. The Moroccan public, for example, has to negotiate the cognitive residue in its historical and traditional patrimony, construct its version of an alternative modernity, and deal with the global reach of the dynamics of postmodernism as an
intellectual and aesthetic practice and as an organizing principle of a lifestyle. At the cross-roads of this triangular effort is a commitment to liberation, equality, and justice. In the next chapter, I will try to recover the emancipatory potential in the concept "community" which I hold to be more appropriate to the study of community formation and performance in post-traditional Morocco.
Chapter Three:
Communal Emergence and
the Ethic of Collective Solidarity

In the previous chapter, I have shown how the conceptual articulation of the public sphere has shifted from a homogenizing view which brackets the organization of social relations and communication practices within the principles of a bourgeois ideology to a recognition of alternative public spheres. In the dominant models of the public sphere, whether it is the liberal, the agonistic or the discursive model, the propertied and educated male individual is granted "natural" rights to spatial representations and a freedom of public action which makes him the absolute author of his destiny. Habermas's theory of communication, for example, could be said to further institutionalize the privileges of the bourgeois male subject by upholding rational discourse against all other forms of expression and communication.

Conversely, the plebeian space hosts everyday performances of groups and communities who are excluded from the sphere of officialdom. Though the Bakhtinian model does not highlight the complex power relations and contradictions which run through the plebeian sphere, the importance of this model lies in the potential it allows the disenfranchised to reproduce their cultural practices and interpellate the dominant culture through oppositional, subversive or negotiable forms. Similarly, post-bourgeois theories of the public sphere argue for the importance of alternative and oppositional spheres in the construction of pockets of resistance to the power structure. Nancy Fraser and Seyla Benhabib, for instance, foreground the legitimate struggle of minorities and the marginalized for a space of representation but also warn against idealizations of alternative spheres since these, too, are shot through with contradictions.

Unlike the dominant models of public space which tend to consolidate the status quo, alternative theories of the public sphere, as proposed and discussed in these pages, may be invigorated by the emancipatory promises of a collective form of social organization. Furthermore, theories of alternative public spheres and counterpublics come closer to articulating the nature of social contradictions which permeate post-traditional societies. However, I have opted for the use of "communal sphere" as a descriptive concept to
ground my theory in the organizational structure of post-traditional society. Even when used in an oppositional sense, the concept “alternative public sphere” remains largely indebted to the historical reality of the Western nation-state and the institutions of its civil society. Conversely, the concept of “communal sphere” highlights the organizing principles of communal forms such as kinship, blood ties, and geographical belonging which are dominant modes of association in post-traditional Morocco.

In this chapter, I contend that the concept of “community” is historically and theoretically amenable to the study of social space and communication practices in post-traditional societies. The concept of “community” constitutes a starting point in tracing the formation of groups. It is also indispensable in analysing the emergence of collective identities. Furthermore, the term “community” remains a key concept in understanding the ways in which a cultural practice relates to the changes affecting society at large. In this respect, I share Baz Kershaw’s definition of “community” as “the conceptual lynchpin which links the experience (and action) of individuals -including that of performance- to major historical changes in society.”¹ I hasten to add that my interest here is neither in the dominant form of Community nor in the cultural capital it mediates. Rather, this research focuses on the formation and transformation of emergent communities and their cultures.

Similarly, the approach I adopt is neither minimalist nor maximalist. It does not claim that popular cultures of subaltern or emergent communities represent a stagnant and marginal world which further alienates the populace. Neither does it claim that the world of popular cultures is self-contained, autonomous, and an authentic representative of people’s aspirations. On the contrary, my approach is premised on the fact that the real and imagined worlds of the dominant and popular cultures are engaged in a dynamic relationship of which domination and resistance constitute only one aspect. The two worlds relate to each other through appropriation and negotiation, moments of contest and times of repose, situations of clear conflict and others of ambivalent tolerance. I do not subscribe to any purist school. I take it for granted that cultures, whether dominant or popular, are in a continuous flux, constantly reconstructing and restructuring one another.

In the spatial practices I explore, I consider what is "residual" and what is "emergent." Individuals, communities, and practices are repositories of past traces and anticipated emancipations, melanges of different voices and practices, of cooing whispers and cacophonic noises, of chatter and bluster. It is the hybrid site between these seemingly contradictory symbolic expressions and practices which this research sets out to explore. The interstices of this ambivalent space constitute a vantage site where communities imagine their identities across differences and conflicts. It is the process in and through which these communities emerge that I endeavour to pin down.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section, I argue that the complexity associated with the idea of community may not reside in the concept itself as much as in its appropriation by subversive and totalizing practices. In this section, I also argue that post-traditional communities invest simultaneously in vertical and horizontal imaginings. I also make the point that the post-traditional community is characterized by its paradoxical state of being simultaneously "real" and "imagined." In this respect, I foreground the importance of spatial production and distribution in the conceptualization of post-traditional communities. The underlying aim is to highlight the ideal of collective and participatory performance which post-traditional communities strive to approximate.

In the second section, I explore some of the processes which mediate communities of spatial location and performative mediation. I argue that the spatial production of communities defines the relations among members and constitutes the spatial text on which the community constructs and imagines its identity. I also contend that performative mediation should be problematized. In this respect, I argue that face-to-face communication is an integral component of the complex structure of power distribution and struggle. Similarly, I contend that oppositional discourses are not a priori subversive or counter-hegemonic. Rather, communities of resistance emerge out of a continuous criss-crossing and mutual interpellation between the language of the dominant ideology and the subordinate discourses which endeavour to produce alternative worldviews.

In the third section, I examine processes of the ritual of communication and performance. I argue that the ritual of community interaction and performance must be problematized rather than idealized. While the collective participation in a ritual of communication and performance can
generate group feeling and solidarity, it can also reproduce existing power relations and mediate the dominant interpretation of reality. In this section, I also examine the importance of liminal spheres in the emergence of communities. I argue that liminal moments and fractured spaces can generate conditions for the emergence of communities and the construction of collective identities. I conclude this chapter by delineating signposts of communal emergence as an ethic of collective solidarity.

From Community to Post-Traditional Communities

A. A Reconstruction of the Concept “Community”

I propose to start by looking at some of the counter-arguments which have been voiced against the use of the concept of “community.” Iris Marion Young begins a chapter on “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference” by listing a series of legitimate concerns which the concept of “community” as a normative model of social organization raises:

The ideal of community [...] privileges unity over difference, immediacy over mediation, sympathy over recognition of the limits of one’s understanding of others from their point of view. Community is an understandable dream, expressing a desire for selves that are transparent to one another, relationships of mutual identification, social closeness and comfort. The dream is understandable, but politically problematic, I argue, because those motivated by it will tend to suppress differences among themselves or implicitly to exclude from their political groups persons with who they do not identify. The vision of small, face-to-face, decentralized units that this ideal promotes, moreover, is an unrealistic vision for transformative politics in mass urban society.¹

Young ends her chapter by suggesting that “community” be replaced by a less problematic one: “Because most articulations of the ideal community carry

the urge to unity I have criticized, however, I think it less confusing to use a term other than community rather than to redefine the term" (Iris Young, 1990, p. 320).

In addition to the fact that the ideal that is promoted by the concept of "community" can homogenize differences and compress pluralities, its condition has been further problematized by the reality that it has been hijacked by groups with different political agendas. Government institutions, elected city councils, and radical groups on the right of the political spectrum all claim sovereignty over the term "community." I need to worry about these types of "communities" only in so far as I do not think the most appropriate way to proceed is to abandon the concept "community" and let homogenizing groups and institutions claim possession of the ideal it carries. Iris Young is right to contend that the possibility of embracing the concept of "community" as a normative model for social organization should not be taken at face value. She is also right to argue that the dream conjured up by the concept of community is "politically problematic." However, I believe that its political problematization pleads in favour of the recuperation of its emancipatory power while remaining alert to the concept's homogenizing potential. After all, the dream the concept conjures up calls for a continuous self-involvement and self-commitment, political and otherwise, and constant vigilance for external and internal compromises.

Though it is difficult to come up with an all-encompassing definition of the concept, the founding principle of "community" is the group's perception of its practices as partaking of a shared system of beliefs and values. This perception procures an ontological meaning to the lives of group members and sustains a sense of coherence of the group's collective identity. Raymond Williams, for example, implies that the basis of a community is the culture's "structure of feeling" which forms "a particular and characteristic colour."1 Tony Bennett explains the concept "structure of feeling" as "a shared set of ways of thinking and feeling which, displaying a patterned regularity, form and are formed by the 'whole way of life' which comprises the 'lived culture' of a particular epoch, class or group."2 E. P. Thompson is more specific in his interpretation of the concept of "community" which he takes to be the

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product of "a high degree of conscious working-class endeavour" which is mediated and reinforced by the traditions of trade unions and friendly societies which socialize and discipline the workers into a particular ethic and way of life.¹

However, if the "whole way of life" is to be taken as the basis of community, then, one should also take into consideration Stuart Hall's legitimate questions:

> Whose way? Which life? One way or several? Isn't it the case that, in the modern world, the more we examine 'whole ways of life' the more internally diversified, the more cut through by complex patterns of difference, they appear to be? Modern people of all sorts and conditions, it seems have had increasingly, as a condition of survival to be members, simultaneously, of several overlapping 'imagined communities'; and the negotiations between and across these complex 'borderlines' are characteristic of modernity itself.²

Stuart Hall draws attention to the ideological implications embedded in the totalizing definition of "culture" or "community" as "a whole way of life." In fact, no one today can question the existence of "ways of life" and "lifestyles." Similarly, it is more just to distinguish between "Community" as deriving from a dominant system of beliefs which, either through coercion or hegemony, makes its version of reality prevail and "communities" or "subaltern communities" which, through strategies of resistance and subversion, struggle to build for themselves a space within and in the face of the dominant Community. The relationship between the dominant Community and the communities which emerge in its margins should not be viewed as a straightforward relation of power and dominance, on one side, and submission and subjugation, on the other. On the contrary, the two categories are tied in a relation of continual flux of mutual resistance and appropriation, contestation and negotiation, concession and compromise.

Reflecting on the complexity of the concept of community, Raymond Williams writes that:

The complexity of community [...] relates to the difficult interaction between the tendencies originally distinguished in the historical development: on the one hand the sense of direct common concern; on the other hand the materialization of various forms of common organization, which may or may not adequately express this. Community can be the warmly persuasive word to describe an existing set of relationships, or the warmly persuasive word to describe an alternative set of relationships. What is most important, perhaps, is that unlike all other terms of social organization (state, nation, society, etc.) it seems never to be used unfavourably, and never to be given any positive opposing or distinguishing term.¹

The complexity associated with the definition of the idea of community may not reside in the concept itself as much as in its malleability to subversive and homogenizing interpretations. Homi Bhabha captures the oppositional dynamics which steers the idea of community by calling "community" the "antagonist supplement of modernity."² The fluidity of the community concept lies in the fact that it lays claim to some of the organizing principles of the nation-state and can therefore provide emancipatory space for oppositional and minority groups while legitimizing the homogenizing ideological claims Grand Narratives perpetuate. In addition, the meaning-making activity which allows the community to construct its collective identity and its relation to outside groups is a compromising process which "continually transforms the reality of difference into the appearance of similarity with such efficacy that people can still invest 'community' with ideological integrity. It unites them in opposition, both to each other, and to those outside."³

¹ Raymond Williams, Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society, New York: Oxford, 1973, p. 76.
² Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture, London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 231.
In Moroccan post-traditional society, Community (the Umma) draws its coherence from two main systems: religion (Islam) and language (classical Arabic). The Moroccan nationalist movement (Morocco was under the French and Spanish Protectorate from 1912 to 1956), had no problems assimilating the two main systems of the Umma to the modern notion of “nation.” Islam and Arabic were mobilized for the simulation of nationalist feelings, national identity, and the articulation of an imagined community that is spiritually and linguistically cohesive and homogeneous. This “modernization” of the concept of Umma has as objectives the immunization of Moroccan identity against foreign (i.e. Western) cultural imperialism, the preservation of the spiritual and moral values of Islam, and the enforcement of an Arab-ness of language, culture, and public life. The implications of this policy have been the systematic marginalization of Moroccan vernacular languages and the popular cultures they mediate, and the desublimation of dialects which are the people’s everyday media of communication and representation. The proponents of a national identity through the unisonance of classical Arabic systematically invoke the world of the sacred, the authentic, and the pure and interpret any other variation in the medium as an attempt to profane the realm of the Community of the faithful and to undermine the unity of the nation. In the words of an influential Moroccan nationalist:

Put in simple terms, there is a reciprocal relationship between settlement and the colonial language because language reinforces settlement and settlement reinforces the foreign language. The victims of this process have been the Arabic language, the Arab, and Muslim personality in the Maghreb.

In an apology for the politics of Arabization, the same theorist writes:

Arabization is not an academic or encyclopedic issue [...] but one which seeks to procure for Arabic its legitimate position as the

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1 See Mohammed Chekroun, Jeux et enjeux culturels au Maroc, Rabat: Editions Okad, 1990, p. 70.
language of one Umma. This is a mission that Arabic does not need to share with any other language.\(^1\)

Without minimizing the threat in the closely knit relationship between the colonial language and settlement or cultural imperialism, the unity of such a Community may lead to an exclusion or marginalization of other communities whose claim of national and spiritual belonging to the nation and the Community of the faithful is very legitimate. One major problematic in such homogenizing and totalizing interpretation of Community is that it is based on an elitist and scripturalist vision since written Arabic is accessible only to the privileged literate group. It is, then, with no surprise that another nationalist and political leader writes that “democracy is good but the Umma must be led by an intellectual aristocracy.”\(^2\) With hindsight, it has become obvious that the process of Arabization which the state apparatuses -especially schools, state administrations, and the media- have adopted has mostly benefited the nation-state which has gained in legitimacy “while decanting in the ‘container’ of Arabic Western ‘contents’, themes of progress, development, the world of production, consumption, and money; in short, a world generated by colonization and which is alien to the Moroccan.”\(^15\)

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1. Ibid. p. 100.
Benedict Anderson has brought to mainstream attention the notion of the “imagined community.” His point is that:

[...] all communities larger than primordial villages of face-to-face contact (and perhaps even these) are imagined. Communities are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined.¹

We infer from his definition of the nation as “an imagined political community” that the community is imagined because its members may

“never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.” We can also infer from this definition that “regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each,” the community is “conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.” While I maintain Anderson’s concept of the “imagined community,” I also think it needs to be nuanced for the purpose of my research. In what follows, I sketch an outline of post-traditional community.

B. Post-Traditional Community: Towards a Definition

Post-traditional communities invest simultaneously in vertical and horizontal imaginings. The vertical dimension of the community is paradigmatic and transcendental. The style in which it is imagined is borrowed from the world of the sacred. Its culture is sacral and its “vast territorial stretch” is “impressive.” The boundaries of the vertical community embrace the territorial map of the nation-state, the pan-Arab state whose unifying principle is Arabic, and the universal world of the Umma which welcomes communities where the dominant religion is Islam and, eventually, the Muslim in an absolute sense.

Anderson has noted the importance of the ritual of the pilgrimage in the reinforcement of the vertical dimension of the religious community. He contends that:

1 Ibid. In fact, Anderson’s statement is on the definition of the nation and it reads: “[The nation] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”

2 Ibid. p. 7. Anderson’s actual phrasing is: “[the nation] is imagined as a community, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation that may prevail in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship.”

3 It is this type of community that Anderson defines as the “religious community” (Anderson, 1991, p 12). Anderson has also argued that the nation is imagined as “sovereign” “because the concept was born in an age in which the Enlightenment and Revolution were destroying the legitimacy of the divinely-ordained, hierarchical dynastic realm. Coming to maturity at a stage of human history when even the most devout adherents of any universal religion were inescapably confronted with the living ‘pluralism’ of such religions, the allomorphism between each faith’s ontological claims and territorial stretch, nations dream of being free, and, if under God, directly so. The gage and emblem of this freedom is the sovereign state” (Anderson, Imagined Communities, 1991, p. 7).
It is not simply that in the minds of Christians, Muslims or Hindus the cities of Rome, Mecca, or Benares were the centres of sacred geographies, but that their centrality was experienced and 'realized' (in the stagecraft sense) by the constant flow of pilgrims moving towards them from remote and otherwise unrelated localities (Anderson, 1991, pp. 53-54).

Further, what is important is not only the experience "realized" by the pilgrim but also that lived by the community as a collective body. The ritual of seeing the pilgrim off and of welcoming her/him back is lived by the pilgrim’s family and acquaintances as an act of collective bonding. In addition, the time-span of the pilgrimage, which lasts about three weeks in the twelfth month of the Muslim lunar calendar, is also the occasion for the media to conjure up the imagined identity of the Muslim Umma.

The pilgrimage to Mecca is experienced not only as a spatial reality but also as a sacred journey in time. For Moroccan children, the furthest geographical location their imagination can summon is Mecca. The metaphysical representation of the geography of Mecca has its justification in the fact that, not so long ago, it used to take a Moroccan pilgrim more than two years to get to and back from Mecca, and up until the late 1960s, the journey by ship took the Moroccan pilgrim about six months. Before it was streamlined by travel agencies and airline carriers, pilgrimage to Mecca was a serious enterprise to organize and a lot of pilgrims never came back. This may explain the reason why Mecca has survived in the Moroccan imaginary as a remote geographical location. However, I also find interesting the transition from geographical to temporal remoteness. Mecca is a remote location not only in space but also in time and the pilgrimage to this sacred geography is also a psychological journey in the vertical time of the Muslim Community.

It is partly in the vertical realm that the post-traditional community imagines the ethos of its self-identification and experiences what Turner calls the state of "communitas:" primarily, "a direct, immediate and total confrontation of human identities" where rank and status are replaced by communal bonding.¹ Anderson marvels at the "idea" that unites the Berber and the Malay in Mecca:

The strange physical juxtaposition of Malays, Persians, Indians, Berbers and Turks in Mecca is something incomprehensible without an idea of their community in some form. The Berber encountering the Malay before the Kaaba must, as it were, ask himself: 'Why is this man doing what I am doing, uttering the same words that I am uttering, even though we can not talk to one another?' There is only one answer, once one has learnt it: 'Because we ... are all Muslims' (Anderson, 1991, p. 54).

However, the vertical communion of the imagined post-traditional community is always already implicated in the horizontal reality of the community, playing out its contradictions, reconstructing its relations, and opening up spaces for new communities to emerge. I have noted before the interface between the sacred realm of the mosque and the profane café space. The believer's prayers are usually punctuated by visits to the neighbourhood café. More importantly, the liminal moment mediated by the vertical realm is often the occasion for marginalized horizontal communities to advance their interests or make their grievances heard. In fact, "Aren't we all Muslims?" is a rhetorical convention in Moroccan colloquial Arabic often used by individuals and groups to invoke the sense of belonging to the Communal identity of Muslims. This rhetorical convention serves the purpose of displacing rank and status disparities and allows the individual a re-entry into the social world on reconstructed terms.¹

In Gender on the Market, Deborah Kapchan provides an illuminating illustration of the key role such rhetorical conventions have in the lives of marginalized groups. She notes that Moroccan market women vendors' continuous invocation and revoicing of the symbolic Communal fraternity embedded in the rhetorical question noted above ("Aren't we all Muslims?") enables them to appropriate a traditional male discourse to their advantage. They use it, for example, to shame a male customer into buying from them instead of a male vendor or a merchant in the city boutique. The collective

¹I am relying here on Elizabeth Burns' proto-semiotic model for the analysis of theatrical duality and in which she identifies the two simultaneous levels in which performance takes place. Burns calls the two types "rhetorical" and "authenticating" conventions. Burns' argument is paraphrased in Baz Kershaw's The Politics of Performance: Radical Theatre as Cultural Intervention, London and New York: Routledge, 1992, pp. 25-27.
pronoun "we" is integrative and universalizing but when used by a subject aware of her condition as a member of a subordinate community, it carries different implications. The mediation of "we" becomes an articulation of an oppositional worldview to a taken-for-granted dominant system of communication and interpretation. As Kapchan puts it:

The consciousness of [the] woman vendor invokes another 'language-intention' and another world view. Her relation to this 'we,' this 'inchoate pronoun' (Fernandez 1986), is different from the 'we' represented in traditional Moroccan rhetoric; in saying 'we' she invokes women (not men), women vendors (not housewives), and vendors of the marketplace (as opposed to merchants in boutiques and stores). She has introduced new categories into the paradigm, new images into the metaphor, while at the same time evoking all the authority to which the traditional categories lay claim.¹

Collective pronouns are often used deliberately by individual members to vocalize their public resistance and protest against the perceived duality of a system which publicizes fairness and equality but practices discrimination and subordination. Individuals who feel they have been victims of a social prejudice are likely to summon the collective pronouns "we" or "us" to advance their claim (as in the rhetorical conventions: "Don’t we have a right in this?" or "What about us?"). By conjuring up the ethos of solidarity and equality of the imagined vertical Community, individuals and groups resource themselves in the Community’s belief system, and thus, become psychologically motivated to claim their rights.

However, the style of imagining of the post-traditional community can not be conceived only in its vertical manifestation. The post-traditional community is also imagined as a horizontal body. I am not necessarily referring to the ideals of small town community or face-to-face communication. The horizontal reality of the community is shaped by the politics of the spatial and temporal framework in which it is articulated, whether in a cybercafé in a hip boulevard in Casablanca or in an isolated suq.

in the Atlas mountains. As a matter of fact, communities are not just "ideas" but, more importantly, they are concrete and actual groupings of people with economic, political, social, and cultural life stories. Raymond Williams is right to underline "the importance of actual communities and forms of association as the necessary mediating element between individuals and large Society."¹

In fact, concepts such as fraternity, group solidarity, and comradeship are imaginable only with the potential existence of an actual and concrete performance of a social grouping. These collective ideas and values are observable in the group's spatial and temporal comportment and manners of thought and behaviour; in a word, the collective ideas materialize in the "culture" of the group. E. P. Thompson has argued that it is the institutionalization of the culture of collectivist values which distinguishes the nineteenth-century working class from the eighteenth-century mob:

Collectivist values are consciously held and are propagated in political theory, trade union ceremonial, moral rhetoric. It is, indeed, this collective self-consciousness, with its corresponding theory, institutions, discipline, and community values which distinguishes the nineteenth-century working class from the eighteenth-century mob.²

In his turn, Raymond Williams has made a point to the effect that it is "the basic collective idea" which distinguishes working-class culture from bourgeois culture. Williams is also right to insist on the continuous interaction between the two cultures:

We may now see what is properly meant by 'working-class culture'. It is not proletarian art, or council houses, or a particular use of language; it is, rather, the basic collective idea, and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and intentions which proceed from this. Bourgeois culture, similarly, is the

basic individualist idea and the institutions, manners, habits of thought and inventions which proceed from that. In our culture as a whole, there is both a constant interaction between these ways of life and an area which can properly be described as common to or underlying both [...] The culture which [the working-class] has produced, and which it is important to recognize, is the collective democratic institutions whether in the trade unions, the cooperative movement or a political party. Working-class culture, in the stage through which it has been passing, is primarily social (in that it has created institutions) rather than individual (in particular intellectual or imaginative work). When it is considered in context, it can be seen as a very remarkable creative achievement.  

I have quoted Raymond Williams at some length because the argument he makes is central to my reading of the horizontal reality of the community. In fact, we may translate the term “culture” here into “community.” The cornerstone argument is that the working-class community is to be celebrated for the idea of collective and associative tradition it has institutionalized. Whether or not the ideal has ever materialized is a subordinate issue. What is important is that it has institutionalized the ideal of collective and participatory performance which post-traditional communities strive to approximate.

Richard Sennett has made a point to the effect that it is the ideal of collective performance which has suffered the reifying process of capitalism. Sennett laments the disintegration of collective identity and the emergence of a “collective personality.” He argues that the erosion of public life has disrupted the relationship between communal identity and shared action, a fact which has weakened the “sense of community” and our understanding of who “we are:”

Collective action nourishing a collective self-image: this alliance stretches from the ideals of Greek political thought to the speech of 18th century coffeehouses and theatres; the shared speech

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yielded people the sense of constituting together a 'public.' In general, we can say that the 'sense of community,' of a society with a strong public life, is born from this union of shared action and a shared sense of collective self.¹

One may object to the nostalgic ring in this statement, but Sennett's point is certainly worth taking into consideration. It is collective action which anchors the imagined identity of the community in historical time. The vertical dimension of the community is universal, timeless, and ahistorical. This is, for example, why the liminal is "a moment." The liminal moment's belated repercussions on the participants and society at large is made possible because collective action historicizes the production and post-production processes of liminality. From a conceptual perspective, collective action validates the notion of "imagined community" by tying its reality in to historical time and reassuring community members that their imagining is not only a suspended web of pictures and images which exists in their heads but that their self-image is also a "real" image, so to speak.

For Sennett, it is capitalism and bourgeois ideology which have severed the relationship between communal identity and collective action. His point is that capitalism has solemnized the inner world of the individual at the expense of the outbound dimension of the collective community. The outcome is the rise of "collective personality" and "collective being" in the place of communal identity and collective action:

What has emerged in the last hundred years, as communities of collective personality have begun to form, is that the shared imagery becomes a deterrent to shared action. Just as personality itself has become an antisocial idea, collective personality becomes group identity in society hostile to, difficult to translate into, group activity. Community has become a phenomenon of collective being rather than collective action, save in one way. The only transaction for the group to engage in is that of purification, of rejection and chastisement of those who are not 'like' the others (Sennett, 1978, p. 223).

Sennett finds evidence of the psychological transformations which occurred to the nineteenth-century man in the emergence of the cult of the flâneur, the stranger on the street who is out there to be "watched, not spoken to" and the institutionalization of "public silence" in workplaces, department stores, the street, the theatre, the café, the pub, and the club. This new code of behaviour had social, political, and psychological repercussions on the individual and the community:

> Public expression could be understood only through the imposition of constraints upon oneself. This meant subservience to the few who act; it was also more. This discipline of silence was an act of purification. One wanted to be stimulated fully, without the adulteration of one's tastes, history, or desire to respond. Out of this, passivity came logically to seem a requisite for knowledge (Sennett, 1978, p. 214).¹

My research on the Moroccan café confirms Sennett's premise in that the ambiance inside the working-class or the lower middle-class café is livelier, noisier, and more disorderly than it is in cafés which cater to a predominantly upper middle-class clientele. In addition, the speech code in either café type is also set by the spatial production of the café, the disposition of tables, the style of the decor which ornates café walls and windows, the name of the café, and the music selection hand-picked by the owner.

Similarly, Deborah Kapchan makes an illuminating point by showing how "the privatization of public life becomes a privatization of the body."² Speaking of the changing perception of middle-class Moroccan women of the hammam, Kapchan notes that:

> Although women are not completely ready to forgo their hours of steam, sweat, and naked gossip at the public bath, these trips are becoming more a supplement to hygiene than a weekly or bi-

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¹ For a more comprehensive analysis of the ideological and cultural implications of public silence and passive spectatorship on class relations and the psychology of the individual, see R. Sennett, The Fall of Public Man, 1978, chapter 9, especially the section entitled "The Spectator," pp. 205-218.

weekly necessity. Women able to exercise choice often complain that the public bath is dirty or dark. By removing themselves from this public institution, they constitute themselves as a class apart. Individual alienation thus becomes a marker of middle-class status.¹

If individual alienation is a marker of middle-class status, social alienation bears the imprint of the moralist discourse which structures social interaction along gender, age, and content boundaries. Gossip, rumour, humour, and play are viewed as subversive discursive elements. To attenuate their efficacy, conventional morality stigmatizes them as a “feminine” pass-time and constructs “wisdom” as synonymous with “self-composure,” “discretion,” and “self-discipline.” Commonplace sayings which satirize discursive interaction, such as “If speech is of silver, silence is of gold,” are framed in moralizing narratives and printed in children’s textbooks.

However, social interaction remains the organizing principle which constructs and cements the horizontal community. Language, spatial proxemics, and body theatrics mediate communal relations. Women who have few opportunities to leave their homes find alternative ways of communicating with their neighbours. Roofs are a favourite social space for women in low-middle class neighbourhoods or in families with conservative male heads. The playful element in social interaction carries more implications than the mere psychological gratification of the individual. As Kapchan notes, “daily ‘talk’ (l-hadra) remains a key genre for discerning the re-organization of power relations as they play in and through multiple spheres” (Kapchan, 1996, p. 15).

The post-traditional community is also characterized by its paradoxical state of being simultaneously “real” and “imagined.” The real or concrete grouping of post-traditional communities is spatially produced. Edward T. Hall has overstated the politics of spatial production in the Arab culture by contending that “the whole concept of the boundary as an abstraction is almost impossible to pin down.”² The fact is that the post-traditional community structures its boundaries along concrete as well as abstract notions. This structuring is outlined across class, gender, status, and age

¹ Ibid.
differences. Interaction between a male and a female, for example, observes a normative standard of distance, posture, and language boundaries. Indeed, the performance of interacting subjects is available for meaning-making. In "In Search for a Husband for my Wife," a Moroccan film which deals with the issue of polygamy, the patriarch divorces his third and youngest wife because he "catches" her talking to a delivery boy in what he takes to be a provocative posture. Similarly, a woman walking in front of a café terrace is expected to observe the gendered boundary limits by keeping her visual field at eye level or by looking down. Likewise, conventional morality has it that a boy addressing an older person should not look him in the eye lest that would be interpreted as a sign of impudence.

I have insisted on the reality of spatial boundary in everyday performance because it is within this ambivalent territory that new communities emerge. In post-traditional society, the concept of spatial boundary, in both its abstract and concrete forms, regulate social relations. I have noted earlier that the dominant ideology stigmatizes "loose" behaviour because it transgresses the boundary line of conventional morality and idealizes self-composure and self-control. I have also argued that the time-old boundary line between the public and the private is now questioned by emergent communities. Arab feminists have demonstrated that laws have been legislated to regulate public space while the injustices which run through the private sphere have been systematically ignored. Also, in spaces like the café, traditionally considered a male territory, gender relations are being reconstructed. Though the café is still a predominantly male reserve, more and more women are conquering this space. Most of my male informants have indicated that the social perception of women in cafés has significantly changed over the last two decades.

In addition, spatial production reassures the community of the "reality" of its identity. W. Scott Haine, for example, has insightfully argued that the sociability the café mediates "refutes simple notions of economic or political determination and, paradoxically, reveals the idea of class consciousness to be more than merely a Marxist abstraction." The manifestation of the community as a concrete grouping confirms, reconstructs, and fine-tunes the ideals of the imagined community. It is spatial praxis which indicates how

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ready members are to commit to the ideals of the imagined community they claim belonging to. Quite a few of my informants state that they see no objection to women frequenting cafés but betray signs of unease at the possibility of their female relatives being seen in the neighbourhood café.

Finally, communities are “imagined” because they are mediated. No community is imagined outside a system of mediating signs. Even in face-to-face communication, language and body performance problematize the construction of communities. This is why I prefer to speak of mediated communities rather than communities of “interest” because the latter foregrounds the organizational element in communities. Moreover, the focus on “interest” may overshadow the process through which communities emerge and the ambivalent sites constructed in and within imagined communities. For the purpose of my study, I consider spatial location and performative mediation the groundrocks of communities, whether the case involves the computer mediated community or the community of the primordial village.

In the following section, I attempt a reconstruction of the communities of location and mediation. I analyze the politics of location and mediation and show how they relate to an emerging communal poetics of emancipation. Territoriality (or location) and mediation are accessible to the legitimate claims of communities while they simultaneously constitute the signposts of the master Narrative of the nation-state. The territorial map is under continuous check by communities of location which redefine their own space - whether on the inner city streets, the limited frequency of AM radio waves or the fiber optic cables of the internet - and create their own politics of belonging and identification. Similarly the spatial and temporal mediation which the homogenizing discourse of the nation-state articulates is deformed and reconstructed as it travels through the interstices of the vernacular discourses of the poor and the marginalized. My overall objective is to recover the emancipatory potential of the idea and ideal of community.
Figure 13: The sacred and the profane: calligraphic writings of the name of Allah, pictures of the monarch and a local nationalist figure, and card games.

A. The Politic of Spatial Production and Communities of Location

Baz Kershaw provides a basic definition of communities of location. He contends that:

‘Communities of location’ are created through networks of relationships formed by face-to-face interaction within a
geographically bounded area. Some communities of location are ideologically explicit [...] though it is much more common for their ideological values to be implied by the organisation and interaction of their networks. This is primarily because such communities usually include a variety of ideological interests within the one geographical area, and overt ideological disputes are generally avoided in the interests of the stability of the community itself.¹

In addition to “communities of location,” Kershaw’s definition also incorporates what I have called “communities of mediation.” Though the two communities are always inter-connected, I treat them separately in order to sort out the dynamics which constitute the processes of their formation and interpretation.

First, ideology is not mapped on the geographical site but the location itself participates actively in the nature of the relations which emerge through interaction. This is why, for example, we can not deal with “location” only as an abstract notion, though all communities are spatially produced whether we refer to the computer mediated community or to communities which emerge in plebeian spheres. This may also explain the reason why the performance of the same social actor may change significantly whether s/he is in a public or private space.

Second, by focusing on mediation, we problematize the communicative process. In fact, face-to-face interaction is often idealized because it implies a simplified interpretation of the communicative act. Mediation in face-to-face communication is not only carried out through language but also within a complex system of performance which includes body signs, attitude, posture, and social etiquette. Last but not least, location and mediation are not to be understood as mere “pre-texts” for the transmission of messages. On the contrary, location and mediation produce the “text” of social interaction. The importance of this approach is that it highlights the decisive role of power relations and power struggles in the construction of communities of location and mediation. This is why location and mediation are to be interpreted as always already constructed along class and gender lines.

The spatial production of communities defines the relations among its members and constitutes the spatial text on which the community constructs/imagines its collective identity. It is also on the spatial and territorial text where the "ideological integrity" of a community is conceived. Though the community of location can take shape in neighbourhoods, cafés, public baths or streets, it has often been associated with the geographical design of the "small town," a fact which has often led to the idealization of the "small and homogeneous community" as a social space where group members know each other and actively take part in the processes of decision-making and policy implementation. Peter Hulton, for example, provides a general definition of community which emphasizes the ideas of physical and psychological "relatedness" and "connectedness." His point is that:

Whenever people have the sense of being alive and wholly present to one another, we have the 'spirit of community' [...] Turner called this process [...] 'communitas'. Without 'communitas' the cycle of daily routines and repeated acts lacks authentic energy and people cease to be able to take care of the world because it is no longer their world.¹

From a similar viewpoint, Ferdinand Tonnies proclaims the rural town community as the ideal type of the Gemeinschaft. He contends that any internal social contradictions that may rise within the rural town community must be considered as minor frictions which do not jeopardize the:

brotherly spirit of give and take [which] will remain alive in the relationship of town and country, which, outside of those barter activities, is fostered by manifold bonds of friendship and kinship, and for which shrines and meeting places provide the rallying points.²

The Gemeinschaft is viewed "as a living organism" (Tonnies, 1957, p. 35) where "understanding" becomes "the special force and sympathy which keeps human beings together as a totality" (Tonnies, 1957, p. 47).

Tonnies' ethics of care premises a universalization of the intimacy and cooperation of the household. His assumption is that the world would be a better place if only the normative model of care and intimacy which characterizes the household relations were applied to the social organization of the public sphere. There is no intent to proceed with a reconciliation between the private household and public space on the basis of contextualized justice and equality. The polarization that Tonnies draws between Gemeinschaft and Gesellschaft communities does not problematize the issues of representation or power distribution but remains focused on affective and "natural" needs: "All intimate, private, and exclusive living together, so we discover, is understood as life in the Gemeinschaft (community). Gesellschaft (society) is public life—it is the world itself" (Tonnies, 1957, p. 33). From this standpoint, the domestic-intimate sphere becomes relevant only in terms of its existence as a domain of affective fulfillment, a "household of emotions," as Agnes Heller calls it.¹

The household community model is also constructed as the sphere of "will" in its "state of nature." "Natural will," "the psychological equivalent of the human body, or the principle of the unity of life" "naturalizes" social relations and prevents the disruption of social order (Tonnies, 1957, p. 103). In fact, Tonnies views the loss of the hegemonic "natural will" as a threat to the ideological paradigm of the power structure:

The only danger confronting Gemeinschaft is the destruction of natural relations, because everything hostile creates hostility; the greater the superiority of force and power of one side to damage another, the stronger the impulse for the oppressed to develop their intellects into rational will and aggressive tricks. One opponent always invites the other opponent to forge the same weapons or to invent better ones. This explains why in all conditions of social disorganization the women use cunning

against the men, the young against the old, and the lower classes against the higher (Tonnies, 1957, p. 170).

Tonnies' theory of Gemeinschaft conceptualizes a bourgeois community in search of an ethics of care and a politics of morality to consolidate its accumulated wealth of economic, political, and social powers. In this theoretical framework, women and the poor are cast as subversive beings who need to be socialized into discursive civility. The resistance of the oppressed and marginalized amounts to mere "aggressive tricks" and "cunning." Eventually, in Tonnies' version, the idealization of the town community with its restricted social space and defined "natural" relations inside the domestic sphere and in public space comes across as a nostalgic longing for a feudal representation of social space where "[e]xternal space was weakly grasped and generally conceptualized as a mysterious cosmology populated by some external authority, heavenly hosts, or more sinister figures of myth and imagination."

In The Human Condition, Arendt gives a different interpretation of the consequential effects which have emerged following a standardization of the household model. She argues that the standardization of the household normative structure, together with the expansionist structure of capitalism and its extended control over urbanization and labour have changed social organization and behaviour and led to the emergence of a "mass society." She captures the ramifications of mass society in the following image:

The public realm, as the common world, gathers us together and yet prevents us from falling over each other, so to speak. What makes mass society so difficult to bear is not the number of people involved, or at least not primarily, but the fact that the world between them has lost its power to gather them together, to relate and to separate them. The weirdness of this situation resembles a spiritualistic seance where a number of people gathered around a table might suddenly, through some magic trick, see the table vanish from their midst, so that two persons sitting opposite each other were no longer separated but also

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would be entirely unrelated to each other by anything tangible
(Arendt, 1958, pp. 52-53).

Hannah Arendt's aversion of "the masses" finds justification in her theory of the origins of totalitarianism where she partly blames the structure of mass society for the failure of the democratic ideals and the consequent rise of totalitarian and fascist regimes. However, mass society has also "invented" "culture" to "fill" in the perceived emptiness generated by the rise of mass society and to function "both as a recognition of practical separation and as an emphasis of alternatives." Reaching out in its self-proclaimed totality as "a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual," culture's attempt to establish a form of social connectedness and regrouping would simultaneously further consolidate the compartmentalization of the social structure by "class-ifying" cultural practices on the basis of class, gender, and geography (mass culture versus high culture; urban culture versus rural culture; proletarian culture versus bourgeois culture; feminine versus masculinist cultural practices).

Alexis de Tocqueville, who studied the New England township, gives a slightly more nuanced, though idealized, interpretation of the small town community. Unlike Arendt, who holds the Greek polis as an ideal public realm, de Tocqueville dismisses Athens as "no more than an aristocratic

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1 "The success of totalitarian movements among the masses meant the end of two illusions of democratically ruled countries in general and of European nation-states and their party system in particular. The first was that the people in its majority had taken an active part in government and that each individual was in sympathy with one's own or somebody else's party. On the contrary, the movements showed that the politically neutral and indifferent masses could easily be the majority in a democratically ruled country, that therefore a democracy could function according to rules which are actively recognized by only a minority. The second democratic illusion exploded by the totalitarian movements was that these politically indifferent masses did not matter, that they were truly neutral and constituted no more than the inarticulate backward setting for the political life of the nation. Now they made apparent what no other organ of public opinion had ever been able to show, namely, that democratic government had rested as much on the silent approbation and tolerance of the indifferent and inarticulate sections of the people as on the articulate and visible institutions and organizations of the country" (H. Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism, San Diego: HBJ Publishers, 1979, p. 312).

2 Raymond Williams, Culture and Society: Coleridge to Orwell, 1993, p. XVIII.
republic in which all the nobles had an equal right to the government.” Similarly, he insists that the:

struggle between patricians and plebeians at Rome must be seen in the same light as an internal quarrel between the elder and younger branches of the same family. They all belonged to the aristocracy and had an aristocratic spirit (de Tocqueville, 1988, p. 476).

Conversely, the township is “a free, strong corporation.” Further, even if it acts within a limited sphere, “within that domain its movements are free” (de Tocqueville, 1988, p. 68).

De Tocqueville’s overstatements about the township are justified by his idealization of the principles of democracy. His theory is that democratic institutions reconstruct social relations and foster a passion for equality, a fact which, theoretically at least, removes class and status barriers which separate individuals in stratified societies:

In times of freedom and enlightened democracy there is nothing to separate men from one another or to keep them in their place. They rise or fall extraordinarily quickly. They are so close to each other that men of different classes are continually meeting. Every day they mix and exchange ideas, imitating and emulating one another. So the people get many ideas, conceptions, and desires which they never would have had if distinctions of rank had been fixed and society static. In such nations a servant never considers himself an entire stranger to the pleasures and work of his master, nor the poor man to those of the rich. The countryman is at pains to be like the townsman, and the provinces to take after the metropolis (de Tocqueville, 1988, p. 458)

De Tocqueville gives a homogenizing and patronizing conceptualization of social relations in the township. Class and race differences are bracketed, the expectations of the slave and the poor are tolerated, and the periphery can afford to dream of competing with the centre. However, as de Tocqueville admits, people's aspirations for equality are constantly denied by everyday inequalities of wealth, power, and status. Further, his conceptualization of the township public sphere echoes Habermas's in that it foregrounds competition and ambition at the expense of collective solidarity and the playful aspects of communication and everyday performance:

It is in the township, the center of the ordinary business of life, that the desire for esteem, the pursuit of substantial interests, and the taste for power and self-advertisement are concentrated; these passions, so often troublesome elements in society, take on a different character when exercised so close to home and, in a sense, within the family circle [. . .] Thus a vast number of people make a good thing for themselves out of the power of the community and are interested in administration for selfish reasons (de Tocqueville, 1988, p. 69).

Thus, the township public sphere becomes an arena of struggle and competition for the achievement of fame and success and the pursuit of self-interest. Conversely, the domestic sphere remains, so to speak, the warrior's resource centre since it provides him with moral and psychological support and legitimates his ambition and desire for self-advancement. It is also incumbent upon the wife to manage and administer the domestic sphere in a way that could fortify the male's base, so to speak. One would find in the words of an eighteenth-century woman writer a paraphrase of the "wisdom" implied in the popular saying which claims that "behind" every leader there is a woman:

It would be pleasant to observe the contrast between a family, the females of which were properly methodical, and economical in their distributions and expenditures of time, and one accustomed to leave everything to the moment of necessity [. . .] The one is the habitation of tranquillity; it is a well ordered
community; it is a complicated machine, the component parts of which are so harmoniously organized, as to produce none but the most concordant sounds [...] while the other [...] is a restoration of the reign of chaos.\(^1\)

The household community is constructed as a "machine" regulated for the production of "harmony" and "tranquility." The family "components" are all devoted with a spirit of self-abnegation to the comfort and success of the household head. Their administration model is borrowed from public management which is "methodical," "economical," and "time-efficient." In such a way, while the female's contribution to the success of her husband and her community may go unnoticed, she is sure to take the blame in the case of their failure.

The collective identity of the community of location is defined neither by a transcendental "brotherly spirit," as Tonnies has claimed, nor by the mere self-assertive will of its public men, as de Tocqueville has predicted. On the contrary, the collective identity of the community emerges out of a dialectic between space and social life. Edward Soja summarizes this dialectic as follows:

The spatio-temporal structuring of social life defines how social action and relationship (including class relations) are materially constituted, made concrete. The constitution/concretization process is problematic, filled with contradiction and struggle (amidst much that is recursive and routinized). Contradictions arise primarily from the duality of produced space as both outcome/embodiment/product and medium/presupposition/producer of social activity.\(^2\)

In a similar vein, Fatima Mernissi notes that social space in the Muslim society is controlled by gender politics where each sex is assigned specific spatial practices:

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Muslim sexuality is a territorial one, i.e., a sexuality whose regulatory mechanisms consist primarily of a strict allocation of space to each sex and an elaborate ritual for resolving the contradictions arising from the inevitable interferences between spaces. Apart from the ritualized trespasses of women into public spaces which are, by definition, male spaces, there are no accepted patterns for interactions between unrelated men and women. Such interactions violate the space rules which are the pillars of the Muslim sexual order.¹

This may explain why Moroccan women, for instance, take the holy month of Ramadan, when Muslims fast every day from sunrise to sunset, not only as a time of spiritual cleansing but also as an emancipatory experience in space and time. The reorganization of social behaviour in this month benefits women in that it tones down male aggressiveness and turns public space into a less antagonistic realm.² The nocturnal rituals and festivities in mosques and public places legitimate, from a cultural perspective, women's outdoor experiences until the early hours of the morning. In fact, quite a few of my female informants have stated that Ramadan is the only time of the year when they can afford to make nocturnal visits to cafés without jeopardizing their social reputation. In a society where a woman's every step outside her home is perceived as a trespassing into a male domain, Ramadan presents an ideal opportunity to contest the male politics of spatial distribution and behaviour.

² The perception of the Ramadan experience as an exercise in discipline and restraint generates a collective social feeling of safety and security. In fact, the religion prohibits Muslims to fight wars in Ramadan and in three other holy months of the Muslim lunar calendar. During the Gulf war, this issue generated heated debates within the Muslim community because the allied forces' attack on Iraq occurred in a holy month. Also, the fact that alcohol sale is prohibited and pubs are closed for the entire month makes the streets safer as there is no risk of being mugged or harassed by a drunkard.
B. Mediation Processes and the Emergence of Communities

My contention, so far, has been that location is engaged with the community in a dynamic relationship. Spatial politics produce social relations while simultaneously mediating and presupposing group relatedness and connectedness but also struggles and contradictions. Location is not only the site where the community imagines its self-identity; more importantly, the processes through which communities construct their collective self-identification are always already imbued in the politics of location. Further, location is neither an extension of communal identity nor is it a spatial satellite moving in an orbit outside social relations. Location comes in shape simultaneously with the emergence of community and community emergence is already anticipated in the politics of location. The point I am trying to make is that location functions both as an abstract concept for community formation and as a concrete space where relations among group members are played out and performed.
I have also made a point to the effect that location and mediation are two interrelated concepts which inform and define one another. It is only for the sake of clarity that I have dealt with them separately. In fact, when dealing with mediation I am simultaneously exploring the politics of location as it is practically impossible to treat location without making constant references to the nature of mediation through which community members build up their self-identity. In this section, I have selected three types of mediation as a sample of the channels through which post-traditional communities foster their collective solidarity and mediate their resistance. The objective here is to problematize notions which are often taken for granted and to pin down some of the processes through which post-traditional communities emerge.

1. Face-to-Face Communication Problematicized

Small communities have often been idealized because of their association with personal and face-to-face communication. This idealization is based on the premise that face-to-face communication mediates connectedness and group feeling and facilitates the processes of meaning-making in which community members are constantly engaged. Peter Manicas puts face-to-face communication at the center of the ideal community:

Consider an association in which persons are in face-to-face contact, but where the relations of persons are not mediated by 'authorities,' sanctified rules, reified bureaucracies or commodities. Each is prepared to absorb the attitudes, reasoning and ideas of others and each is in a position to do so. Their relations, thus, are open, immediate and reciprocal. Further, the total conditions of their social lives are to be conjointly determined with each having an equal voice and equal power. When these conditions are satisfied and when as a result, the consequences and fruits of their associated and independent activities are perceived and consciously become an object of
individual desire and effort, then there is a democratic community.\(^1\)

This definition of the politics of face-to-face communication underlines the problematic of mediation. Manicas assumes that because it is not mediated by an "authority," face-to-face communication unproblematizes the act of communication and, thus, makes it possible for group members to participate at an equal par in the representation of their social reality. In Manicas' interpretation of face-to-face communication, social subjects are de-historicized and their class, gender, and race differences are bracketed. Thus, they seem to operate in a vacuum free from the constraints of institutions and social traditions. This is not even true for the academy whose proclaimed ideal is the freedom of teaching and research (i.e. a democratic production and distribution of knowledge where the importance of face-to-face communication is primordial).\(^2\)

The fact is that face-to-face communication has been the subject of different interpretations. Walter Lippmann, for example, makes a point that goes against Manicas' interpretation. He argues that the "self-contained" town community which relies primarily on horizontal communication among its members ends up with what amounts to a deformed and subjective representation of the world outside the community's immediate context:

> men formed their picture of the world outside from the unchallenged pictures into their head [...] Most voters lived their whole lives in one environment, and with nothing but a few feeble newspapers, some pamphlets, political speeches, their religious training, and rumor to go on, they had to conceive that larger environment of commerce and finance, of war and peace.


\(^2\) I have dealt with some of the problems facing the implementation of collective processes of academic learning in a paper given at an international conference on the idea of university in Rabat, 1997 (Said Graioud, "Theories of Communication and Ideas of the University: The University as an Alternative Public Space" in Taieb Belghazi, ed., The Idea of the University, Casablanca: Najah EL-Jadida, 1997, pp. 125-141).
Unlike Manicas who considers the flow of unmediated knowledge among group members as the springboard to a democratic community, Lippmann downplays the role of agency and holds that the public’s socialization into the "stereotype of democracy" depends on the press’s ability to challenge the distorted pictures in people’s heads. Lippmann’s theory of democracy does not originate in the social life-world which in his opinion remains prone to contradictions, rumour, and distorted public opinion. On the contrary, he argues that the stereotype of democracy materializes first in "the visible government:" "It was only the words of the law, the speeches of politicians, the platforms, and the formal machinery of administration that have had to conform to the pristine image of democracy" (Lippmann, 1941, p. 287). This is why Lippmann assumes that the democratization of the life-world requires the active involvement of media industries operating in accordance with a "constitutional procedure" and not "sensationalism" (Lippmann, 1941, p. 351).

Tonnies agrees that the press is not only "comparable and, in some respects, superior to the material power which the states possess," but also, because "it is not confined within natural borders," it is thus "comparable to the power of a permanent or temporary alliance of states." However, unlike Lippmann, Tonnies finds that the alliance between capital and the organized press commodifies communication and threatens the maintenance of the principles of the Gemeinschaft community:

In this form of communication, judgments and opinions are wrapped up like grocers’ goods and offered for consumption in their objective reality. It is prepared and offered to our generation in the most perfect manner by the newspapers, which make possible the quickest production, multiplication, and distribution of facts and thoughts, just as the hotel kitchen

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provides food and drink in every conceivable form and quantity.¹

John Dewey, too, disagrees with Lippmann and qualifies as "absurd" the assumption which claims that legal propositions could institute the freedom of thought and communication: "[r]emoval of formal limitations is but a negative condition; positive freedom is not a state but an act which involves methods and instrumentalities for control of conditions."² He contends that the empowerment of the public is possible only through enlightenment via art and science whose transcendental dimension facilitates the transition from the "Great Society" to the "Great Community." Dewey's Great Community is:

a society in which the ever-expanding and intricately ramifying consequences of associated activities shall be known in the full sense of that word, so that an organized, articulate Public comes into being. The highest and most difficult kind of inquiry and subtle, delicate, vivid and responsive art of communication must take possession of the physical machinery of transmission and circulation and breathe life into it. When the machine age has thus perfected its machinery, it will be a means of life and not its despotic master. Democracy will come into its own, for democracy is a name for a life of free and enriching communion (Dewey, 1927, p. 184).

John Dewey's Community, as John Keane points out, forecasts a "radicalized version of the old bourgeois theory of a critical, power-scrutinizing public."³ Dewey trusts that a "free and systematic communication" in which the public actively participates through face-to-face communication can salvage public


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life and lay the conditions for the emergence of the Great Community
(Dewey, 1927, p. 167).1

In the case of post-traditional society, face-to-face communication is
inscribed in the wider issues of oral tradition and oral transmission. Post-
traditional society is predominantly oral. To explain the extensive power of
oral tradition by a mere reference to the high rate of illiteracy among post-
traditional communities oversimplifies the issue and makes us overlook the
complex dynamics of orality, in general, and face-to-face communication, in
particular. The validity of the claim is determined as much by the content of
the message as by the reliability of the sender. The sender is obviously
expected to excel in public performance. However, performance efficacy, to
use Baz Kershaw’s concept, is defined not only by the degree to which
performance manages to interrogate the community’s system of belief or
thought but also by the extent to which it has done justice to the power of the
word.2 Oral transmission is motivated not only by the desire to overcome
spatial and temporal limitations but the transmission process itself is a
necessary complement to the understanding and interpretation of the content
of the message.3 In other words, it is not enough that “truth” is transmitted; it
must be “lived.”

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1 John Dewey’s theory of community is justified by the perceived revolutionary potential of the
publicity concept which has become a distinctive feature of the modern world. Holsher, for
example, has noted that though the publicity concept was “forged into the battle-instruments
of political propaganda by Enlightenment philosophy,” it has come to represent since the late
eighteenth century “the social medium in which political authority not only must legitimate
itself but also [...] should primarily form itself” (Holsher, 1979, quoted in John Durham Peters,
“Distrust of Representation: Habermas on the Public Sphere” in Media, Culture and Society.

2 Baz Kershaw defines performance efficacy as follows: “It [...] follows that if the spectator
decides that the performance is of central significance to her or his ideology then such choice
implies a commitment. It is this commitment that is the source of the efficacy of performance
for the future, because a decision that affects a system of belief, an ideology, is more likely
to result in changes to future action. It is in this respect that the collective impact of a
performance is so important. For if a whole audience, or even a whole community, responds in
this way to the symbolism of a ‘possible world’, then the potential of performance efficacy is
multiplied by more than the audience number” (Baz Kershaw, The Politics of Performance:

3 In the Arabo-Islamic civilization, oral tradition is directly embedded in the symbolic system
of the sacred. Jacques Berque has noted that the Arabic verb does not belong to the earthly
world since, by definition, it has “descended” from Heaven (in reference to Revelation). Thus,
Berque argues, it is always distinguished from the language of everyday life (which is that of
especially chapter x). Seyyed Hossein Nasr, a professor of history and philosophy, has also
underlined the importance of oral transmission in the Islamic civilization. His point is that:
The central importance of oral tradition in post-traditional societies problematizes the issue of face-to-face communication and the ideal community this mode of communication and performance is usually expected to generate. On one hand, it expands and enlarges the community of performers. The written text is only the starting point not an exclusive and self-sufficient form of knowledge and understanding. The central position of the spoken word accounts for the importance of concrete groupings and face-to-face communication in post-traditional communities. It is true that the printed word is an effective medium of imagining but the "simultaneity" it purports is more effectively lived through an act of collective oral production than through isolated acts of reading.

On the other hand, the possibilities of collective solidarity and bonding which face-to-face communication tends to generate must be kept in perspective. Power relations do not disappear in small town communities and the predominance of oral tradition does not necessarily mean that information is democratically channelled to all group members. On the contrary, power struggle in a small community may intensify and the neediest may be those who benefit the least from the informal channels of exchange concerning both information and goods. In a study on the importance of the informal channels of exchange in one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Cairo, Egypt, Nadia Khouri-Dagher demystifies the myth of collective solidarity and mutual aid which is often attributed to marginalized communities. Her research has revealed a "surprising paradox:"

those who needed most the help of others, that is the poorest, were also the ones who benefited the least from the networks of informal exchange. This is because in order to receive assistance, one must also be in a position to give. However, it is precisely

"Whether current Western scholarship accepts the authenticity of this oral tradition or not is of secondary significance. What is important is that the Islamic intellectual tradition itself has functioned with the belief that the oral tradition is of central importance [...] recent masters [...] would insist that it was of little use to simply read the text [...] and understand the Arabic by oneself. Rather, it was necessary to study it with a real teacher who could also impart to the qualified student the oral tradition which alone can clarify the meaning of the written word" (Seyyed Hossein Nasr, "Oral Transmission and the Book in Islamic Education: The Spoken and the Written Word" in George N. Atiyeh, ed., The Book in the Islamic World: The Written Word and Communication in the Middle East, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995, pp. 62-63).
the neediest group that has the least possibilities to offer either goods, services or precious information. The networks of informal exchange, which are based entirely on social relations, constitute an important “informal” sector for the procurement of goods and services which are necessary for survival in the city. However, this sector tends to reinforce, rather than abolish, social differences and exclusions.¹

The reality of everyday practices should lay to rest the overstated claims about the ideal social relations which small communities and face-to-face communication mediate. The struggle for survival can reinforce marginalization and exclusion as it can generate collective solidarity. The issue here is that face-to-face communication is an integrated part of the complex structure of power distribution and struggle. While face-to-face communication carries the potential of emancipation, it must be underlined that this potential lies in the exchange process itself and not in the medium as an absolute mode of mediation. In the next section, I explore some of the salient aspects of the oppositional relations between the “authorized language,” as the language of officialdom and authority, and oppositional discourses which struggle to create alternative modes of mediation and representation.

2. Authorized Language and Oppositional Discourses

Brinkley Messick distinguishes between subordinate discourse and alternative or oppositional discourse. He defines subordinate discourse as:

a form of expression characterized by its power relation to a dominant ideology with which it coexists. A subordinate discourse must be distinguished from an alternative or competing ideology (or model, theory, subculture), which would entail an explicit celebration of an oppositional conceptual order,

and might give rise to efforts at suppression by upholders of the dominant ideology.¹

Though Messick’s definition highlights some of the salient workings of subordinate discourse, I find it quite restrictive. On one hand, any subordinate discourse is potentially oppositional because it tends to celebrate values that are considered subversive by the dominant ideological order and the norms of cultural authority. On the other hand, to insist that only oppositional or alternative discourses can produce a “conceptual framework” somehow limits opposition to an elitist group.

I tend to use subordinate, oppositional, and minority discourses interchangeably. In fact, I find Homi Bhabha’s reflection on the dynamic workings of minority discourse applicable to any discourse which seeks to provide an alternative or oppositional worldview to the one perpetuated by the dominant ideology. Bhabha describes the communicative act of minority discourse as follows:

Minority discourse sets the act of emergence in the antagonistic in-between of image and sign, the accumulative and the adjunct, presence and proxy. It contests genealogies of ‘origin’ that lead to claims for cultural supremacy and historical priority. Minority discourse acknowledges the status of national culture -and the people- as a contentious, performative space of the perplexity of the living in the midst of the pedagogical representations of the fullness of life. Now there is no reason to believe that such marks of difference cannot inscribe a 'history' of the people or become the gathering points of political solidarity. They will not, however, celebrate the monumentality of historicist memory, the sociological totality of society, or the homogeneity of cultural experience. The discourse of minority reveals the insurmountable ambivalence that structures the equivocal movement of historical time.²

By distancing itself from the totalizing mode of the master Narrative, minority discourse (and the sub-culture it mediates) demystifies the transcendental and universalizing mystique of the dominant ideology. Minority discourse capitalizes on the movement of oscillation which occurs within "the governing 'present' of cultural authority" to celebrate the emergence of communal identifications and collective histories (Bhabha, 1994, p. 157). The equivocality of the nation's time and master discourse has its roots in the historical paradox on which the idea of the nation is built. The nation's claim to homogeneity and simultaneity is sustained by its posturing as a "sociological organism moving calendrically through homogeneous, empty time." The nation's self-representation through homogeneous and "empty time" must be viewed as an attempt to override the spatial and temporal limitations which constitute two of the organizing principles of its imagined community (no community can exist outside time and space).

More importantly, as Benedict Anderson points out, "official nationalisms" are historically "impossible" without the existence of subordinate discourses which construct communities solid enough to destabilize the power structure:

['Official nationalisms'] were historically 'impossible' until after the appearance of popular linguistic-nationalisms, for, at bottom, they were responses by power-groups - primarily, but not exclusively, dynastic and aristocratic - threatened with exclusion from, or marginalization in, popular imagined communities [...]. Such official nationalisms were conservative, not to say reactionary, policies, adapted from the model of the largely spontaneous popular nationalisms that preceded them (Anderson, 1991, pp. 109-110).

In a similar mode, official nationalism de-centres the claim to universality and re-inscribes the accommodating notion of simultaneity in an empty time which finds its best illustration in the narrative of the novel and the newspaper page lay-out. The official discourse structures the grammatical sentence in such a way that meaning is authorized, classified, and delimited.

However, despite its hegemonizing and homogenizing strategies, the instabilities of the authoritative official discourse can not be altogether erased. The fragile orderliness of the official discourse is constantly challenged by the sporadic randomness and spontaneity of subordinate discourses. Likewise, the official discourse's claim to homogeneity is fractured upon the manifestation of a hybrid discourse which resists containment. This is, for example, how Roland Barthes describes his encounter with a hybrid discourse in a Moroccan bar:

Through me passed words, syntagms, bits of formulae and no sentence formed, as though that were the law of such a language. This speech at once very cultural and very savage, was above all lexical, sporadic; it set up in me, through its apparent flow, a definitive discontinuity: this non-sentence was in no way something that could not have acceded to the sentence, that might have been before the sentence; it was: what is [...] outside the sentence.¹

What is "outside the sentence" is a determined collective will to resist the encapsulation and framing official writing imposes. If print-language, as Anderson argues, is "what invents nationalism, not a particular language," communal emergence and resistance draw on different levels of the communicative act (Anderson, 1991, p. 134). The Moroccan café, for example, is a spatial text which celebrates the co-existence of a stereophony of languages and vernaculars, welcomes the blend of loud voices to a diversity of musical rhythms and tunes. It is a space where body performance gives its generic discourse a kind of materiality that overwhelms the grammar of the receptive ear of the non-initiated. The discontinuity of the text at the level of the sentence is rendered even more subversive by the powerful physicality of its discourse making of it a text that is written aloud: "a text of pulsional incidents, the language lined with flesh, a text where we can hear the grain of the throat [...] a whole carnal stereophony: the articulation of the tongue, not the meaning of language."²

In Driss Chraibi's *Mother Comes of Age* (1984) (La civilisation, ma mère, 1973), a novel about identity formation and emancipation during the French Protectorate in Morocco, the youngest child in a family of four is allowed to attend the French school but is not authorized to speak French at home. His Mama, who is convinced that the profanity of the French language represents a risk to her child's innocent soul, makes sure he "washes out his mouth" whenever he gets home from school.¹ In her vision, words are material and water is not only a symbol for soul purification and cleansing but also a mediator which reconciles her son's individual self to the collective identity of his community. When Moroccan resistance leaders insisted that French be spoken with an 'accent' to avoid any identification with or alienation to the colonizer's language and culture, the local intonation which was appended to the lexical and semantic fields of the colonial language served as a material witness of the elite's commitment to and connectedness with the collective and communal identity of the people. Contemporary Moroccan authors who write in French argue that they create a textual hybrid deliberately constructed to make French readers feel alienated inside their own language. Written outside the normative mode prescribed by the cultural authority of the French Academy, their texts split familiar signs and construct in the liberated space alienating signifiers and signifieds which subvert the official system of meaning of the French reader.²

¹ "Listen, child,' my mother reproached me, 'how many times do I have to tell you to wash out your mouth when you get home from school?'

'Every day, Mama. At exactly the same time. Except on Saturdays, Sundays, and holidays. I'll go do it, Mama.'

'And do me the favor of taking off those heathen clothes, too!'

'Yes, Mama, right away.' ....

I would go to wash my mouth with a toothpaste of mother's fabrication. Not for killing microbes [...] but I followed orders to cleanse away the remnants of the French language which I dared to use inside of her house, and right in front of her to boot. And I would shed the vestiges of that other civilization and re-dress in the clothes mother had made for me herself" (Driss Chraibi, *Mother Comes of Age*, trans. from French by Hugh A. Harter, Washington: Three Continents Press, 1984; originally published in 1972 under the title La civilisation, ma mère. Paris: Editions Denoel).

² In a postface for Khatibi's *Tattooed Memory* (La Mémoire tatouée) entitled "Ce que je dois à Khatibi" (What I owe to Khatibi), Roland Barthes writes about Khatibi's use of signs, images, and marks admitting that "because he shifts these categories as I conceive them, because he carries me to his realm, away from myself, to my very limits, Khatibi teaches me something new, shakes me up in my own knowledge" (quoted in John Erickson, "Metaikoi and Magical Realism in the Maghrebian Narratives of Tahar ben Jelloun and Abdelkebir Khatibi" in Lois Parkinson Zamora and Wendy Faris, eds., *Magical Realism: Theory, History, Community*, 1995, p. 437).
In short, authorized language perpetuates the dominant ideology and strives to uphold the coherence and cohesion of the Community. By contrast, subordinate and oppositional discourses are residues of a potential subversive energy which characterizes the interstitial spaces of social discourse. The singularity of woman, for example, as Julian Kristeva argues, is perceived as a threat because it demystifies "the community of language as a universal and unifying tool, one which totalizes and equalizes." The singularity of woman, it is worth underlying, pertains not only to her body performance but also to the female discourse. In Moroccan post-traditional society, this female bodily and discursive singularity is marginalized and contained in the dimly lit rooms of the public bath. Likewise, the non-institutionalized discourses and noises which characterize café space are stereotyped and satirized by the authorized interpretation of the dominant ideology.

However, subordinate discourses are not a priori oppositional or subversive. Neither are they autonomous and self-contained. On the contrary, communities of resistance emerge out of a continuous criss-crossing and mutual interpellation between the Language of the dominant ideology and the subordinate discourses which endeavour to produce alternative worldviews. In the café space, for example, the interface between the media of the dominant ideology (television, the press) and subordinate discourses mediates the emergence of alternative and oppositional interpretations of social reality. In the next section, I explore some implications of body behaviour and the mediation of ritualized performance in the emergence of communities.

1 J. Kristeva, quoted in Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 1994, p. 155.
C. The ritual of Communication and Performance

In *The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance*, Richard Schechner defines rituals as:

ambivalent symbolic actions pointing at the real transactions even as they help people avoid too direct a confrontation with these events. Thus rituals are also bridges - reliable doings carrying people across dangerous waters. It is no accident that many rituals are "rites of passage."¹

Schechner further elaborates on the ambivalence of rituals by arguing that human ritual:

might be said to short-circuit thinking, providing ready-made answers to deal with crisis. Individual and collective anxieties are relieved by rituals whose qualities of repetition, rhythmicity,

exaggeration, condensation, and simplification stimulate the brain into releasing endorphins directly into the bloodstream yielding ritual's second benefit, a relief from pain, a surfeit of pleasure. In saying that religion was the opium of the people, Marx may have been right biochemically speaking. But ritual is also creative because, as Turner showed, the ritual process opens up a time/space of anti-structural playfulness. And whereas in animals the non-cognitive is dominant, in humans there is always a dialectical tension between the cognitive and the affective (Schechner, 1995, p. 233).

Schechner is right to highlight the ambivalence which characterizes the symbolic world of the ritual. Ritual performance is simultaneously liberating and accommodating. It has the potential of generating collective solidarity and opening up spaces of communal emancipation while it can also naturalize the dominant worldview and perpetuate the existing power relations among community and group individuals.

Above all, the ritual of communication and performance is central to the processes of a collective construction of identity and negotiation of reality. In Communication as Culture: Essays on Media and Society, James Carey, a communication and cultural studies scholar, constructs a model of communication that is sensitive to the richness of the lifeworld and the complexities of human communication and performance. In this model, he focuses on the ritual aspect of communication, and thus, repositions communal solidarity as a central organizing principle in social behaviour and communicative exchange. The thrust of Carey’s argument is that:

In a ritual definition, communication is linked to terms such as 'sharing,' 'participation,' 'association,' 'fellowship,' and 'the possession of a common faith.' This definition exploits the ancient identity and common roots of the terms 'commonness,' 'communion,' 'community,' and 'communication.' A ritual view of communication is directed not toward the extension of messages in space but toward the maintenance of society in time;

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not the act of imparting information but the representation of shared beliefs (Carey, 1990, p. 18).

Carey contrasts this view with the transmission model which is primarily concerned about communication as a means of spatial, temporal, and human control: "a process whereby messages are transmitted and distributed in space for the control of distance and people" (Carey, 1990, p. 15). Drawing on the philosophy of John Dewey, Carey presents a view which attempts to embrace the primordial ritual of communication which highlights togetherness and connectedness. Like Turner who views social life as a "social drama," Carey argues that under a ritual view of communication:

news is not information but drama. It does not describe the world but portrays an arena of dramatic forces and action; it exists solely in historical time; and it invites our participation on the basis of our assuming, often vicariously, social [i.e. ideological] roles within it (Carey, 1990, p. 21).

However, James Carey's proposed model does not conceptualize conditions for the emergence of emancipated communities. Instead of exploring the liminal dimension of ritual which allows for change and creativity, he abstracts group struggle into a bourgeois utopian vision of Community. Consequently, in Carey's theory, the ritual view of communication translates into an emphasis on "the production of a coherent world that is then presumed, for all practical purposes, to exist" and "the construction and maintenance of paradigms" (Carey, 1990, p. 85). Thus, he logically comes to the conclusion that communication is merely "a process whereby reality is created, shared, modified, and preserved" (Carey, 1990, p. 33). This is because in his view, the ritual aspect of communication is valued not for its liminal and subversive power but for its ability to homogenize and conflate practices, aspirations, and differences.

James Carey's hermeneutic approach to communication yields a humanist and globalist vision of societies and cultures. The objectives of studying communication practices and the social relations they create is:
to try to find out what other people are up to, or at least what they think they are up to; to render transparent the concepts and purposes that guide their actions and render the world coherent to them; to extend the human conversation, to incorporate into our world other actors tending to other dramas by comprehending what they are saying. Understanding another person or culture, which is the first order goal and wasting resource of the study of communication, is akin to understanding a scientific theory. You look at the practices people engage in, the conceptual world embedded in and presupposed by those practices, and the social relations and forms of life that they manifest (Carey, 1990, pp. 85-86).

This hermeneutic model seeks to generalize experience and thought and accommodate them to a presumed coherent and utopian type of Community. However, the idea of such an ideal Community is negated through the patronizing attitude of self to other. What is proposed is not a relational-interaction based on an ideal exchange between two complementary, interdependent, and equal identities. He admits that while "[we] are all democrats, in communication as in everything else [...] we are also more than a little in love with power," before adding that a "critical theory of communication must affirm what is before our eyes [lust for power] and transcend it by imagining, at the very least a world more desirable" (Carey, 1990, p. 88).

In Carey's communication model, social contradictions, power struggle, and cultural differences are acknowledged only on the margins of the Communal text. Carey's main objective remains an invocation of the transcendental Community of rational, equal, sharing, and just individuals that John Dewey has imagined. In fact, he approvingly paraphrases the principles of Dewey's universal Community:

Dewey's image of a democratic community was that of a community of equals using procedures of rational thought to advance their shared purposes. His emphasis on the community of inquirers, the public, was designed to highlight the process of codetermination of reality in the medium of maximum equality,
flexibility, and accessibility. We can all talk. He saw more clearly than most the decline and eclipse of public life, the rise of a new breed of professional experts, and the models of communication they were embodying in the new mass media. With the noise of an even angrier and uglier world in our heads we can scarcely follow him, let alone believe him (Carey, 1990, p. 88).

What is also missing in this approach is the sense of any problematization of historical agency and its role in defining the relation of self to the other and the social relations which imprint the group's collective identity. The "noise" of the "angry" and "ugly" world metamorphoses into an image "in our heads" and, in the process, makes it "morally" acceptable to sacrifice the concrete needs, desires, and aspirations of the other for the sake of the moral integrity of the Community. The ritualized "we" in "we can all talk" is homogenizing and accommodating. It is not accessible to minorities and social groups as a liberating form of collective expression. Its appeal is symbolic for it premises that material contradictions and singular individual or group identities are, from a humanist perspective, secondary and subordinate.

The historical development of writing and orality highlights the ambivalence which underlies the ritual of communication and transmission. In the Arab world, the medium is not only a channel of information transmission but the act of communication itself is an occasion for communal bonding. This may explain why poetry, and not painting, has flourished as the most dominant mode of representation. Adonis, a Lebanese contemporary poet, describes the poetics of the pre-Islamic orality as follows:

The poem was perceived as call and response, the dialectic of a mutual invitation between the poet and the group; it was as if the aim of the poet in composing his poem, and that of the group or tribe in listening to it, coincided by prior agreement. In this situation there was no difference between poetry and life: life was poetry and poetry life, and so the structure of the poem corresponded to the movement involved in the act of communication as well as to its effectiveness and its ultimate intention. Rhythm is the basis of pre-Islamic poetical speech.
because it is a living energy binding the self to the other. It is the pulse of the living being, bringing together the movement of body and soul.¹

The driving force behind the poetic act is the sharing of a collective emotional and intellectual experience. The act of the poet does not summon individual selves but the collective body of the community’s stock of knowledge and cultural symbols. Because the communicative act expects a response in the form of a collective action, it blends the cognitive and affective levels of the sign with the signifier’s material condition as it is uttered and received. The pre-Islamic poem, which shares a number of affinities with the Greek epic especially in its foregrounding of drama, comes into existence only as it is produced and consumed by the group. The pre-Islamic poetic tradition granted the poet the space of the first verse to sing her/his individual interest (the first verse usually comes in the form of an address to the poet’s beloved), and, then, it is “as if” the poem no longer belonged to her/him but to the communal life-world. As Adonis puts it, in the pre-Islamic poetic tradition:

> the foundations were laid for the Arabic speech to confront life and for the Arab to confront himself and the other for the first time. It was not only a conscious application of speech, but also a conscious participation in the act of existence (Adonis, 1990, p. 32).

The communal tradition of bonding through words, chant, and rhythm still dominates the cultural life-world in post-traditional society. In Qu’ranic schools, children are initiated to classical Arabic through a reading performance centered on rhythmic drills which require muscular movement and chant. Tradition also prescribes that the act of reading or reciting the Qu’ran be a collective performance which brings the group together in rhythmic unison. In rural areas in Morocco, women’s field and household activities are carried out through song and chant. Finally, perhaps the best example of the central position of the rhythmic word in the Arab culture is the socialization, over a relatively short period of time, of Arab audiences

into the Egyptian dialect through music and song, before television has brought the Egyptian soap opera to almost every home in the Arab world.

Similarly, writing is not viewed as a mere channel of transmission but as a residue of sacredness, piety, and an intermediary of power. Through its appropriation of knowledge and order, writing positions itself as the organizing authority of the social, cultural, and ethical norms in the lifeworld. The secularization of writing explains the high visibility it enjoys while the profane tradition of orality is relegated to the shadows of subaltern spaces. The power struggle between writing and orality has also resulted in a division of spatial representation and a schism in social discourse articulated in the opposition between the "serious" and the "playful," the "sacred" and the "profane." Oleg Grabar describes the ideological ramifications of writing in the Islamic civilization as follows:

At times it merely passes on a statement, it allows a narrative to be fixed. At other times it proclaims, directly or indirectly, by the very fact of its existence, the power of a ruler or of God. At other times yet it is an act of piety that purifies both maker and beholder. Writing is indeed an intermediary, which is judged by how well it expresses the quality of its maker and affects the sensitivity of its user. Writing has an ethical component in the very way of medieval Islamic ethics, whereby the intent behind the act is what validates the act. But since intent is not available to anyone but God, the viewer acknowledges the intent by providing his own interpretation of the writing and thereby enters into an ongoing dialectic relationship with the created object, which never stops at the object and yet can not exist without the object.

However, the power vested in writing is impaired by an awareness of its limits in emulating the Word of God. Meaning in this case becomes the

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1 The first Qu'ranic verse revealed to the Prophet through Gabriel invokes the power and authority of "the pen." It reads: "Proclaim, and thy Lord is most Bountiful, Who taught by the pen, taught man which he knew not" (verse 94, 3-4).
3 In fact, the realization that even if "all the trees on earth were pens and the sea ink -seven seas after it to replenish it-, yet would the Words of God not be spent" defines/divines writing
responsibility of those who can converse with the literate sign. Calligraphy, which elevates writing to the status of an art institution and legitimizes it as the official spatial text for Communal identification also displays a text which carries on its fringes signs that negate any meaning the text attempts to encapsulate. Grabar makes the point that:

writing emerged on all media and with a variety of shapes and forms that defies single explanation [...] [examples of writing] even include the very denial of writing -that is to say, letters that have apparently no verbal meaning associated with them (Grabar, 1992, p. 83).

Grabar is referring to the ornamental signs which characterize the calligraphic text and which he defines as an "intermediate order" which functions like "prisms" that mediate between texts, the community of readers, and the world. This intermediate order can also be taken as a spatial metaphor where the authority of writing is challenged by the creative playfulness of oral speech. The discipline and hierarchical structure which writing relentlessly tries to impose on the sentence and the lifeworld is met with a carnivalesque resistance of the chaotic structure of oral speech. Unlike writing, whose value is determined by the efficacy of its representation and the authority which mediates the sign, speech is more liberated from material restrictions.

The historian William McNeill, who has analyzed the contribution of ritual performance to communal emergence, argues that muscular bonding has a key role in keeping communities together in time. On the religion of Islam, for example, he acknowledges the power of words in the construction of the Muslim community but asserts that the "emotional warmth and solidarity" which unite the Community of the Faithful is better sought in the ritual of the prayer (five times a day) which requires the assembled believers to demonstrate their membership in "public" by moving "rhythmically and in unison."


as the medium to apprehend social and universal dramas while at the same time downplaying its power and reach (The Qu’ran, verse 31, 27).
In addition to the "the muscular unison of public prayer," McNeill cites the rise of dervish orders as an example of community formation through muscular bonding. Dervish orders organize themselves in sub-communities that seek union with God through the media of prolonged chanting, background music and rhythmic muscular engagement, a performance which often leads the participants into a state of trance. In the performance of dervish sub-communities, the act is at least as central as the word. Though the dervish tradition is often blamed for displacing reason in favour of emotional engagement, dervish sub-communities are "effective missionaries" and their "enthusiasm inspired Moslem armies to undertake new conquests across almost all frontiers" (McNeill, 1995p. 93). McNeill concludes that:

despite the conscious, deliberate effort of all pious Moslems to discover and obey God's will as recorded in Sacred Scripture, words were only part of what united them. Keeping together in time, along with music, song, and chant, also played its part, arousing primitive, inchoate, and powerful sentiments of solidarity that allowed them to act more energetically and effectively than words and doctrine by themselves could have done (McNeill, 1995, p. 94).

In McNeill's theory, the idea of community is not constructed by face-to-face communication only - which is generally conceived as a form of dialogic communication-, but rather by a commitment to a collective performance whereby group feeling and solidarity are generated through participation at different levels of the communicative act. McNeill asserts that the conceptual model of community formation and invention which shaped the form of "primitive sociality" "has lost none of its power to create communities, and since we need communities as acutely as ever, opportunities for invention that will help to shape social solidarity in the future are unusually wide open" (McNeill, 1995, p. 156).

However, the liberating potential of the ritual of communication and performance must not be overstated. While ritual can be effective in building collective solidarity, it can also reproduce power relations among group members and perpetuate oppressive traditions. The Moroccan woman
filmmaker Farida Belyazid has attempted a reading of the role female dervish sub-communities play in generating and maintaining female solidarity. In "A Door Open to the Sky," the protagonist, a Moroccan female expatriate, returns home after the death of her father. Her long experience in France makes it very difficult for her to readjust to the mode of everyday life in Morocco. Her attempts to effect change in people's conditions and worldviews are met with a stunning commonsense resistance. The turning point in her life occurs when she is introduced to a female dervish sub-community. She renounces her decision to go back to France, ends her relationship with her French boyfriend, and marries a young Moroccan man. The mystical world of the dervish sub-community seems to have empowered the young woman. However, the film ends with an ambivalent scene which questions the liberating values the protagonist seems to have found in the door open to the sky. In this closing scene, the young woman is seen washing her husband's feet. Though the scene is framed to suggest the couple's erotic playfulness, we can not overlook the fact that the centuries' long practice of a wife's washing of her husband's feet has become an archetypal metaphor for women's subservience and subjugation.

Similarly, ritualized performance and communication in hammams and cafés must not be idealized. The Moroccan café is simultaneously a space where communal bonding is mediated and power relations are reproduced, where the dominant interpretation of social reality is reinterpreted but also where the state apparatuses check and control the swings of public opinion. Likewise, ritual performance and communication in women's public bath mediate female solidarity but simultaneously reproduce and legitimize patriarchal ideology. As most of my female informants assert, while the male is physically absent from the communal sphere of women's public bath, he is, nonetheless, forcefully present in women's discourse. In addition, the ritual of cleansing and treatment through which a woman seeks to increase her beauty is largely aimed at the seduction of her male partner. In short, to quote Schechner, ritual's "conservatism may restrain humans enough to prevent our extinction, while its magmatic creative core demands that human life - social, individual, maybe even biological - keep changing" (Schechner, 1995, p. 263). In the following section, I delineate the importance of liminal spheres in the emergence of communities.
D. Liminal Spaces and the Emergence of Communities

The schism between the dramatic representation of writing and the playfulness characteristic of orality corresponds to the dialectic relationship between what Victor Turner calls "social drama" and "liminality." Turner defines social drama as an "experiential matrix" which consists of "[b]reach, crisis and reintegrative or divisive outcomes." The cultural life-world of social drama rests upon a dialectic process which engages the serious and the playful, structure and liminality, and order and randomness. This dialectic process finds its articulation in liminal spheres where moral, artistic, analytical, and ritual orders of culture are simultaneously in ploy and in question. This "betwixt and between" phase, Turner asserts, is "humankind's thorny problem [...] [and at] the same time [...] our native way of manifesting ourselves to ourselves and, of declaring where power and meaning lie and

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how they are distributed."¹ Turner goes as far as to argue that the availability of liminal spheres can be decisive to the survival and continuity of societies:

any society that hopes to be imperishable must carve out for itself a piece of space and a period of time in which it can look honestly at itself. This honesty is not that of the scientist, who exchanges the honesty of his ego for the objectivity of the gaze. It is, rather, akin to the supreme honesty of the creative artist [...] All generalizations are in some way skewed, and artists with candid vision "labor well the minute particulars," as Blake knew. This may be a metalanguage, but all this means is that the "meta" part of it is not at an abstract remove from what goes on in the world of "getting and spending," but rather sees it more clearly, whether more passionately or dispassionately is beside my present point. Whether anthropology can ignore this incandescent objectivity and still lay claim to being "the study of man" I gravely doubt.²

Liminal spaces can create conditions for communal emergence by liberating disenfranchised groups from the limitations of abstract systems which bracket sentences within rigid rules of grammar and syntax. The liminal text is produced "outside the sentence" and in the margins of the dominant normative system of values and ethics. However, for the emancipatory aesthetics that lay latent in liminal spheres to emerge, the concept of liminality must articulate the historical struggle in which sub-communities are involved. Liminal discourses need not remain at the level of metaphysics. On the contrary, they are called upon to provide alternative interpretations of social reality. The creative energy of liminal moments should be channelled to undermine the homogenizing worldview which dominant ideologies mediate.

Jurgen Habermas has drawn attention to the ambivalence which underlies liminal spheres. On the one hand, he acknowledges the important

¹ Ibid. p. 78.
contribution of liminality which permeates the low-key residues of subcultures to the revitalization of the life-world:

ascriptive characteristics such as gender, age, skin color, neighborhood or locality, and religious affiliation serve to build up and separate off communities, to establish subculturally protected communities supportive of the search for personal and collective identity. The revaluation of the particular, the natural, the provincial, of social spaces that are small enough to be familiar, of decentralized forms of commerce and despecialized activities, of segmented pubs, simple interactions and dedifferentiated public spheres - all this is meant to foster the revitalization of possibilities for expression and communication that have been buried alive.¹

However, on the other hand, Habermas asserts that liminal spheres jeopardize group solidarity and social integration. In his opinion, social spaces which serve as forums for minority discourses may be too emotionally committed to the historical and social reality of sub-communities and subcultures that they may prove to be unable to transcend the immediate context of the utterance and accommodate to the order of public rationality. Liminality may also constitute a threat to the integrity of the intersubjective world of social actors and may put the possibility of Communal understanding in jeopardy. The fact of the matter is that Habermas needs the life-world as "a horizon behind which we can not go [...] a totality with no reverse side."² The location of the lifeworld as a transcendental site is a prerequisite for the conceptualization of public rationality and Communal organization.

Furthermore, even when he seems to acknowledge the importance of autonomous spheres which are generated by the richness of the lifeworld, Habermas is more interested in the possibility of their institutionalization than in the conditions in which they operate. In The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, he writes:

² Ibid. p. 149.
I call those public spheres autonomous which are neither bred nor kept by a political system for purposes of creating legitimation. Centers of concentrated communication that arise spontaneously out of microdomains of everyday practice can develop into autonomous public spheres and consolidate as self-supporting higher-level intersubjectivities only to the degree that the life-world potential for self-organization and for the self-organized use of the means of communication are utilized. Forms of self-organization strengthen the collective capacity for action. Grassroots organizations, however, may not cross the threshold to the formal organization of independent systems. Otherwise they will pay for the indisputable gain in complexity by having organizational goals detached from the orientations and attitudes of their members and dependent instead upon imperatives of maintaining and expanding organizational power.¹

Though his critique of grassroots organizations is to be reckoned with, his vision has no room for a radical alternative for social change or for intermediate hybrid forms. "Spontaneity" is foregrounded only to be dismissed in favour of a "rationalized" lifeworld: "Autonomous public spheres can draw their strength only from the resources of largely rationalized lifeworlds."² Despite his critique of systems theories (especially Parson's), Habermas eventually calls for a rationalization of liminal behaviour.

Indeed, from the viewpoint of dominant ideologies, liminality is often interpreted as a subversive force to public rationality. In this respect, Gouldner has tried to show the ideological implications of this interpretation by arguing that public rationality's claim to justice and emancipation should not hide its ties to capital and the dominant social class:

² Ibid. p. 365.
In both bourgeois society and in classical antiquity, public rationality was grounded in privilege and in unchallenged male domination of the family. Both provided that indispensable requisite for rational discourse: leisure, free from time-consuming work in the household and in the work-place, and the freedom to allocate one's own 'free time' without the control or permission of another. Patriarchal subjugation of women and private property, then, were the unmistakable conditions and limits of the post-Enlightenment development of public rationality.¹

Similarly, impartial rational discourse claims to uphold objectivity while, in fact, it perpetuates the hegemonic practices of the power structure by deciding who is fit to take part in public discourse. Iris Young has underlined the limitations of impartiality in modern moral discourse:

The ideal of impartial moral reason also seeks to eliminate otherness in the form of differentiated moral subject. Impartial reason must judge from a point of view outside of the particular perspectives of persons involved in interaction, able to totalize these perspectives into a whole, or general will ... In modern moral discourse, being impartial means especially being dispassionate: being entirely unaffected by feelings in one's judgment. The ideal of impartiality thus seeks to eliminate alterity in a different sense, in the sense of the sensuous, desiring and emotional experiences that tie me to the concreteness of things, which I apprehend in their particular relation to me. Why does the idea of impartiality require the separation of moral reason from desire, affectivity and a bodily sensuous relation with things, people and situations? Because only by expelling desire, affectivity and the body from reason can impartiality achieve its unity.²

The subordination of otherness in cultural representations downplays the various forms of the communicative act. By denying public legitimacy to subordinate and minority discourses, public rationality paradoxically gives up its claim to impartiality. Moreover, if social discourse is a representation of material conditions and the relations they generate, then, the claim to discursive impartiality in stratified societies is unfounded. In societies permeated by economic, gender, and cultural prejudices, the argument of impartiality can easily turn into a hegemonizing hierarchization of issues.

In post-traditional societies, the visibility of minority discourses depends on the fragmented openings created by liminal moments. It is in such fractured spaces where liberationist aesthetics can take form. Adonis has insightfully recommended that the emergence of a liberated thought be sought in the coherent and the confused, the complete and the incomplete:

If Arab poetic modernity is partly based on the liberation of what has been suppressed -that is, on the expression of desire- and on everything that undermines the existing repressive norms and values, and transcends them, then ideological concepts like 'authenticity,' 'roots,' 'heritage,' 'renaissance' and 'identity' take on different meanings. Traditional notions of the continuous, the coherent, the one, the complete, are replaced by the interrupted, the confused, the plural, the incomplete, implying that the relationship between words and things is constantly changing: that is, there is always a gap between them which saying or writing the words cannot fill. This unbridgeable gap means the questions 'What is knowledge?,' 'What is truth?,' 'What is poetry?,' remain open, that knowledge is never complete and that the truth is a continuing search.¹

Finally, liminality and hybridity inscribe in the gap between social discourse and social reality conditions for the emergence of communities and for the construction of a collective identity, a process similar to Eugenio Barba's notion of a "barter" performance where "exchange [is] the only possibility of

finding equality."¹ In the concluding section, I summarize the signposts of communal emergence in the light of Nancy Fraser's concept of the ethic of collective solidarity.

Conclusion:  
Communal Emergence and the Ethic of Collective Solidarity

Throughout this chapter, I have maintained that communal emergence is a complex and ambivalent process. The fluidity of community theories render it even more problematic to pin down. In my endeavour to outline conditions of the emergence of communities, I have tried to follow in the footsteps of Raymond Williams who argues that the study of communication is not only an exercise in the self-reflexive practice of discourse but that, more importantly, communication theories are constructions of models of social organization which effectively reflect on the social praxis of everyday life and conjure up types and ideals of communities. In Raymond Williams' words:

Communication begins in the struggle to learn and to describe. To start this process in our minds and to pass on its results to others, we depend on certain communication models, certain rules or conventions through which we can make contact. We can change these models when they become inadequate or we can modify and extend them. Our efforts to do so, and to use the existing models successfully, take up a large part of our living energy [...] Moreover, many of our communication models become, in themselves, social institutions. Certain attitudes to others, certain forms of address, certain tones and styles become embodied in institutions which are then very powerful in social effect [...] These arguable assumptions are often embodied in solid, practical institutions which then teach the models from which they start.²

In a short article, Nancy Fraser takes on Seila Benhabib's theoretical model of "the concrete other" and sketches an "alternative concept of autonomy" which she terms "the collective concrete other." Fraser argues that the collective concrete other makes it possible to focus on "the cultural specificity of the narrative resources available to individuals and groups for the construction of individual life-stories or group identities and solidarities" (Fraser, 1986, p. 428). The ethic of the collective concrete other is one of "solidarity," the norms governing interaction would likewise be attuned to "collective solidarities" and the moral feeling would be one of "moral solidarity." From this standpoint, it is possible to argue that:

to be autonomous [...] would mean to be a member of a group or groups which have achieved a degree of collective control over the means of interpretation and communication sufficient to enable one to participate on a par with members of other groups in moral and political deliberation; that is, to speak and to be heard, to tell one's life-story, to press one's claims and point of view in one's own voice (Fraser, 1986, p. 428).

Fraser's contextual and hermeneutic model of the collective concrete other provides an insightful alternative communication and performance approach to the hegemonizing theories which dismiss class, gender, race, and culture differences in favour of an ideal type of Community. Fraser's model may also be viewed as an alternative to Habermas's theory of communicative action which is biased against individuals and groups that can not live up to the demands of a structured rational and critical discourse. In the view of the collective concrete other, consensus is possible both because it is mediated through a concrete collective awareness of the social and material conditions that one's group or collectivity occupies in relation to other groups and classes and because the individual life-story in its entirety overlaps and intermingles with the collective narrative of the group. From this standpoint, communities can not be classified on the basis of whether or not they are

inquisitive, critical, rational or deliberative. Similarly, the dichotomy between
elite and mass culture becomes a subordinate issue because the collective
historical, intellectual, and affective experience is accessible to all individual
identities and articulated in a collectively constructed discourse.

However, though the notion of the collective concrete other outlines
some of the fundamental principles of and conditions for communal
emergence, Fraser does not seem to think it is:

wise or even possible to extrapolate the specific content of such a
solidarity from the current, prepoliticized experiences and
idiolects of women, especially since it is likely, in [her] view, that
these will turn out to be the current prepoliticized experiences
and idiolects only of some women" (Fraser, 1986, p. 429).

Fraser reaches this conclusion because she holds the political ethic superior to
other forms of discursive representation and resistance. Her preference is
suggested by the view that, as a concept, the collective concrete other is
tailored mostly for the political action of social movements. Though she
starts with the premise that the collective struggle is essentially about the
construction and appropriation of a collective discourse of communication
and interpretation, she accentuates the political over other forms of
communication and, consequently, ends up bracketing the conceptual
experience of the collective concrete other within the space of organized
politics and political militancy.

The insistence on singling out political discourse as the most viable form
of communicating and interpreting social struggle and resistance in Western
thought and philosophy follows a tradition inherited from ancient Greece
and summarized in a snapshot in Aristotle's famous saying which defines
"man" as "a political animal." This tradition was later fossilized by post-
Enlightenment thought which also insisted on distinguishing the political
society (polity/state) from civil society. This polarity is in line with other
political and philosophical divisions which separate between public and
private, reason and emotion, politics and culture for they, too, serve the
interests of groups in control of the means to interpret and communicate the
differentiated structures of social organization. In fact, polarities are more
likely to mask the politics of cultural production than demystify hegemonic
processes. As Homi Bhabha puts it, "[f]orms of popular rebellion and mobilization are often most subversive and transgressive when they are created through oppositional cultural practices."¹

What must also be highlighted is group or collective agency. Jusdanis has made a point to the effect that:

texts of resistance literature differ from other writing not in an essential or absolute way [...] but in their use [...] It is a community's refusal to detach language from political reality and its integration of literature into social struggles that challenge the alleged universality of aesthetic autonomy.²

In a similar vein, Stanley Fish asserts that the institution of literature is made up of a set of conventions on which an "interpretive community" of readers has agreed:

What will, at any time, be recognized as literature is a function of a communal decision as to what will count as literature. All texts have the potential of so counting, in that it is possible to regard any stretch of language in such a way that it will display those properties presently understood to be literary. In other words, it is not that literature exhibits certain formal properties that compel a certain kind of attention; rather, paying a certain kind of attention [...] results in the emergence into noticeability of the properties we know in advance to be literary. The conclusion is that while literature is still a category, it is an open category, not definable by fictionality, or by a disregard of propositional truth, or by a predominance of tropes and figures, but simply by what we decide to put into it.³

Though Jusdanis and Fish foreground communal agency and subordinate the authority of writer and text, they remain vague about which communal group is entitled to hold the means of interpretation and communication.

¹ Homi Bhabha, The Location of Culture. 1994, p. 20.
³ Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, pp. 10-11.
Communal agency must be viewed as a collective mediation which draws on the community's current material conditions, historical consciousness, past experiences, and an articulated vision of future action. It is at times when oppositional communal agency takes on the streets that the rift between the dominant interpretation and communication of social conditions and the will of communities is most visible. While a parade, for instance, is often used as an example of a form of public discourse to celebrate Communal homogeneity and legitimize mainstream interpretations of cultural symbols, general strikes, sit-ins, and march protests mediate alternative interpretations, needs, and desires of an oppositional communal agency. Similarly, café and public bath experiences are not flat out hegemonizing or oppositional cultural practices. It is the social reality of groups and communities that mediates the appropriation of those spaces for the empowerment of collective consciousness. Neither is oppositional communal agency an always-already vested right; on the contrary, it is a complex process that is mediated through conflict, resistance, negotiation, and compromise but also through performative and communicative liminality and playfulness.

Moreover, the practice of resistance and subversion is not necessarily a conscious undertaking. It is a historical process which materializes and grows up over time in ways that may remain unknown to group members themselves until the time for action dawns. In his discussion of the theatre of the oppressed, Augusto Boal defines the "poetics of the oppressed" as:

the poetics of liberation: the spectator no longer delegates power to the characters either to think or act in his place. The spectator frees himself; he thinks and acts for himself! Theater is action! [...] Perhaps the theater is not revolutionary in itself; but have no doubts, it is a rehearsal for revolution.¹

Likewise, the spheres of communal resistance and identity interpretation are forums for a collective carving and nursing of liberationist aesthetics.

Communal emergence provides an alternative to a repressive and oppressive political, cultural, economic, and social context. It imagines itself within the politics of culture and inscribes its resistance to the power

structure through the media of ritual liminality, subversive hybridity or direct political action. Communal emergence can take shape in high visibility as well as low visibility spheres which, in post-traditional Morocco, represent a residue of latent vitality, often too familiar to be noticed, which orchestrates much of the dynamics that permeate the cultural life-world. Public bath spaces and café terraces constitute spheres for potential communal emergence and contribute to the development of an ethic of collective solidarity.

The communal ethic of solidarity can also emerge in the form of a political ethic as demonstrated by a group of Moroccan women whose children were imprisoned for expressing oppositional opinions. In the 1970s when the power structure proceeded to the incarceration of a number of political militants, and at a time when debate in the public sphere was firmly restricted, the mothers (most of them illiterate and with no experience beyond the immediate space of their private spheres) of a group of political prisoners constituted a resistance movement that proved to be one of the most effective resistance movements in post-colonial Morocco. With the feminist movement still in its fledgling stage of organization, those women were able to develop an ethic of collective solidarity in their confrontation against the power structure. When asked who was behind their political action, they simply replied, "our heart, and a heart can not be imprisoned." With "simple reasoning," as Zakya Daoud puts it, they triumphed over adversities and managed to keep the case of their offspring on the public agenda.1 In the next section of this study, I examine three selected communal spheres in post-traditional Morocco: the hammam, the café, and cinema. The study of these three spaces will hopefully provide an illustration of resistance in its concrete and performed dimensions and show the implications of an ethic of collective solidarity as it relates to everyday life experiences of post-traditional communities in Morocco.

Chapter Four:
Communication in the Hot Steam
The Hammam, The Public Sphere, and Moroccan Women

In the film "Halfaouine," Farid Boughedir depicts the role of women's hammam (public bath) in the construction of male gender identity in the Tunisian society. The film tackles the underpinnings of the biological, social, and psychological transformations of a boy as he reaches the age when he is no longer allowed to accompany his mother in her visits to women's hammam. In Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia, the ritual of transition from childhood (i.e. women's world) to the realm of male community is effected at the time the boy is banned from women's hammam. As a general rule, boys accompany their mothers in their visits to the public bath until the bath attendant detects in the boy's gaze or comportment a threat to the privacy of women bathers. In "Halfaouine," the boy is caught prying about women's nearly unclothed bodies. In fact, quite a few of my male and female informants have told me stories about similar experiences which either happened to them or ones they witnessed. However, though there are stories about cases of boys of eleven and twelve visiting women's hammam, especially if the boy is physically very small and thin, the moment of expulsion usually occurs at the age of four or five.

Translated into English as steam bath, Turkish bath or public bath and into French as bain maure or bain publique, the word hammam has, over centuries, wrapped itself into a magic realm of signification. In the course of a workshop in which I gave a paper on women's hammam, a Moroccan scholar objected to the alternate use of the word "hammam" with "public bath." In fact, the hammam has carved a space in the collective memory of Moroccans which no other term can actually displace. Be it in poor or upper middle-class districts, in rural villages or suburban areas, within lower or upper class families, the term hammam has one common referent and resists narrow definitions of class and power. Even in upper middle class houses equipped with sophisticated bathing facilities, the hammam still forces a mystical recognition as a saint that needs visiting at least once a month. One might resent the inconveniences the bathing experience sometimes causes, but all
my informants have agreed that the feeling of relaxation enjoyed after a visit to the hammam and a cup of hot mint tea is irresistible.

A spirit of collectivity is a prerequisite for any conception of the hammam. The spirit of community is evoked from the moment one decides to go to the hammam. Companionship of relatives or friends is always sought. Though there may be some truth in the assumption that the spirit of collectivity the hammam generates has its original motivation in a popular fear of ghosts believed to prefer this warm and humid space as a dwelling, the fact is that the hammam exacts tremendous physical effort which can be less painfully managed when labour is divided. Moreover, as a ritual, the hammam experience is more fulfilling when performed in a communal spirit.

People go to the hammam in search of purification, both physical and spiritual. They go in a state of impurity and uncleanness and leave as pure as "the day they were born." A widespread Moroccan saying has mythologized the rift between the pre- and post-hammam experience by noting that "entering the hammam is not like leaving it." However, the hammam fulfills more than the function of a purifier or therapist. It is a space where people meet, communicate, exchange information, help each other, chat, and gossip. When we leave the hammam, we are always more informed, be it about local faits-divers or national matters. It is this aspect of the hammam as a space of ritual performance and communication which commands attention. The issue is even of greater importance when we consider the role the hammam has played in the life of the Moroccan woman.

Though women in contemporary post-traditional Morocco have access to more public spaces where they can meet and socialize, the hammam may still be considered as an ideal space for lateral communication. In the hammam, women meet to exchange information, chat, and celebrate their femininity away from the gaze of men. The informal co-mingling and association this feminine space generates mediates a feeling of solidarity which allows millions of poor and illiterate women who visit the hammam to resource themselves and deal with the humdrum of everyday life. In post-traditional

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1 Moroccan popular culture thrives with stories and legends about bathers' encounters with djins (ghosts) at the hammam. Though testimonies are always constructed in the form of a hear-say, the belief is well-established, especially among the illiterate layers of the population. This is what has led Westermarck to state that "[nobody] would like to go alone into a public bath at night - indeed many persons are afraid of doing so even by day" (Edward Westermarck, Ritual and Belief in Morocco, Volume One, London: Macmillan, 1926, p. 299).
Morocco, the hammam brings together women from different generations and different social classes. The young generation of Moroccan women may be visiting the hammam primarily for its functional role as a place of bathing and cleaning for now access to other sources of information and public spaces is easier. In fact, quite a few of my informants have humorously joked about these young women who use mobile phones inside the hammam. In addition, some upper middle-class women may have renounced going to the hammam altogether because of its inconveniences. However, for most women, even those who live in houses with bathing facilities, a visit to the hammam once or twice a month is still a sacred ritual. All my young informants have also admitted that their hammam experience is almost always an opportunity for making new friends, chatting, gossiping, and exchanging information. As a spatial practice, the hammam also functions as a sphere which mediates communal bonding and gender solidarity.

What I want to attend to in this chapter is the ambivalence which underlines women’s hammam. The hammam functions as a trait d’union (a hyphen) between a state of impurity and that of purity. It mediates between the Muslim and her God. As the Tunisian sociologist Abdelwahab Boudhiba puts it, the hammam is simultaneously “the epilogue to the sexual act and the prologue to the prayer.”¹ The hammam is an ideal place for the performance of the major ablution, necessary for doing prayers and the reading of the Qu’ran. In fact, W. Marçais refers to the hammam as “a sort of annex of the mosque.”² If, for the male, the hammam experience represents the moment he recovers his purity and reconciles his being with the divine spirit, it is for the woman a rite to reintegrate the Umma, the Community of the believers.

Women’s hammam is a site of celebration of the female body, of subversive discourses, and of a spatial performance which escapes men's control. However, this feminine space can simultaneously be viewed as an indication of the patriarchal structure’s marginalization of women. As articulated by my informants, though the male is physically excluded from this sphere, his symbolic presence is predominant since he remains the subject of most of the discourse consumed inside the hammam; moreover,

through most of the rituals of cleaning she performs, the woman seeks to render herself desirable to her partner. The hammam is also simultaneously a centre of communication and one of control since the woman can be vulnerable to gossip which can damage her reputation among friends, relatives, and neighbours.

Though the hammam is a public space, it is not accessible to all women. One needs to pay a fee to be admitted to the hammam and prices have been systematically increasing so much that women from lower classes can no longer visit the hammam as frequently as they want to. In addition, while the hammam is a public space, most of the discourse hammam users entertain relates to issues of private concerns. This issue requires a reinterpretation of the binary opposition between public and private. At a more specific level, because of the high temperature inside the hammam and the frequent shortage in hot water, the hammam exacts tremendous physical efforts, a fact which makes the bathing experience inaccessible to women with health problems. Finally, while the hammam is primarily meant to procure good hygiene for its users, most customers complain that some hammams, especially those in poor neighbourhoods, are in such deplorable conditions that their use may entail health hazards for bathers.

My objective in this chapter is to reconstrue some of the processes through which communities and groups emerge while simultaneously underlining the contradictions and conflicts which accompany such emergence. Women's hammam provides an excellent example of an informal form of association and organization. Though the hammam ritual performance has its own norms, the process of organization itself is shot through with contradictions and conflicts. A breach of the hammam etiquette can lead to disputes and quarrels among bathers. However, despite the contradictions and conflicts which the bathing experience often creates, what is specific to the hammam performance is the collective spirit it generates. I first attempt a reconstruction of the hammam organization and bathing ritual before I deal with some of the methodological concerns which the nature of my research raises. In the third section, I explore some of the implications the ritual performance of bathing generates. In the fourth section, I analyze the significance of this feminine spatial practice in relation to the politics of the production of space in post-traditional Morocco. I end this chapter with an analysis of the
representation of women’s hammam in North African male francophone literature.

A. Moroccan Hammams: Organization and Bathing Ritual

The hammam institution has imposed itself as a major component of the identity of the Arabo-Islamic city to the extent that its Greek and Roman origins are barely remembered. However, while Muslim societies have accommodated the hammam to their spiritual, social, and cultural needs, structural traces of the Roman thermal balnea have survived in the architectural organization of the hammam. Like the balnea, the intra-muros design of the hammam has a quadruple structure: the sitting-room (guelssa), the equivalent of the apodyterium, the first or cold room (beit al-awal or beit al-barid), whose Roman equivalent is the frigidarium, the middle room (beit al-wastani), whose counterpart is the tepidarium, and the heated room (beit skh’un), which corresponds to the Roman caldarium or sudatorium.

However, unlike the Roman balnea, the hammam is not open to both sexes at the same time. While its spiritual dimension in the life of the believer requires that it be accessible to all members of the Umma, society has developed mechanisms to meet this requirement without compromising the principle of the strict spatial division between the two sexes. In Morocco, most hammams are designed in the form of two adjacent but independent constructions, one for women and the other for men. This architectural design is both practical and economical because it helps save on energy since the same furnace feeds women’s and men’s baths. At a symbolic level, the spatial differentiation between men’s and women’s hammams contributes to the regulation of sexual impulses which the erotic space of the hammam generates.

When there is only one hammam, it is used alternately by women and men. In this case, men use the hammam in the evening hours and at dawn while it is open to women throughout the day. This temporal division which regulates the use of the hammam space is ordered by the dominant view of gender politics in the Arabo-Islamic society. On one hand, this arrangement saves the female the potential risk of trespassing into public space after dark and, on the other hand, the hammam is accessible to the male believer for the morning ritual of purification which is mandatory for the Friday prayer.
However, though strictly controlled, this alternate use of the same hammam by the two sexes has not prevented the emergence of collective erotic phantasms which often find expression in the form of a “hammamophobia.” For example, there are various popular stories about virgins falling pregnant just because they used a hammam that had just been vacated by men and were not careful enough to clean their spot before sitting. Similarly, men often talk with an overstated repulsion about the deplorable condition in which women leave the hammam. This mutual antagonism between the two sexes foregrounds the tension which characterizes gender relations in the Arabo-Islamic society and simultaneously sublimes the collective sexual impulses generated by a strict sexual division of space between men and women and a puritanical regulation of sexuality.\(^1\) An excursion inside the architectural organization of the hammam and the bathing ritual will provide a road map for the complex network of relationships which the hammam hosts.\(^2\)

The sitting-room mediates between the outside and the intra-muros world of the hammam and functions as a changing-room. Here, bathers undress before going into the bathing rooms and relax after their bath. The sitting-room is traditionally furnished with a mat, though it is more common today to find benches lined up against the wall. After their bath, hammam users usually lie down and rest in the sitting-room until the body has adjusted to the outside temperature. Most bathers treat themselves to a soda they can buy on the premises or relinquish any fruit they have brought with them. Before leaving, the bather stops to pay the hammam superintendent whose counter is always next to the entrance door.

\(^1\) In this respect, I want to reiterate that though I agree with Marjo Buitlaar’s interpretation which refers women’s “hammamophobia” to a feeling of bodily vulnerability for being in a space previously occupied by men, I maintain that such imaginary stories provide an outlet for the accumulated sexual frustrations of both women and men. In his turn, A. Boudhiba argues that the “hammamophobia” is generated by the ambivalent position of the hammam as a sacred and erotic space (Marjo Buitlaar, “Public Baths as Private Places” in Karin Ask and Maxit Tjomssland, eds., Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on Gender Relations, Oxford: Berg, 1998, p. 113 and A. Boudhiba, La sexualité en Islam. Paris: PUF, 1975, pp. 209-210).

\(^2\) This road map is reconstructed on the basis of my own observations in men’s hammam, my life experience in a culture where the hammam institution is an important architectural and social patrimony, my readings of the literature on the hammam, and the data I gathered through my conversations with female informants. I provide a more detailed account of the methodological approach in the next section.
The superintendent (guellassa) is usually the hammam manager. In addition to keeping the accounts of the hammam, she is also responsible for watching over the clothes of bathers, cleaning the ground floor in the sitting room, and supervising the work of other attendants -if the hammam is big enough to have any. Moreover, it is also incumbent upon the superintendent to remind to order bathers who break the hammam etiquette. Bathers tend to walk on the mat with their slippers or may be tempted to take a bucket half-full of hot water inside the sitting-room to put their feet on. For the superintendent, such practices are not allowed because they disrupt the peace of other bathers and create more work for her. She also brings to order bathers who do not cover their nudity with a loin-cloth while in the sitting-room. Those are usually newly immigrant women from rural areas who have not yet been socialized into the protocol of performance in the sitting-room. The superintendent is always on the look-out for boys who are past the age of visiting women’s hammam with their mothers. Her judgment is mythically unmistakable and final. Last but not least, the superintendent establishes close relationships with her customers. She is usually let into the secrets of families and may know more about hammam users than any other woman in the neighbourhood.

Once the bather has picked up the buckets she will use (usually one bather is entitled to two buckets made of plastic), she steps inside the bath rooms. The bath rooms and the sitting-room are separated by a wooden door that is levered by a bar of steel to keep it constantly closed in order to prevent steam from evaporating. Once behind this door, the bather’s journey inside the world of the hammam has truly begun. The lights are very dim, the atmosphere is humid, and the bather is greeted with a comforting wave of warm air. The first or cold room is a transit space which allows the body to adjust to the great and abrupt shift in temperature inside the heated room. Also, after hours spent inside this heated setting, a well-advised bather would rest for a short time in the cold room to allow the body’s temperature to drop before leaving. In fact, it is in this room where the ritual of purification is performed. The bather fills her buckets with water from the basin and retires to a corner in the cold room (unless there is a m’tahra, a room reserved for the ritual of purification) and does her major ablution.

The heated room contains the basin of hot water. At times, the temperature is so high that the floor in this room feels like a live coal. Yet, it
is in the heated room where the bathing experience truly begins. Upon arrival, the bather lines up to fill her buckets from the basin. Bathers proceed in this way because, on one hand, they do not mind standing in line because they have to sweat anyway; on the other hand, each bather uses her buckets to mark the boundaries of the space she will be using. Bathers often reserve their space in the middle-room because it is here where most of the bathing performance takes place. Once this is settled, the bather goes back to the heated room. Here, she chooses a spot that she cleans with water, rubs her body with a jelly black substance bought at an herbalist’s (sabun el-beldi), and lies down on the floor. Depending on her physical resistance, a bather can spend between fifteen and forty-five minutes in the heated room. After she has had a good sweat, the bather douses herself with a bucket of hot water and moves out to the spot she has reserved in the middle-room. The heated room will be revisited every time the bather needs hot water.

The middle-room is the centre of the social world inside the hammam since it is here where most of the bathing performance and interaction take place. The stay in the heated room has relaxed both the body and the mind and the bather can now take her time in scrubbing, rubbing, rinsing, and dousing her body with water. Bathers often get together in pairs or in groups to help each other with the scrubbing and the cleaning ritual. If the bather has dyed her hair with henna (a plant used to dye the hair and decorate the hands and feet) before coming to the hammam, now is the time to rinse it out. The bather then shampoos her hair and rinses her body with soap. While they are engaged in the bathing performance, bathers talk, chat, gossip, comfort the sad and have a joke with the merry, transmit information and exchange advice. At times quarrels and disputes break out but most of the time, the atmosphere is one of sociability and conviviality.

The bather who can afford to hire the services of the massage woman (teyabba) is taken care of from beginning to end. The teyabba is an expert in handling bodies and her reputation is built on this account. She is expected to be fast and swift. The hammam is her world and she knows it inside out. She fills the client’s buckets, reserves the best spot for her, scrubs and rubs her, shampoos her hair and rinses her body with soap before treating her to a seance of massage. Here she displays her knowledge of the human body. She squeezes every muscle and every rib with great dexterity. Her mission is to revitalize every inch in her client’s body. Sometimes, the pain is unbearable
and the client needs to let out a scream and tap the floor with her hand as an indication that her body has reached the limits of endurance. A seance of massage makes the bather feel her body very light. In fact, it is partly for such feeling that bathers hire the services of the massage woman. However, while the services of the massage woman establish the client’s social status among the community of bathers, they also marginalize her from the social world inside the hammam. In the hands of the teyabba, she does not have many opportunities to mix with other bathers. In fact, only middle or upper middle-class women can afford to hire the services of the teyabba. A teyabba usually “does” between two and six clients a day, except on week-ends when she can get as many as ten. Finally, the bathing experience is completed with the ritual of purification. This ritual provides the bather with more self-assurance and reconciles her with the community of believers. Now, she can step outside where she is greeted by congratulations from other bathers in the sitting-room.

Besides its spiritual and social role, the hammam institution is also a business investment which generates job opportunities for thousands of families. In addition to the superintendent, most hammams employ at least two massage persons, one attendant, and a person to operate the furnace which is located in the basement adjacent to the hammam. The work of the furnace man (this job is never held by a woman) is indispensable to a well-balanced heating of the hammam. His skill consists of feeding the fire just enough wood to keep the right temperature inside the hammam. In fact, quite a few hammams develop the reputation of being either over- or under-heated. In either case, the hammam stands to lose a significant number of its potential clientele.

In addition, it is worth noting that a significant percentage of hammams in Morocco has become the property of the Ministry of Islamic Affairs. The revenue generated by this endowment goes to the maintenance of mosques, orphanages, and the implementation of other social projects. All in all, though no statistics are available, one can safely state that the hammam institution provides employment for thousands of urban dwellers and assistance to a very poor segment of the population. Finally, I need to

1 For an in-depth analysis of the role of the hammam as an economic institution, see Omar Carlier, "Le hammam maghrébin, héritage séculaire et acculturation à la modernité (xix-xx
reiterate that though this study focuses on the social world the feminine hammam mediates, the importance of this institution must be viewed in the light of its three-dimensional interaction with the spiritual, the social, and the economic structures in the Arabo-Islamic city. In the next section, I provide some reflections on the methodological approach I have adopted in my study of the hammam as a female spatial practice.

*Figure 17. The subaltern world of the public bath: A hammam in the medina of Salé.*

B. Reflections on the Methodological Approach

I first became aware of the importance of women's hammam as a centre of communication when I was in my early teens. I must have been about seven years old when a family moved into our neighbourhood. Soon, it was known that the father was a sh'rif (a saint) who was blessed with the supernatural gift of healing ailing infants. Hundreds of mothers carrying their infants on their backs made the journey to the sh'rif's house. I never knew the exact fee the sh'rif charged his patients but the line in front of his house grew bigger day in day out. Since the sh'rif would see his patients only between the day's first two prayers (from about 6:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.), visitors were soon forced to spend the night in line hoping their turn would arrive before the day's second call for prayer. As a child, I watched how our quiet neighbourhood gradually changed into a busy district. People drove from other cities to see the sh'rif. I remember how, as children, we developed a circumstantial game which consisted of guessing the cars' registration centres by reading their plate numbers. Five years later, while the sh'rif kept the house in our street for his practice, his family moved out to a villa in an upper middle-class neighbourhood.

It was only years later that the secret to the sh'rif's astounding rise to success and popularity became public. Thus, it was revealed that his wife had engineered his success. I remember her as a strong and authoritative woman who scared us off from playing football near her house. During the sh'rif's early months of practice, she made the round of women's hammams in the city. With her two-year old son by her side, she explained to her hammam's audience how, after she had lost hope, a newly-settled sh'rif was able to snatch her only child (she actually had six children) from a certain death. Of course, in her story, no mention of her relation to the sh'rif was made. She apparently made sure to demystify the nature of the child's sickness for her husband was believed to heal all kinds of infant diseases. She retired when she was sure the sh'rif's reputation could travel independently through women's communication networks.

Obviously, my awareness of the importance of women's hammam as a social setting can not solve all the methodological limitations of this research. As a male, I have no access to this feminine space and no matter how much information I have gathered, I can not claim familiarity with the social world.
inside women’s hammam. In addition, I have had to consider ethical and moral issues. As a male researcher, I have had to take into consideration the implications of the norms of moral appropriateness which regulate gender relations in post-traditional Morocco. Men and women do not generally converse about women’s hammam. More than that, in conservative circles, the term hammam is often avoided. When a woman is out on a visit to the hammam, she is simply “out to run an errand.” I have had to consider the ethical appropriateness of this research. Women’s hammam is the most private of public places available to women, and thus, I have had to consider whether or not my research would constitute a violation of women’s privacy.

My decision to maintain women’s hammam as a case study in this research project has been motivated by a number of reasons. First, since I have opted for the café as a predominantly male space, I have concluded that, for the structural coherence of this study, I need to explore a women’s space to analyze the processes which mediate female post-traditional communities. It is true that I could have selected another women’s space. I could have, for instance, chosen from among social settings such as the workplace, clubs and fitness centres or public gardens. However, none of these spaces answers to the immediate questions I have set for this research. Indeed, most of these social settings are either exclusive of specific age and social groups or would have simply raised similar research and methodological problems. As a social setting, women’s hammam has the advantage of bringing together women from different social classes and different generations. Eventually, I have decided to resolve methodological problems as they arise in the course of my research. My overriding motivation is to put my research at the service of the needs and aspirations of women in my country. Last but not least, the resistance encountered in the study of this exclusively feminine space is also to be taken as an epitome of women’s resistance to the dominant patriarchal structure.

For this study, I have conducted a survey among women of different ages. I have asked some of my informants to fill in questionnaires but most of my research has taken the form of unstructured and casual interviewing. My subject position as a male studying an exclusively feminine space has obviously been a major handicap. In addition to the fact that it is not culturally appropriate to talk about women’s hammam in public, I have also realized in the course of my interviews that women are generally very
protective of their hammam world. The hammam relates to the most private and intimate dimensions in their lives and it is justifiable that they vehemently defend it against the potential threat of an intrusive male gaze. As Marjo Buitelaar has noted, the scene of the boy caught prying about unclothed women in the film “Halfaouine” creates “such a state of frenzy among bathing women” because they perceive the boy’s comportment as a transgression of their privacy.¹ In fact, quite a few of my informants gave me the impression that they were not comfortable with the fact that they were giving away information about a world “that is the most private of female domains.”²

To overcome some of the limitations imposed by the cultural context, I chose my informants from among family relatives, friends or neighbours. I discovered that, because of my gender identity, I could not ask a woman I did not know to sit down for an interview on women’s hammam. More than that, even with acquaintances, conducting structured interviews was no easy task. I experienced embarrassment at the beginning of all interviewing sessions and my informants were usually the ones who made the effort to put me at ease. However, my interviews and conversations with elderly women were always interesting and fun. I interviewed a woman who, for more than three decades, led a life of seclusion except for the rare occasions of a family wedding or a funeral and a bi-weekly visit to the hammam. She married at the age of thirteen and since her husband was most of the year out of town, she had to stay with her in-laws. When her children reached adolescence and her husband retired, they moved to a new house but it was too late for her to change her lifestyle. For this woman, the hammam was not a window on the outside world. It was, as she put it, a bewildering world in itself. She told me how, after every visit, she came back with her mind as puzzled as ever. It was in the hammam that she heard about a “thing” which moved by itself (i.e. car) and about a magic box with “real-life” people who could talk (i.e. television). This acquaintance is now in her nineties. She lives with one of her daughters in a hip area in Casablanca. Every now and then, she insists

² Ibid. p. 112.
that her granddaughters take her for a visit to the hammam although she can
not stay inside for more than thirty minutes.

I also realized that focus group interviews were easier to conduct. Feminine
complicity among focus group members usually created a relaxed
atmosphere and made everybody experience the interview session more like
a friendly chat than a burdensome effort to extract or give away information.
In fact, one of the first group interviews I conducted confirmed the
importance of focus group sessions in my methodological approach. I told a
friend who ran a small business about my project and asked her to find out if
her two employees could sit for an interview on women’s hammam. I kept
postponing the interview session because I dreaded the moment of being
with a group of women talking about women’s hammam. Eventually, my
friend took the initiative and arranged a meeting in her workplace at lunch
time and invited me to join them. In addition to my friend and her two
employees, there were four other women: two graduate students and two
administration secretaries. It was a small group of young women aged
between twenty-four and forty. During lunch, my friend switched on a tape-
recorder and started the conversation about the hammam. It was an
interesting interviewing session. For more than one hour, my informants
talked about the hammam experience, its importance in their lives, and the
stories and legends women associate with this feminine space. Most of the
time, I was a mere witness to their debate. I intervened only to shift the
conversation to other issues and most of the time I did that by giving them
my interpretation of a practice in men’s hammam. During this session, I got
quite a comprehensive sample of the different attitudes women may hold
towards their hammam. My informants alternated responses of appreciation,
apprehension, and even repulsion against some practices of bathers.
However, they were unanimous about its importance as a space for
purification and feminine sociability.

In this study, I have also relied on secondary data collected by women
researchers. As a general observation, I have noted that though women’s
hammam has got only marginal attention by researchers, the literature on
this feminine space can be divided into three main headings. Under the first
heading, one can include studies conducted by European and North-
American researchers. In this category, one can distinguish between the early
writings which carry a presumptuous colonial attitude and those of the more
self-conscious contemporary scholars. The early literature on women’s hammam was generally written by European travellers who were intrigued by the novelty of this indigenous spatial practice. In this body of literature, the hammam is “othered.” It is constructed to correspond to the phantasmagoric world of the Oriental harem. In these Orientalist representations, bathers become seraglio women and the hammam world loses its reality and turns into a sensual world of eroticism. By contrast, contemporary anthropologists are more sensitive to the social and cultural norms which regulate the spatial experience of women’s hammam. Most of these researchers show a self-conscious awareness of the implications of their identity position and its interference in their study subject. However, I have found the contributions of these researchers important for a more comprehensive understanding of women’s hammam.

The second main heading of the literature on women’s hammam consists of the literary interpretations of this space by Moroccan male francophone writers. In fact, reconstruction scenes of women’s hammam are abundant in North African francophone literature. The importance of this body of

1 In an article on Women’s hammam in Morocco, Valerie Staats devotes a small section to the analysis of “The Western gaze” of this feminine space. She mostly refers to the writings of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), a British aristocrat who wrote in her letters about her experience in a woman’s bath in Sophia, Turkey. V. Staats also quotes at length from the diary of the French writer Anais Nin who visited Fez, Morocco, in the 1930s and recorded her impressions of her experience in women’s hammam (see Valerie Staats, “Ritual, Strategy, or Convention: Social Meanings in the Traditional Women’s Baths in Morocco” in Frontiers, vol. xiv, no. 3, 1994; see also Robert Halsband, ed., The Complete Letters of Lady Mary Wortley Montagu, Volume One 1708-1720, London: Oxford University Press, 1965 and Gunther Stulmann, ed., The Diary of Anais Nin, Volume Two 1934-1939, New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1967).

2 This is, for example, how Valerie Staats concludes an article on Women’s hammam in Morocco: “I was a naive observer, especially during my two-year residence in Morocco, when I used the baths functionally and simply lived the experience. I did not systematically investigate public baths nor formally interview Moroccans about them. With a functional Moroccan Arabic level, I could converse with women in the bath on most topics but surely missed nuances, cultural references and lots of unfamiliar vocabulary. My observations come from my love affair with the experience of bathing at hammams. I made my own ceremonial hammam visits part of my experience of them (turning thirty, leaving Morocco, revisiting Morocco). The baths intrigued me, and I could only experience them through my cultural lenses, those of a middle-class, white, Christian-raised North American woman (Valerie Staats, “Ritual, Strategy, or Convention: Social Meanings in the Traditional Women’s Baths in Morocco” in Frontiers, vol. xiv, no. 3, 1994, pp. 15-16).

3 Quite a few North African francophone novels are undeclared forms of autobiography. I am especially thinking of the novels of Moroccan authors Driss Chraibi, A. Serhane, T. Benjelloun, A. Khatibi and of those of Algerian novelists A. Sefrioui, Kateb Yacine or R. Boudjedra.
literature lies in the fact that it reveals the major role the hammam occupies in the imaginary of the North African male (the present research may be considered as a further evidence of that). Sifted through the filters of male artistic production, women's hammam is emptied of its real substance and turned into a pre-text for the expression of male anxieties and phantasms. The reconstructed scenes of women's hammam in North African male francophone literature depict an othered and silenced female body and a terrorizing feminine nudity. As I argue in the final section of this chapter, though hammam scenes in male literary production may be read as a contestation of a hegemonic order which organizes post-traditional societies, the attempts to transgress the borderlines between the sacred and the profane, the authorized and the silenced, benefit the dominant patriarchal ideology rather than the female.

The third heading of the literature on women's hammam encompasses the research done by Moroccan women sociologists. The contribution of Moroccan women researchers to the understanding of this feminine spatial practice in its social, psychological, and ritual dimensions is tremendous. Fatima Mernissi, Soumaya Naamane-Guessous or Aicha Belarbi have provided illuminating insights into the important role of the hammam in the lives of Moroccan women. They have underlined the underpinnings of the social significance of the hammam as a centre of communication, its psychological dimensions as a therapeutic agent, and its cultural and symbolic dimensions as a performative ritual which punctuates the lifeworld of Moroccan women. However, most studies by Moroccan women researchers fail to deal with the hammam as an autonomous institution. Contributions to the understanding of this feminine space remain dispersed since they mostly occur as sections in studies which deal with broader issues. In fact, because of its fragmented nature, research on the hammam has not been able to exhaust all the issues this institution raises nor has it stressed the ambivalent role of this feminine space and the importance its ambivalence plays in the emergence of post-traditional groups and communities.

Finally, despite all the limitations I have had to deal with, I have endeavoured to follow in the footsteps of C. Wright Mills who has urged social critics to cultivate a "sociological imagination." C. Wright Mills considers the success of intellectual enterprise in the development of "a quality of mind" rather than the quest for information or "the skills of
reason."¹ I share his viewpoint that the sociological imagination speaks against rigid and one-dimensional approaches to social issues. To disentangle the webs of people's "welter of daily experience," I have tried to develop a framework of analysis which remains conversant with and receptive to the particularities of the subject under study. In what follows, I deal with the organizational aspects of the hammam and the ritual of collective performance which this feminine spatial practice generates.

Figure 18: A woman and her daughter preparing to enter the world of the hammam.

¹ This is how C. Wright Mills defines the benefits of the sociological imagination: "The sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experience, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues" (C. Wright Mills, The Sociological Imagination, London: Oxford University Press, 1959, p. 5).
C. Women’s Hammam and Spatial Politics

Communication and everyday performance do not take place in a metaphysical realm. They are part and parcel of spatial and temporal practices with which they are involved in a dynamic relationship. A brief analysis of spatial representations in the Moroccan city brings into relief the ambivalent position of the hammam as a marginalized space and as a sphere which harbours practices subversive to the dominant patriarchal structure.

The structure of the Moroccan city draws its coherence from a triangular network which summarizes the spatial practices in post-cultural Morocco: the mosque, the marketplace, and the hammam. These three communal spheres speak not only to the structural coherence of space but also to the continuity of Moroccan culture in both time and space. They are the defining signifiers in every district. The value of a property is partly defined by the property’s proximity to those three markers. Because most houses are not equipped with bathing facilities (despite an accelerated modernization of the urban landscape over the last decades), a hammam within a walking distance is a blessing. So is the case with respect to the mosque and the marketplace. When we consider the fact that people need to perform five prayers a day and visit the marketplace at least once a day, we realize the importance of the three communal spheres in the structure of Moroccan cities.

As symbolic forms, these spatial practices contribute significantly to the production and reconstruction of culture and social relations. From this viewpoint, the marketplace stands for an experienced space since it relates to a material practice concerned with the flow of goods and capital growth. Commodity exchange addresses the material welfare of the community and the reproduction and reinforcement of existing social relations. Conversely, the symbolic associations of the mosque make of this sphere a predominantly perceived spatial practice. The reverence of the mosque stems from the perception of this space as a transcendental signifier with eternal aspirations. However, the symbolic dimensions of the mosque do reflect back on everyday performances. Everyday practices are punctuated by visits to the mosque and television programming is interrupted to announce the call for prayer to the believers.

By contrast, the ambivalence of the hammam sphere is more pronounced. If the hammam today is an integral component of the Arabo-Islamic
civilization, this has not always been the case. In fact, the institutionalization of the hammam in the Islamic world met with a strong resistance because of the promiscuity this space generates. While the religion proclaims cleanliness as a necessary component of faith, it also prohibits and repudiates nudity in the presence of others, be they of the same sex. It is on this principle that the hammam generated controversial interpretations among the community of Muslim theologians. Al-Ghazali, an eleventh-century theologian, prohibited the hammam for women except when they are convalescent or after childbirth. For men, he devotes a chapter in his book *Ih'ya* to a description of the behaviour the Muslim must adopt in the hammam. In this respect, he prescribes the use of two loin-cloths: one to cover the part between the abdomen and the knees and the other for the head so that one could protect oneself from the presumed indecency of impudent bathers.¹ Uqbani, too, criticized the indecency and promiscuity which reigned in the hammam. He warned that the nudity of bathers encouraged deviant and homosexual behaviour. He also gave the husband the right to prohibit his wife from visiting the hammam.² This ambivalent construction of the hammam as both a site of promiscuity and an ideal place for the achievement of the rite of purification has made of this spatial practice an integral component of the Muslim's everyday performance while simultaneously marginalizing its symbolic representation.

The marketplace, the mosque, and the hammam generate a spatialized conception of time which contributes to a definition of everyday communication and performance in the Arabo-Islamic city. At a symbolic level, the marketplace constructs a horizontal representation of time in that it focuses on the commodity’s material value which is largely determined by a clock-time movement. In the traditional Moroccan marketplace, the value of commodities changes following the clock-time movement. While the dynamics between supply and demand define the commodity’s market value, the commodity’s exchange value is also determined by the time in the day the transaction is carried out. The commodity could lose half of its value between sunrise and sunset.

Conversely, the mosque involves a vertical representation of time. Within this sphere, time embraces a vertical line that spirals upward in

² Ibid. p. 205.
search of atemporality and eternity. The call for prayer, performed from the
top of the thirty-feet minaret, is a symbolic communicative act which disrupts
the order of horizontal time. The sphere of the mosque acts as host to a
collective experience that is not affected by the constraints of mundane
interpretations of time and space, beginnings and endings. In fact, the classical
design of the mosque prescribes an open central yard with water
fountainheads where the believers can do the minor ablution. This
centralized open space functions as a window onto the sky and reinforces the
Muslim’s aspirations for the heavenly realm.

Within the realm of the hammam, time takes a different shape. In this
sphere, the arms of the conventional clock are blurred and no aspirations for
a vertical exercise are manifested. Inside the hammam, time freezes. The
hammam building has no windows giving on the outside world and the
small, squared panes which adorn its domed ceiling barely let in a beam of
light because of the steam inside. From a symbolic viewpoint, a visit to the
hammam is a return to the womb, a longing for that lost and cherished
protective warmth. This is how Boudhiba describes temporality in the
hammam:

The hammam culture dictates that one do not wash hastily or
perform a rite in an expeditious way. On the contrary, the
hammam is a place where one sojourns and stops to live an
important slot of time. There is a temporality that is specific to
the hammam, just like there was one to the Balnea.¹

For women, the temporality procured by the hammam experience is even
more anticipated. Time inside the hammam sphere provides a relief from the
monotonous pace of everyday life. Women go to the hammam to escape the
inhibiting world of the domestic sphere, to relax, and “to forget time.” As an
informant puts it: “I lie down and I forget the world around me.”²

As a child, I remember how I struggled to make sense of the temporality
which regulated women’s hammam. I must have stopped visiting the
hammam with my mother at a very early age for I do not have the slightest

¹ A. Boudhiba, La sexualité en Islam, 1975, p. 198.
recollection of the exclusive world of this feminine space. However, I had to escort my mother to and back from the hammam every Sunday. Her weekly visits were a sacred ritual and I was part of it because I had to carry her suitcase. The hammam my mother went to was about two blocks away from our house but, to me, that distance felt like miles. On our way to the hammam, I would try to take out against my mother all the resentment and outrage I felt. I would hassle her with questions about her need to take an entire suitcase (which I held responsible for ruining my Sunday plans) just for a visit to the hammam, about the reasons she did not bathe in one hour, as my father did, instead of the five to six hours she needed. I would even try to talk her into renouncing the hammam visits altogether. Little did I know that for my mother, just like for millions of other Moroccan women, the weekly visit to the hammam was a refuge from the humdrum of daily chores and routine and a social event which set its own temporality.

Unlike men who generally hurry through the bathing ritual, women welcome the liberating opportunities which this social occasion creates. For them, the hammam experience is not only a functional rite to be hastily fulfilled but a process that must be lived through. For generations of Moroccan women, the hammam visit has been:

an “outing,” a spectacle, an entertainment, a change of scenery, and a relaxation in the full sense of the word. This is why women spent whole afternoons and even entire days in the hammam.¹

The construction of the hammam experience as a social event must be read in the light of the power relations which regulate spatial distribution and gender relations. The marketplace, the mosque, the street, the café or other public spaces are predominantly male spatial practices. They secure the male’s material, spiritual, and psychological comfort and, thus, guarantee his continuity in space and time. Men do not need to make of the hammam experience more than a bathing rite for the purification of their bodies since they have access to other communal realms where they can meet, talk, debate, play, and gossip. The café space, which I explore in the next chapter, functions

¹ A. Boudhiba, La séxualité en Islam, 1975, p. 199.
as a social space which is exploited by male communities to generate group solidarity. By contrast, women’s access to public spaces is strictly regulated. The presence of the female in quite a few public places (like the mosque) could only occur through the mediation of the veil (the ultimate marker of the male territorial space). It is from this perspective that the hammam’s importance as a communal space must be considered.

The Moroccan sociologist Fatima Mernissi has underlined the importance of spatial politics in the definition of Muslim sexuality. She has made the point that the power relations which regulate the interaction between men and women are produced and reconstructed through a hierarchical mapping of space. The divide between women and men is institutionalized through a strict definition of spatial practices: “[strict] space boundaries divide Moroccan society into two sub-universes: the universe of men, the Umma universe of religion and power and the universe of sexuality and the family.”¹ Women’s access to spaces outside the domestic sphere occurs under male surveillance:

If chaperoned, women are allowed to trespass into the men’s universe on the traditional visits to the hammam, “the public bath,” and to the tomb of the local saint. According to my data, the visit to the hammam used to be bi-monthly and that to the saint’s tomb not more than once or twice a year [...] and both required the husband’s permission. The chaperoning was entrusted to an elderly asexual woman, usually the mother in law.²

The strict spatial division which regulates gender relations has generated an ambivalent relation between the female and public space and between her and her body. Public space is simultaneously an anticipated site of liberation and freedom and a formidable territory where the body is under constant threat. This is how a sixty year old informant describes her experience with public space:

[…] When we moved to this big city, I was so afraid of traffic that I could not go out […] I used to imagine that every passing car

² Ibid. p. 84.
would run me over and I would immediately go back home. I did not have any sense of direction either for I got lost everytime I tried to walk further than the street where we lived. One day, a relative came to visit from the country. As a token of my welcome, I proposed to take her for a visit to the hammam so that I could ornate her hands and feet with henna (a plant used to dye the skin and the hair). Thus, myself, my mother-in-law, my three children, and my visiting relative set out for the hammam. And you know what? We spent an entire afternoon looking for the hammam but in vain. Even though I and my mother-in-law had bathed there a number of times, we walked in front of it time and over without recognizing it. Eventually, we decided to go back home without bathing [...] Similar incidents occurred to us quite frequently. We used to stay home and everytime we tried to go out for an errand, we got lost [...]  

In this testimony, the female body is held hostage to the domestic sphere. It seems that only through child-bearing can the female express her femininity. Even access to the hammam, the most private of public domains, can prove too difficult to negotiate. In post-traditional Morocco, though women have more access to public spaces, stepping out into the street is still felt by many as an act of trespassing into a hostile male domain. In general, women seem to observe a prescribed code for using public space. A lingering walk or a giggle are likely to draw disapproving looks from passers-by. In fact, my research on the café has confirmed that women tend generally to cross the road to avoid café terraces. 

In short, women are expected to carry themselves with dignity and reverence in public places. One of the overriding objectives of the politics of spatial division has to do with the socialization of the body into a strict disciplinary system. The female body epitomizes the deepest and most acute anxieties of the believer. It is the site where the profane and the sacred are in constant tension. The female body is sacred because it is the source of life and generosity. Child-bearing is perceived as a sacred manifestation of the woman's femininity. While uncovered or loose hair is considered immoral, a

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mother can breast-feed in public. The breast in this case loses its sensual dimension and forces awe and reverence. A saying by the Prophet learnt by every Muslim states that “heaven is under the feet of mothers.” In fact, quite a few Moroccan women report that their sex life radically changed after they became mothers.¹

Conversely, an unchecked female body can also be the source of fitna (chaos). The term fitna itself embeds the ambivalence which characterizes the social construction of the female body. Fitna is derived from the root fatana (to attract and to seduce). Thus, the female body is simultaneously a source of fascination, fear, and apprehension. Because it is endowed with the power to attract and fascinate, it is presumed that it also carries the potential, to lure, seduce, and distract the believer from his duties and responsibilities. Lawrence Rosen has insightfully argued that the fear of disorder and destabilization is an overriding ordering principle of social organization in Morocco. His point is that, in addition to a “web of relationships” which mediates Moroccan identity and self-identification, there:

resides a sense - indeed a fear - of chaos, a belief that the orderliness of the world is contingent on many factors and that the tendency, or at least the strong possibility, exists that this uncertain physical and social environment might well give way to utter disorder.²

The ambivalent social construction of the female body stems from its perception as simultaneously a sacred source of life to be held in reverence and a contingent site that can potentially generate disorder and chaos. The spatial boundaries which regulate gender relations are partly aimed at protecting the believer from the seductive abyss of the “boundless” female body.

What must be underlined is that the strictly controlled distribution of space avails also in the private sphere. Though Moroccan families have internalized practical processes in terms of gender spatial arrangements inside

the domestic sphere, women enjoy less privacy than one may assume. As a general rule, guests are entertained in the living room, though women usually entertain their visitors in whatever room they happen to be at the time of the visit. Except in the case of very close family members, women tend to stay in the kitchen or use another room when the family is hosting male guests. Similarly, when the woman invites her friends, it is the husband who stays at a distance either by retreating to another room or leaving the house altogether. Quite a few of my male informants have indicated that they go to the neighbourhood café when they return home to a group of women visitors. Susan Ossman has noted the spatial arrangements in post-traditional Moroccan family:

This living room, whether inscribed in the architect's plans or defined by the occupants, is the central node of the house and of family communications. In contemporary urban homes the kitchen is usually dominated by the women of the family, but the salon is generally open to both sexes at all times. Men and women are not confined to specific spaces, but in certain contexts age or gender will determine who will feel comfortable in the presence of one or another person [...] While men and women have different roles in entertaining guests [...] very few of the families I have known in Casablanca confine men or women to specific spaces.¹

Marjo Buitlaar has made a similar point by arguing that for Moroccan women, gender privacy is more important than family privacy. She notes that women freely engage in discussions about private issues until the intrusion of an adult male disturbs the setting. Buitlaar observes that “[in] such cases, women cut off their conversation, check their posture and clothing, and expect the man to withdraw as quickly as possible.”² However, as Buitlaar has insightfully argued, it is the woman’s privacy that is likely to

be overruled in the presence of a male, especially in more conservative households:

Even when there are no visitors women may feel ill at ease when adult male members of the family are present. They feel checked in their activities and are on their guard not to discuss certain matters, particularly topics concerning sexuality. Teenage girls love to dance or sing along with the radio, but when their father or an older brother enters the house they stop at once and may be ordered by their mother to turn off the radio altogether. There is of course considerable variation between families. In liberal families gender privacy is not seldom overruled by family privacy and family members of both genders feel rather comfortable in the presence of each other. The attitude of more traditional women concerning mixed-gender domestic situations can perhaps best be illustrated by quoting a Moroccan proverb according to which 'A man about the house is like a boil on the back' - that is, a nuisance that prevents one from leaning back and relaxing.¹

Moreover, for many women, the issue of gender privacy may be mere illusion. In poor households where the entire family shares a small space, the slightest moments of privacy are very difficult to find. This is how an informant articulates her conception of space:

Space is the place we live in. It is rather a prison, not a place: one room I share with my husband and four children. None of us knows how to move around without stirring the anger and ire of the others. At times, I do not even find the opportunity to change my clothes because I can never be alone and I am too bashful to do that in the presence of my sons. In such conditions, one can think only of escaping this crowded space. This is why, after lunch, I pick up my infant on my back and I go to the park

¹ Ibid.
nearby and I do not come back until after the prayer of mid-afternoon [...] May Allah have mercy on us!  

For millions of women living in extreme poverty, a visit to the hammam is always an anticipated experience. Whenever they can afford it and even if they have to take their children with them, the bathing experience provides them with very rare moments to enter into communion with their bodies, establish relationship networks, and forget for a while the constraints of everyday reality. As Susan Schaefer puts it:

In an area where women are still generally secluded [or when they have no moments of privacy, one can add] the bath is one of the main places where women of all families and social classes meet and gossip [...] [A]lthough clanging pails, splashing water and crying children all conspire against it, the bath is one of the main centers of communication.  

However, women's strategic use of the hammam space should not be read as a consequence of the housing problem or a result of the strict spatial division which limits their access to other public spheres. Such interpretation would simplify the complexity of gender and power relations in post-traditional Morocco. On the contrary, women's appropriation of the hammam sphere must be viewed as a grassroots alternative to the dominant ideology which has en-gendered a spatial politics based on the binaries of inclusion versus seclusion, accessibility versus inaccessibility, and freedom versus prohibition. It is not because her access to public space is limited that she takes refuge in the exclusive world of the hammam. Rather, it is her appropriation of the communal sphere of the hammam to short-circuit the intrusive patriarchal structure that must be highlighted. An informant has given me a good illustration of this. She explained that when her family found out about her relationship with the man she would eventually marry, they used all tactics to prevent her from seeing him. She was forced to drop

out of school and was placed in home confinement. She confessed that those were the most difficult days in her life. She humourously remarked, in reference to the fact that her mobile phone rang about three or four times during the interview, that there were no cellular phones back then for her to stay in touch with the outside world. For over a year, before her family consented to their marriage, her visit to the hammam was the only opportunity available to her to see her fiancé. She joked that while couples cherished recollections of exotic sunsets on the beach or morning strolls in the park, she and her husband -they have been married for eight-years now- treasured a nostalgic thought for the furtive moments of their encounters in a narrow alley leading to the hammam she used to visit.

Moreover, the sense of privacy, sociability, and conviviality in the sphere of the hammam generates a feeling of group solidarity among participants. The hammam collective ritual performance conjures up the imagined community of women and upholds their awareness of their self-identity. In the next section, I consider some of the processes through which communities emerge inside the sphere of the hammam and the contradictions and conflicts which are part and parcel of the group’s collective performance.

D. The Bathing Experience as a Collective Performance

Reflecting on the organizational structure of the hammam, Kilito, a Moroccan cultural theorist, writes that:

the architecture of the hammam is centered upon the basin of hot water, the living heart of the structure, its center of attraction, a magnetic focal point from which no one can escape. The path through the hammam is constrained; it leads straight to the basin, reminding one of the mosque in which one can only move in a single direction, the direction of the mihrab [the platform on which the Imam stands to deliver the Friday sermon], the niche that has been opened in the wall and is pointing toward Mecca.1

Kilito's interpretation of the hammam proceeds from the symbolic order of the patriarchal structure which has inspired it. The representation of the hammam as a sacred place impersonalizes this space and stabilizes any ambivalence it may generate. Through this reading, the hammam is freed from the profane traces the body inscribes on it. The binding norms in this space become unequivocally sacred, uplifting, and awe-inspiring. This reverential character of the hammam overrules all sets of contradictory significations. The path inside the hammam is predetermined and constrained: it delivers the believer from the uncertainties of the mundane world and reconciles him with the regenerating realm of the Umma.

The codification of the hammam through the sole elements of the sacred en-genders a marginalization of other sets of significations and practices viewed by the dominant ideology as partaking of the feminine world. In a sacred representation of the hammam, the ritual of purification is foregrounded at the expense of other collective rites. Interestingly enough, the process of purification is the only individual act inside the collective sphere of the hammam. Moroccan hammams are usually equipped with a small room (m'tahra) where the bather retires for the performance of the major ablution. The ordering of the hammam experience along the principles of the sacred is also meant to comfort and reassure the male community in the legitimacy of its practices. Boudhiba relates the obsession with purification rituals to the male's obsessive fear of disorder and chaos:

Impure, man slides into the dangerous zone of evil. His protective angels shun him. He is prohibited from doing prayers, reciting the Qu’ran, holding the Holy Book or entering a mosque. He is no longer safe. The act of purification is his way of regaining back his feeling of security. Thus, it is recommended that he purify himself promptly so as to reestablish the order that was disrupted and drive away the demons which lie in wait for the slightest moments of his weaknesses. The hammam is a space of safety, or rather it is a transit zone and a centre of alternation between purity and impurity.1

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The urgent need to recover the state of purity is also an implicit indication of the male’s desire to distanciate himself from the profane and underground world of women. While for women the act of purification is also required at the end of the menstruation period or after childbirth, only the sexual act can profane a man’s body. Thus, for the male, the act of purification functions as a symbolic attempt to wash away the traces left through his encounter with the female body. The obsession with the vertical representation of the hammam speaks to an unconscious desire to lift the soul away from the destabilizing vicissitudes of the body.

Conversely, women’s hammam experience entails other implications than the simple ritual act of purification. The hammam is “the temple of the body.”¹ It is a beauty centre. In women’s hammam, the body is sanctified, adorned, and adored. The ritual of the sanctification of the body is a major component of the bathing experience and, when possible, women devote hours to the fulfillment of this rite. For the female, the purification of the soul and the sanctification of the body are perceived as complementary rather than mutually exclusive performances. More importantly, the ritual of bathing, the etiquette of performance, and the sociability communication processes generate contribute to the emergence of a collective community based on shared principles derived primarily from gender and class identity. In fact, it is the spirit of collective solidarity and communal camaraderie which is foregrounded in women’s representation of the hammam. Soumaya Naamane-Guessous, a Moroccan female sociologist, describes the dominant traits of women’s hammam as follows:

[...] for centuries, the hammam was the only place Moroccan urban women were allowed to visit and, for this reason, it played a social role in their lives. While men congregated in the marketplace, the mosque, and cafés, women had no other place to meet than the hammam. It was their unique link with the world outside the domestic sphere. In the hammam, women established network relationships, knew about the prevailing fashion, enjoyed themselves freely, and gathered information

about their neighbours. Thus, a visit to the hammam was celebrated as a holiday since it disrupted the monotonous rhythm of everyday life and they made sure to fully enjoy it. This was the reason women were able to stay in the hammam up to six or eight hours. Wealthy households had the possibility to hire the hammam for the night and all female family members shared in the experience just like on ceremonial occasions: full dress, pastries, fruits, tea [...] In the hammam, women chat and prattle, whisper and chatter out of reach of the indiscreet ears of the male. They can move around unclothed without the risk of being accused of indecency and without inconveniencing those around them. Above all, they wash, rub, and massage themselves. This is why the hammam visit has remained a customary rite for the majority of female population. The fact that women are more emancipated today has not much affected the frequency of their visits to the hammam. For the large number of women who lives in houses not equipped with bathrooms, the hammam visit is obviously an indispensable rite.¹

This descriptive rendering of the social world of women’s hammam and the ritual of bathing puts into relief the aspects of association, co-mingling, and collectivity which the hammam sphere mediates. In this feminine world, women do not seem to be obsessed with the ritual of purification. On the contrary, what they appreciate more in the hammam is the collective feeling of freedom, surrender, and indulgence they experience within its premises. In the protective sphere of the hammam, the repressed body is freed, the silenced voice can sing, and the oppressed can find a compassionate audience to her grievances. As T. Zannad has put it, the hammam “contributes to the equilibrium of [women’s] physical and mental health.”² An informant’s testimony validates this diagnosis and summarizes the important position the hammam holds in the lives of post-traditional Moroccan women:

If I do not go to the hammam once a week, I feel ill. In fact, my weekly visit to the hammam comes before anything else. Even when I was in Paris for a month, the first thing I did was to look for a hammam. I was happier than a child when I found one.¹

More importantly, what is specific to women's experience of the hammam is the collective spirit and performance it mediates. Unlike men who generally tend to avoid interaction in the hammam, women look at their bath experience as a participatory collective ritual where every bather's contribution is expected. In fact, the spirit of collectivity is already visible in the preparation that precedes the visit to the hammam. What follows is an account of a typical preparation for the hammam visit as I have reconstructed it on the basis of information gathered during my fieldwork research and also my life observations.

In the morning of the day of the hammam visit, female family members and, at times, neighbours get together for the ceremonial rite of the application of henna to their hair. This ritual is accomplished in a feminine convivial ambiance. The hostess offers mint tea and pastries and makes sure adult male family members are not present in the house. Quite often, women seize the opportunity to ornate their hands and feet with henna. The ceremonial rite is usually carried out in a festive atmosphere of song, music, and dance. Moroccan popular music (preferably shikhat) is played on a tape recorder and young women are encouraged to dance. This ceremonial rite is a participatory collective experience par excellence. Participants help one another in the application of henna, exchange advice on health issues, and discuss family problems. In short, this ritual of preparation is a prelude to the hammam experience. By the time women set out in a group for the hammam, they have already been drawn together in a spirit of camaraderie and solidarity. This feminine bonding which the hammam experience mediates has not escaped the observant eye of the anthropologist Elizabeth W. Fernea who writes in A Street in Marrakech, a book in which she documents her one-year experience in Morocco:

I sometimes saw groups of djellabaed [the *djellaba* is a traditional Moroccan costume with a hood worn by both men and women] and veiled women going into the public bath, bundles of towels and clean clothes carried in baskets over their arms. I would hear them laughing together and be struck by a pang of envy at the sound of that camaraderie, which seemed forever unavailable to me. Taking a bath was a real social event.¹

Valerie Staats has noted the spirit of camaraderie and sociability which characterizes the social world of women's hammam. In her diary, she records her impressions about her first visit to a Moroccan hammam. Though Staats' testimony is to be kept in perspective, as she herself states, the information it contains provides a glimpse of the sociability which reigns in the collective world of women's hammam:

Yesterday evening I had my first experience at a hammam, or public bath. In ways it was just like I had imagined. Many mostly naked women sat around the edge of the room, drying off, talking, slowly dressing [...] We watched M. pick out about eight heavy, black rubber buckets for us all to use [...] We went into the inner room and found a place along the wall where the three of us could sit. The walls were lined, all the way around, with women sitting on the floors, legs outstretched, with three or four black buckets marking off their territory [...] We didn't get as many stares as I thought we would. Many women returned the smiles I offered. Some women had their children with them and bathed them too. The place was pretty crowded, and women of all ages and sizes were there, all thoroughly naked except for the perfunctory bikini underwear. The atmosphere was hot, steamy and sensuous to me, as I watched the women lovingly scrub each other's backs, sides, buttocks, even breasts. Many smiles and much camaraderie among the women, all taking their time and relaxing [...] They scrub themselves and each other very hard, all over, repeatedly, and douse themselves with water from time to

time. K. and I, pretty well finished, sat talking, rinsing ourselves and idly scrubbing [...] We went to the outer room, slowly dried and dressed, and did get a few stares, especially at our clothing. Kim wore a jellaba, so she was more respectable than I, at least in her opinion (unpublished journal).

This inside view of women’s hammam, even if it is reported through the cultural lenses of an American woman, depicts a feminine world where the female body, freed from social and moral inhibitions, spontaneously surrenders to a collective expression of life histories. As my informants have confirmed to me, every female body in the hammam tells a life story. Tattooed bodies, hennaed bodies, scarred bodies, battered bodies, large and small bodies all have stories to tell about the complex life of women in post-traditional Morocco. In the communal sphere of the hammam, the outer sign on the body is often the opening sentence to a narrative on love, hatred, passion, superstition, illness, revenge or violence that the narrator-protagonist willingly shares with her audience. The stories the signs reference are integral parts of the life histories of their bearers and, regardless of the experiences which have generated them, they all foreground the precarious position of the female body in a male dominated society. In this respect, I remember how in the course of a conversation, a women’s rights activist told about how she managed to get a young woman to visit a centre for victims of domestic violence. She had first seen marks of violence on the victim’s body in a neighbourhood hammam and got the young woman to confide in her. The activist told about how the victim was so scared that she had never revealed her secret to anyone, not even to her family. In fact, her life story was written on her body and in the intimate sphere of the hammam, stories are publicized.

However, as Staats’ testimony suggests, the social world of the hammam is primarily one of festive celebrations. It is a world of abundance, indulgence, and surrender. Women go to the hammam to relax and forget about the drudgery of everyday life. More importantly, Moroccan women have used the hammam to spatialize certain family ceremonies and religious feasts. On such occasions, the hammam mediates between the end of a major chapter in

the woman's life and the beginning of a new one. A bride, for instance, visits
the hammam in the weeks preceding and after the wedding ceremony. In this
case, the hammam spatializes the woman's transition from maidenhood and
entry into the marriage institution. A woman's first visit to the hammam
after a childbirth is also an indication of the end of her convalescence period
and re-entry into the social world of her community. These two ceremonial
rites take place in an ambiance of festivity and merriment. On such occasions,
the hammam becomes the stage for a communal festive ceremony in which
the collectivity is invited to participate. In a short story entitled "Honour,"
Alifa Rifaat depicts the ceremonial bathing of a bride in Egypt:

They took Sophia to the public bath. The bride's bath involves
special rituals. Shalabya, the bath house attendant, came with
her equipment to perform them. She brought ashes from the
stove, sugar, lemon, scented soap and an abundant supply of
containers filled with warm water, all of which are applied to the
bride's body so she will be smooth and hairless. During the
process, Shalabya whispered words of guidance into the bride's
ear to prepare her for the night. Amidst the singing and cries of
joy the bride let Shalabya decorate her with red and white dyes.
Then we combed her hair.¹

The ceremonial bathing of a Moroccan bride involves a similar collective
ritual. About two weeks before the wedding night, the bride begins the ritual
of the twelve baths. The last bath is called taqbab. Taqbab is a ceremonial
bathing which takes place on the evening before the wedding night and is
supervised by the bride's family members and friends. The hammam
attendants light up tapers and lead the bride to the m'tahra (the small room
inside the hammam). While she stands facing the wall with her eyes closed,
two close family members undress and douse her with water prepared in
advance by the hammam attendants. The ritual requires that they use a
container brought from Mecca and seven buckets filled with warm water. In
the meantime, women sing the beauty of the bride and ululate. At the end of
the ceremony, the bride puts on a new caftan (a Moroccan women's dress) and

¹ Alifa Rifaat, 1981, quoted in Valerie Staats, "Ritual, Strategy, or Convention: Social
gives the one she had on when she arrived at the hammam to the attendants with a sum of money. Seven days after the wedding, the bride revisits the hammam, a spatial practice which indicates the end of the wedding festivities and the beginning of a new life for the woman. After the bath, the bride displays to her audience the gifts she has received from her husband. This ceremonial rite, which is followed with great interest, is an initial indication of the power position the woman will hold in her extended family and her community. The more valuable the gifts she has received are, the better her position will be.\(^1\)

In the collective ceremonial rites in women’s hammam, the sacred and the secular are juxtaposed, the material and the spiritual are brought together, and the individual is reconciled with the social world of her feminine community. At a more symbolic level, these collective performances renew bonding and solidarity among the female collectivity and comfort them in the existence and legitimacy of their imagined community. More importantly, collective rituals re-confirm notions of sharing, support, and mutual assistance, all predominant aspects of performance in women’s hammam. In fact, sharing and mutual help are two fundamental principles on which the hammam experience is based. My informants have explained that a hammam user should expect to share her hammam paraphernalia such as shampoo, soap, henna (a traditional herb that Moroccan women use on their hair), Rhasool (a traditional shampoo), and sometimes even her personal kees (a coarse and rough mitt used to scrub the old skin away). The hammam etiquette also dictates that a hammam user ought to assist an elderly, a pregnant woman or a disabled if she happens to be near her. A young woman, for example, can assist another bather by filling her buckets from the hot water basin, a very tedious task since the basin is in the most heated room inside the hammam and there is almost always a line of bathers waiting with their buckets because of the frequent shortage in hot water. It is also very common for two or three bathers to organize themselves in a collective whereby they scrub and massage each other.

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\(^1\) For the reconstruction of the ceremonial bathing of the bride, I have consulted the works of Soumaya Naamane-Guessous (Au-delà de toute pudeur, la sexualité féminine au Maroc, Casablanca: EDDIF, 1988) and Yasmina Benrahhal Serghini (Hammams d’hier et d’aujourd’hui: cas de Rabat, 1992, unpublished thesis, the school of architecture, Rabat). I have also used information supplied by my informants.
More importantly, hammam etiquette requires that one socialize with the community of bathers. Quite a few of my informants have stated that they find it very difficult not to feign interest in the stories they are told at the hammam. A young woman doctor has told me that most of her visits to the hammam turn into medical check up sessions. Because she is a regular, the hammam attendants look forward to her visits. She now admits she would feel guilty if she goes to another hammam or if she misses out on her hammam visits for too long. It has also become part of her hammam visit preparation ritual to take with her over-the-counter medicine which she distributes to the attendants and the needy. This collective spirit builds up solidarity among bathers and makes the hammam experience a communal participation in the construction of group identity. It is the spirit of conviviality and sociability the bathing experience generates which makes of the hammam visit a much anticipated social event.

However, hammam communities do not stand for ideal forms of social organization. Rather, they are shot through with contradictions and conflicts. The hammam sphere is often the stage for disputes, quarrels, and intrigues. Some bathers do not observe hammam etiquette or the bathing protocol such as taking more space than one needs, not waiting for one's turn to fill buckets from the basin or dousing oneself with water without consideration of bathers nearby. Such behaviour draws the ire of hammam users and, at times, things degenerate into disputes and quarrels. Almost all my informants deplored the frequency of disputes, especially in hammams in low middle class neighbourhoods. One informant told me how she was once a witness to a physical fight which involved members from two families. In the course of the fight, some of the belligerent were seriously injured, a fact which required the intervention of the police. She explained the frenzy of the women inside the hammam when they were asked to dress up so that the police could come in. It took the police more than two hours to reestablish order and to evacuate the wounded to the hospital.

In fact, even if this incident is an exception, since disputes are almost always sorted out amicably, it highlights the vulnerability of women inside the hammam. In addition to the presence of small boys in this feminine space, women's privacy is always potentially at risk of being violated by adult males. Stories about men mistaking women's hammam entrance for men's, incidents of young men running away from danger and seeking protection
inside women's hammam or mentally deranged individuals forcing their way into this feminine world are quite common in Morocco. The potential risk of a male violation of women's privacy underlines the reality that women have less control over the mapping of private and public territories. After all, girls are never allowed into men's hammam and I have never heard of a woman seeking protection in this masculine space.\(^1\)

Furthermore, women's vulnerability at the hammam does not lie only in the potential risk of the violation of their privacy by men but also by hammam users. As much as an active participation in the hammam communication networks contributes to the bather's empowerment, it can also render her vulnerable to gossip and rumour. Women's discourse in the hammam is neither institutional nor structurally delimited. Women chat, gossip, and converse about issues of general and private concerns. In their feminine world, women exchange advice and information about children's education, birth control, family and career problems, food recipes, and the catering services in town. One of my informants confided that her female relatives called her by the humourous nickname of "the peppermint daughter" in reference to the fact that she was conceived when her mother was using peppermint as a contraceptive, a method she learnt about during one of her visits to the hammam. But women at the hammam also gossip about the neighbours, circulate rumours about enemies, satirize old-fashioned weddings, and laugh about or pity betrayed wives. In this liberated sphere, intimate information about private lives is exposed for communal consumption. Participants do not hesitate to ask advice about how to heal a husband's sexual impotence and contain or stir his sexual appetite. Much information on how to render an adulterous partner impotent also circulates in the sphere of the hammam.

Hildred Geertz has summarized the scope of women's discourse as follows:

\(^1\) After a discussion of similar issues on the vulnerability of women's privacy, Marjo Buitlaar persuasively concludes that the violation of women's privacy is symbolically perceived in "[men's] legitimate penetration of women's private parts in sexual intercourse. In this way, cultural definitions of femininity and masculinity are embedded in the universals of human sexuality. In the dominant world-view, men are conceived of as bounded entities that are able to exert considerable self-control. This explains why men do not have to take measures when their domains are invaded; it is no threat to their integrity" (Marjo Buitlaar, "Public Baths as Private Places" in Karin Ask and Maxit Tjomsland, eds., Women and Islamization: Contemporary Dimensions of Discourse on Gender Relations, Oxford: Berg, 1998, p. 111).
The give-and-take of mutual review and appraisal continues at all times, sometimes desultory and trivial, sometimes intense and agonistic, often touching on their men’s lives as well as their own.¹

However, the liberated scope of hammam communication leads to the revelation of secrets about private lives, a fact which can be exploited to stain or destroy the reputation of individuals and families. As T. Zannad has put it, “quite frequently, schemes and intrigues take shape in this space of sociability and superstition.”² In this respect, the hammam does not only function as a space where representations and performances subversive to the dominant ideological order are constructed. On the contrary, hammam practices can also reinforce the patriarchal structure.

Fatima Mernissi has noted the pivotal role elderly women play in socializing young girls into the patriarchal order. She underlines the vantage position of the hammam as a communication centre wherein the secrets of families are revealed. She writes that the hammam:

has manifold functions besides allowing people to perform the purification rituals and bathe. The hammam is an intense communication centre, a powerful information agency exposing the secrets of the families who frequent it. The guellassa (“the cashier”) and the teyyaba (the “girl friday”) who assist the clientele with all sorts of things, giving massages, carrying water, suggesting herb recipes for uterine trouble) have a strategic position in the hammam. They have more or less complete biographical accounts of the members of the families living around the hammam. The young girls are a particular target for gossip, and their behaviour is a daily object of concern to other women -those related to them and those who are not. A young


girl’s reputation has a direct impact on her family’s honour and prestige.¹

In a male dominated society, the reputation of a woman is often her capital. Rumours about young girls can keep away potential suitors and gossip about a married woman can cause the destruction of her household. For poor and illiterate homemakers, intimate information about their private lives is more important than any discussion about matters of public concern.

Communication and performance in the communal sphere of the hammam must not be idealized. While they contribute to the socialization of women into a spirit of collectivity and solidarity, they can also act as hegemonic processes which further marginalize a category of females and consolidate the hold of patriarchal structure. The ambivalence which characterizes performance in this feminine space is inscribed in its simultaneous mediation of emancipation and subordination, sociability and conflict, solidarity and contradiction. In the following section, I analyze male construction of women’s hammam. More precisely, I explore some of the processes through which male imagination has appropriated this feminine space for the interests of male creativity. Eventually, I show how the relation between the feminine world and the male imaginary informs about spatial politics and gender relations in post-traditional communities.

The moment a boy stops visiting women’s hammam at the age of four or five constitutes the germ of an ambivalent relationship between him and the world of feminine community. This separation occurs at an age when the boy begins his quest for gender identity. Women’s hammam mediates the first stage in this process in that it exposes the other’s difference to his scrutiny. Boudhiba goes as far as to suggest that, in the Arabo-Islamic world, one may speak not only of the “oedipus complex” but also of “a hammam complex.”¹ The boy’s separation from this feminine world marks the beginning of his immersion in masculine communities. From now on, he will be visiting men’s hammam, the marketplace, and the café, all spaces of predominantly masculine communities. The socialization of the boy into masculine communities is carried out through processes which include a systematic

¹ A. Boudhiba, La sexualité en Islam, 1975, p. 207.
derision and demonization of the feminine world.\(^1\) Thus the hammam lives in the imaginary of the male as simultaneously a “lost paradise” and “a real hell.” It becomes the site of conflicting and dual attitudes which reveal the male’s anxieties and fantasies, fascination and repulsion of the feminine it hosts.

A. Kilito, for instance, has argued that the maternal hammam represents the male’s prelapserian world. It stands for a magical sphere of unclothed women and a lost paradise of innocent experiments with love:

Many men speak of their early childhood experience of the steam bath or hammam as if it were a lost paradise. They used to accompany their mothers to this warm and moist place, a place filled with magical female bodies. And then they had to stop going with their mother and resign themselves to visiting the hammam with their father. They had to leave the world of women and enter the world of men. At about the age of five, they were subjected to a second weaning, a second separation. The maternal hammam is thus nostalgically recalled as a paradise of childish loves.\(^2\)

The boy’s “second weaning” is, in reality, the first of a series of frustrations he will accumulate throughout the socialization process. His nostalgic recollections of the magical world of women’s hammam should be read as signs of repressed desires, sexual and otherwise, which the ordering social structure generates. Thus, women’s hammam will live in his imaginary as an alternative to the inhibiting adult world and simultaneously as one that is accessible only at the level of the imaginary.

A. Boudhiba has argued that for the male, every visit to the hammam is an imaginary return to women’s world:

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1 Nawal Saadawi, an Egyptian women’s rights activist, has stated that the “female world [...] is looked upon by men [in the Arab world] as an area surrounded by, and peopled with, obscure and puzzling secrets, filled with all the dark mystery of sorcery, devilry and the works of Satan” (Nawal Saadawi, 1982, p. 147, quoted in Valerie Staats, “Ritual, Strategy, or Convention: Social Meanings in the Traditional Women’s Baths in Morocco” in Frontier, vol. xiv, no. 3, 1994, p. 14).

The lost world is recovered at every visit to the hammam. In fact, every visit is a return to the world of childhood. Childhood phantasms, recollections, aspirations, and desires blend with the cold and hot steam which appeases the body and excites the spirit. Innumerable hammam, a space haunted with so many memories, so many scenes, and so many mixed visions where the mother and sisters, charming cousins, and enigmatic neighbours make up a dream world of femininity that every man carries inside him.¹

In North African literature, the separation from the enchanted world of women's hammam is generally constructed as a traumatic experience. In Harouda, by the Moroccan novelist Tahar Benjelloun, the narrator recalls how the mere thought of his probable rejection from women's hammam used to frighten him.² In Abdelhak Serhane's Messaouda, the narrator's repudiation from the feminine world of women's hammam brings him close to insanity:

I collapsed upon learning that I would never return to women's hammam [...] Circumcised, I was no longer considered a boy. I had to abandon my childhood at the precise moment I was most in need of this mysterious world for my sexual development. My whole life was then suspended to one image, that of my mother. The undesirable was repudiated, banned from the world of One Thousand and One Nights [...] This new atmosphere overwhelmed me and I struggled with all my strength to escape madness.³

The inner struggle the narrator experiences at the moment of his repudiation from women's hammam stems from the contradictory and conflictual desires which order the relationship between the individual and the collectivity and between masculine and feminine communities. Women's hammam is positioned at the cross-roads between childhood and adulthood, between the

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¹ A. Boudhiba, La sexualité en Islam, 1975, p. 209.
age of nonchalance and an age of responsibility. It is the mediating line between play and seriousness. In fact, circumcision and repudiation from women’s hammam are the symbolic acts which purify the male from the impurities of the feminine world and initiate him to the realm of the community of believers. In Harouda, the child-narrator is prepared to the ritual of circumcision with a speech that demonizes childhood and the feminine world and sanctifies manhood and masculinity:

There has to be an end to childhood, a voice told me. It can not last forever. You consumed it in streets and hammams. There comes a moment when you have to part with it. This [the act of circumcision] will happen with lightening speed. And above all, don’t embarrass us! Don’t panic! Don’t be afraid! Don’t cry! You have become a man and this is the right path of Islam and purity. In fact, we will make you get rid of all the impurities you have accumulated during your childhood and which have assembled and settled in this piece of flesh that must be cut.¹

The feminine world is dematerialized. In the dominant worldview, the world of women is childish and impure and as such, it is repressed and negated. Life for the male begins after circumcision. Status, power, and honour are masculine attributes which the male develops once his excursions to women’s hammams are over.

However, in the imaginary of the male, the maternal hammam is also the space of erotic desires, remembered dreams, and life-giving encounters. The imaginary re-expedition to women’s hammam is “a journey among bodies” in quest for generative narratives. The feminine space becomes a house of fiction wherein the male artist exorcises the traumatic experience of the repudiation he lived as a child and simultaneously subverts and disrupts the dominant order which has repressed his desires. As an adult, the artist adopts a child’s viewpoint and re-explores a space which has left a lasting impression on him. In Ahmed Sefrioui’s La boîte à merveilles, the child-narrator gives his impressions of the ambiance inside the hammam and the female bodies that populate it:

We started to undress in the midst of a hubbub of shrill voices and half-clothed women [who] were in constant movement, talked loudly, gesticulated with passion, and howled in an unexplainable and unjustified way.¹

What is striking in this description is the overwhelming melody of voices which fill the world of the hammam. The child-narrator is unable to explain the reasons which generate the collective excitement around him. In fact, he is terrified by what he interprets as shrills, squeaks, and howling. Similarly, the female body is a source of anxiety and femininity seems to invoke an underground world of nightmarish terror: “wet legs,” “pending breasts,” “a mass of thighs and arms,” and the “rumbling of wet bodies.”²

In Harouda, the reconstructed world of the maternal hammam is not even populated with human beings but with “creatures.”³ Unlike the tumultuous females in Sefrioui’s novel, women in Harouda do not speak. The female body is used as a pre-text to generate a narrative of desire. The creative imagination encompasses the female body and moulds it to give shape to the most extravagant whims and phantasmagoric dreams of the male artist-creator:

I placed the women at the edge of whiteness, at the edge of verdure. At the call of the distant foam, they became lovers and travellers [...] I drank milk from their mouth. I pushed my nudity into sexes which murmured my delirium and I taught the pink flesh my mirror where only the eye was visible.⁴

In this recreated world of one thousand and one nights, the female body has no voice and no will. It is a subservient and domitable body easily manipulated by the creative delirium of the imaginary of the male. Just like the sphere of the hammam, the female body becomes the site of contestation between purity (whiteness) and perversion. However, though a passive

² Ibid. pp. 11-12.
³ “I also knew that I would never again have so many creatures at my fingertips” (T. Ben Jelloun, Harouda, 1973, p. 36).
recipient, it is made an accomplice of the forces of perversion and moral corruption. The ambivalence which characterizes the masculinist attitude to the female body further legitimates the existing gender relations. The construction of the female body as both an agent and an intermediary of transgression “naturalizes” the dominant view about the potential subversive threat of the female to the social order and the need to keep her performance under control.

In *The sand child*, T. Benjelloun renders an even more ambivalent construction of femininity. The novel tells the story of a female whose father decides to make her pass for a boy so as to preserve his family’s honour. The narrative is an account of the patriarch’s relentless struggle to efface all signs of femininity which appear on his daughter’s body. Her chest is bandaged to prevent the development of her breasts and herbal medicine is used to coarsen her voice. She is also dressed in a boy’s clothes, prohibited from playing with girls, and even a make-believe circumcision ceremony is staged to convince the most skeptical community members that she “is” a boy. The following passage is an excerpt from the son/daughter’s journal where she tells of her experience at women’s hammam when she was at an age to accompany her mother in her visits to this feminine space:

My mother forgot all about me. She set up her buckets of hot water and talked to her neighbors. They all spoke at the same time. It didn’t matter what they said—they just went on talking. They behaved as if they were in a salon where it was indispensable for their health to talk. Words and sentences flowed on every side [...] The ceiling was like a writing table [...] A few words fell more often than others, like, for example, “night,” “back,” “breasts,” “thumb” - scarcely had they been spoken when they dripped on my face [...] Curiously, the drops that fell on me were salty. I told myself that the words had the savor of life. For all those women, life was limited. It did not amount to much more than cooking, housework, waiting around, and, once a week, a restful afternoon in the hammam. I was secretly pleased that I did not belong to that limited world. I juggled with the words and sometimes made pseudo-sentences fall on my head, such as “At night the sun on my back in a corridor where the
man's thumb my man in the gate of heaven laughter ...” [...] Some words fascinated me because they were spoken seldom and softly -words like “mani,” “qlaoui,” or “tabun.” I later learnt that these pertained to sex and that the women did not have the right to use them [...]1

The hybrid voice in this passage foregrounds the ambivalence which underlines women’s hammam. Women have a voice and the narrator acknowledges the therapeutic dimension of their discursive performance. However, their discourse is mostly on sexuality, a fact which profanes the purifying sphere of the hammam. Additionally, the absence/presence of men in this feminine space problematizes the notion of privacy in this sphere. Above all, the quote delineates the social world of women’s hammam while at the same bracketing its status as a public space.

At a symbolic level, the construction of this feminine space is even more biased against women. The male artist appropriates a female voice to mediate his transgression of the cultural order. In fact, the discourse on sexuality does not only subvert the dominant conservative worldview but also the sacred sphere of writing. In the sphere of women’s hammam, writing is profaned. It is not only that women are shown to consume taboo words which pertain to sex but more importantly, this discourse is publicized through the act of writing itself. The generated text of transgression is liberating because it seeks to free the individual and the community from the inhibiting chains of tradition. However, such liberation is predominantly gendered because the female body and the feminine sphere are not actively implicated in the reconstruction of the dominant social order. On the contrary, they function as mere sites where male erotic desires, anxieties, and frustrations are mediated and negotiated. As Zohra Mezgueldi, a Moroccan literary critic has put it, in North-African male francophone literature:

[...] writing is another veil cast at the female body. It may be more transparent because it involves a kind of erotic game but it is nonetheless a veil which further masks femininity. Since writing is conceived as a sexual act in a play of textual eroticism

wherein the woman is absent, the female body becomes a mere recipient of the seminal text. Femininity, missing and absent, is sought through a bodily encounter with words.¹

In the words of the sand child, "being a woman is a natural infirmity to which everybody accommodates. Being a man is an illusion and a violence that everybody justifies and condones."²

Figure 20. The hammam and the politics of national identity: A women’s hammam celebrating a national holiday.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have tried to show the role women’s hammam plays in the emergence of female communities. I have argued that the ambivalence which characterizes the construction of this feminine space must be viewed

in the light of the dominant view of spatial production and distribution, gender and power relations, and the regulated performance of women in “open” public spaces. Women do not visit the hammam only for hygienic or religious reasons. The spatial practice of the hammam provides them with a communal sphere where they celebrate their gender privacy, rejoice in body performance, and empower themselves through intense participation in lateral communication and relationship networks. I have also made a point to the effect that what is specific to the feminine performance in the hammam is the spirit of collectivity it mediates. Unlike men’s, women’s experience of the hammam is carried out in a spirit of “communitas” which emerges through processes of shared labour, mutual assistance, participation in ceremonial bathing rituals, exchange of information and advice, but also through song, chat, and laughter.

I have also argued that hammam communities are not to be taken as ideal forms of organization. Feminine association in the hammam sphere is also shot through with contradictions and conflicts. Gossip and rumour can destroy the reputation of families. Disputes usually erupt among bathers and can even degenerate into fights. More importantly, the extraterritoriality of women’s hammam does not only mediate practices and discourses which are subversive to the dominant worldview. On the contrary, this feminine spatial practice can also legitimate and reproduce the existing power and gender relations. Quite a few of my informants have deplored the fact that young girls are often socialized into degrading practices of superstition and black magic inside the sphere of the hammam. In addition, while the hammam constitutes a grassroots alternative to the poor housing conditions of millions of Moroccan women and to their limited access to public space, one can also make a point to the effect that women’s hammam has served as an imaginary outlet for the male’s erotic desires, anxieties, and frustrations. In North African male francophone literature, women’s hammam is used to mediate a transgression of the dominant conservative order while serving as a muse to stimulate the repressed desires and anxieties of the male artist (and symbolically the genesis of the literary text). I have explored a sample of literary reconstructions of this space by male novelists to illustrate this argument.

The social and structural changes which have occurred in post-traditional Morocco may be read as signs which call into question the future of the
hammam as a cultural practice. Women have access to more public spaces and meeting places, more houses in urban centres are now equipped with bathing facilities, a wider public is now aware of the potential health hazards in hammams, and the appearance of public showers may be interpreted as indicators of the grim prospects of the hammam institution. In addition, over the last few years, environmentalist groups have been pointing to the hammam as a major cause in the degradation of Moroccan forests. In fact, quite a few voices have called for the abolition of public baths and public ovens which still rely on wood to generate heat. In short, the steady shift in lifestyle is bound to generate legitimate questions about the perennial relevance of centuries-old cultural practices.

Conversely, other indicators show the capacity of the hammam institution to adapt to the changing lifestyle in post-traditional Morocco. Over centuries of existence, the hammam has become an indispensable component of the identity of the Arabo-Islamic city. In fact, A. Boudhiba goes as far as to argue that the services rendered by the hammam institution have played an important role in the development of the Arabo-Islamic civilization:

Everything is carried out as if the hammam, a social space par excellence, were but a means through which society rationalizes sexuality by incorporating the individual into the dominant social order [...] The hammam institution accommodates the sexual impulses of the individual by allowing him temporary moments of exaltation and excitement [...] More than that, Muslim society exploits to its advantage the thrust and pressure of the unconscious by integrating them to an institution [the hammam] that is more accommodating to the interests of the group than what the theologians have admitted. This is because what could have been an anarchic and destructive thrust is transformed into rites and myths, crystallized and, thus, loses all its morbid characteristics [...] It may be that the Muslim society has been able to survive for centuries thanks to the hammam which has functioned as a powerful derivative of all the tensions to which the Muslim has inevitably been subjected. By using the hammam, Muslim society has forged a valid instrument to tame the sexual impulses liberated by religion but
repressed by a misogynous puritanism which has developed over centuries and a strict gender separation imposed on all and which might have been fatal.¹

Boudhiba’s argument underlines the role of the hammam as a spatial and psychological mediator between the individual and the community. The ambivalent position of the hammam as simultaneously a sacred and profane spatial practice has made it possible for the Muslim community to negotiate the contradictions generated by its organizational system. The dimly lit space of the hammam has functioned as an intermediary site where the tensions created by power, gender, and class conflicts are released. For the female, the visit to the hammam compensates for the oppressive rules which regulate her everyday life. For the male, the hammam is an outlet to the accumulated frustrations suffered because of the repressive order which organizes gender relations. For the poor, the hammam functions as a spatial reminder that there are no class barriers within the Community of believers.

In post-traditional Morocco, new sites seem to be taking over the role the hammam has played over centuries. Social and class conflicts are now debated in media outlets. Gender and spatial boundaries are no longer as strict as they used to be a few decades ago and women and men can meet more freely in public places. Moreover, middle and upper middle class women can afford to look at the hammam as a spatial practice unbecoming of their lifestyle. However, for millions of other women, the hammam institution is still the only place where they can bathe, purify themselves, meet with friends and establish network relationships. For those women, the hammam continues to be their grassroots alternative to a social system which marginalizes them.

Moreover, research findings show that the hammam continues to be an important spatial practice in the life of post-traditional Moroccan women. In Aicha Belarbi’s study, fifteen (13 blue collar workers and 02 managers) out of thirty women visit the hammam at a weekly basis.² Yasmina Benrahhal Serghini, whose research aimed primarily at determining the future of the hammam as an architectural institution in the contemporary urban landscape of the Moroccan city, has confirmed the perennial advantages of

¹ A. Boudhiba, La séxualité en Islam, 1975, pp. 212-213.
the public bath to a large segment of the population which can not afford to set bathing facilities at home. In fact, her informants have welcomed the idea of a renovated architectural style of the hammam on the condition that the prices do not go up.1 Benrahhal Serghini herself submitted with her thesis the blueprint of a new style hammam which has since been constructed. In the course of my fieldwork research, I never got the impression that women were ready to give up altogether the spatial practice of the hammam. Even my informants who had bathing facilities at home or those who said they only visited the hammam occasionally admitted that they would not like to see their feminine space extinct.

In addition, owners are adapting the hammam to the changing social lifestyle to meet the new needs of their clienteles. More and more hammams are now annexed to larger structures which include fitness centres, saunas, and beauty salons. In such cases, one may speak of an extension of the hammam institution since the emergent spaces are all meeting places for a predominantly female clientele.2 In addition, owners are now more sensitive to the environmentalist demands. The traditional furnace is now being replaced by a fuel-based heating system. This means that the job of the furnace man is on its way to extinction but the new heating system also contributes to the preservation of Moroccan forests and allows the hammam institution a smoother adaptation to the lifestyle and worldview of its post-traditional users.

Hammam practices may change and feminine communal resistance is already emerging in other spheres. Yet, the hammam institution is also capable of negotiating the transitional social, architectural, and cultural changes occurring in post-traditional societies. Post-traditional communities know that "the hammam is a good place to live in" and, more importantly, they have to remember that "if, no matter what, life is still good in Arabo-

2 Aicha Ech-Chenna, the founder of “Solidarité Féminine,” a non-government agency has recently stated that the organization is planning to invest in the construction of a hammam. This project will allow the association to generate additional revenues and the hammam will be used as a site where members of the organization are trained for new jobs. In her own words: “We have bought a piece of land on which we will build a hammam. This project will allow the association to train women for jobs in other domains: massage, manicure, fitness ...” (Aicha Ech-Chenna, quoted in A. Alqoh, “Aicha Ech-Chenna: la mère de tous” in Demain, no. 18, Juillet (du 15 au 21), 2000, p. 17).
Islamic societies, it is thanks to the hammam.\textsuperscript{1} Generations of Moroccan women have made the journey to the hammam. For them, the hammam carries more than the functional role of bathing. It is their window on the outside world, a place where they can meet friends, establish network relationships, chat, gossip, and exchange news and information. As Montagu puts it, the hammam is "women's coffee house."\textsuperscript{2} In the next chapter, I explore a space that renders similar services to a predominantly male clientele: the café.

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\begin{itemize}
  \item A. Boudhiba, \textit{La sexualité en Islam}, 1975, p. 213.
\end{itemize}
This chapter explores the role café space plays in the emergence of subaltern communities in Morocco. While women’s hammam, as I have argued in the previous chapter, caters to the needs of an exclusively female community, the café is appropriated by a predominantly male public. Though, as I argue, the café also functions as a site where gender relations are negotiated in the light of the transformations affecting post-traditional Moroccan society, a general observation of the café clientele underlines the reality that the presence of women in café terraces is still a novel sight in Moroccan cities.

The importance of the café space in Morocco can be noted at different levels. In addition to the prominent presence of cafés in the Moroccan urban landscape, the importance of the café lies also in the complex reactions this space generates among the general public.¹ In the course of my fieldwork research, I have noted the significant amount of excitement discussions about the café space trigger. Whether one holds a positive or a negative view of the café, everybody has an opinion about cafés and the role they play in the formation of cultural politics in Morocco. However, my informants generally betrayed an expression of surprise upon learning about the topic of this research. It seems that café culture has become so integrated into people’s everyday life that they hardly stop to reflect on the ramifications this practice has on the general politics of Moroccan culture.

The café provides an excellent illustration of the importance of low-visibility spaces which often function, in Raymond Williams’ terms, as “residues of culture.” The low-visibility of the café is to be understood in

¹ A popular saying summarizes the ironical attitude of Moroccans towards the proliferation of cafés in Moroccan cities as follows: “While in Geneva, there is a bank between every two other banks, one finds in Morocco a café between every two other cafés.” Indeed, though I could not get the exact number of cafés in select cities, a fact which would have made it possible to work out an approximate percentage of cafés in relation to local population, I can safely state that this rate must be high in comparison with that of other public services. It is now a commonplace belief in Morocco that cafés represent one of the most thriving businesses in the country.
terms of the important sub-culture it generates and which, though tolerated, is generally excluded from the official discourse. Indeed, “the ambiguity of the café status,” as Scott Haine has argued, can be traced to its position as “at once private property and a public place; a commercial establishment and a community center.” The café is perceived as a public space though one has to pay to be admitted to its premises; it is also a business investment while its own premises serve as lieu of commercial transactions, judging by the frequent visits of street sellers who often come to expose their merchandise to café clienteles, and by the high rate of business appointments given in cafés. More importantly, Moroccan cafés play an overriding role in the formation and emergence of subaltern communities and publics. The sociability the café mediates “refutes simple notions of economic or political determination and, paradoxically, reveals the idea of class consciousness to be more than merely a Marxist abstraction” (Haine, 1996, p. 2).

In The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere (1992), Habermas attributes a set of institutional criteria to coffee-houses which, he believes, have mediated the structural formation of the bourgeois public sphere. Habermas lists three main criteria which coffee-houses had in common with salons: first, they “preserved a kind of social intercourse that, far from presupposing the equality of status, disregarded status altogether” (1992, p. 36). Secondly, “discussion within such a public presupposed the problematization of areas that until then had not been questioned” (1992, p. 36). Thirdly, “the same process that converted culture into a commodity (and in this fashion constituted it as a culture that could become the object of discussion to begin with) established the public as in principle inclusive” (Habermas, 1992, p.37). Habermas has also noted the social function of coffee-houses and salons since they were both centres of criticism, literary at first, then also political, “critical debate ignited by works of literature and art was soon extended to include economic and political disputes, without any guarantee (such as was given in the salons) that such discussions would be inconsequential, at least in the immediate context” (Habermas, 1992, p. 33). The discussions about literature and art also laid down the principles of rational-critical debate and institutionalized “lay judgment” on art, literature, culture and on economic

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and social issues: “discussion became the medium through which people appropriated art” (Habermas, 1992, p. 40). The pamphlets criticizing or defending art “built on the discussions of the salons and reached back on them -art criticism as conversation” (Habermas, 1992, p. 40).1

Habermas has also underlined the role of the coffee-house as an ideal space where the nobility, merchants, and intellectuals could meet on an equal basis, “social equality was possible at first only as an equality outside the state” (Habermas, 1992, p. 35). Within the coffee-house sphere, “everyone had to be able to participate” (Habermas, 1992, p. 37). However, Habermas’s hypothesis of the coffee-house public as inclusive remains a theoretical postulate. No matter how “inclusive” the public of the coffee-houses became, the coffee-house society -just like the salon’s- reproduced the power relations which prevailed in society at large: “the nobility joining the upper bourgeois stratum still possessed the social functions lost by the French; it represented landed and moneyed interests” (Habermas, 1992, p. 33). Neither were women admitted to the coffee-house society, a fact which led the women of London to mount an offensive against the new institution which culminated in 1674 in the publication of a pamphlet entitled “The Women’s Petition against Coffee, representing to Public Consideration of the Grand Inconveniences according to their Sex from the Excessive use of that Drying, Enfeebling Liquor.”2

Though Habermas has noted the proliferation of “specialized” coffee-houses which catered to target clienteles from different professions, interests, and social strata, he is more interested in the coffee-house public which was

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1 Addison and Steele’s Tattler (first issue published in 1709) served as contact among the thousandfold circles of the coffee-house frequenters: “At the same time the new periodical was so interwoven with the life of the coffee houses that the individual issues were indeed sufficient basis for its reconstruction. The periodical articles were not only made the object of study by the public of the coffee houses but were viewed as integral part of this discussion; this was demonstrated by the flood of letters from which the editor each week published a selection. When the Spectator separated from the Guardian the letters to the editor were provided with a special institution: on the West side of the Button’s Coffee House a lion’s head was attached through whose jaws the reader threw his letter. The dialogue form too, employed by many of the articles, attested to their proximity to the spoken word [...] A number of the later weeklies of this genre even appeared without dates in order to emphasize the trans-temporal continuity, as it were, of the process of mutual enlightenment” (Yurgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society, trans. Thomas Burger with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992, p. 42).

predominantly “bourgeois in its social origin” (Habermas, 1992, p.43). While I take note of Habermas’s argument that the early informal associations in coffee-houses and salons mediated the institutionalization of the notion of an organized public, I believe that the exclusive focus on the elements of rationality, critical debate, and argumentation as the organizing principles of communication processes in the coffee-house space homogenizes the members of social groups who, either because of their class, gender, and race identity or because of their educational background or geographical location are left out because they can not meet the normative standards of debate fixed by privileged groups. The exclusive focus on reason, argumentation, persuasion, criticism, and debate can also make the observer overlook the elements of humour, noise, wit, amusement, play, liminality, sociability, solidarity, power, subversion, body language, behavioural arrangements, gossip, rumour, which all constitute integral parts of the richness of café life.

In The World of the Paris Café: Sociability among the French Working Class, 1789-1914, W. Scott Haine (1996) provides a historical study of the Parisian café which attests to the important role Parisian cafés played in the emergence of the French labour movement and working class politics. Haine’s study is more sensitive to the conflicting and contradictory dynamics which animate café life and to the new forms of solidarities café sociability generates:

The study of the café, by encompassing the interface between the formal and informal aspects of working class life, as well as the relation between public and private life, provides a more

1 “Every profession, trade, class, party, had its favourite coffee-house. The lawyers discussed law or literature, criticised the last new play, or retailed the freshest Westminster-Hall ‘bite’ at Nando’s or the Grecian, both close to the purlieus of the Temple [...] The cits met to discuss the rise and fall of stocks, and to settle the rate of insurances at Garraway’s or Jonathan’s; the parsons exchanged university gossip, or commented on Dr. Sacheverell’s last sermon at Truby’s or at Child’s in St. Paul’s Churchyard; the soldiers mustered to grumble over the grievances at Old or Young Man’s, near Charing Cross; the St. James’s and the Smyrna were the head-quarters of the Whig politicians, while the Tories frequented the Cocoa-Tree or Ozinda’s, all in St. James’s Street; Scotchmen had their house of call at Forrest’s, Frenchmen at Giles’s or old Slaughter’s in St. Martin’s Lane; the gamesters shook their elbows in White’s, and the Chocolate-houses, round Covent Garden; the virtuosi honoured the neighbourhood of Gresham College; and the leading wits gathered at Will’s, Button’s, or Tom’s, in Great Russell Street, where after the theatre, was playing at piquet and the best of conversation till midnight” (“The Clubs of London” in National Review 4, No. 8, April 1857, p. 301, quoted in Jurgen Habermas, The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere, 1992, p. 257, endnote 13).
rounded picture of working class identity and incorporates gender issues as well [...] Café sociability provides a privileged space within which to view these myriad identities, to see workers in the café interact as customers, friends, lovers, relatives, strangers and enemies (Haine, 1996, p. X).

Haine’s study has also pointed out the different uses which the working class and the bourgeoisie make of the café space. Even if both classes “may have been assiduous cafégóers, the working class relied on the café for support in their private lives much more than did those above them in the social hierarchy” (Haine, 1996, p. 57). Underlining the working class’s rituals of sociability, camaraderie and resistance, Haine has made the point that cafés “provided a space for the ‘informal collective practices’ that Alain Cottereau sees as one of the hallmarks of French working-class life, helping compensate for the perpetual lack of a strong formal working-class movement like those in England and Germany” (Haine, 1996, p. 60). In a similar vein, the German social historian Lutz Niethammer writes to underline the specific nature of the congeniality of the working-class in nineteenth-century Europe:

“[d]eprived of property and thereby of tangible representations of their identity, the vagrant poor and, above them, a large part of the working class [...] did not have a materialized civilization, but a culture of sociability and accommodation.” While Habermas sees the importance of the coffee-house in its role as a space which helped institutionalize the norms of rational-critical debate among a predominantly male, bourgeois public, Haine brings into relief the importance of the café as “a metaphor typifying the social mores of working-class life rather than as an institution that existed in time and space” (Haine, 1996, p. 151). In this respect, Haine sums up the role of the café as a “transitional space” which allowed the working-class to adapt to the norms of the new urban public life:

In this sense, the café served as an apprenticeship in behavior in small enclosed places, comportment to which rural peasants and denizens of the early modern city had not been accustomed. This explains how both the family and the café could develop at the

same time. The intimacy that developed among workers in the
ambiance of the café made it more of a home than the wretched
apartments they were forced to live in. The satisfactions of café
sociability explain, in part, why Paris workers spent more time
on questions of political and economic rights and improvements
and so little time on the housing question. The sense of dwelling
in the café, of creating a space through habitual behavior, laid
the social foundations for the labor movement and working-
class politics (Haine, 1996, pp. 57-58).

In this chapter, I argue that the Moroccan café provides an excellent site for
the study of the emergence of subaltern communities and groups. The
informal associations which the café space mediates make it possible for
marginalized social groups to build up solidarities based on their individual
and collective experiences and histories. I contend that café mediated
communities are imagined in the space in-between the explicit and implicit,
the public and the private, performance and spectatorship, the official and
unofficial, the dominant and the alternative, the legal and the transgressive.
The status of the Moroccan café generates a congeniality among café subaltern
communities which renders the café space the site of subversive practices
which are barely tolerated by the dominant and mainstream conservative
culture. In the Friday sermons, which are broadcast on national radio and
television, the café is often condemned as a “vessel of vices” and a place of
immoral and deviant practices. Through communication strategies which
incorporate information, transmission and exchange of advice, friendly
conversations, heated discussions, gossip, rumour, play, and pranks, café
subaltern communities develop solidarities which bracket the dominant
versions of class, gender, ethnic, social, political, and cultural structures. As a
social setting, the café undermines the assumption that resistances are built
only within institutionalized organizations and shows that unconstructed co-
mingling and informal associations are often exploited by marginalized
groups and individuals to reconstruct their social positions and to resource
themselves. This is not to say that the café is an ideal space where equality is
materialized; on the contrary, the café also reproduces, constructs, and
reconstructs the power relations which prevail in post-traditional Morocco. In
addition, subalternity is not mapped onto the café space. Rather, the café is a
nexus and a site where the emancipatory thrust, as well as the conflicts and contradictions, which characterize everyday communication and performance may be observed.

Within the ambivalent café space, echoes of social contradictions can be heard. The vacillation between a peasant mode of life and an urban one, between a normative model of relations based on authority and obedience and one which seeks to foreground tolerance, alterity, and the right to difference, as well as the ambivalent interpretations of the public and the private, the intimate and the anonymous, put into evidence the status of the Moroccan café as a metaphor of duality which simultaneously produces and reproduces, writes and re-writes, constructs and reconstructs the changing social relations. It must be noted that these strategies of duality and co-mingling are not possible within the official culture where the boundaries between the authorized and the unauthorized, the sanctioned and the unsanctioned, the sacred and the profane are clearly drawn. One area in which the on-going renegotiations are prominently typified in the café space is that of gender relations. In a culture which has invested so much in the mapping of gender relations along strict spatial boundaries, the social setting of the café acts as a spatial metaphor where the dominant interpretations of gender relations are constantly contested and renegotiated. Traditionally a male territory, the café is being conquered by post-traditional Moroccan women. Hannah Davis Taieb (1998) has attempted a study of the en-gendered status of the Moroccan café as a meeting place for women. However, the criterion she sets at the beginning of her research (she decides to consider as a meeting place for women only the café with a majority of women customers) leads her eventually to focus on fast-foods (especially McDonald’s). She insightfully concludes that urban Moroccan women like to meet in “neutral” and “empty” spaces which have “thin” or no historical referent.1 However, Hannah Davis Taieb’s criterion implies a homogeneity of the café space. While I concede that it is very difficult to find a café with a majority of women clients, I have noted that the number of women often equals or is even higher than that of men in some sections of cafés. If the café terrace is predominantly a male territory, the inside upper sections of cafés are often

the realm of a female clientele. This reality reproduces the dominant patriarchal spatial division which subordinates the female to the hidden private sphere and foregrounds the male in the public realm. Yet, the presence of women in cafés, though often as a minority, speaks to the fractured nature of the café space where gender, class, and power relations are constantly contested and renegotiated. In addition, fast-food places, especially McDonald’s where the price of a “happy meal” for children (30 dhş= ~ $3.50) equals the pay of a labour’s day for a large segment of the population, are generally accessible only to a privileged bourgeois clientele which, in its majority, shuns cafés not only because of their gender biases but also their class biases.¹

What I want to attend to in my research is the café which is accessible to the majority of the population, including the poor. This is why I have excluded the cafés in the upper middle class neighbourhoods as well as all the cafés which either by way of their luxurious and expensive design, the prices they charge or even their names, seek to target an exclusive clientele.² My interest has been in the traditional café of the medina and cafés in working-class and lower middle-class neighbourhoods. Though I have been a café habitué since my teenage years and have reflected on the important implications of this cultural practice for at least the last two years, I have conducted a fieldwork research during six months (from November 1, 1998 to May 1, 1999) in El-Jadida, Casablanca, and Rabat, three coastal cities in the North-Western part of Morocco.

In addition to participant observation, during which I at times visited up to ten cafés a day, I also relied on questionnaires of which I distributed 150 in Rabat, 220 in Casablanca, and 70 in El-Jadida. I have also conducted one-to-one interviews and focus group interviews, most of which took place inside cafés. The questionnaires were often the occasion for me to proceed with

¹ Hannah Davis Taieb has noted the class identity of the McDonald’s clientele in Casablanca and Rabat: “[m]y observations attest to the fact that this space is frequented by a clientele from a wide range of the social strata, excluding the poor” (Hannah Davis-Taieb, “Là où vont les femmes: notes sur les femmes, les cafés, et les fast-foods au Maroc” in Susan Ossman, Miroirs maghrébins: Itinéraires de soi et paysages de rencontre, Paris: CNRS Editions, 1998, p. 223).
² In addition to café bars where alcohol is served, I have also deliberately ignored the Salons de Thé, Crémeries, and Glacières (all types of cafés) because they are designed to target a bourgeois clientele. A daily Moroccan newspaper, L’Opinion, reports in its edition of March 8, 1999 -Women’s Day- that a luxuriously designed café in the city centre of Rabat forbids women dressed in djellabahs within its premises while it welcomes, the journalist comments, those dressed in mini-skirts.
unstructured interviewing to elicit from my informants information material which the scope of the questionnaire does not allow. During my research, I have had to deal with “good informants” and informants who are not “so good.”¹ I have interviewed female and male customers, waitresses and waiters, café owners and managers, café habitués (those who visit cafés at least once a day), café regulars (those who frequent the same café at regular times), and non-habitués (who visit cafés on occasions). Though some of my informants betrayed signs of suspicion when I first approached them, they became reassured once I explained to them the purpose of my research. In fact, except for the names of cafés which I have kept, I have decided not to use the proper names of my informants to preserve their anonymity.

However, I had to deal with a moral and ethical problematic in the course of my interviews with students. Knowing that they were preparing for their final exams, I felt I was encroaching on their rights by taking some of their time to conduct my interviews (which usually lasted between 30 and 60 minutes). I did not want to interview them outside the café because I wanted the interviews to take place within the site of this cultural practice. Indeed, some of them asked me to wait until they were done with their studying, a request I was more than willing to fulfill. Others simply told me they had no time to spare, a desire I wholeheartedly respected.

By contrast, the retired were very happy to talk about the importance of this practice in their lives. They were also a very good source of information about the importance of the café cultural practice during the times of the French Protectorate. I have also noted that women are excellent informants because of their insightful skills at “objectifying” this cultural practice. This may be explained by the fact that they are more self-conscious of their experience in cafés than their male counterparts. All in all, I find some consolation in the fact that from an ethical perspective, I have been motivated by one fundamental principle: that of making, in so far as possible,

¹ I use Paul Rabinow’s definition of a “good informant:” “One of the essential qualities of a good informant is the ability to explain even the simplest and (to him) most obvious things in a variety of ways. The most consistently productive of my informants displayed this quality from the start. It was not merely patience (although that was certainly a capital virtue), or even intelligence (which certainly helped), but rather an imaginative ability to objectify one’s own culture for a foreigner, so as to present it in a number of ways” (Paul Rabinow, Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977, p. 95).
my research in the service of the researched groups.\textsuperscript{1} I believe, along with Clifford Geertz, that the task of the ethnographer is "an elaborate venture" in the realm in between what Gilbert Ryle calls "thin" and "thick" descriptions since it is in this space where "the object of ethnography lies: a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures."\textsuperscript{2}

This chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section, I examine the organizational structure of the café. I focus on the traditional café in the medina (the old and densely populated section of the Moroccan city) and modern cafés in low and working class neighbourhoods. I argue that the café structure reconstructs the cultural practices which prevail within the café space and society at large. In the second section, I analyze relationship between the café and other public spaces. I focus on the interface between café and street and the implications of the role of the café as a reading room. In the third section, I examine the interplay between the café and print and audiovisual media. I analyze the behaviour of café audiences and their reconstruction of media texts. The underlying argument throughout this chapter is that the Moroccan café acts as a nexus of contestation and negotiation. On café terraces, the dominant worldview is subverted, reconstructed, and reproduced. This journey inside cafés will also shed light on the changes affecting the politics of gender relations in post-traditional Morocco.

\textsuperscript{1} For an insightful analysis of the commitments of researchers to the researched population, see Francesca M. Cancian, "Feminist Science: Methodologies that Challenge Inequality" in Gender and Society, vol. 6, no. 4, 1992, pp. 623-642; see also her article "Conflicts between Activist Research and Academic Success: Participatory Research and Alternative Strategies" in American Sociologist, vol. 24, no. 1, 1993, pp. 92-106.

\textsuperscript{2} This is how Clifford Geertz explains the difference between "thin" and "thick" descriptions: "But the point is that between what Ryle calls [...] 'thin description' [...] and [...] 'thick description' [...] lies the object of ethnography: a stratified hierarchy of meaningful structures in terms of which twitches, winks, fake-winks, parodies, rehearsals of parodies are produced, perceived, and interpreted, and without which they would not (not even the zero-form twitches, which, as a cultural category, are as much nonwinks as winks are nontwitches) in fact exist, no matter what anyone did or didn't do with his eyelids" (Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, London: Fontana Press, 1973, p. 7).
A. The Organizational Structure of the Café

1. The Traditional Café:

I use the term "traditional café" to refer to the type of cafés usually found in the Moroccan medina (the pre-colonial city known for its labyrinthine and narrow streets and around which modern architecture expanded during the French protectorate). A typical traditional café is composed of a very small space furnished with mats, rugs, and cushions which customers sit on. Most traditional cafés do not even have a counter and it is even more unusual to find one equipped with a modern espresso-machine. In fact, traditional cafés are more known for the quality of mint tea they provide for their customers; mint tea is, in fact, the only drink available. Most traditional café owners still observe the ritual of tea preparation which consists of boiling water on a clay stove before letting the teapot steep over the charcoal. When available, coffee is also prepared in the traditional manner by boiling ground coffee in water.
before filtering it in large glasses for customers. The lack of space certainly accounts for the absence of chairs, tables, counters -not to mention outside terraces- and other modern coffee-house equipment in traditional cafés. However, it is important to note that some traditional café owners are reticent to “modernize” the space of their cafés even if they have the means and the space in which to do so, because they want to preserve the historical character of their cafés.\(^1\)

The traditional café caters to a specific clientele which is usually composed of the retired and of neighbouring merchants and retailers who often have their orders delivered to their shops. The traditional café frequenters, when they are not tourists driven by curiosity to experience this cultural practice, are almost always residents of the medina who gather to play draughts, cards or simply to “kill time” through chat and gossip. It is also quite common to see the traditional café customers partaking in the ritualized experience of cannabis smoking. The traditional café owner is also a very important figure in the organizational structure of this space since he is often of the same generation as his clientele and himself a resident of the medina. In fact, traditional cafés are almost always known by the names of their owners. The traditional café owner usually shares with his clients the same recollections of the resistance experience during the French protectorate in Morocco. When he is not serving his customers, he is often seen playing cards, draughts or chatting with his customers: signs that his bonding with his clientele goes beyond owner-customer relationship. The importance of the traditional café owner lies also in the fact that, due to the extensive network of acquaintances he has, he is often the source of information about all the happenings in the medina. In fact, as quite a few of my informants have testified, the traditional

\(^1\) A very good example is provided by the owners of “café les Oudayas” in Rabat. Les Oudayas is a historical monument and an important tourist site in the capital of Morocco. The architecture of this medieval city is very similar to that of the medina with the exception that the Oudayas overlooks the Bouregreg river and the Atlantic sea. In fact, the Oudayas café is famous for its view over the river and the sea. Though very spacious, its owners have preserved the traditional character which has made it a tourist attraction. Even if this café is furnished with wooden tables, coffee and mint tea are prepared in the traditional way and customers have a variety of Moroccan cookies and pastries to choose from. Moreover, the café employees are all dressed in the Moroccan traditional costume. However, it is also worth noting that though this café serves as a meeting venue for the Oudayas inhabitants, it is more oriented towards a tourist clientele, both national and foreign. In fact, tour operators make the Oudayas café an inevitable stop in the itineraries they set for their customers. This may explain the owners’ reticence to modernize their café space.
café space was frequently used by the militant nationalists during the French protectorate to exchange and transmit information among themselves and to the residents of the medina.

Another outstanding characteristic of the traditional café space is the nature of pictures and photographs which decorate its walls. While it is quite common to find in modern cafés paintings by Moroccan artists, posters of world music and film celebrities, black and white posters of early car models or copies of landscape pictures and photographs—all signs which address a younger and modern café clientele—it is more common to find in traditional cafés the official photographs of the late and current Moroccan monarchs, photographs of nationalist leaders, posters of Arab classical singers (such as the Egyptian diva Oum-Kalsum, her compatriots Abdul-Wahab and Abdul-Halim Hafez or the Lebanese composer and singer Farid al-Atrach), calligraphic writings of Qu'ranic verses, pictures of the café owner and his friends who are often some of his most faithful café habitués, and images which address issues of local identity politics, such as pictures of the hometown football team. At times, one can even find family pictures such as those of the owner’s father or sons, but never those of his wife or daughters.

These ornaments make of the traditional café walls a palimpsest of signs and meanings in which the historical and the contemporary, the ancient and the modern, the national and the pan-Arab, the sacred and the profane, the public and the private seem to co-exist in oblivion of—or in the face of—the contradictions which such binaries tend to generate. In fact, the “liquid text” which is interwoven in this space bears witness to the obliteration of the boundaries between those binaries and which the walls’ decoration and display of the pictures underline in a visual way. Discussions in the traditional café tend to oscillate between recollections of the pre-independence era with particular focus on life difficulties (shortage in food supplies, systematic repression and abuse, and the lack of freedom, including that of movement), the heroic achievements of nationalist militants, and social commentaries on today’s living conditions (this debate usually prevails in the presence of younger clients). With respect to this issue, there seems to be a consensus among the older participants as to the post-independence achievements which are summarized in the “abundance” of material comfort, the progress made in the domain of human rights but also a deplorable degeneration of moral and spiritual values. More than a mere
attempt on their part to cling to a nostalgic past, the traditional café habitués consider themselves as preservers of the unofficial history and culture of the country. Whether through the debates it facilitates or the illustrations and ornaments which decorate its walls, the traditional café functions as a subaltern space which allows its clienteles to resource themselves.

In the traditional café, discussions tend to fluctuate between matters of general concern and private interest. Participants move back and forth from debates on the role of political parties and the problems facing the Moroccan socialist government to an exchange of opinions and points of view on issues of private interest. In fact, while I was conducting my research in a traditional café in Rabat, a young man came to see a group of the café clients who were his father’s friends. He wanted them to intervene with his father who was reticent to lend him money to start a business. Their conversation lasted for a good while during which the young man tried to convince his audience of his confidence in the success of his project. In their turn, the “jury members” tested the young man’s skills and knowledge of the different issues surrounding the implementation of his project, reassured him of the well-meaning intentions of the father whose sole concern was the well-being and success of his children, before they promised him that they would address the issue with his father to find out the reasons of his reticence. In this way, the café space becomes the arena where private issues are debated and analyzed. Another telling incident occurred when I was doing research in a traditional café in El-Jadida, where an eight year old girl dashed into the café looking for her father, who was a café habitué. When she did not find him, she asked about his whereabouts and left him a message with the owner before she again dashed out of the café telling the clients who called after her that her mother was waiting for her outside. This incident shows that the borderline between the public and the private is often obliterated since, when need be, the traditional café space proves to be “fluid” enough to be annexed to the private space of the family. At a symbolic level, the café is perceived as an extended space of the family sphere. It seemed very natural for the family to look for their father in the café since he was not home.

The obliteration of the line between the private and the public underlines the fact that, within the Moroccan culture, the two concepts must not be interpreted in the light of the historical underpinnings they have acquired within Western philosophy. Within Moroccan society, the private does
not necessarily correspond to an autonomous subjectivity. On the contrary, the private can often embrace notions of the communal and the collective. The young man who came to expose his private concerns to the café public knew that the success of his private enterprise depended to a large degree on the solidarity he could get from a wider public. The autonomy of the individual identity is not perceived to be in conflict with the collective identity of the community. On the contrary, individual autonomy has a community-basis.

Similarly, instead of seeing the symbolic annexation of the traditional café space to the private sphere of the family as a result of the housing crisis, though there is a lot of truth in that given the fact that the housing issue constitutes one of the most serious problems facing the Moroccan urban population, it would be more appropriate to view the domestication of the public space of the café as "a grassroots attempt to solve it," as Haine has argued with respect to the nineteenth century Paris working class:

The Paris working class coped with a severe housing crisis by appropriating the café. Workers as individuals and families lacked the money necessary to own private property and enjoy the accompanying prerogatives of privacy, but they did have the strength of numbers and myriad available milieus in the cafés for a collective appropriation of space. By continually frequenting a neighborhood, a group, or even a couple, could make a café into their own space. Such frequentation could lead to a sense of belonging, a sense of being "at home," as shown by the much greater ease with which nineteenth-century Parisians let private emotions and family matters become part of café life, and also by the café owner's position as a pillar of the community with respect to such benchmarks in a person's and family's life as marriage, birth, and death (Haine, 1996, p. 57).

One traditional café I have visited in El-Jadida is owned and managed by a widowed woman who offers her clients, in addition to the traditional mint tea, home-made wheat or bean soup, as her four sons do their homework inside the café. Her children seem to have become accustomed to this practice since they do not seem to be bothered by the noise and disorder within the
café space. In fact, the woman owner seems to seize every opportunity available to ask her clients -quite a few of them are university students who visit her place for the cheap and excellent wheat or bean soup she prepares- to help her children with their school work, a favour they seem to enjoy doing. One client explained to me that the first time he helped her children, she refused to be paid for his order and that he had to be emphatic to make her accept. He also said that she would seek every opportunity to return some of the favours the students do for her children. He said that it was common practice for students short on money to come to her for assistance which she wholeheartedly gave them, knowing that they would not be able to return the borrowed money until they received their trimestrial scholarship or till they visited their families during holidays. In such a way, the traditional café space of this woman owner is turned into a family space wherein the café owner acts out the role of the surrogate mother while her young clients perform their duty as elder brothers and sisters to her children. The sociability which this café behaviour creates not only allows transactions based on mutual interest and help but also lays the foundations for the emergence of a sense of community whereby the involved parties seek to short-circuit their social and economic conditions.

Another example of the dynamics which regulate private and public spaces can be seen in the case of a retired military officer I interviewed in a traditional café in Rabat, who refers to the café he frequents as his "second home." This retired officer has been frequenting the same café for the last two years and, despite the reservations he has about some of its habitués, he admits that this space provides him with a pleasure he can not find anywhere else, including his "first" home. In addition to the pleasure he derives from card playing with his café friends, he often spends up to ten hours in this café (from 11:00 a.m. to 11:00 p.m.) skipping over meal times to avoid the constant "nagging" he has to put up with from his wife and children. He also complains that his house is often full of his wife's friends and relatives who regularly come to visit her. This explains why the café space has become not only his "refuge" where he "can forget his duties as the sole bread-winner of the family," but also why the time he spends there is viewed as a concession on his part not to encroach on the privacy and the freedom of his wife's friends and family: "I let them talk at their ease," he said. Mario Buitelaar
(1998) has taken note of the spatial arrangements the notion of privacy generates within Moroccan society:

[...] men can also feel uncomfortable in complex domestic situations where their actions are limited by rules of avoidance. A fact that is often overlooked by Westerners is that the seclusion of women not only limits the freedom of women but also circumscribes men's behaviour. In the family with whom I lived for six months in Sidi Slimane, during the evening that my host was not out to a café to meet his friends he sat in the unheated garage to listen to his transistor radio by the light of a candle. Inside the house the female members of the family were comfortably watching the television in a heated and illuminated room. When a programme was being broadcast that my hostess thought would interest her husband, she sent out her small daughter to fetch the father. Instead of joining us on the divan, he would sit down on a stool in the far corner of the room and leave again as soon as the programme was over.¹

The borderline between the private and the public is constantly contested and redefined. The social space of the café is flexible enough to encompass debates about issues of general concern as well as intimate family matters. It does not claim independence from the private sphere of the family but engages the notion of privacy in a dynamic whereby the economic, social, cultural, ethical, and psychological identity of the individual is not marginalized or silenced, but publicized and given voice in the collective space. This ambivalent interpretation of the relationship between the public and the private does not weaken public deliberation. On the contrary, it allows otherwise

disadvantaged groups to tell their life-stories and to take part in what Nancy Fraser has defined as “an ethic of collective solidarity:”

The most general ethical force of this orientation would be something like this: we owe each other behaviour such that each is confirmed as a being with specific collective identifications and solidarities. The norms governing these interactions would be neither norms of intimacy such as love and care, nor those of formal institutions such as rights and entitlements. Rather they would be norms of collective solidarities as expressed in shared but non-universal social practices. The privileged moral feeling would be neither dignity nor love, but social solidarity. Finally, and most important, to be autonomous here would mean to be a member of a group or groups which have achieved a degree of collective control over the means of interpretation and communication sufficient to enable one to participate on a par with members of other groups in moral and political deliberation; that is, to speak and be heard, to tell one’s own life-story, to press one’s claims and points of view.

The space of the traditional café becomes a collective social text composed of individual life-stories. Similarly, café sociability has the potential of generating a sense of collective solidarity as in the case of the woman café owner and her clients. However, it must be noted here that though this owner has managed to inscribe her identity as a female subject in a male-dominated space, the traditional café space largely remains male-controlled and its transgression by a female is not culturally sanctioned. The reservations the retired officer holds against the café he frequents have mostly to do with some members of the café clientele who he identifies as “drunkards, delinquents, thieves and individuals with criminal histories.”

In a culture where masculinity is often expressed through obscenities, if not physical violence, such a space can be unsafe for a male, let alone a female. Moreover, card games often give rise to disputes which in turn generate a discourse of obscenities which the cultural politics of Moroccan

society does not deem appropriate for women to hear. This explains why the presence of women in traditional cafés is extremely rare. The woman owner, as she has explained to me, has benefited from the capital of respect her deceased husband enjoyed with his clientele and the people in the neighbourhood. Moreover, her traditional dress which consists of a djellabah and a black scarf which covers her hair and the presence of her children with whom all the café habitués are acquainted have made it easier for her to win the esteem and respect of her customers. The fact that this traditional café is run by a woman can also account for its frequenting by a female clientele that is mostly composed of university students. In fact, during my visits to this café, I have noticed the existence of a sense of female solidarity between the owner and her female customers because some of them greet her with kisses on the cheeks, a revealing sign of the close friendship they have developed. Overall, the traditional café remains a male territory. Except for women tourists who are likely to visit this space and whose presence is very much tolerated, it is very unusual for a Moroccan woman to visit traditional cafés. By contrast, more and more women in urban centres are conquering the space of modern cafés.

2. The Modern Café

Modern cafés are generally found in city centers, administrative areas and middle or lower middle-class neighbourhoods. Modern cafés have a modern architecture, though the ceilings are often decorated with plaster works in the traditional Moroccan style. The chairs and tables are often designed to match the dominant pattern of the café's overall decoration. It is also a common practice for modern café owners to cover the sides of walls with huge mirrors to accentuate the illusion of space. In fact, more and more owners now tend to hire professional designers for the decoration of their cafés. The desired impact is to provide a comfortable and impressive space for the clientele. Instead of framed posters, the tendency now is to decorate the walls with paintings by Moroccan artists, a well-appreciated initiative, according to a group of artists with whom I have informally discussed this issue. Also, most modern cafés are equipped with all kinds of appliances which range from espresso machines and juice makers to freezers, micro-waves, and toasters. In a modern café, in addition to mint tea and coffee, the client can choose from a
wide range of soft drinks and juice, pastries and, at times, even ice-creams. In short, the modern café is an important business investment which requires a capital that can reach hundreds of thousands of dollars, especially if one includes the value of the property, which fact accounts for the high prices that are usually charged in some modern cafés.

A typical modern café has a tripartite division: an outside terrace, an inside area and an upstairs section. The inside area is the main section of the café space, even when it is not large or big enough. It is the center of the café because that is where the counter and, behind it, the coffee-machine, the most important item in the café, are. It is also at the counter that waiters and waitresses come to take their customers' orders. At times, waiters and waitresses are busy elsewhere and can not be found, but the customer is always sure that, sooner or later, they will show up at the counter. I have noticed that most clients, even those who choose to sit at the terrace, would usually take a look in the direction of the counter, and they would often wait until they are sure they have caught the waiter's eye before they seat themselves. The waiter responds to this ritual by nodding or making a gesture with his hand to let the client know he has taken note of his presence. Language is not used in this communicative act but the implicit message is that the waiter would soon come to take the client's orders. A customer in a hurry would walk straight to the counter to place his order directly to the espresso-machine operator. If the customer desires an espresso or a 'half-coffee, half milk,' he only needs to make the appropriate gesture with his hand - a movement imitating the action of bringing down the handle of the coffee-machine for the espresso order and a gesture which consists of keeping the palm of the hand in a horizontal position and then making two swift movements by moving the arm from left to right and then from left to right to order a 'half-half.'

The operator of the coffee-machine holds the most important position in the café because it is his skill which decides of the quality of the coffee. Clients can tolerate any discomfort they feel about a café, including the unfriendliness of some waiters, if the quality of the coffee served is good. Also, if there is any complaint about the quality of the product, it is mainly the operator, not the waiter, who is to bear the blame. In fact, too many complaints can lead to the dismissal of the operator. Café owners are very much aware of the importance of the espresso-machine operators and they
often make a number of concessions to keep an operator who has proved his competence and skill. This is why of all the personnel of cafés, operators are usually the ones whose rights are relatively respected. They have the highest salary, while most waiters are employed in exchange of the tips they get, and more importantly, they often enjoy the benefits of social security and retirement. Moreover, the espresso-machine operator has control over the waiters themselves because he can delay a waiter's orders and, could, thus, create problems for him with his clients. This is why most waiters, at the end of their shift, give a percentage of their tips to the operator.

Figure 22. Café Rocher: The central position of the coffee machine operator.

The upstairs area is usually the smallest section of the café space. It is often annexed to the original architecture of the place. For the owner, this section is an additional café space to be exploited. However, this café section has developed its own clientele which is often made of couples and students who use it as a romance or study area. Because of its small size and its isolation, this space provides a protective shield from the public eye and generates a
feeling of privacy and intimacy which is not to be found in the other two café sections. In addition, because this section rarely has any windows looking onto the street - and even when there are windows, these are always very small and do not allow in enough daylight- the owner is compelled to keep the lights on for the entire day, a fact which adds to the 'homely' atmosphere of this space. Unlike the other two sections, the clientele which frequents the upstairs area is mainly composed of the young. In fact, as it is very uncommon for young couples or unaccompanied women to use the terrace, it is also very unusual for a middle-aged customer to use the upstairs section. When no seat is available in the terrace or the inside area, middle-aged customers tend to share tables with clients they do not know rather than go to the upstairs section. This observation underlines the underpinnings of the dynamic relationship between the contradictions of social life and spatial distribution. The dual nature of the café space lies in its ability to materialize and reproduce social contradictions while simultaneously producing the appropriate context to challenge them. In this case, it is age and gender contradictions which are highlighted.

The terrace brings into relief another duality: that between street life and café life. The terrace is often set on the sidewalk and is usually composed of at least two rows of tables, though city legislation limits the display of tables outside cafés to one row. The first observation to be made is that it is a very common practice for terrace users to set their chairs facing the street. When a group of five friends or more visits the café, there is usually a discreet competition among them about who would take the seats facing the street - close friends would even joke about those of them who can not accommodate their chairs to face the street. Giving one's back to the street means that one is missing out on the street show. The street becomes a stage while the café terrace acts as the spectators' lodgings. However, terrace users too offer themselves as a spectacle to the street users. In this way, the line between spectatorship and performance is obliterated.

The interface between street and café life also reproduces the contradictions between the two spheres. Café terraces encroach upon the street space and often disrupt the pedestrians' use of the sidewalk. A number of inconveniences are created for pedestrians who are often forced to jeopardize their physical safety by stepping down to the road. This encroachment on public space also highlights gender contradictions. Because
café terraces are used primarily by a male clientele, women pedestrians tend to make a detour by crossing to the other side of the street to avoid the close scrutiny of the male gaze. On one hand, this highlights the reproduction of gender power relations. Yet, on the other hand, the interface between café and street can also contest the balance of these power relations. In fact, I have noted that quite a few women, though they generally quicken their pace and look straight ahead, would 'defiantly' proceed between the café terrace tables if these happen to be taking the entire sidewalk.

Finally, unlike traditional cafés which are known by the names of their owners, modern cafés are given independent names which are often written in Arabic and French above the main entrance and on the front window. The cafés which opened during the protectorate have French names (such as Café Français, Café de Paris, Café les Negociants, Café les Ambassadeurs, Café Arc de Triomphe, Café Les Elisées, Café la Rotonde, Café la Comédie, Café la Renaissance, Café Marignon). These cafés are generally located on main avenues in the city centre and almost every Moroccan city center has cafés of the same or similar names. The pre-independence modern cafés were owned by French colonists who named them famous Parisian cafés. Though most of these cafés have since changed owners, their Moroccan proprietors have kept the original names in order to preserve the "historical" value of these places. In fact, militant nationalists during the protectorate have reported that the blueprint of the Manifest for Independence was first drafted in Café la Comédie in Rabat.¹

Another striking observation is that there is a tendency among owners to name their cafés after their children or grandchildren (some of them, in an attempt to keep a sense of equity towards their children or grandchildren, would even combine syllables from two or three names to devise a new name). There is certainly an advantage in this marketing strategy since proper names are easy to remember. However, the tendency to 'personify' the café by giving it a proper name underlines a desire to 'home' this public space and to

¹ The Manifest for Independence was signed by representatives of the Resistance movement and king Mohammed V. The Manifest declared the end of the Protectorate era and asked the French government to recognize the independence of Morocco. This document was given to the Resident General, the French Governor of Morocco, in January 11, 1944. The French authorities responded by a series of repression against the militants and the exile of the Moroccan monarch in 1953. In fact, the date of the declaration of the Manifest constituted the beginning of an intensified armed struggle against the colonizer until the independence of the country in 1956.
bestow upon it an aura of intimacy which is the characteristic of the family sphere, especially if we take into consideration the fact that, besides cafés, it is mostly houses and residence buildings which are usually given proper names. This dual characteristic of the café which consists of a constant interplay between the private and the public is an issue I will address later. Before closing this sub-section, I propose a description of a sample modern café based on a field observation I carried on November 26, 1998 between 1:00 p.m. and 9:00 p.m.

Café Rocher (The Rock) is located at the corner of Rue de France and Moulouya, Agdal, Rabat. Rue de France is one of, if not the busiest street in the south-east area of town. It is also considered as the dividing line between le bas Agdal (a lower middle-class area) and le haut Agdal (upper middle-class). The Agdal neighbourhood has the characteristic of being both a residential and administrative area. Up until the late seventies, this neighbourhood was one of the quietest in town since it was exclusively a residential area of one floor houses (villas). In the late seventies, a city legislation authorized the construction of four-floor buildings and the value of the land sky-rocketed. Property owners sold to entrepreneurs who over the last two decades metamorphosed the architecture of the neighbourhood. Constructions are still going on and the last villas are being demolished to give place to buildings. Most of the buildings have been rented to ministries, government administrations, public, semi-public, international or banking agencies. The population of this area has exploded, and consequently, cafés have mushroomed in almost every street of this neighbourhood (I have counted over thirty cafés in two blocks, this figure does not include about eight café bars, and a McDonald's fast-food which attracts a predominantly young clientele).

Café Rocher has the advantage of being at the intersection between the lower and upper middle-class neighbourhoods. It is also within a walking distance from a women's university residence hall. Its geographical location accounts for the mixed clientele which frequents it and which is composed of university students, administration employees, labourers, construction builders, the retired, and neighbourhood residents. Though not very big, the architectural design of this café seems to answer the different needs of its mixed clientele. It has a terrace with two rows of tables on Rue de France, two inside sitting areas on the ground floor, and an upstairs section. The first
The first inside sitting area had two customers sitting at different tables: one was reading a newspaper and the other one was working on a document. The two café waiters, the espresso-machine operator, and two other café employees were at another table conversing in Berber, a language of the Atlas mountains. There was one customer in the second sitting area who was sipping his coffee. The upstairs area was empty. The café radio was tuned to Radio Mediterranée, a private radio station located in Tangiers, in the North of Morocco, and which broadcasts in French and Arabic. It was one of the waiters who made my coffee because the espresso-machine operator was engaged in a conversation with his colleagues.

At about 1:30, the café started to get busy as more and more customers arrived. The employees went back each to his position. By 2:00 p.m. the first sitting area and about half of the second one were filled. In the upstairs section, three tables (out of six) were taken. By 2:15, all the three sections inside were filled, and the two waiters were busy moving chairs from the upstairs section to accommodate the groups of customers who formed around
tables downstairs. Some of the late customers accepted, with resignation, to be seated in the terrace, and soon, all the tables outside were taken. Some of the clients' reticence to sit in the terrace can be explained by their desire to join some of their colleagues or acquaintances who have formed groups in one of the inside sitting areas or by the fact that they were in a hurry. Indeed, as I have realized in the course of the interviews I conducted, in the mind of the majority of café frequenters, the terrace is associated with leisure time. Most of my informants, except those who can not stand cigarette smoke and who prefer the terrace open space, state that they tend to sit in the terrace when they are not in a hurry (i.e. week-ends and after work). For about thirty minutes, the atmosphere inside the café was seemingly one of disorder and confusion. The radio music was lost in the midst of loud conversations, customers' calls for their orders and the constant squeaks made by the adjustment of tables and chairs. The waiters ran in all directions trying to satisfy the customers' orders. However, the overall ambiance was one of a collective festivity.

By 3:00 p.m., order was re-established as most of the customers left. In fact, both the first sitting area and the terrace were now empty. However, the upstairs section and the second sitting area looked like a reading room in a public library since all the tables were taken by students who were studying for their mid-term exam. I noticed that some of them had been there for more than thirty minutes before they were served. When I asked the waiter, he informed me that there was a tacit agreement between him and his student clientele to the effect that, since the students would be there for the afternoon, they would wait till the administration clientele had left.

Between 3:00 and 6:00 p.m., the café was relatively quiet. In the first sitting area, there were two individual customers who in a leisurely manner sipped their coffee while looking outside. At another table, a group of three were engaged in a conversation while a couple chose to sit at a table in the corner. Though it is not very common for accompanied women to use this section, the quiet atmosphere inside the café at this time of the day can encourage couples to transgress this tacit code of café behaviour. Moreover, it was very significant that the woman chose to sit with her back to the street. In the second sitting area and the upstairs section, male and female students seemed to have their own temporal map in which study time was punctuated by breaks. At regular intervals, the order and silence in the café sections they
were occupying gave way to laughter, loud discussions and the squeaking of chairs. At one moment, a student handed the waiter an audio-tape which he immediately played. For about one hour, the café clientele was treated to a live recording of Dire Straits' "Sultans of Swing."

In the meantime, there were between seven and twelve customers in the terrace. Some were by themselves and others were in groups of two and three. Between 3:00 and 6:00, I counted about nine beggars who made the round of the terrace clientele. Though very few owners would allow beggars to come inside their cafés, they are unable to prevent them from begging to the customers using the terrace. Beggars seem to take advantage of the ambivalent status of the terrace space. I have witnessed scenes in which beggars stand up to waiters who try to drive them off the terrace space. Their argument in most cases is that the terrace is a public space. Shoe-cleaners, too, are not allowed inside cafés, though for a different reason. In fact, though shoe-cleaners are often on good terms with waiters and café owners because, when need be, they can run errands for them, they are not allowed to work inside the café because of the nauseating smell which the shoe-shine can leave in the café. In the mid-afternoon, though, the café was visited by a flower boy. When he came in, he went straight to the couple who was using the first sitting area and managed to sell them a rose for which the young man paid. Then he went to the other sections and tried to sell his roses to the students. The students joked about the boy's strategy which consisted of pressuring accompanied men in an attempt to get them to buy from him. One of the waiters joined the scene and they all got into a friendly conversation with the boy. I believe this served as a good opportunity for the students to take a break from their studies. In the end a female student volunteered to buy one rose from the boy. He thanked her and made a comment which made them all burst into laughter before he rushed out. A few minutes after that, order was re-established in this section as all the students went back to their work.

By 6:45 p.m., the café was very busy again. All the tables in the terrace were taken as were those in the two sitting areas on the ground floor. Most of the students had left and those who were still there had their books folded and were chatting and conversing. In the upstairs' section, except for one table occupied by a group of students, the other six tables were taken by young couples. This section seemed to offer couples an ideal space for intimacy and

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privacy. In fact, the young lovers seemed to be oblivious of the chaos and disorder which reigned on the ground floor sections. By 7:30 p.m., clients started leaving and as groups parted, I heard some of them make arrangements to meet in the same café the next morning. A group of four who was using a table next to mine and who seemed to be work colleagues agreed to meet in the same place as early as possible to finish their discussion on a project they were finishing up before going to work. By 8:30, the café was almost empty except for two customers in the inside section and three in the terrace. The waiters had already started arranging tables and chairs to clean up the place. They started by the upstairs and the second sitting area which were already empty and as they got to the first sitting section, I and the other two clients prepared to leave. In fact, their work day starts at 7:00 a.m. and finishes at about 9:00 p.m., a fact which explains their eagerness to finish up and leave. I paid my orders and left a generous tip for the waiters —I had a total of four espressos, one mint tea, and a café crème—, thanked all the café employees before I left. It would have been great to interview the waiters at the end of their work day, but I did not dare ask them this. They had been working for fourteen hours.

Though each café has its own particularities which are determined by its location, the organization of its spatial and temporal structure, its clientele and the amiability of its personnel, this sample observation afternoon in this modern café in Rabat highlights some of the salient underpinnings and contradictions which shape the communicative act in the café space. The issues of privacy and publicness, liminality and seriousness, performance and spectatorship, the formation of subaltern communities and power relations, homosociality and the question of gender politics which find echoes in my sample are some of the dominant themes I have observed in all the cafés I have visited. In the next section, I attempt an outline of the relationship between the café and other public sites. I will consider the café in relation to the street, the public library, and the media.
B. The Café in Relation to Other Public Spaces:

1. The café in relation to the street:

The café’s ambivalent relation to the street is partly due to the ambiguity which characterizes the spatial, discursive, and behavioural division between the two sites. At the level of spatial distribution, the interface between café and street is mediated by the café terrace. Café owners often transgress the legislative text and occupy most of the public space in front of their cafés by displaying tables and chairs on the sidewalk. Most of them mark the spatial limits of their businesses by setting up publicity metal boards at the two ends of the table display on the sidewalk. Some, if their cafés happen to be in arcades or covered passages, would go so far as to set up strong canvas blinds from the arcade’s ceiling to the ground to isolate their premises from next door competitors and to shield their terrace clientele from draughts which can be strong in such alleys.
In addition to the fact that these practices encroach on public space and inconvenience the pedestrians, especially women who often have to cross to the other side of the street to avoid trespassing into this male territory, the interface between café and street challenges the status of the café as a private property. As I have argued earlier, café owners and managers find it very difficult to defend their premises against the repeated “invasions” of street beggars and hustlers who inconvenience their clientele. Quite a few waiters I have addressed this issue with have reported that they know of colleagues who have been victims of physical violence inflicted upon them by street beggars or hustlers they tried to drive away from café premises. They have also noted that owners usually do not want the police to interfere because they know that they themselves transgress the law by displaying more than one row of tables in their café terraces. More than that, in the course of my fieldwork research, I witnessed a scene in which two café customers were soaked with water which was poured from a top floor balcony. It seemed that the top floor apartment owners never agreed to a café opening on the ground floor of their building and used all available strategies to create problems for the café owner. In fact, while the customers were outraged, the owner did his best to calm them, going so far as to propose that he would send their jackets to a nearby express laundry for cleaning. It was obvious that he was helpless towards his top floor neighbours because he knew his terrace display was illegal.

The ambivalent relation between café and street has been dramatized by a Moroccan comedian who, in a satirical video sketch broadcast on channel 1 in the late 1980s, acts as a café customer who, intrigued by the long rows of tables and chairs in a café terrace and which stretch way beyond the café’s entrance, picks up a chair and starts walking away with it. The waiter sees him and starts running after him, which generated a hilarious pursuit scene. After about eight hundred yards, when the man, out of breath and realizing that the waiter is about to get hold of him, puts the chair in the middle of the road and sits on it. When the waiter catches up with him, obviously out of his mind and ready to inflict punishment on the transgressor, the man panted out his order for a “strong espresso.” In fact, as it is implied in this sketch, the division between café and street is far from clear-cut. More often than not, there is a blurring at the edges (i.e. café terrace and sidewalk) which often leads to confusion. The café’s encroachment on public space also weakens its
status as a private property. Beggars, shoe-cleaners, street sellers, musicians and singers are continuously testing the autonomy of café space. Owners are usually helpless before their incursion into the realm of their cafés.

The ambivalent relation between café and street also reflects on people’s behaviour. In his study of the social role of nineteenth-century Parisian cafés, Haine underlines the important role of cafés in the socialization of the peasant population and the provision of workers with centres of sociability:

By the 1860s [...] the café was the scene of much of the animation of traditional street life as it became progressively forced off the main thoroughfares [...] working class café life grew across the century both to complement and to compensate for the workers’ loss of street sociability. Many café owners sublet some of their space to newspaper and chestnut vendors and even to shoemakers, thus encouraging the interconnection between street and café life (Haine, 1996, p. 159).

Unaccustomed to the city lifestyle, peasants find in café culture an emotional support which helps them integrate and adapt to city life. Café sociability allows them to build friendships and make new contacts, learn about the ways of city life and recreate a surrogate world which would compensate for the tribal communal familiarity they have lost. The rural exodus Moroccan cities have witnessed over the last twenty years has highlighted the function of the café as a transitional space between the peasant culture and city life. In fact, I have even noticed that the cafés which cater to a predominantly emigrant peasant clientele have a special status. These cafés are often located in the vicinity of bus stations. They are not really traditional but they are not modern cafés either. Though they often have the same structure and, more or less, the same equipment as modern cafés, their style is usually rustic. In the cafés which lack an efficient system of ventilation, the atmosphere inside can even be asphyxiating because of the smell of cheap tobacco that peasants tend to smoke. However, while such cafés play a tremendous role in the socialization of the emigrant rural population, it is also worth underlining that they can also be hazardous for the recently arrived peasants. Indeed, these cafés are frequented by all kinds of swindlers for whom the ‘naive’ peasant constitutes an easy prey.
The ambivalent relation between café and street can also be noted in the imaginary reality the café terrace creates. The terrace provides its users with a hyper-reality whereby they are simultaneously inside and outside. Street behaviour which is characterized by a degree of flexibility and laxity in speech, demeanour and deportment is, to a large extent, reproduced in the café space. The café terrace has the advantage of recreating the street context and, thus, allowing its users to reproduce street behaviour. This becomes more important when the age factor is considered. In low middle and working class areas where public leisure infrastructure is lacking, children and teenagers take to the street which serves as the lieu for all their games and leisure activities. In fact, the youth in such neighbourhoods are famous for what may be called a “street corner culture.” It would not be an overstatement to say that café terraces allow their adult clienteles to relive part of that street culture. In fact, a group of teenagers I interviewed in a lower middle-class neighborhood in El-Jadida informed me that they used the code word “office” for the street corner where they met. They also informed me that since the day a café opened in their neighbourhood (the one in which I interviewed them), their gatherings in the “office” decreased and became limited to weekend evenings and holidays as they would move to their street corner to finish their conversations after the closing time of the café. In what follows, I look into the role of the café as a reading room. In fact, from this viewpoint, the café may be seen to hold an ambivalent relation with the public library that is based on elements of complementarity, compensation, and subversion.
2. The Café as a Reading Room

Geoff Ely has made the point that adapted meeting and association centres which have developed following the growth of the urban culture have been decisive in the rise of the public sphere. His argument is that the public sphere:

was linked to the growth of provincial urban culture as the novel arena for a locally organized public life, to a new infrastructure of social communication (including the press and other literary media, the rise of a reading public, improved transportation and adapted centres of sociability like coffee
houses, taverns and clubs) and to a new universe of voluntary association.¹

In Morocco, one of the early association centres which has served as an institution of education and a space of sociability is the zawiya (brotherhood or lodge). James Miller and Donna Lee Bowen define zawiyas as follows:

Zawiyas may be large or small: from a small, domed mudbrick shrine covering the tomb of a local person renowned for his or her piety to a sophisticated urban compound occupying considerable space, owning a wealth of land, attracting membership from all over the country, and spawning affiliate branches in faraway cities and towns. The tomb of the saint is the focal point of any zawiya. Other physical components may include a school, a mosque, guest and caravan quarters, and agricultural land, as well as other properties offered as pious donations.²

In addition to its social, political, religious, cultural and economic roles, the zawiya was also a centre of learning specialized in the training of religious scholars. The most influential zawiyas were endowed with important libraries which were accessible to their students and affiliate members.³ In addition to its mission as an educational institution, Abdallah Laroui also notes the important function of the zawiya as a meeting place:  

³ Some of the most influential zawiyas were the Sharqawiya and Nasiriyya in the south (founded respectively in the late sixteenth and mid-seventeenth centuries), the Wazaniyya in the north (founded in the mid-seventeenth century), the Darqawiyya and Kataniyya in the Atlas region (founded in the late eighteenth century) the Bu’azawiyya in the western plains. For a more detailed analysis, see A. Laroui, Les Origines sociales et culturelles du nationalisme marocain (1830-1912), Casablanca: Centre Culturel Arabe, 1979.
The zawiya is a meeting place and the social function it plays is crystal clear. In the country, it is a resting-place for commercial travellers or mere travellers and a host for fairs which are regularly held on its premises. The zawiya also plays the same role salons and cafés play in urban centers. It is the head of a zawiya himself who makes this analogy. In fact, nobody has been more sensitive to the social function of the zawiya than the Swiss E. Montet: 'Morocco [...] will build its civilization on the intrinsic democratic values of association and cooperation. This is the most outstanding trait of the Moroccan character.' For Montet, the zawiya is the symbol of cooperation.¹

However, though the social function of the zawiya was undeniable, the sociability it created lacked the element of playfulness and liminality which characterizes café ambiance. The secular powers of the zawiya almost exclusively depended on the charismatic leadership of its masters and teachers -some of whom were considered saints. To preserve their authority, the masters insisted on order and discipline and expected their students to maintain a strict code of behaviour inside the zawiya. This does not mean that there were no transgressions, but in principle, students were expected to show total reverence towards their masters and respect the sanctity of the place. James Miller and Donna Lee Bowen report that Ben Nasir, one of the founders of the Nasiriyya zawiya:

adamantly opposed all religious innovation. Dancing or use of musical instruments, such as the tambourines or drums, which are widely used for music in the south, was prohibited. Ben Nasir enforced this edict with a blow of a sandal whenever he caught a miscreant indulging in popular music. He was equally opposed to tobacco in any form and prohibited its use in the zawiya: "All of that is forbidden! forbidden! forbidden! (haram!

haram! haram!). Whoever smokes or takes snuff has nothing in common with us."\(^1\)

Though there is some truth in the argument that the zawiya offered an alternative learning to the scriptural one which was mainly provided by the official university of al-Qu’arawiyeen in Fez, teachers in both centres expected their students to observe the sanctities of their institution. In fact, the sanctification of knowledge in both the zawiya and the al-Qu’arawiyeen university led to the establishment of a strict discipline inside the two institutions and the repression of transgressive and subversive behaviour.

The decadence of the zawiya began immediately after the independence of Morocco in the late 1950s. Referring to the Nasiriyya zawiya, James Miller and Donna Lee Bowen have noted that as "a symbol of Islamic learning and piety, its library is a point of interest for bus loads of European tourists visiting the qasbahs of southern Morocco."\(^2\) However, the idea of the educational institution as a sanctuary had already been fixed. Most of my informants remember their days in the Qu’ranic school, which still functions as a kindergarten in lower middle-class and poor neighbourhoods initiating pupils to the study of the Qu’ranic text and to reading and writing, and the trauma they suffered because of the severe and uncompromising methodological approach of the master.\(^3\) Moreover, most of them confirmed that their primary school experience was no different from that of the

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2 Ibid. p. 149.

3 Here, I share an account of how an Egyptian author describes his experience in the Qu’ranic school. Though these memoirs refer to the Egyptian context at the beginning of the century, the experience they depict would also be true for the Moroccan context. Though corporal punishment has decreased relatively over the last two decades, the learning process described here is still the same and the master has not lost much of his authoritative powers: "[My parents] ended up, after a lot of talk and bickering, sending me to the Quran school [...] I went every day, after a whipping from my uncle and a few pokes from my mother. I would walk into the school with my loaf under my arm, and the monitor would meet me and reach out politely to take my loaf and put it in Master's cupboard. Then we would all sit down on the old mats and tattered rags, and off we would go with our alphabet: ‘\textit{Alif}, with no dots; \textit{Ba}, one dot underneath; \textit{La}, two dots on top ... “ After two or three hours of this we would write on our slates and do memory work. Then we would recite, and nobody would escape getting two or three lashes. Myself, I almost always ended up with my feet in the stocks" (Yusuf Abu Haggag, 1926, \textit{Memoirs of a Street Tough}, trans. by Everett K. Rowson in Donna Lee Bowen and Evelyn A. Early, eds., \textit{Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East}, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993, p. 39).
Qu’ranic school. In short, for all of them, school was not an arena for play, and the learning endeavour often ended up in a traumatic experience. For some of them, the classroom was a sacred place since most of their school teachers did their prayers on the classroom desk in front of the pupils. Today, and because of pressures from fundamentalist groups, most Moroccan universities have set up mosques on their premises.

Figure 25. Mundane experiences and spiritual anticipation: A shoe-cleaner making his way through rows of café terrace tables - with the minaret of the mosque in the background.
In addition to the atmosphere of seriousness which prevails in all educational institutions, Morocco has also to face the problem of its weak educational infrastructure. Though mass education began in Morocco only in the early 1960s, the government has found it very difficult to set up the necessary infrastructure which a rapidly expanding education requires. At the level of higher education, most universities lack the most elementary infrastructure for an adequate education. Because of the shortage in classrooms, administrators engage into complex computing operations and incredible schedule scenarios to answer the ever-growing need for teaching rooms. In this context, reading and library rooms become a luxury and both instructors and students are quite happy if they can only find rooms and enough chairs where to give their lectures and hold their seminars. Moreover, the number of city or private-owned libraries is insignificant compared to the size of the population. In Casablanca, a city of more than five million people, the only reference library is one that was set up by Saudi funds in the 1980s. In El-Jadida, my informants joked about the fact that a cultural centre which was the meeting place for students in the 1960s and 1970s has been transformed into a police station.

It is in this historical, cultural, political and economic context that the appropriation of the café space for study purposes must be viewed. To explain the students and academics' use of café space as an answer to the shortage in the educational infrastructure would simplify the issue. On the contrary, the appropriation of café space must be viewed as a grassroots attempt to solve this problem. In fact, in addition to the café, the students tend to appropriate the street, public gardens, parks, and beaches for the same purposes. It is very common to find students studying under the light of street and boulevard post-lamps, especially during the weeks preceding final exams. However, the café space has the advantage of providing its users with an intimacy, comfort, and protection which other spaces can not grant.

First, not all owners allow students to study in their café premises. For some, it is not profitable since students take up tables for long hours and often

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1 In *A History of the Arab Peoples*, Albert Hourani gives approximate figures of the Muslim children enrolled in school during the protectorate and after the country's independence: "In Morocco, only 12 per cent of Muslim children were in school in 1954, in spite of efforts made by the French during the last years of the protectorate, but by 1963 the figure had risen to 60 per cent, and to almost 100 per cent of children aged seven" (*A History of the Arab Peoples*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1991, p. 390).
do not consume much. For others, especially in salons de thé, which cater to an upper middle class clientele, students’ café behaviour contests the image the owners want to give of their places. However, most café owners tolerate the presence of students and some would even make arrangements with them. Students generally agree to use particular areas in the café, usually the upstairs section, and would also agree to avoid the café’s peak hours (usually before 8:30 a.m. and 2:30 p.m. and after 6:30 p.m.). In exchange, the owner allows students to use his café space even if some of them do not order one drink for an entire afternoon. In most cafés frequented by students, some owners tend to treat their student clientele as if they were their own offspring. They would know their exam dates, ask about their grades, congratulate those who have succeeded and console the ones who have failed. One café owner in Rabat has detailed information about most of his students’ private lives. He told me about the family problems of some, the poor backgrounds of others, and who was dating whom from among the students’ groups. In fact, I noticed that he spent quite some time at the students’ tables and chatted with them about different life issues and the students seemed very willing to confide in him.

Further, café waiters seem to develop strong relationships with their student clientele. This can be explained by the fact that waiters and students are generally from the same generation, which tends to attenuate some of the seriousness which usually characterizes customer-waiter relations. In fact, of all their café clientele, students seem to be the ones who deal with waiters as acquaintances rather than “servants” or mere café employees. They call them by their first names and greet them on the cheeks if they have been away for a few days. Waiters and students have mutual interests in the relationship they establish among themselves. Because of the friendly treatment of waiters, students feel ‘at home’ in the café they frequent. They can arrange their own sitting ‘decor’ by putting a number of tables together to form large groups, consume on credit, ask to listen to specific music or have their own audio-cassettes played on the café stereo, and at times even borrow money from the waiter. In exchange, waiters derive a psychological and moral support from the friendships they establish with students. Since most waiters are illiterate, they feel ‘honoured’ to be friends with university students, as a waiter in El-Jadida explained to me. They think of students as their “brothers” and “sisters,” appreciate and encourage their investment in their studies and are
often pleased to feel they somehow contribute to their education. Waiters can also derive practical benefits from the friendship networks they establish with their student clientele. Students can help them fill in administrative forms, consult with them, especially with the Law School students, about any legal problems they may have. At times, some students can even use their parents' influence or position to solve a waiter's administrative problem or case.

Moreover, for café owners, students are also future customers and consumers since by the time they graduate, they have already been initiated to the world of the café and become café habitués. For female students, the function of the café as a study space seems to sanction their 'transgression' of this traditional male territory. Because they almost always frequent cafés in groups, female students seem to be more 'at home' than a café user who is by herself or one who is accompanied by a male. It is not unusual to find veiled women among students' groups in cafés. According to my female student informants, studying constitutes the primary reason which draws them to the café space and the majority of my other female informants affirms that they started frequenting cafés at a regular basis during their academic years. In fact, the café students frequent during their university years is likely to live in their imagination as a special place reminiscent of old friendships, acquaintances, and memories. Most of my informants betray a nostalgic tone when they talk about the cafés they frequented when they were students.

In addition to the fact that it constitutes a grassroots solution to the shortage in academic and cultural infrastructure, the café experience also provides an alternative mode of learning to the dominant educational paradigm. The café context allows for a liminal and playful collective mode of learning which the official institutions of education marginalize and try to suppress. Collective learning in cafés allows students to benefit from the individual knowledge and information of one another. Even when they are using individual tables, students know they can, at any time, turn to the friend sitting in the next table to ask for a clarification of an ambiguous statement or an elaboration on a key argument. A major difference between studying at the library and in a café is that, in cafés, students can act freely and spontaneously without worrying about the librarian's warning looks or the patronizing attitudes of other library users. Moreover, a student group can divide tasks and have each one of them make a presentation on a specific section of the programme. This strategy does not only initiate them to a mode
of collective participation but also trains them in the performing art of public speaking. For quite a few of them, presentations before friends in cafés constitute their first experience in addressing a small "public." This collective experience constructs an alternative to the traditional modes of learning which encourage passive reception rather than analytical reflection.

Another important feature of collective learning in cafés are the elements of playfulness and liminality which accompany this experience. Jokes, wit, humour, comedy, laughter, satire, oaths and even derision and curses are inscribed in the text which is constructed in cafés.¹ This levity in speech and behaviour contrasts with the serious and grave ponderation associated with the learning experience in the official academic institutions. This learning strategy obviously allows students to sublimate some of the anxieties which exam preparations generally entail. However, such behavioural performances achieve a larger function than this. The ribaldry which collective learning in cafés tends to generate creates a festive ambiance which contributes to the cementing of the bonding ties among the group members. The implications of this process can rightly be compared to the effects of the marketplace language which Mikhail Bakhtin insightfully delineates in his study of the Rablaisian world:

Abuses, curses, profanities, and improprieties are the unofficial elements of speech. They were and are still conceived as a breach of established norms of verbal address; they refuse to conform to

¹ Victor Turner (1983, pp. 233-234) analyzes the difficulties encountered in the definition of "play" but makes a subtle distinction between "play" and "playfulness:" "Playfulness is volatile, sometimes dangerously explosive essence, which cultural institutions seek to bottle or contain in the vials of games of competition, chance, and strength, in modes of simulation such as theater, and in controlled disorientation, from roller coasters to dervish dancing [...] Most definitions of play involve notions of disengagement, of free-wheeling, of being out of mesh with the serious "bread and butter," let alone "life-and-death" processes of production, social control, "getting and spending," and raising the next generation [...] Play can be everywhere and nowhere, imitate anything, yet be identified with nothing [...] Play is the supreme bricoleur of frail transient constructions, like a caddis worm's case or a magpie's nest [...] Its metamessages are composed of a potpourri of apparently incongruous elements [...] Passages of seemingly wholly rational thought jostle in a Joycean or surrealist manner with passages filleted of all syntactical connectedness. Yet, although "spinning loose" as it were, the wheel of play reveals to us (as Milhaly Csikszentmihalyi has argued [1975]) the possibility of changing our goals and, therefore, the restructuring of what our culture states to be reality" (quoted in Richard Schechner, The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance. London and New York: Routledge, 1995, pp. 24-25).
conventions, to etiquette, civility, respectability. These elements of freedom, if present in sufficient numbers and with a precise intention, exercise a strong influence on the entire content of speech, transferring it to another sphere beyond the limits of conventional language. Such speech forms, liberated from norms, hierarchies, and prohibitions of established idiom, become themselves a peculiar argot and create a special collectivity, a group of people initiated in familiar intercourse, who are frank and free in expressing themselves verbally. The marketplace crowd was such a collectivity, especially the festive, carnivalesque crowd of the fair.1

Students’ groups in cafés can not, in any obvious way, be compared to carnivalesque crowds. Neither does the text they construct in cafés contain repeated curses, profanities or improprieties. However, the spirit of conviviality and sociability which café learning generates certainly creates a ‘special collectivity’ which not only supports an autonomous intercourse but also shares in the group’s worries, joys, interests, and anxieties. In fact, there is a political edge to the special collectivity which students create in the café space. Because of the marginalization of their unions, students have been deprived of a platform where they can voice their concerns. In addition, the increasing ‘radicalization’ and ‘politicization’ of the academy, the lack of a media space like newspapers, radio and television stations -not to mention the new technologies- where both students and academics can disseminate information, exchange opinions, and debate issues of interest to them, create frustrations which seek an outlet outside the realm of academia.2

2 In a recent interview published in a Moroccan daily newspaper, the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research admits that “in fact, there is a process of radicalization which is taking place within Moroccan universities, though this remains a minority within a silent majority. It goes without saying that this radicalization is not to the advantage of the academy because the university must remain a space of liberty and expression. Even during the most difficult times, the spirit of tolerance prevailed and all groups could voice their opinions, which is not always the case today in certain universities where cold steel circulates on campuses, a fact which underlines the seriousness of the situation and the amount of accumulated frustrations. The government, which is obviously preoccupied by this situation, is working out a social program to improve the living conditions of students and to ameliorate the conditions within the academic institutions” (interviewed by Farida Moha in Liberation, no. 2501, Tuesday, March 25, 1999, p. 6). In the same issue and on the front page, the newspaper
its accessibility and availability, the café space functions as an important outlet where those frustrations can be released or sublimated, but they can also develop into seeds of resistance. Indeed, though it is at this stage impossible to establish a direct link between the special collectivity which is created in the café space and the wider student solidarity among the unemployed graduates, there is room enough to state that such correlation holds. The graduates who have not been able to find employment have organized themselves in associations and, through sit-ins, hunger strikes, protest marches, and occupation of public spaces, are now trying to pressure the government into finding solutions to their problems. In fact, in the course of my fieldwork research, I have realized that a significant percentage of café users are unemployed degree-holders. More than that, I have also come across waiters and waitresses with a B.A. (Licence) in physics, mathematics, and biology who have chosen to wait (no pun intended here!) in cafés until they can find a 'job.' On the basis of my conversations with this marginalized group, I can safely state that the germs of the wider student solidarity are to be looked for in the special collectivities which café frequenting generates.

The playful tone which characterizes collective learning in cafés can also be detected in the seduction play in which female and male participants engage. In her study of female sexuality in Morocco, the sociologist Soumaya Naamane-Guessous notes the important role of café space in the life of young Moroccan women:

> Another striking phenomenon that must be underlined is the increasing rate with which young women are frequenting cafés. This can be explained by the fact that the café is one of the few public spaces where the young can meet freely, where idyllic relationships are formed, and exams are prepared. However, it is also in cafés where young women let themselves be desired and coveted. Though quite a few young women prefer dance clubs, most of them find it very difficult to go out at night.¹

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The function of the café is not to be viewed merely as a space where female-male encounters are tolerated. Neither must it be considered as an outlet where the repressed discourse on sexuality resurfaces. In fact, the café space does not constitute a clear cut boundary between the authorized and the censored. It is true that in a society where gender relations are rigidly spatialized, the café becomes a site where the agencies of social domination regulate and monitor the sexual behaviour of its young populace. However, the café is also the stage where the oppressive powers of traditions, laws and taboos are tested, contested, and retranscribed by the emancipatory forces of desire and pleasure, thus revealing the limits of the power of repressive institutions. Michel Foucault has shown the workings of the dynamic interplay between the "deployment of sexuality" and the "putative mechanics of power:"

Underlying both the general theme that power represses sex and the idea that the law constitutes desire, one encounters the same putative mechanics of power. It is defined in a strangely restrictive way, in that, to begin with, this power is poor in resources, sparing of its methods, monotonous in the tactics it utilizes, incapable of invention, and seemingly doomed always to repeat itself. Further, it is a power that only has the force of the negative on its side, a power to say no; in no condition to produce, capable only of posting limits, it is basically anti-energy. This is the paradox of its effectiveness: it is incapable of doing anything, except to render what it dominates incapable of doing anything either, except what this power allows it to do. And finally, it is a power whose model is essentially juridical, centered on nothing more than the statement of the law and the operation of taboos. All modes of domination, submission, and subjugation are ultimately reduced to an effect of obedience.¹

It is true that the patriarchal modes of power and control are still very effective within Moroccan society, since the most recent statistics show that 78.4% of Moroccan women marry according to the will of their parents.

and have no say in the choice of their partners. The same study, however, has also revealed that 69.5% of women who have been to the university exercised their right in the choice of their partners, a fact which underlines the importance of the ‘academic experience’ in the shaping of the female subject’s identity.¹

In fact, it is the subversive potential inherent in the playfulness that café ambiance creates which makes the agents of control and censorship resent café space. Female cafégoers are aware of the power issues at play their café experience generates. They also know they take ‘risks’ by frequenting cafés and that “the fun of playing, when there is fun, is in playing with fire, going in over one’s head, inverting accepted procedures and hierarchies” and that “risk, danger, and insecurity are part of playing’s thrill.”² This explains why most female cafégoers tend to avoid neighbourhood cafés which are usually frequented by relatives or acquaintances.³ By frequenting cafés, a young woman runs the risk of being seen in the company of a male, a fact which can ‘stigmatize’ her reputation within her family and community. Moreover, the seduction play which café ambiance mediates may develop into a sexual relation in which the young woman runs most of, if not all, the risks.⁴ Though the majority of educated young women would express their

¹ I use the phrase “academic experience” to mean not only ‘academic education’ but also all the experiences which a student’s life is likely to encompass, including the café experience. It must be noted that the same study has also revealed the paradoxical truth that 30% of women with university degrees had their marriages arranged for them by their parents, which speaks to the limited effect that education can have in the shaping of the student’s identity. The study did not analyze the totality of the student’s academic experience to see if there was any correlation between a woman’s lifestyle on and off campus and the nature of the variables leading to the woman’s marriage. It is obviously impossible to determine the extent of the relationship between café going and a woman’s self-autonomy and self-dependence. However, one can safely state that café experience contributes to the development of gender relations and the shaping of the individual subject’s identity.


³ In her study of the behaviour of the Moroccan youth, the political scientist Mounia Bennani-Chraibi notes this tendency among female café goers: “Young women ... tend to prefer places which are not frequented by relatives and which are relatively shielded from people’s eyes like café upstairs sections and hotels” (Mounia Bennani-Chraibi, Soumis et rebelles, les jeunes au maroc, Casablanca: Le Fennec, 1994, p. 51).

⁴ I recall here the French poet Apollinaire’s (1880-1918) fascination by the erotic dimension of café ambiance. His descriptions of cafés usually run to this effect such as his famous reference to cafés as places “swollen with cigarette smoke” (cafés gonfés de fumée) (quoted in Raymond Jean, Lectures du désir: Nerval, Lautreamont, Apollinaire, Eluard, Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1977, p. 117).
resentment and rebellion against the oppressive norms of tradition which restrict their freedom, most of them would still seek to negotiate ways to reconcile the demands of tradition and their desire for self-fulfillment.¹

Before closing this section, it must be noted that the smoke-polluted air inside cafés usually inconveniences non-smokers who feel compelled to avoid, or at least reduce, their visits to cafés. The social pressure to prohibit smoking in public spaces -including cafés- is rising and there are already a few smoke-free cafés across the country. In Rabat, quite a few of my informants state that they do not hesitate to take the trouble of driving through busy traffic to go to a smoke-free café in the city center. A university professor from Fez has gone so far as to publish an article in a Moroccan daily newspaper in which he calls for the prohibition of smoking in cafés. In a prelude to his article, the author states he has always viewed the café "not only [as] a space of leisure but especially one for intellectual work. It is in cafés where I read newspapers, magazines, books and where I often write articles. It is also in this space where I meet friends to debate issues of literary, social, artistic or sporting interests. I sincerely believe that the café remains an ideal space for writing." Having stated the historical relation between cafés and literary and artistic productions in which the names of world-known artists have become associated with the names of cafés they frequented (from Balzac, Theophile Gautier, Jules Mery and Gerard de Newal who frequented the Parisian café "Le Divan" to the Egyptian Nobel Prize winner Naguib Mahfouz who is a habitué of a traditional café in Cairo), the author moves on to lament the current desolate state of Moroccan cafés because of cigarette smoke:

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¹ Soumaya Naamane-Guessous concludes that nine out of ten young women admit that a young woman must preserve her virginity until her wedding night. Those who resent this view, usually young women with secondary or university education, would still confess that it is no easy matter to rebel against the weight of tradition and that for a young woman to lose her virginity before marriage would only "create problems for her" (Soumaya Naamane-Guessous, Au-delà de toute pudeur, Casablanca: EDDIF, 1988, p. 167). Mounia Bennani-Chraibi reaches a similar conclusion: "The strong tensions which underline the definition of sexual identity highlight the malaise which runs through the ensemble of social relations [...] Yesterday's values, though under erosion, continue to exercise their hold on the individual's behaviour. Within this climate of insecurity, the emerging individual vacillates, now more than ever, between the normative and the pragmatic, at times redefining the group's values and at other times transgressing them, but more often than not, s/he would privilege arrangement rather than rupture" (Mounia Bennani-Chraibi, Soumis et rebelles. les jeunes au maroc, Casablanca: Le Fennec, 1994, p. 134).
[...] today I find it unbearable to sit in a café for the simple reason that some inconsiderate customers fail to realize the harm the intoxicating nicotine of their cigarette smoke does to the café users. I keep changing cafés but I always find myself prey to the nauseating cigarette odor of relentless smokers. This is the reason why I call upon the authorities to implement the law which prohibits smoking in public spaces, or at least to reserve smoke-free sitting areas in cafés, restaurants, and trains [...] as is the case in Europe, for example. In conclusion, I reiterate the fact that the café remains an ideal space for writing and creativity and not only a place for the consumption of packs of poisonous cigarettes. The café is also a place for cultural exchange which benefits the entire society.1

C. Café Con Entertainment: Café Audiences and Mass-Ceremony

In this section, I examine some of the ways in which the café space is appropriated by print and audio-visual media audiences2 The focus here is more on audience behaviour rather than on media content. The point I will be making is that the collective consumption of media products in café spaces generates the emergence of subaltern interpretive communities which

2 I am aware of the messy nature of the concept “audience.” Ellis (1983, p. 49), for example, distinguishes between “audience” which he defines as “a profoundly ideological concept” and “viewers” who are “individuals, people who use TV within their domestic and group social contexts.” For Ellis, viewers are “the few people who ring in to the duty officer, or write to the broadcasters or to newspapers, expressing their opinions” while audiences are “bulk agglomerations created by statistical research” who “do not use TV, they watch it and consume it” (quoted in Ien Ang, Desperately Seeking the Audience, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 37). Ang who has revealed “the profundity of the gap between the institutional point of view on the one hand, and the virtual standpoint of actual audiences on the other” concludes that this gap can be understood as “the opposition between macro and micro, the formal and informal, control and creativity, structure and agency, strategy and tactics, communication as transmission and communication as ritual, the view from the top and the view from the bottom” (Ien Ang, 1991, Desperately Seeking the Audience, London and New York: Routledge, 1991, p. 165). The concept “audience” is further problematized when it is used in conjunction with other concepts such as “public,” “community,” “consumers” or “spectators.” Here, I am using “audience” as a normative term to refer to any assembled group of individuals engaged in a collective consumption of media texts.
activate media texts by decoding programmes and reconstructing them, analyzing information and critically commenting on it, and by participating in a collective ceremony which consists of filling in the "gaps" of the media text. In short, through playfulness, subaltern interpretive communities engage in the construction of subversive narratives, "metatexts" or "incrustations" which they inscribe in the margins of the media text.

Media consumption in Moroccan cafés seems to be determined by the socio-economic context in which the café is located. The consumption of print media, for example, tends to prevail in cafés located in middle and upper middle-class neighbourhoods where the clientele is largely composed of government employees, academics, artists, journalists or business owners and managers. In lower and working class neighbourhoods where the majority of café clienteles is composed of unskilled labour, the dominant media of entertainment is television. In addition, while all cafés are equipped with

1 Stanley Fish has argued that "it is interpretive communities, rather than either the text or the reader, that produce meanings and are responsible for the emergence of formal features. Interpretive communities are made up of those who share interpretive strategies not for reading but for writing texts, for constituting their properties. In other words these strategies exist prior to the act of reading and therefore determine the shape of what is read rather than, as is usually assumed, the other way around" (Stanley Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980, p. 14). Stanley Fish's notion of interpretive communities has been criticized from within literary studies for its failure to realize that "interpretive communities are bound to be communities on other grounds as well, bound to have common interests besides the production of interpretations, bound to correspond to other social differentiations" (Mary Louise Pratt, 1986, p. 52, quoted in Jane Feuer, "Reading Dynasty : Television and Reception Theory" in The South Atlantic Quarterly, Spring, Vol. 88, No. 2, 1989, p. 450). In her study of the television series "Dynasty," Jane Feuer has argued that the reception of television programs is very much different from that of literary texts: "(...) interpretive communities never merely interpret -they enact, they are counted as demographics, they consume not just a fictional text but a whole range of products as well. Not only would I posit that the interpretive community is the text, it also produces the text and in addition is produced by the text" (Jane Feuer, "Reading Dynasty : Television and Reception Theory" in The South Atlantic Quarterly, Spring, Vol. 88, No. 2, 1989, p. 458). I use the notion of 'subaltern interpretive communities' to mean that those communities are not only produced by social differentiations nor are they only interpellated by and produced by the media text but that their social differentiations make them inscribe on the text meanings and interpretations subversive to the 'dominant readings' which both the fictional text and the social world 'cue' for them. Their decoding strategies are outlined by the reality of their life conditions.

2 Tony Bennet, for instance, has pointed out that the critic's task is not only to study 'the primary text' but also to consider all the "hermeneutic activators" (writings on the 'primary' text, commentaries, interpretations, readings and misreadings and the cultural commodities which the primary text generates) as "supplementary evidence to be cited in support of the analysis of the 'primary' texts" (Tony Bennett, "The Bond Phenomenon: Theorizing a Popular Hero" in Southern Review, 16, July 1983, p. 220).
stereo systems, cafés in upper middle class neighbourhoods (usually called salons de thé) tend to play recorded music rather than tune up to a radio station.

Most café owners make accessible to their clienteles a selection of national daily newspapers. It is very difficult to state whether the selection is motivated by the owner's political affiliation because, since the majority of Moroccan press is partisan, owners tend to provide a selection which belongs to different political parties. Quite a few customers, too, leave their newspapers in the café after they have read them. Thus by mid-day, a variety of newspapers circulates among café customers. Furthermore, newspaper vendors tend to establish their stands in strategic positions where they can be accessible to the clienteles of a few cafés, a fact which encourages a practice very much resented by the print media institutions. This practice consists of the café customer "hiring" a number of newspapers and magazines in exchange of a few dirhams (usually the equivalent of the price of one daily newspaper). This "transaction" allows the customer to skim through a
selection of newspapers and magazines and the vendor to make some more money. In fact, this practice must be viewed as a grassroots strategy to overcome the limited purchasing power of the customer who can not afford to buy more than one or two newspapers and the very small percentage the vendor gets for every newspaper sold. In addition, there seems to be a consensus among readers as to the “nullity” of the Moroccan newspapers, both in form and content. One of my informants summarizes this attitude by stating that for him, buying a newspaper (daily newspapers cost 2 dirhams) constitutes his “most expensive hobby,” in reference to the equation between the price he pays and the amount of time he spends reading it.

The weak content of newspapers partly explains why doing cross-word puzzles has become a dominant practice in Moroccan cafés. Customers tend to skim over the headlines and the sports page and then turn to the entertainment section to do the cross-word puzzle. I have even noted that some customers go straight to the entertainment section before they go back and read news reports and the majority does not spend more than a few minutes on the headlines before reaching for their pens to do the cross-word puzzle. However, what is striking about doing cross-word puzzles in cafés is that this activity, which is supposed to quiz the individual's lexical knowledge and intellectual skills, becomes a collective enterprise of 'riddle-solving' as groups join efforts to complete the puzzle. In fact, it is common practice for individual customers to turn to their neighbours at the next table to ask their help in the completion of the puzzle.

Doing cross-word puzzles in cafés can be interpreted at different levels. First, since cross-word puzzle is primarily a game, its main purpose remains that of rating, ranking, and stratifying individuals on the basis of their knowledge, wit, and capacity to memorize (since some clues are repeated in different puzzles). From this perspective, Pierre Bourdieu’s (1980) argument that the social role of culture is to classify people according to their knowledge is highly relevant to the understanding of the cross-word ‘game’ in café spaces. In a society where the rate of illiteracy is very high, “cultural capital” remains an essential means to achieve power, authority, and social status. An individual whose skills in cross-word puzzle solving are acknowledged by his friends gains not only ‘personal gratification’ but ‘social status,’ especially if those skills pertain to a puzzle in French. Fiske (1983) has shown the mutual interplay between television quiz shows and the educational system in
Western societies and has argued that such "an ideology and its ritual/game performances grounds social or class differences in individual natural differences and thus naturalizes the class system."\(^1\) The same argument is applicable to the cross-word puzzle games which 'naturalize' the individual's social power and influence.

At another level, the ritual aspect of cross-word puzzle games overrides individual differences and grants the group communal identity. Moreover, because the puzzle quizzes the players in different areas of knowledge, all the participants are likely to get a chance to contribute to the completion of the puzzle. Though knowledge hierarchy can not be downplayed, cross-word puzzles are set to establish 'authorities' in different areas of knowledge, from 'academic' knowledge to the knowledge of specific individual actors, actresses or football players.\(^2\) In fact, individual group members usually establish their authorities in specific areas of knowledge.

Further, the pleasure café audiences derive from cross-word puzzles contributes to the construction of "imagined communities" not only in time but also in space. Writing of the role of print media in the construction of "imagined communities, Benedict Anderson contends that it is "the obsolescence of the newspaper on the marrow of its printing" which creates the "extraordinary mass ceremony" of "the almost precisely simultaneous consumption ('imagining') of the newspaper-as-fiction."\(^3\) Anderson, then, goes on to argue that the significance of this mass ceremony is "paradoxical:"

It is performed in silent privacy, in the lair of the skull. Yet each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion. Furthermore, this ceremony is incessantly repeated at daily or half-daily intervals throughout

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2 John Fiske divides the knowledge that is tested in television quiz shows into two main sections: factual and human. In the category of factual knowledge, he ranks "academic" knowledge first, then "everyday" knowledge second; as for human knowledge, he lists the knowledge of people in general, then the knowledge of specific individuals. It must be noted that cross-word puzzles quiz players in all these areas of knowledge (John Fiske, *Television Culture*. London and New York: Routledge, 1994, p. 269).
the calendar. What more vivid figure for the secular, historically
clocked, imagined community can be envisioned? At the same
time, the newspaper reader, observing exact replicas of his own
paper being consumed by his subway, barbershop, or residential
neighbours, is continually reassured that the imagined world is
visibly rooted in everyday life. As with *Noli Me Tangere*, fiction
seeps quietly and continuously into reality, creating that
remarkable confidence of community in anonymity which is the

In reference to the obsolescence of print media, some of my informants joked
about the fact that the Moroccan newspaper is always already obsolescent
even before its printing. In fact, I have had this confirmed to me in the form
of an anecdote. In the course of my fieldwork research, I was interviewing a
café customer while his eleven year old boy was reading the newspaper. It was
late afternoon and the next day’s edition was already out. The boy interrupted
our conversation to tell his father that the events covered on the front page
were those of the past two days. The father confirmed his son’s doubts and the
boy went back to read the newspaper. Shortly afterwards, he interrupted us
again, and this time, with even greater astonishment, remarked that that was
the next day’s edition. His father turned to him and said: “You’re right. In this
country, you can buy tomorrow’s newspaper today so as to read about
yesterday’s events!”

However, in a café, the mass ceremony of newspaper consumption
becomes a collective and publicized enterprise wherein each communicant is
well aware that the ritual he performs is replicated not only in time but also
in space. The awareness of the spatial dimension of community has several
ramifications on the performance of the ceremony and the communicant’s
identity. Further, like the newspaper narratives which are suspended in time
between yesterday and tomorrow, the space in which the community
imagines itself is held on the threshold between the public and the private,
home and the street, the homogeneous and the heterogeneous, and between
the official and the unofficial. The café space is similar to what Gilane
Tawadros calls the “zone of indiscernability” where the boundary between
pleasure and seriousness holds to a very thin line, a space where the mass
ceremony performance “imagines” a community while it simultaneously
foregrounds subject identities and individual social positions. Here, communities are imagined not only within the interstices of time but also in the ambivalent space of the here and there, of the ‘betwixt’ and in-between, or rather, in the “space-off,” as Teresa de Lauretis puts it:

It is the elsewhere of discourse here and now, the blind spots, or the space-off, of its representations. I think of it as spaces in the margins of hegemonic discourses, social spaces carved in the interstices of institutions and in the chinks and cracks of the power-knowledge apparati.

The appropriation of print media in café spaces is also revealing of the contradictory underpinnings of both space and subjectivity. Newspaper reading -the “morning prayer” of the modern man, as Hegel put it- is not performed in “silent privacy,” but becomes a “public show” of the individual’s social and political positions. Because the Moroccan press is predominantly partisan, newspaper reading in cafés is often understood as a ‘public’ declaration of one’s political affiliations. Likewise, since almost all political parties issue their newspapers in Arabic and French editions, the type of the edition brackets the subject’s social and cultural affiliations. Members of an elite clientele would be seen reading French newspapers, especially Le Monde or Le Monde Diplomatique. This very restricted elite is usually composed of intellectuals, artists, university professors or individuals who have been educated in French universities. Young business owners or managers tend to consume weekly newspapers which specialize in economic and financial news reports. This public character of newspaper consumption in cafés is double-edged. On one hand, it seems to reassure and comfort the individual’s belonging to a community. On the other hand, this publicness has a homogenizing dimension in the sense that the individual’s newspaper selection can be dictated by a tacit social pressure. In fact, I have noticed that the newspapers consumed in cafés are predominantly those of the coalition government parties, especially socialist parties and the Istiqlal (independence)

It is true that while members of the aforementioned parties would take this as an argument of the popularity of their parties, most of my informants state that their preference is not dictated by their political affinities but simply by the fact that, content-wise, the other newspapers are not even worth “looking at.” However, a few of my informants have testified that they feel “embarrassed” to read newspapers of the political parties of the Right because they may be perceived as “sell-out” by café customers. Some would even buy two or three newspapers belonging to different political parties to “blur” their political affinities. In what follows, I will look at how café audiences appropriate the medium of television.

The intrusion of television into café spaces has tremendous ramifications on the behaviour and practices of café clienteles. When the television is on, the ground floor section becomes like a movie theatre. The lights are dimmed, if it is day-time, blinds are drawn, and tables and chairs are rearranged to face the television screen. One of my informants commented that the view of café audiences watching television provides a dramatized example of the notion of “the absurd” that the French philosopher Albert Camus has theorized. The fact that the television screen is usually set in a high position to accommodate customers sitting in different areas of the café makes the audience look as if they were gazing at the café ceiling. Further, as the same informant has noted, television viewing inside cafés has condemned the customers who are not interested in watching television to use the terrace. In addition, the intrusion of television has also subordinated other leisure activities to which café audiences in working class neighbourhoods are accustomed such as card, draught, and dominos playing. However, the intrusion of television in café spaces has also generated viewing habits which consist of audiences decoding and reconstructing television texts and inscribing meta-narratives in their margins. In fact, the view of café television audiences from the outside is misleading because it gives the impression that the audience is a passive consumer of stories and images while in fact the ambiance inside is very much like in a marketplace. Indeed, the marketplace may be a good place to start in order to understand the behaviour of café television audiences since both the café and the marketplace are spaces for entertainment and public performances.
The market place is not only a place for commerce but also for public performance. The halqa (literally "a ring") consists in the performers, storytellers, preachers, musicians, stand-up comedians, comedy troupes, snake charmers, herbs and medicine vendors, animal trainers, fortune tellers and other entertainments which include muscle-testing, betting, gambling and games of chance. In addition to their role as entertainers, public
performers have served other functions, which Philip D. Schuyler succinctly summarizes as follows:

The itinerant entertainers acted as journalists, carrying news from one market to the next. Public preachers offered moral guidance and explanations of religious texts to a largely illiterate public. Comedians provided political and social commentary. Storytellers gave lessons in history. Musicians put all these messages into song. Times have changed, of course. Public education has brought literacy to many. Radio, television, recordings, and films now provide entertainment and information. Yet street performances continue much as before, an important stage in the apprenticeship of many entertainers, a supplement to the income of journeymen and masters, and an honest way to earn a living for many down their luck. The tradition is so entrenched that in modern cities without public performance areas, such as Rabat and Casablanca, musicians perform in the aisles of intercity buses before departure.¹

Public performance areas in urban centres may have decreased but the "show" seems to have moved inside café spaces. Entertainers are also drawn to café terraces where they perform for an already 'organized' audience. The Syrian playwright, actor, and film and television producer speaks of the hakawati, or coffee house story teller, as an entertainer who performed the same function as the television narratives do today in café spaces:

The hakawati had become much less prevalent. The original reason for the hakawati was the widespread illiteracy of the people. He would sit on an elevated chair and read stories of Antar, Abla, Abu Zayd al-Hilali, and other heroic knights. People love stories of heroes, particularly ones as dramatic as Antar. The hakawati would read the story of Antar and, as they do in television today, he would stop reading the story at a suspense-

filled point. Of course, if the people were literate, they could have taken the book about Antar and read it themselves. But in that time you had maybe two literate people in a lane. Sometimes the coffee house crowd would divide into proponents and opponents of Antar; sometimes the two groups would fight and splinter chairs on each others' heads. Antar's proponents might prevail on the reader to read one more page until he came to a point where Antar's side won. They would then go home happy and relaxed. I heard a story once; I don't know if it is true, but it is certainly conceivable. A hakawati reached a stopping place in the story and said: "Come tomorrow for the next installment." At that point in the story, Antar was imprisoned and one of his supporters was so upset that he could not sleep. He had become a part of the story. He dressed, went to the hakawati's house, knocked on his door, gave him money, and said: Take this money and read another page or so until Antar is freed from the prison." Surely this story or its equivalent happened.¹

I could not find a confirmation of the historical existence of the hakawati in traditional Moroccan cafés. However, storytellers in marketplace areas are an integral part of Moroccan popular culture. In fact, the heroic adventures of Antar and other historical and mythical knights are some of the most popular folk narratives in Morocco. In all cases, the point to make is that television programmes are appropriated by café audiences as a continuity of the cultural forms which the marketplace provides. Egyptian and Mexican soap operas on Moroccan channels 1 and 2 generate emotional involvement, social criticism but also derisive laughter. The hero of a Mexican soap opera "Mari Mar," very popular with the Moroccan audience, who is unable to recognize the wife he has abandoned and who, in the meantime, has inherited her father's fortune and metamorphosed into a sophisticated "lady," draws all kinds of derision from the exclusively male café audiences. I watched episodes of this prime time show, which is dubbed in French and broadcast on channel 2, in seven

different cafés and the different audiences had the same response: comments on the heroine’s beauty, jokes about the gullible hero and resentment against the scheming mother-in-law. Yet, the response remains predominantly playful as the audience invokes its belonging to the Moroccan male community.

An Egyptian soap opera broadcast on the same channel between 1:00 and 2:00 p.m. and which reconstructs the major political events that led to the military coup d’état which brought Jamal Abdu Nasser to power generates political commentary about the effects of colonialism, the corruption of Arab governments, and the ever-increasing social contradictions in the Arab world. Audiences also tend to create parallels between the constructed historical events in the soap opera and the contemporary political and social situation in Morocco and the Arab world. Through their interpellation of the soap’s narrative, audiences invoke, in turn, the Muslim *Umma*, the Moroccan community but also position themselves as members of a marginalized social class. In a working-class neighbourhood café in El-Jadida where I watched an episode of this Egyptian soap opera, I was a witness of a highly revealing debate among the audience members. This debate was triggered by a scene in which a young woman aristocrat—a relative of King Faruq, the last Egyptian monarch who was overthrown by Nasser in 1952—laments the absence of love in her life. This scene is about two minutes long and shows the woman in her bedroom dressed in a nightgown; the camera provides a wide shot of the luxuriously decorated room and focuses on the young woman who is lying on the bed. The young woman’s long hair is undone and her eyes are filled with tears. A long close-up shot accentuates her sensuous beauty. The momentary silence in the café was suddenly broken by a viewer who called out loud and “proposed” himself as the ideal lover for the young woman. Another viewer disputed his friend’s claim and proposed himself as the most suitable lover for the young woman. Soon, the café was filled with “potential suitors” who sang their qualities and derided the ostentation of their “competitors.” This ‘real-life’ scene was carried out in a playful tone until a viewer who had been silent all this time intervened to remind the “suitors” of their real-life conditions and of their “lot” in this world. This comment drew the ire of the audience and shifted the debate to the role of “fantasy” and “dream” in people’s lives. One participant rebuked the man who interrupted the audience’s fantasy narrative and stated: “We
already suffer all kinds of oppressions and frustrations, so why do you want to take away from us even the freedom to dream and fantasize?!" Another viewer added: "Anyway, we don’t need anyone to remind us of our real-life conditions. We are here to enjoy ourselves, not to lament over our misfortunes, and those who want to do so are not welcome here!" These arguments drew support from the majority of the audience and the debate was settled. It is true that this scene provides an example of how the media reify the image of the woman for the consumption of the male gaze. It is also true that such a real-life scene is a dramatized instance of "spectacle as narrative," with "woman as image [and] man as bearer of the look," as Laura Mulvey has convincingly argued. The audience that consumes television images in cafés is almost always exclusively male, except on the occasion of an important football match of the national team when I have come across female spectators in cafés in Casablanca. However, the erotic contemplation which the café audience engages in does not write off altogether the contradictions in which the audience members are involved in their social life. The pleasurable structure of the soap is displaced to make room for the collective production of a subversive narrative which depicts the contradictions that characterize the social lifeworld. In fact, quite a few members of the audience seemed to have lost the soap’s story line because, when order was reestablished, some asked to be updated on the narrative events.

Though film scenes can also generate debates among audience members in movie theatres, as I have noted in working-class neighbourhood cinemas and as I have had quite a few of my informants confirm the same practice, the difference between a café space and a cinema must be underlined. In movie theatres, the audience is expected to respect a code of behaviour which institutionalizes the viewing experience. The dark auditorium and the silence which must be observed by the spectators serve to individualize the act of viewing and create the illusion that each individual is secretly engaged

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1 Relevant to the instance I am discussing here is Laura Mulvey’s statement: “Woman then stands in a patriarchal culture as signifier for the male other, bound by a symbolic order in which man can live out his fantasies and obsessions through linguistic command by imposing them on the silent image of woman still tied to her place as bearer of meaning, not maker of meaning” (See Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema” in Philip Rosen ed., Narrative, Apparatus, Ideology: A Film Theory Reader, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986, p. 199).
in a voyeuristic exercise. By contrast, even when simulacra of the movie theatre conditions are recreated, such as the dimming of the lights and the arrangements of tables and chairs, the café space is too flexible and malleable to allow for a complete isolation of the individual viewer. Café audiences obviously have more freedom in speech and behaviour, a fact which contributes to the collectivization of the viewing experience. In fact, the regular interpellations of the television text, the intermittent comic routine which interrupts the flow of the show's narrative, the ribald language which disrupts the order the official discourse of the television text seeks to impose, and the subversive interpretations and explanations which are written on the margins of the official text all make of television viewing in cafés a more immediate and fascinating experience which is reminiscent of the marketplace ambiance.
In a neighbourhood café in Rabat, I witnessed a scene which indicates how café audiences can seamlessly move from a playful and detached tone to a more emotional involvement with the television text. The occasion was the evening news on the Moroccan channel 2. The lead story was the visit of the U.S. First Lady Hillary Clinton to Morocco. On that day, she happened to be visiting the southern region of the country where she spent the night in a camp in the desert. In the Moroccan imaginary, this region is notorious for its
being the land of practitioners of black magic, fuqha (plural from fiqih), local religious scholars believed to be endowed with spiritual and visionary powers which allow them to dig up buried ancient treasures but also, according to the desire of the client, to make a man fall blindly in love or render him sexually impotent. Commenting on the images on the television screen, the correspondent was explaining that the region in which Mrs. Clinton spent the night was famous for being the place of the most beautiful sunsets in the world when a member of the audience intoned, “You block-head! She is not here for the sunset or the sunrise, she is here because she’s got news of an efficient fiqih who can taqaf her husband (render him sexually impotent).” This comment drew wild laughter from the audience and generated conversations about the private lives of politicians abroad and in Morocco.

However, the second news story about NATO’s air attacks of Belgrade shifted both the tone and the theme of conversations among the café clientele. The war in the Balkans seemed to generate contradictory attitudes among the café audience. On one hand, there was clear approval of the air attacks by those who viewed the Balkan conflict in terms of the religious divide between the Muslim Bosnian community and the Serbs. Supporters of this position highlighted the ethnic genocide against the Kosovan Muslim community by the Serbian army. However, there was another group who, without condemning the air attacks, criticized the “arrogant” attitude of the West, and especially that of the U.S. government, which sought to impose its will on the rest of the world. Holders of this position insisted on drawing parallels between the air attacks on Belgrade and the raids on Baghdad. In addition, there was another group whose position was even more ambivalent. On one hand, this group seemed to favour the air strike against Belgrade but, on the other hand, holders of this position also showed their contentment when the correspondent reported news of an American warplane which was shot down by the Serbian army. One customer asked his friend who shouted his contentment at the news of the destroyed plane: “Are you for or against the strikes?” The answer came in the form of an ambivalent position which summarizes the attitude of the Arab peoples to the West: “I’m for no one. I want them to make the Serbs pay for the genocide they are committing but I also want the Americans to pay for all the sufferings they are making the children of Iraq endure.” However, while the café audience showed an ambivalent attitude towards the NATO’s air strikes
of Belgrade, there was a unanimous consensus against the "coward" position of Arab governments concerning both the war in the Balkans and the war against Iraq.

The examples discussed above show how café space functions as a platform for café audiences to fill in the gaps in the mainstream media text. Through playfulness, but also with a genuine emotional involvement, café customers rewrite television narratives in the light of their histories and the dynamics which organize their social lifeworld. Further, the fact that participation in debates and conversations does not require the observance of any decorum allows for a liberating spontaneity among the participants. It is true that a participant who utters "non-sense" can subject himself to ridicule but, most of the time, even derision is accommodated to cement the sociability of the group. Finally, if soap operas, films, and newscasts seem to draw significant audiences to cafés, football matches, especially those of the Moroccan national team, mobilize the largest audiences and convert even the cafés which do not usually have televisions into miniature stadiums. It is probably during football matches that the role of the café as a space which mediates communal emergence is most prominent. In the course of my fieldwork research, I watched quite a few football matches in different cafés and in different neighbourhoods and I have noted a similar behaviour within different audiences. Football matches of the national team are often the occasion for celebration when the team is winning -customers dancing on tables after the scoring of a goal, the teasing of those who are reluctant to give free vent to their joy-, or the occasion of a collective anger and dissatisfaction when the team is losing or not playing very well -some customers would even show their anger by breaking glasses or café tables, a fact they would regret later when they come back to pay for the damage they have caused. Susan Ossman has captured the spirit of national identity which televised football matches of the national team generate:

Throughout these televised matches, which were inundated by crowds, the streets were deserted. Those without televisions jammed cafés to catch each move of their favorite players' maneuvers. Only at halftime did people frantically rush away, by car or by foot, to get to another television set for the second half. The rhythms of entire cities were timed to the beat of the game.
In homes televisions blared at full volume when the Moroccan team played, especially during the game with Algeria. ¹

However, it must be noted that the majority of people who watch football matches in cafés do so, not because they do not have televisions at home, but for the playful and exciting ambiance which is created in café spaces. Most of my informants have confirmed the fact that for them, watching football matches is a collective experience which calls for commentaries, discussions, humour, and channels dense feelings and emotions. Quite a few of my informants stated that, for them, the entertainment was more in the interactions which take place inside the café than in the game itself. However, the point that I want to make is that the homogenizing feeling of national identity does not write off altogether the traces of subversive voices which imprint in the margins of the seemingly “alienating” entertainment show disparate narratives of social commentary which can often have a political edge. A player’s fatigue is attributed to the fact that he lives on “bread and mint tea,” a statement which constitutes a direct commentary on malnutrition from which the poor, especially in rural areas, suffer. In fact, while the fame of the Moroccan culinary art has crossed borders, “bread and tea” remains in the Moroccan popular imaginary as the “dish” of the poor. The bad conditions of the sports infrastructure is explained by the immoral racketeering of corrupted officials who use the taxpayers’ money for their own enrichment. The incorporation of a player judged to be ‘unfit’ to play for the national team is interpreted as a sign that the player enjoys the support of a high government official who imposes him on the team. This usually leads to commentaries on the social organization system which favours family, kinship or blood ties at the expense of competence and individual excellence. Further, the case of the current coach of the national team, who happens to be French, is almost always debated during the games of the team. The attitude of the Moroccan public to the national team coach is very much influenced by the ambivalent attitude of the general public to the French which has been shaped by the history of the French protectorate in Morocco (1912-1956), the experience of the Moroccan immigrant community in France but also by an awareness of the enduring impact of the French culture on the contemporary

Moroccan identity and lifestyle. Thus, despite the acknowledged competence of the coach and the excellent results the team has achieved under his direction, at the first occasion on which the team does not perform well, voices rise to call for his dismissal. When the team was not playing well in a recent game, one café customer remarked it was unfair that the coach was getting about the total salary of six Moroccan ministers. It was then I learnt that the French coach’s monthly salary was about $30,000. The fact that the average monthly salary of a Moroccan is about $200 explains the bitterness the general public can feel towards someone who makes in a month what an average Moroccan makes in more than a decade, and who is on top of it “French.” More than that, the café customer’s remark generated a spontaneous debate about the distribution of wages in Morocco and extensive commentaries were also made about the salaries of ministers, cabinet members, and high government officials. It must be noted here that even football matches which usually generate a homogenizing identity of “Moroccanness” are subject to subversion in café spaces where they can instead allow for the emergence of a community which is imagined in terms of economic and power status in the social structure. The “wordliness,” as Edward Said would have called it, of entertainment shows in café spaces makes it possible for communities with shared histories and experiences to build up solidarities.

What must also be underlined is that the café audience of football matches is almost exclusively male. I have noticed that in cases when women happen to be in the café, they almost always leave a few minutes after kick-off. On one occasion, a couple watched the first half of a game before they left. On this occasion, it was interesting to hear disparate voices reminding audience members “to watch their language” because of the presence of a woman in the audience. Indeed, women avoid cafés when a football match is broadcast because, in addition to the fact that cigarette smoke renders the atmosphere inside unbearable, audience members tend to revel in the use of profanities, curses, oaths, insults, and indecent language. As shown by the case of the couple, the presence of women in cafés during the broadcast of a football match inconveniences both the woman and the male audience. When the café has a sheltered terrace, it is part of café etiquette for couples to move outside to “liberate” the male television audience.
The dominant communication medium in cafés remains the radio. There is hardly a café which is not equipped with a stereo tuner. It is true that some cafés, especially the salons de thé which cater to a young clientele from the upper middle-class, tend to play recorded Western music. However, café owners and managers generally find ways to accommodate the different tastes of their clientele. In the cafés I have researched, I have noted that in the morning and late afternoon busy times, café owners find it convenient to tune up to a radio station. On one hand, the café personnel do not have to worry about changing or reversing the audio tape. On the other, radio programmes during these times are diverse enough to suit the different tastes of café customers. In all the cafés I have researched, I have noted that all the radios are tuned up to the radio station Radio Méditerranée Internationale (Medi Internationale) which broadcasts from Tangiers. Medi Internationale is a private station, co-owned by Moroccan and French interest groups, which broadcasts in both Arabic and French. The programming in this station is centered around news and music. Newscasts are alternately in Arabic and French and “a song by Oum Kalsoum [the late Egyptian diva of the Arabic song] immediately succeeds Samantha Fox’s latest hit.”¹ The diverse programmes of this station make it appeal to the wide and different audiences of cafés.² During the café’s morning busy hours (between 7:00 a.m. and 9:00 a.m.) there are two main news broadcasts, one in Arabic and one in French, two relatively shorter ones, four news flashes, two main sports programmes, in Arabic and French, a review of the international press, a focus by an expert on a major national or international event, and all these programmes are punctuated by songs and commercials. Most of my interviewees have underlined the fact that they generally get their media morning news while having their breakfast in cafés. Depending on the importance of the day’s

² "In public places with a high affluence, cafés, businesses [...] it is this station which is selected “to satisfy everybody” (Mounia Bennani-Chraibi, Soumis et rebelles: les jeunes au maroc, 1994, p. 47). “According to a survey made by SECODIP International, the radio stations which have a daily audience are the RTM in Arabic 61%, Medi I 44%, the RTM in French 17%. The last two stations have the highest rates in young audiences. With respect to the foreign radio stations received in Morocco, and in the age category between 15-20 years, Spanish and Algerian radios come first with a rate of 20%; the BBC comes next with a rate of 18%; RFI has an audience rate of 14% and France Inter 9%. For the age category between 20-29, the BBC is first with 20% audience rate, RFI and Radio Alger are second with 16%, then Spanish radios with 13% and, finally, France Inter with 12%” (footnoted in Mounia Bennani-Chraibi, Soumis et rebelles: les jeunes au maroc, 1994, p. 48).
news, news broadcasts usually generate conversations and debates among customers. Customers who have already listened to or watched news programmes on other radio stations or satellite channels tend to use the information they have to comment on and analyze the Medi I news broadcasts.
Figure 29. Interface between café Balima and the House of Parliament.
In conclusion, I need to reiterate the fact that media consumption in cafés generates a dynamics of audience response, interpretation, and behaviour which is typical of this space. Cafés and situations differ and customers come and go, but what holds sway among café communities is their awareness of the liminality of the café space and their belief in the imagined histories and experiences they share as café customers and as actors in the social world. In their ethnographic study of Spanish newspaper journalists and their readers in café-bars (bares), Machin and Carrithers (1996) propose to substitute “communities of improvisation” for “communities of interpretation” to comprehend the small scale changes which affect everyday experiences in the lifeworld:

The work done by the notion of a community of improvisation here is twofold. On the one hand, it captures a dimension of everyday experience and everyday talk that is pervasive. People do change in their attitudes and expressions from moment to moment and from setting to setting. On the other hand, these changes add up to much larger changes as well, amounting to a process of continual historical change, which is so deeply a part of our collective character. This is an ontological point: by describing this Spanish material as emanating from a community of improvisation we assert that this social world, like other social worlds, is composed of such a change. By contrast, the notion of an interpretive community, like an older notion of cultural in cultural anthropology, shows a collectivity of people as holding a uniform set of attitudes and beliefs across all members. But this idea has its own ontology, an ontology

1 In a café in El-Jadida, a customer enters and sees an acquaintance of his, he goes to greet him and, in a teasing tone, tells him, “How come I find you in every café I go to? Don’t you have anything to do?” His acquaintance greets him in return, and in a similar tone, answers back: “Doesn’t it occur to you that I could say the same thing about you?” He pauses, then adds, “I am looking for the same thing as you!” The newcomer pulls a chair and sits down. None of them tries to explain “the thing” they are looking for in cafés but, judging from the spirit of conviviality they show as they are later joined by a group of three, it was obvious that whatever “thing” they were looking for was either provided by or subordinated to the atmosphere of sociability the café space creates.
specifying that people will always act in a set fashion according to the uni-dimensional set of values they hold.¹

While I have noted changes in café customers’ attitudes either during their commentaries on media programmes or during conversations on matters of general concern, I do not think the notion of “communities of improvisation” captures all the dynamics at play in café contexts. The notion of “communities of improvisation” makes it sound as if café customers operated in a vacuum. Indeed, my ethnographic research has not sorted out any “ontological fact” about café communities. On the contrary, the social world of the café seems to bring into relief the dominant issues which characterize the social lifeworld. Issues of gender, class, age, identity, power, play, leisure, employment, and unemployment are all foregrounded in the spatial premises of cafés. I do not claim that a study of café communities can unproblematically be extended to comment on the flux and struggles which affect the society at large. Yet, I contend that the café space allows for a closer analysis of some of the dominant social contradictions which run through post-traditional Moroccan society. At the same time, cafés allow for the emergence of communities with shared histories, experiences and a pronounced awareness of their position within the power balance which characterizes the social lifeworld. Even in the seemingly most playful situations, café participants are likely to underline their positions in the stratified society in which they live.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that café space mediates the formation and emergence of subaltern communities. The communal emergence which the café space constructs transcends the organizing principles of professional interest or neighbourhood identity and allows café communities to develop a sense of class and gender awareness and a shared understanding of the dynamic which regulates their lifeworld. I have also argued that café etiquette and strategies of sociability make of the café a liminal space where discourse and performance often manifest themselves in a subversive playfulness. I

have also maintained that café behaviour plays out the contradictions which define gender politics in post-traditional Morocco. Though café-going for women is still bracketed by the dominant patriarchal order, the growing presence of women in cafés is reconstructing café behaviour and affecting the transformation of gender relations in post-traditional Morocco.

I have also examined how café subaltern communities rewrite the notions of the public and the private, of the individual and the collective, of performance and spectatorship. The encroachment of the café on public space reconstructs public behaviour as in the case of women crossing the street to avoid the gaze of café terrace users. Conversely, terrace users themselves become a target for gossip for pedestrians. Similarly, communication and performance inside cafés are not bracketed within a rational-critical normative model. On the contrary, while rationality presupposes a noise-free dialogue, noise is an integrated component of café talk and ambiance. Silence, too, is an essential element of café experience. In fact, the communicative and performative act inside cafés is discontinuous and disruptive. Likewise, café dialogue can drift from a discussion of private and family concerns to an exchange of information on job issues to a debate on political and social matters.

However, it can not be stressed enough that the café is not only imagined as a “utopia” but also operates as an institution of control. It is a commonplace belief among café users that café space constitutes an important operational site for under-cover agents and moqqadems (agents of local authorities) who use it to gather information about café clientele and families in the neighbourhood. Similarly, the ambivalent conquest by women of café space has also made of cafés a site of exploitation of women. In fact, quite a few cafés have developed the reputation of catering to a clientele of prostitutes and pimps. In such cafés, women are subjected to exploitation by owners, pimps, and café users. From this viewpoint, the café contributes actively to the reproduction of the prevailing power relations. In short, subalternity should not be read off or mapped onto the café. The café is not a neutral space. It is a site and a nexus where subaltern resistance is performed but also a spatial practice which can reproduce the existing power relations. In the next chapter, I examine the contribution of the Moroccan film to the ongoing debate on post-tradition.
Chapter Six

Post-Traditional Aesthetics:
The Moroccan Film and the Politics of Everyday

In the two previous case studies, I explored social spaces where processes of people’s everyday performance and communication can be observed. I have argued that the feminine space of women’s hammam and the predominantly masculine space of the café must be put in the perspective of the politics of spatial production and distribution which order the behaviours and interactions of post-traditional communities. In this chapter, I seek to delineate the contribution of cinematic expression to the debate on post-tradition and the anticipated project of a more emancipatory society. The choice of cinema is premised on two main assumptions. First, the making of post-tradition is a process rendered possible not only through everyday performance and communication but also through aesthetic and symbolic reconstructions of competing and antagonistic worldviews. Second, unlike other audio-visual media, cinema allows more creative freedom and independence for an aesthetic mediation of ambivalent and contradictory individual and communal voices. Though film production is subjected to a number of financial, technical, and institutional limitations which reflect on the creative expression of filmmakers, the institution of cinema plays a more active role in the mediation of the contradictions of everyday life than the state controlled television text or many other art forms.

1 This is, for example, how the filmmaker Abdelkader Lagtaâ defines the limits of the Moroccan television text in dealing with the social changes affecting people’s everyday life: “Our national production is subjected to more rigid rules than imported foreign production. This discrimination between local and foreign productions is motivated by the absurd assumption that our moral principles and ethics are superior to theirs. While the representation of erotic desires and political and social opinions is tolerated in foreign productions, we are condemned to repress ours and live them only as dreams [...] In fact, unable to keep pace with the changes occurring in society and incapable of articulating the ideas which could contribute to our self-awareness, our television fictions limit themselves to the most superficial manifestations of our reality. We are continually aggressed by populist, and even obscurantist, discourses mediated by characters which have nothing to do with the desiring and sexual subjects that we are” (A. Lagtaâ, “Entre cinema et télévision: le spectre du réel” in L'opinion, vendredi 30 Avril, 1999, p. 6).

2 John D. Downing summarizes the universal dimension of film art as follows: “More than literature, more than the plastic arts, more even than theatre, film can communicate to an audience that will never travel, beyond and through the pungency of a specific work of art, the
Cinema is an industry, a technology, an institution, a commodity, an art form, and a medium of mass education and entertainment. It is implicated in a complex system of competing and conflicting interests. The stakes are even higher for most Arab and African cineasts who work in a complex system of contradictory forces. Their creative vision and expression are jeopardized by the financial and technical limitations of their national film industries. Their commitment to a poetics of resistance is often toned down by oppressive political structures or foreign production companies which exercise hegemonizing control over the entire processes of production and distribution. Moreover, if attempts to establish a solid base for a cinema that could re-produce images of the African and Arab peoples’ struggles and desires have been mitigated by economic, technological, and political limitations, the prospects for the future are not necessarily optimistic. The transnationalization of capital, the rewriting of international laws and regulations on trade and tariffs, and the ever-growing power and monopoly of Hollywood industry all combine to further bracket the space of creativity and recognition for African and Arab artists. Given the fragile structures of most African and Arab countries, the global implications of free market economies may render their already disadvantaged national film industries more vulnerable.

This chapter proceeds from the preliminary assumption that the historical trajectory of the Moroccan film can not be coherently mapped in oversight of the trends which have affected the general course of Arab and African cinemas. The historical experience of the Arab and African peoples with colonialism, their subsequent post-colonial disillusionments, and their collective anticipation of a more liberating and emancipatory societal project have mediated the emergence of cinemas with convergent aesthetic and thematic representations. It is not my intention to homogenize the emotional, cultural and political dynamics of another people. At certain points, some of the universals of historical human experience stand revealed precisely because of, and in, a specific, local drama” (John D. Downing, ed., Film and Politics in the Third World, New York: Autonomedia, 1987, p. x).

1 Ferid Boughedir has argued that the affinities between Maghrebian (especially in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia) and African cinemas were predominant during the decades of the 1960’s and 1970’s while in the last two decades, a shift in direction has been recorded. African filmmakers, he contends, have turned their focus to local cultural specificities while Maghrebian cineasts seem to have moved from “the local” to the “universal.” This may have been the case in the 1980’s. However, over the last decade, Moroccan filmmakers have shown a genuine interest in the specificity of their immediate cultural context. In fact, more films have
distinctive aesthetics of Arab and African national cinemas but rather to dovetail the signposts which have characterized the cinematic language and style of cineasts on the African continent and in the Arab world. In fact, despite their distinctive expressions, there is at least one common cause which brings most African and Arab filmmakers together, namely their declared commitment to a poetics of resistance. Given the context in which they work, for the most fortunate film director, the fact of making a film is in itself an act of resistance. The purpose behind an analytical account of the convergences which have made the distinctive identity of Arab and African cinemas is to trace a road-map for the discussion of emergent post-traditional aesthetics.

In this chapter, I use the notion of “post-traditional aesthetics” in a descriptive sense to differentiate the nascent aesthetics not only from political cinema but also from commercial films. Post-traditional film is aesthetically and thematically subversive. It is a site for confrontation between conflicting lifestyles and contradictory worldviews. It mediates individual and collective desires and anxieties and reconstructs the ambiguous and ambivalent everyday performances of post-traditional subjects. I do not claim that we can yet talk about a fully-fledged post-traditional cinema. Neither do I hold that post-traditional style has emerged only since the late 1980’s. On the contrary, post-tradition is an on-going

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1 Arab and African films have been traditionally discussed within the more complex and problematic area of “Third World Cinema.” Formerly used to designate the united political stand of Arab, African, Asian, and South American filmmakers and to demarcate a perceived unity underlining their work, the label “Third World Film” has gradually lost unanimity among academics and film critics. Its opponents have long argued that this appellation has imposed itself as an easy way to “dump” distinct styles and conventions into a “shapeless sack,” as Regis Debray might have said (Regis Debray, quoted in Barbara Harlowe, Resistance Literature London: Methuen, 1987, p. 60). Here, I would like to state that some of the works I have referenced contain the term “Third World Cinema.” However, I can safely state that their authors did not use this term in any ideologically biased way. To speak only of those I know, Gabriel Teshome is a Nigerian film critic who has written substantially about African cinema and John D. Downing, my professor at the Radio, Television, Film department, the University of Texas at Austin, has been actively working to bring Arab and African cinemas to US audiences. In the “Foreword” to his edited Film and Politics in the Third World, he writes that his aim is to communicate “the fascination of little-known artistic excellence (with a political sting)” and develop “international comprehension in a nation [the US] which seems bent on understanding neither itself nor others” (John D. Downing, ed., Film and Politics in the Third World, New York: Autonomedia, 1987, p. x).
process and only a more quantitative and qualitative accumulation of films could sort out the defining orientations of post-traditional aesthetics. Hamid Benani’s “Tattoo” (1970) or Mohamed Reggab’s “The Barber of the Quarter of the Poor” (1982), for instance, have deployed a masterful use of post-traditional aesthetics. In short, the emancipatory thrust of post-traditional aesthetics generates an ambivalent site where individuals and groups can negotiate spatial and temporal contradictions and conflicts. In the sample I analyze later in this chapter, the protagonists share an incommensurable desire for freedom and liberation. However, their struggle for a more emancipatory social space also unveils their self-contradictions and internal conflicts. Their life stories inscribe on the hegemonizing worldview of a conservative culture narratives of desire and anxiety. Their subversive voices and noises mediate self-contradictions and aspirations trapped in a repressive social space from which they yearn to break free.

This chapter is divided into three main sections. In the first section, I delineate the politics of film production in Africa and the Arab world. I argue that though film industry in the majority of Arab and African countries is deeply enmeshed in an inherited structure of economic and political dependence, filmmakers have generally been able to negotiate a balance between the financial demands of the industry and the space of creativity they need. I also discuss two positive experiences in the history of African documentary films: the super 8 project in Mozambique and the Yoruba theatre in Nigeria. In the second section, I analyze the dimensions of African and Arab political cinemas. I argue that this cinematic style is influenced by a Marxist vision. African and Arab filmmakers have sought to represent class contradictions, exploitation, and social injustices. In the final section, I focus on Moroccan cinema. I first lay out the reality about film industry in Morocco before I analyze a sample of post-traditional films to show their contribution to the on-going debate on post-tradition and the politics of everyday life. My choice of Abderrahmane Tazi’s “Badis” (1988) and “In Search for a Husband for My Wife” (1993) is motivated by the status of the cineast who is considered a pioneer of Moroccan cinema, the impact the two films have had on the Moroccan public, in addition to the fact that the two films reveal a self-conscious commitment to the cinematic representation of everyday life contradictions, anxieties, desires, and dreams which make up post-traditional identities. I have also chosen to include Daoud Aoulad-Syad’s “Good-bye
Fair” (1998) because though this is the first feature film of a photographer converted into filmmaking, it carries an original transgressive sting which compels the spectator into acknowledging areas of marginalized practices rarely tapped by Moroccan cinema. Through a reconstruction of the marginalized community of the fair, especially the cultural figure of the cross-dressed dancer, Daoud Aoulad-Syad has managed to drive home the idea that gender identity is a mere social construct. In a patriarchal structure where spatial and temporal marginalization of women has been enshrined, “Goodbye Fair” commands a special attention. Finally, cutting across these objectives, it is also my purpose to help bring the distinctive style of Moroccan, Arab, and African cinemas to an English-speaking public. In what follows, I delineate the politics of film production which have affected the historical course of Arab and African cinemas.

A. Arab and African Filmmaking and the Political Economy of Dependence

African filmmakers who met during the XIV Ouagadougou Film Festival in Burkina Faso celebrated the centenary of cinema. The film festival was also an occasion to honour the pioneers of African cinema and to pay a tribute to the Art of filmmaking. However, one hundred years after the invention of cinema, African film directors are still debating the frustrations they encounter. When, for example, the Mauritanian cineast Med Hondo wanted to make a film on the dehumanizing treatment of African immigrants in France during the era of Charles Pasqua, the conservative French minister of Interior, he needed six years to find an institution to finance his project and the intervention of two presidents, François Mitterand of France and the president of Mali, to get permission to shoot on location in the two countries. When the Moroccan filmmaker Moumen Smihi made his “44 or Tales of the Night” (1982) (“44 ou les récits de la nuit”) (a French-Moroccan co-production), which deals with the history of Morocco during the 44 years of French protectorate, he had to cast French actors to play the roles of Moroccan nationalists. So when the young filmmaker Idrissa Toure, whose “Haramuya” was widely acclaimed during the Ouagadougou festival, joked about the African filmmakers’ dependence on state and foreign patronage, he struck a sensitive note which did not please his audience. To the pioneers of
African filmmaking, whose experiences with colonial and neo-colonial cinemas can be told in the form of an epic, Idrissa Toure's statement must have seemed as removed from reality as are the melodramas and romances which flood the African market.

For peoples in the South, the struggle to reclaim their history and culture has proved to be as arduous as was the struggle for their political independence. Colonial and post-colonial powers, working subtly through a combination of economic domination, political subjugation, and stereotyped re-presentations, exercise a hegemonizing control over the production and circulation of cultural signs and images. The filmmaking industry illustrates this political economy of dependence and domination. Cinema was first introduced to Africa and the Arab world as a colonial industry. African and Arab audiences had to consume films which mediated blatant ethnocentric prejudices against their histories, civilizations, and cultures. At one end, the perpetuation of racial and cultural stereotypes sought to legitimatize the colonial enterprise in the eyes of the people at the metropolis. At the other end, the ideological implications of cinematic representations worked in various ways to estrange the colonized from their own historical and cultural identity. The articulated mission of the institution of cinema was:

to supply a cultural and ideological justification for the political domination and economic exploitation [...] The cinema, just like education, archeology, books and newspapers, conspired in the falsification of reality whereby the colonizer was a technician, a man of progress, from a superior culture and civilization, while the native was a primitive, incapable of technical progress or of mastering his passions, the next best thing to a wild beast (even if he could on occasion be "proud and generous").

The audio and visual powers of cinema rendered the stereotyped encapsulation of Africans and Arabs more effective. Exotic landscapes and bizarre rituals combined with colonial discourse to mythologize and reify the people and their life-histories. As late as 1958, William Sellers, a key figure in the colonial Film Unit supported the argument that entertainment films

made for Western audiences should not be shown to Africans because such films "set out to falsify the facts of life, and would not only be misleading but dangerous when shown to illiterate rural audiences in rural Africa."¹

The quantification of African audiences was meant to enforce the social stratification of African societies. The colonial powers developed a strategy that would subsequently create a problematic issue for the newly independent Arab and African film makers. In the colonies, Western arts and values were accessible only to local elites who were allowed into film theatres:

the showing of recent and prestigious films in modern air-conditioned cinemas charging admission prices so high as to limit the audience to European expatriates and members of the Westernized elites. Here cinema forms just one part of that wave of cultural influences [...] Like the introduction of television transmission in a context where a television set costs more than a peasant family's entire annual income, cinema in this form can only enhance social divisions and constitute yet one further aspect of the ideological control of native elites—a key feature of neo-colonialism.²

The assumption was that by condoning the African "development" within the framework of the Western paradigm, the colonial powers hoped to short-circuit potential resistances and to preserve a lasting hegemony over the continent. Native elites were socialized into Western values and lifestyles in an attempt to alienate them from the social reality of local populations. The Senegalese filmmaker Ousmane Sembene has drawn attention to the social fracture which divides the people and the Westernized elite:

My attitude then was that there was nothing wrong with imposing the French language on the films, because the French language was a fact of life. But on the other hand the peasants were quick to point out to me that I was the one who was

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alienated because they would have preferred the film in their own language without the French.¹

The controversial issue concerning mediation through the colonizer's language at the expense of the native vernacular has generated contradictory views and opinions among Arab and African intellectuals and academics.² For filmmakers, the issue has been more complex. They are compelled to work with a technology controlled by the colonizer, produce under a series of limitations, and address an audience socialized into Western cinematic conventions and aesthetics. Roy Armes has pointed out the "alien" character of cinema as a form of communication in the countries of the South:

As a modern form of communication, cinema has characteristics that set it off from earlier, traditional forms. Oral communication is universal, and its forms are indigenous, having grown out of specific cultures in which they are rooted historically. Most advanced societies have their own culturally specific forms of written communication, which, even if scripts or alphabets are imported, have usually evolved over hundreds of years. This situation is no longer true, however, when we talk of a modern medium of communication like the cinema. Though now widely distributed throughout the world, the cinema is the product of a limited number of Western countries at a particular recent point in their historical development. For all Third World countries, then, film is an imported form of communication.³

¹ Quoted in Lizbeth Malkmus and Roy Armes, Arab and African Film Making, 1991, p. 171.
² The Algerian writer Mouloud Mammeri, for example, defends his use of French by contending that for him, the French language is not "at all the shameful language of an enemy, but an incomparable instrument of liberation and secondly, of communication with the rest of the world. I consider that it translates [traduit] us more than it betrays [trahit] us" (quoted in Lizbeth Malkmus and Roy Armes, Arab and African Film Making, 1991, p. 27). For the Moroccan sociologist Abdelkhir Khatibi, “[irony] might not only have been a kind of displaced revenge on the part of the oppressed colonized seduced by the West, but would have also allowed the francophone North African writer to take his own distance on the language by inventing it, destroying it and presenting new structures to the point where the French reader would feel a stranger in his own language” (quoted in Barbara Harlowe, Resistance Literature, London: Methuen, 1987, p. 23).
³ Roy Armes, Third World Film Making and the West, 1987, p. 35.
Moreover, in most cases, the creative freedom of Arab and African filmmakers is more often jeopardized by financial and technological constraints than by artistic alienation:

The newspapers were of little help because fewer than one fifth of the citizens in any country could read. Therefore, along with the radio stations, film was the best tool for reaching people. However, unlike the radio stations which all the new governments acquired, films were not within reach of the independent countries for two reasons: Francophone countries lacked production structures and the means to acquire them, and they also lacked production film technicians and, in many instances, directors. It was under these conditions that any help was welcomed from the technologically advanced countries, be it donations of movie projectors or offers to film the independent celebration of a country.¹

Because of their weak national film industries, filmmakers have been forced to work in collaboration with foreign producers. In fact, most African countries signed a contract with the French consortium Audio-Visual International (C.A.I.) which agreed to produce educational films and documentaries. France, as a case in point, seized this opportunity to institutionalize its assimilationist policy and cultural hegemony over its ex-colonies. Filmmakers who work under the condescending supervision of foreign producers soon realize they have to accommodate their artistic expression to Western worldviews. Ousmane Sembene has testified to the implications of co-production with European companies:

Co-production with the West is often tainted with paternalism, and it is an economic dependency which, as such, gives the West the right to view Africa in a way I can not bear. Sometimes, one is also coerced into consenting to commercial concessions. In a

word, Europeans often have a conception of Africa that is not ours.¹

Furthermore, the disillusionment of filmmakers has been accentuated by the policies adopted by most Arab and African states. Film subsidies have often been conditioned by the endorsement of the official interpretations of reality. The state's control of production and distribution has further bracketed filmmakers' contribution to the social development of their communities. Censorship and moral and physical coercion have led most Arab and African filmmakers to either work in exile or make fundamental concessions. This is why it is of paramount importance to take into consideration the blending of artistic, political, technological, and economic realities when analyzing Arab and African cinemas:

In a place [Africa] where there hadn't been a structure and a tradition of National cinemas before, they [filmmakers] had believed that all that was needed, in addition to their own commitment to making films, was the support of the state, which they thought was determined to create national cinemas. Feeling strongly about what they had to say and imagining themselves free to express it, they did not doubt that a limit could be put on their freedom to act.²

Besieged by hegemonizing systems from both the centre and the periphery, Arab and African filmmakers have to rely on their personal contacts to raise the funds for their films. The situation of independent filmmaking is a precarious enterprise even in economically powerful countries such as the United States, let alone in countries of the South:

Being a freelance worker in a Third World country means walking the high wire without a safety net. There is no social protection, no unemployment benefit, no social security, no

right to a pension. A bohemian life of a kind long forgotten in the West. An artist's life, absolute risk, total dependence on the patron, the prince (that is today, the state).\(^1\)

It is within these economic and political realities that Arab and African film makers are called upon to produce and create. And this is why they deserve high tributes, be it only for the fact that they have relentlessly fought all adversities and hostile forces to contribute to the development of their peoples. Their struggle is their most valuable contribution.

Arab and African filmmakers take it as their first duty to use film for development purposes. They have all along been sensitive to the people's needs and aspirations. Kwame Boato depicts post-independence Africa in the following terms:

Black African countries have emerged from the struggle for political independence only to find themselves in a seemingly intractable liberation struggle against an inadequate supply of food, water, shelter, and clothing; an ever-increasing population growth rate; low life expectancy; high infant mortality; and continuous political and economic strife, creating millions of political and economic refugees [...] Most parts of black Africa are faced with deep-seated political and economic crises and are plagued by drought, famine, poverty and illiteracy.\(^2\)

Aware of the potential emancipatory power of cinema, Arab and African film-makers have chosen to carry on the struggle. Moreover, the field of communication in Africa is still subjected to strict regulations, as the Yaounde Declaration states:

In Africa, in the communication field, more perhaps than in any other, the prevailing situation is the direct result of the heritage of colonization. Political independence has not always been


followed by a decolonization of cultural life or the elimination of many alienating factors, imposed by the colonial system. Communication structures still conform to the old colonial patterns and not to the needs and aspirations of African peoples.\footnote{Ibid. p. 108.}

The independent African countries have either underestimated the ideological role intrinsic to the means of communication or, closer to truth, post-independence governments have not considered it to their advantage to democratize and liberate the media. Indeed, the African people would soon realize they are not to expect much from state-controlled media. Despite the limitations imposed on them, Arab and African cinemas have been able to create a liberated space where people can find cultural, political, and social cinematic representations of their needs and aspirations. In addition to its capacity to reach a wide audience, film can also converse with urban and rural populations and educated and illiterate alike.

\section*{B. Cinema for Development: 
The Case of the Documentary Film}

The case of documentary films, which are information-oriented and usually intended for technical development projects, is controversial and needs a close evaluation. The controversy stems from the fact that they are perceived by the target population as propaganda films which seek to mystify reality. The fact is that the developmentalist bias in the majority of educational films follows the principle of a unidimensional top-down communication. Decisions are often taken in administration offices and the communication is passed down to the beneficiaries in the form of governmental orders. The exclusive appropriation of documentary films by the state has limited the participation of committed filmmakers who are generally suspicious of the ideological intentions behind developmental projects. Conversely, film technicians are usually state employees who show little interest in the quality of the films they produce. The point that Santi P. 

\footnote{Ibid. p. 108.}
Chowdhury makes about India is perfectly applicable to the Arab and African realities:

Many of those [documentary films] are what I should call hard working films- informing the public about projects and processes, techniques and training, organizations and achievements. I have no quarrel with them except that they are charred out by a sausage factory. Considerations of quality have the least priority and many of those films are too cluttered in terms of concepts, locations etc., and above all damaged by bureaucratic interference. It is a wonder that a few good films emerge every year out of this mess.¹

Furthermore, what filmmakers find most outrageous is the fact that huge budgets are allocated to government-supervised films which more often than not remain lacking in quality and objectives.

Though African and Arab governments' involvement in developmental filmmaking began only in the early 1960's, a thirty year experience is largely sufficient to make assessments and draw conclusions. As a case in point, various suggestions have been made by communication specialists and film critics to render films more efficient in promoting and communicating development. Subbana, for example, argues that the phrase "cinema for development" has lost its quintessential meaning. To restore to the phrase its substance, he suggests that "total cinema" for "total development" be encouraged. Moreover, development must be conceived as an all-encompassing entity and cinema "must touch the people as the expression of man's total awareness (of body, mind and intellect and visual consciousness and the sum of all these)."²

Srinivasan offers another perspective. He criticizes developmental films for stressing the "final product" instead of "the sense of conflict, striving, excitement and change that is inherent in development."³ His point is that

¹ Santi P. Chowdhury, "Films for Development" in Symposium on Cinema in Developing Countries, New Delhi: Publications Division, 1979, p. 80.
films for development should underline the human consequences of
development projects, be made in consultation with the film users, and be
projected by a development agent and not only a projectionist.

However, while there is a general consensus concerning the fact that
developing countries can not afford not to make films, many find it ironic
that some African countries still spend enormous sums of money to hire
Westerners to direct developmental films. With respect to this issue, Diawara
states:

With the number of film makers available in Africa today, it is
ironic that some Anglophone African countries call upon
Westerners to direct documentaries and educational films
intended for Africans. Coproductions are desirable, but, if
possible they should be between African nations. There are
many reasons why I assert this principle. First, by using Africans,
the producers will spend less. Second, by its double or triple
nationality, it increases the chances that it will recoup its cost
among an African audience. Coproduction among Africans may
also put to full use the equipment in such countries [...] where all
the production facilities exist but feature films are rare. Most
important, aesthetical films run far less risk of misinterpreting
African cultures and reifying African people when made by
African directors.1

To this effect, Ahmad Abass Khwaya argues that while technological means
and technical skills may be imported from abroad, creativity is to be generated
internally and indigenously. Historical experiences have shown that
indigenous creativity has made it possible to overcome the problem of
resources. He predicts that developing countries would do better by
enhancing the creativity of their aspiring filmmakers than by spending
millions of dollars on cinema equipment and machinery for film production.

It is a fact that Arab and African exploitation of cinema for development
has not been very effective. However, two experiences launched by two
African countries stand out as worthy of consideration. The first experience

was carried out by the Mozambican Institute of Communication in 1978 and is now known as the Super 8 project. The project came out of a co-production between Mozambique and France and was supervised by the French director Jean Rouch -who was later joined by Jean-Luc Godard who was in his turn doing a video project for the Mozambican government. Despite the heavy criticism it has generated because of the involvement of a colonial country, the project remains an illuminating experience for African nations. As Rouch put it, the project consisted of teaching African students "to write with a camera." His innovation was the use of the super 8 to produce films for development purposes. Though he amusingly called such films *cartes postales* (postcards), Jean Rouch was very enthusiastic about the project:

> The thing is that I have finally realized that it is not a dream to teach people to write with a camera [...] One can make people who know how to write with a camera, and write simple things.\(^1\)

In four months, the group produced several short films. Rouch documented the stages of the team's work as follows:

> They shot in the morning, processed at twelve o'clock, looked at the film at one, did the editing between three and five. In the evening they returned to the marketplace, set the electrical facilities in place and projected the film to the people they filmed in the morning.\(^2\)

The films were about people's everyday life performances: markets, hospital employees and patients, and government officers. They were highly informative and, through their realist mode of representation, they challenged the viewer to participate in the creation of the scenes. Moreover, they questioned the "direct address" strategy which was the dominant convention in both film and television documentaries. This style of *cinema verité* does not have to be "simple minded." Some of the films turned out to

\(^2\) Ibid.
be excellent and the accumulation of experiences inevitably led to quality improvement. Moreover, the super 8 project seems to be not only practical but financially less cumbersome.

The second experience is about the initiative taken by the Nigerian government which, in 1972, decreed what has come to be known as the "Indigenization Act." The decision consisted of providing exclusive monopoly over distribution and exhibition of film features to Nigerian investors. This governmental decision has generated many advantages. It has led to the creation of a National Film Distribution Company which has helped regulate the policy of distribution and exhibition and, thus, enabled the Nigerian feature film to compete with imported productions. A quota system which forces theatre owners to run one Nigerian film for every ten foreign productions they show has been implemented. In such a context, the national filmmaker is protected from unbalanced competition. Moreover, this institution has created new jobs and has kept the capital inside the country.

More importantly, now that filmmakers can recoup the cost of production, more businessmen and stars become attracted to film industry. In 1976, a star of the popular Yoruba theatre -Ade "Love" Folayan- featured in a very successful film made by Ola Balogun. This experience has inspired more Yoruba theatre stars to adapt their plays to cinema. The spontaneous and smooth union of film and the Yoruba theatre has given birth to the "Yoruba Cinema." Indeed, the newly-born cinema is not only affordable -the Yoruba theatre comes to cinema fully equipped- but also provides an alternative to Western productions:

This cinema is not only relevant to the social conditions of Nigeria because it reflects stories and spectacles based on everyday life and on the collective myths, but it also provides an aesthetic and economic alternative to the Western superproduction. For Soyinka, the Yoruba cinema can manipulate the technology provided by film to evolve a new art form for the masses, as opposed to an elitist art form open only to the intellectual.¹

The Yoruba Cinema may be criticized for its exotic sting for there may be indeed some truth in the claim that an incorporation of popular arts into film might impair the artistic potential inherent in both forms of expression. However, Africans have learnt by now that everyday life treasures a wealth of cinematic narratives and stories which, if successfully exploited, can generate the emancipation of their cinemas. After all, the identity of African cinema may be in the amalgam of popular culture and personal creativity.

The Super 8 project and the Indigenization Act provide evidence that Arab and African cinemas can produce films for development that meet peoples' needs and expectations in quality and quantity. The governments' appropriation and often mismanagement of developmental films has limited the output the projects are supposed to achieve. Yet, they can also make the appropriate decision to endow their national cinemas with a favourable context for progress. In the next section, I analyze the aesthetics of Arab and African political cinemas.

C. Arab and African Cinemas and the Aesthetics of Political Film

Political cinema has been built around the objective of combating imperialism and neo-colonialism on national and international levels. The primary goal of filmmakers is to destroy the Hollywood model and to set up instead an alternative cinema which would lead to the liberation of the oppressed. This paradigm has been called by Fernando Solanas and Octavio Getino (1969) "Third Cinema":

The anti-imperialist struggle of the peoples of the Third World and of their equivalents inside the imperialist countries constitutes today the axis of the world revolution. Third cinema is, in our opinion, the cinema that recognizes in that struggle of the most gigantic cultural, scientific, and artistic manifestation of our time, the great possibility of constructing a liberated
personality with each people as the starting point- in a word, the decolonization of culture.¹

In the same vein, filmmakers who met in Algiers in 1973 defined the role of cinema as follows:

The role of cinema in the process consists of manufacturing films reflecting the objective conditions in which the struggling peoples are developing, i.e., films which bring about desalienation of the colonized peoples at the same time as they contribute sound and objective information for the peoples of the Third World, including the oppressed classes of the colonizing countries, and place the struggle of their peoples in the general context of the struggle of the countries and peoples of the Third World. This requires from the militant film maker a dialectical analysis of the socio-historic phenomenon of colonization.²

The defining characteristic of Third Cinema is its call for armed struggle to achieve the decolonization of culture. Third Cinema prevailed mainly in the early seventies and was largely adopted by South American filmmakers who, after the success of the Cuban revolution, predicted the triumph over home dictators and international imperialism through armed struggle. The conceptual framework of this international guerrilla film was phrased by Solanas and Getino in the following terms:

a guerrilla cinema, at this stage still within the reach of limited layers of the population, is, nevertheless, the only cinema of the masses possible today, since it is the only one involved with the interests, aspirations, and prospects of the vast majority of the people. Every important film produced by a revolutionary cinema will be, explicit or not, a national event of the masses.

This cinema of the masses, which is prevented from reaching beyond the sectors representing the masses, provokes with each showing, as in a revolutionary military incursion, a liberated space, a decolonized territory. The showing can be turned into a kind of political event, which according to Fanon, could be a liturgical act, a privileged occasion for human beings to hear and be heard. Militant cinema must be able to extract the infinity of new possibilities that open up for it from the conditions of proscription imposed by the system. The attempt to overcome neocolonial oppression calls for the invention of forms of communication; it opens up the possibility.  

The vision which orders guerrilla cinema is uncompromising. The success of the revolutionary film is measured by the extent to which it is able to "summon" people for action. Rather than mere denunciation, the guerrilla film seeks immediate armed intervention. In the poster that advertised the tenth anniversary of the Instituto Cubano de Arte e Industria Cinematografica in 1969, the camera is metaphorically represented as a military weapon. By extension, the filmmaker becomes a guerrilla fighter engaged in war against imperialism and dictatorship. “A Luta Continua”, “Victory to Victory”, “Playa Giron”, “Tuparamos,” and the “traitors” represent a sample of the guerrilla film.

Arab and African political cinemas have generally adopted different poetics of resistance. Arab and African filmmakers have not been much receptive of the guerrilla style. Though they have embraced the fundamental concepts of Third Cinema, very few of them would claim to be guerrilla fighters. Rather, their political resistance has been mediated through symbolic narratives which denounce class contradictions and exploitation. However, they seem to nurse an unfathomable faith in the power of cinema and the resourceful poetic means of representation it makes accessible. The Algerian filmmaker Merzak Allouach notes that cinema can only be about "a reality of representation" rather than a representation of an objective reality and concludes that this explains his firm belief in the power of the image and

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communication through silence. Likewise, the Moroccan cineast Souhail Ben Barka praises the image which he takes to be the most effective means to communicate political and social conflicts.

Political, ideological, historical, and cultural reasons may account for Arab and African filmmakers' choice of an ideological venue slightly different from the one embraced by most South American cineasts. Ousmane Sembene defines his films as "denouncers". His revolutionary impulse is deliberately controlled:

It's not after having read Marx or Lenin that you go out and make a revolution [...] All the works are just a reference in history. And that's all. Before the end of an act of creation society usually has already surpassed it.

Sembene allows space for human agency. He admits that cinema can contribute to people's self-consciousness, but films can not decide for them the moment they are to convert their awareness into action.

Likewise, most Arab and African filmmakers believe that the fundamental role of cinema is to mediate a reading of the deplorable reality that hampers the progress of their communities. Comparing Sembene's "Ceddo" and Med Hondo's "West Indies", Mpoyi-Buata drives home a synthesis that is applicable to Arab and African realities. His point is that both films, dealing with slavery and a rediscovery of the uprooted African history, bring forth a reconciliatory ground -democratic opportunities- that could save the African continent from the ravages of military and red dictatorships:

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1 This is how Allouache explains his fascination with the power of the silent image: “My concern today is to know how to make a practically silent film in our society. A film where everything would be said by the image. I have the impression it’s the most difficult thing to do in Algerian society. In our society, speech, words, rumor, lies, have become a privileged method of communication. The smallest, most trivial event can not take place in the most remote village without everyone in Algiers talking about it the next day. Sure, the discussions are punctuated, re-expressed by gestures, but speech remains dominant. Speech is dominant in our cinema. You can’t do anything about it. There is so much richness in speech that when I write a screenplay, my greatest pleasures consist in writing the dialogue” (Merzak Allouache, “The Necessity of a Cinema Which Interrogates Everyday Life” in John Downing, ed., Film and Politics in the Third World, 1987, pp. 95-96).


It seems that from Ousmane to Hondo there may be a good use put to a certain form of Marxism. The utilization of the latter can only come about through its perversion, by way of developing democratic opportunities, namely the participation of the greatest number of decision-making. Slavery being nothing other than the appropriation of these decisions by a small number of people, and the exclusion from these same decisions of the greatest number.¹

Caught between Western conceptual frameworks (communism or liberalism) and a reality that resents the adoption of either one, Arab and African intellectuals have been trying to articulate suitable aesthetics that would be in tune with African and Arab realities. The urgent desire to demarcate their perspective from Western philosophies has reflected on their works. In order for them to invent a cinema which may also be “a form of writing capable of generating a new mode of thought,” they interrogate both Western values and the cultural and political everyday reality of their societies.² Even in films that focus on the issue of neo-colonialism such as Sembene’s “Xala,” there is a clear denunciation of the conspiracies of the local petty bourgeoisie. The filmmaker’s expression of resistance consists of depicting social and political realities in a way that helps imbue the viewer with a lucid perception. As Abdellatif Ben Ammar puts it:

[... ] to be lucid is also to be strong. I would like young people with the information at their disposal, to attain a clear view of life and may be some effective action. Lucidity is very important because it enables you not to be manipulated.³

To achieve this objective, Arab and African filmmakers have adopted what Fernando Birri calls a “cinema of discovery” which he identifies as a cinema that contributes to peoples’ development:

by showing how reality is and in no other way. This is the evolutionary function of social documentary and realist, critical and popular cinema in Latin America. By testifying, critically, to this reality -to this sub-reality, this misery- cinema refuses it. It rejects it. It denounces, judges, criticizes and deconstructs it. Because it shows matters as they irrefutably are, and not as we would like them to be (or as, in good or bad faith, others would like to make us believe them to be).¹

The aim of a critical representation of reality is to mediate a collective historical consciousness -a necessary though not sufficient- requirement for any positive social development. Sembene’s “Borom Sarret” -a twenty-minute tale- illustrates how a cinema of resistance can be powerfully simple and uncompromising towards both the hegemonic dominant class and people’s ignorance. The film opens with a cart driver starting his day with a prayer, “I beseech the divine protection of Allah and the merciful saints on me and my family. That they may protect me from laws and disbelievers.” However, the events of the day would show that he is called upon to act in a context -Dakar- which seems to have been abandoned by providence. He would have his cart confiscated when he ventures into the part of the city reserved for the ruling elite (originally built by French colonizers). Consequently, he goes back home in the evening empty-handed and his wife is forced to go out to prostitute herself in order to procure food for her family. His final words (“Where’s she going now? There is nothing to eat”) reflect a mind unable to draw syntheses and, thus, incapable of developing a critical consciousness.²

More importantly, it is by giving voice and space to the people and by mediating their everyday life with all its contradictions, anxieties, desires, and anticipations that Arab and African filmmakers are discovering alternative aesthetics for their cinemas. In his analysis of Sembene’s “Xala,” Gabriel

¹ Quoted in Roy Armes, Third World Film Making and the West, 1987, p. 80.
Teshome uses the African metaphor of "wax and gold" to explain the cinematic style of the African film:

The film language of xala, I believe, can be constructed on the model of an African poetic form called "sem-enna-wora" which literally means, "wax and gold." The term refers to the "lost wax" process in which a goldsmith creates a wax form, casts a clay mold around it, then drains out the wax, and pours in molten gold to form the valued object. Applied to poetics, the concept acknowledges two levels of interpretation, distinct in theory and representation. Such a poetic form aims to attain a maximum of ideas with a minimum of words. "Wax" refers to the most obvious and superficial meaning, whereas the "gold" embedded in the art work offers the "true" meaning, which may be inaccessible unless one understands the finer nuances of folk culture.¹

The metaphor of "wax and gold" provides insights into Arab and African cinemas, though probably not in the sense of the essentialist reading of Teshome. Arab and African filmmaking has emerged in the margins of the cinema of the metropolis and cineasts have been struggling against national and international constraints, technical and financial limitations. The aesthetic identity of Arab and African cinemas has been moulded -and still is- within a context of imperfections, contradictions, and ambivalences. The emergent aesthetics of these cinemas may be neither in the "gold" nor in the "wax" but in the moulding process itself. Garcia Espinosa is right to point out that:

We should understand that in fact the soul is contained in the body just as the spirit is contained in the material life, just as - to speak in strictly artistic terms - the essence is contained in the surface and the content in the form.²

As a matter of fact, a centuries’ old Moroccan artisanal tradition of making silver jewelry consists of adding clay to silver before moulding the two substances together. This artisanal silver artifact is not as sparkling as manufactured silver products but it is by far more genuine. In addition, the moulding of silver and earth allows the silver-smith more opportunities for creation and inspiration. The forms and designs which shape and ornate artisanal silver artifacts mediate the natural context and worldview of the artisan. However, these artifacts also carry signatures of the “imperfections” of the artisanal means of production and the moods of the artisan. Nonetheless, they are artifacts with a spirit and a soul. Applied to film aesthetics, this artisanal silver artifact may be a more appropriate metaphor to describe the Arab and African “silver screens.” The voices and noises African and Arab cineasts mediate are not only contributing to peoples and communities coming to grips with their self-identification but are also a contribution to the richness of “cinema as a world phenomenon:”

[... the role of Third World film makers in giving voice to peoples excluded from history and to minorities (or even majorities) normally denied expression- such as the Arabs of Israel or the Quechua Indians of Bolivia- calls into question the status of many western cinemas as expressions of a ‘national’ culture (be it that of Paris or London). Where, for example, are the films that would give us insight into the regional diversity of rural France? And why was it that the Wolof of Senegal and the Yoruba of Nigeria could find their filmic voice by the mid-1970’s, while such ‘submerged’ nations as Wales and Scotland had to wait until the 1980’s for films in Welsh and Gaelic? To pose such questions is to undertake what seems to me the most urgent task of film history at the present time. Only when film history ceases merely to echo and justify by its illusions and exclusions the Western commercial dominance of film distribution can it begin to draw attention to the diversity of voices that make up the true richness of cinema as a world phenomenon.]

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In the next section, I focus on the aesthetics of the Moroccan film. I attempt a reconstruction of the historical trajectory of the Moroccan film, analyze the politics of cinematic industry in Morocco, and give an outline of the emergent post-traditional aesthetics of Moroccan cinema. I close the section by a study of a sample of the Moroccan post-traditional film.

Figure 30. Posters of 4 post-traditional Moroccan films.
D. Moroccan Cinema: From Propaganda to Post-Traditional Aesthetics

In 1976, I attended the inauguration of a film theatre in my home town on the North-Western coast of Morocco. The theatre was built in a working-class neighbourhood. Up to then, there had been three theatres for a population of about fifty-thousand people and they were all located in the city centre. The new theatre was inaugurated by the city Governor and local dignitaries in the course of a staged political ceremony. In his speech, the Governor underlined the role the new theatre was to play in that neighbourhood, claimed he had more development projects in perspective, and promised that the entire county would be served by similar projects. The audience responded with an applause which echoed the mechanical rhythm of the speech. People were there either because they had nothing else to do or because they were "invited" by the moqadam (the mediator between local authorities and the neighbourhood inhabitants). The new theatre was given an official name by which it would never be called for people preferred instead its owner's name, Bouhalufa (literally a 'she-pig') which was very popular in the area.

Two weeks later, I went to the newly inaugurated theatre. The two films shown respected the logic of the dominant trend in the majority of movie houses, namely, an Indian romance and a Hong Kong karate. I also found out that the theatre had already turned into a deplorable state. The seats were razor-cut and the walls had changed colour due to the smeared stamps of hands on them. The air was thickened by the smoke of cigarette, hashish, and kif. The sound of a bottle which crashed to the floor generated a storm of curses and oaths and soon I understood the reason of the audience's excitement. The odour of a cheap red wine invaded the already polluted air and added to the intoxicating atmosphere a sense of the unreal. There was poetry in the air.

On one occasion, a strident female voice disrupted one of the rare moments of silence during the film projection. A woman broke into the theatre and refused to leave unless her son left with her. Under jabbing mockeries from his friends and cursing from the audience, the son ultimately yielded to his mother's will. On another occasion, the audience was treated to an incredible live scene. The hero, a karate champion, was fighting a gang of armed criminals and the situation looked like his enemies were about to
close in on him. A total silence filled the theatre. Then, as the hero's life became seriously jeopardized, the audience's patience wore out and the theatre turned into a noisy marketplace. Some started dictating fighting strategies to the hero while others warned him against imminent danger. The audience's excitement was getting out of control when all of a sudden, the lights went on and the little square figure of the theatre owner appeared on the stage. Under a shower of curses, insults, and obscenities he explained that the hero would ultimately win the fight and threatened to stop the projection if the collective frenzy inside the theatre did not subside. Then, with a swift gesture, he signaled the operator to resume the projection and disappeared leaving behind a bewildered but even more excited audience. About ten years later, the theatre was pulled down.

The presence of African and Arab cinemas in various film festivals and the resounding success of some films with audiences across cultures and continents is a sign that the poetics of these cinemas is finally gaining ground. However, most of the issues raised in the above vignette are still of major concern in Arab and African countries. The number of film theatres is still insignificant, the content of the films shown has not changed much, local productions with limited financial and technical means have to compete for an audience which has been co-opted by the Hollywood box-office style, and the local power structures are still wary of the potential subversive dimension of the cultural institution of cinema. Before exploring the potential and limitations of the cinematic industry in Morocco, I proceed first with a brief account of the historical itinerary of the Moroccan film since independence (1956).

a. The Rise of Moroccan Cinema

The identity of Moroccan cinema has emerged out of complex national, regional, and international historical conjunctures. The French Protectorate administration encouraged the production of propaganda films to harness the superiority of the colonizers and their civilization while perpetuating stereotyped images about Moroccan culture and lifestyle. The nascent

1 A memorandum signed by the French general Lyautey in December 31st, 1920 defined the objectives of colonial cinema in Morocco. In this memo, Lyautey argues that "cinema will
Moroccan state institutionalized the developmental role of film. The Moroccan Film Centre, created in 1944, was charged with the production of propaganda films for various departments of the state (especially the ministries of Interior, Agriculture, Health, Education, and Tourism). It was only at the beginning of the 1970's that a generation of Moroccan filmmakers, trained in Western and Eastern film schools and institutes, started using cinema as an aesthetic means to mediate the conflicts and contradictions of society and to mediate everyday desires, anxieties, and dreams of Moroccans. This generation of filmmakers viewed their work as partaking of an Arab, African, and universal struggle for emancipation and development. In the words of the Moroccan filmmaker Moumen Smihi, cinema "may be a form of writing capable of regenerating a mode of thought."

In the Maghreb (especially in Morocco, Algeria, and Tunisia), the cinema of the 1970's had a declared political dimension. The Tunisian filmmaker Ferid Boughedir has made the point that the Maghrebian film reflected the different struggles in which the Maghrebian society was engaged in that decade:

Undoubtedly yield satisfactory results in the education of our protégés. The appropriate films and scenes will definitely have profound effects on the minds of Moroccans who will not only be impressed by the power, wealth, and dynamism of France but will also assimilate the beauty of its landscape, its products, and the French style of management" (quoted in Larbi wahi, "Cinema and colonialism: the case of Morocco" [text in Arabic] in Histoire et cinéma: actes du colloque tenu du 16 au 24 février 1990, Casablanca: Publication de la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines II, Ben M'sik, 1993, p. 100). In fact, Lyautey himself supervised the production of the propaganda film "New Men" ("Les hommes nouveaux") which documented the experiences of the "new men" who injected new blood in the colonial economy (ibid. p. 105).

1 D. Jaidi has classified the films and documentaries produced by the Moroccan Film Centre between 1956 and 1977 as follows: 50% constituted pure propaganda films; 16% targeted development in the educational sector; 12% was ethnographic, and only 2% of the films produced could be considered creative or artistic (D. Jaidi, "The Representation of Moroccan Society in Short Films: 1956-1977" [text in Arabic] in Histoire et cinéma: actes du colloque tenu du 16 au 24 février 1990, Casablanca: Publication de la Faculté des Lettres et des Sciences Humaines II, Ben M'sik, 1993, p. 113).

2 Moumen Smihi, "Moroccan Society as Mythology" in John D. Downing, ed., Film and Politics in the Third World, New York: Autonomedia, 1987, p. 82. Elsewhere, Smihi argues that the mission of cinema is to preserve universal cultural heritage and patrimony: "I do not fear only for my cultural identity and image. Arab culture (and my Moroccan "way" of practicing it) is a component of the large and multiple culture of the world. If the Arab image were to fail, to be lacking, or if it were to disappear and could not be reconstituted and perpetuated, all human culture would be amputated. There have been enough amputations in human history" (Moumen Smihi, "Si l'image arabe venait à disparaître ..." in Mouny Berrah et al., eds., Les cinémas arabes, Paris: Editions du Cerf and Institut du Monde Arabe, 1987, p. 105).
the struggle against economic underdevelopment, the need to change structures and mentalities, and the fight against both the negative heritage of certain aspects of "Tradition" and the "infantile diseases" of independences or abuses of the new power structures.¹

In fact, the political aesthetics of struggle and resistance which the Moroccan film shared with Arab and African cinemas was predominantly influenced by Marxist politics. Filmmakers saw it as their mission to denounce class and gender contradictions, exploitation, oppression, corruption, and alienation whether by Tradition or bourgeois practices.²

More importantly, Moroccan cineasts were also engaged in a declared war against commercial cinema and its alienating style. Egyptian musicals, Indian melodramas, Hong Kong Karate, and Hollywood romance and action films were denounced for alienating spectators and socializing them into the conventions of an escapist cinema. Conversely, most of these filmmakers adopted the style of Auteur cinema to make an original stamp on their films.³ However, in their desire to demarcate their works from commercial cinema, they often ended up with films so hermetically sealed that they alienated their potential audiences. In the words of Ferid Boughedir, "at

² To the Moroccan filmmaker Souhail Ben Barka, for example, the political content of his film "A Thousand and One Hands" is very clear: "I denounce the fact that a thousand hands are working for the exclusive benefit of just one" (Souhail Ben Barka, "A Cinema Founded on the Image" in John D. Downing, ed., Film and Politics in the Third World. New York: Autonomedia, 1987, p. 91).
³ Moumen Smihi explains the incorporation of biographical experiences in his film “El Chergui” (1976) by the urgent need to adhere to the Auteur cinema school: “Just as every film is political, I think every film is also autobiographical [...] Every communication tells a little bit about its originator. Besides, there is the Auteur cinema tradition which claims that the first full-length film ought to be autobiographical in tendency. It's mainly to say "I" when you start to speak ...?” (Moumen Smihi, “Moroccan Society as Mythology” in John D. Downing, ed., Film and Politics in the Third World. New York: Autonomedia, 1987, p. 80). In a footnote, John D. Downing explains that the Auteur cinema approach “sees personality and perspective of the director as stamping itself on a film with the same apparent conclusiveness as the individual author (auteur) of a novel. John D. Downing, then, points out some of the limitations which have characterized the Auteur cinema: "Critics of this view have been many, and have often centered their objections on the reality of film production, in which actors, cameraperson, sound technicians, lighting specialists, make-up artists and not least financiers, all play a part in the construction of the product" (John D. Downing, ed., Film and Politics in the Third World, New York: Autonomedia, 1987, p. 87).
times, the ‘auteur films’ refused the slightest concession to the ‘general public’ that they came out in an avant-garde form which was quite hermetic.”

In the decade of the 1980’s, political cinema started making way for the emergence of a new film aesthetics. Without compromising the political vision which shaped their earlier films, quite a few Moroccan cineasts called for a relinquishment of the elitist approach to cinema and the adoption of an all-encompassing style which would be accessible to the general public. The experimentation with this new style generated controversial reactions from filmmakers and film critics. M. Jibril, a Moroccan film critic, wrote in a comparative survey of Moroccan film that “despite its very limited production, Moroccan cinema of the 1970’s was better [than the cinema of the 1980’s] because it was original” before stating in a testimonial tone that “whatever flows from a source and mediates a truth has all the chances of communicating with the spectator even if it looks complex.” By contrast, the filmmaker Hakim Nouri sees the threads of a staged conspiracy against “popular cinema” which is, in his opinion, deliberately marginalized by the Moroccan Film Fund Commission: “[The members of the Film Fund Commission] are against popular cinema. For them, popular is synonymous with vulgar. They expect us to make metaphysical films.” For H. Nouri, and for a number of other filmmakers, the success and development of Moroccan cinema is conditional upon its acclaim by the general public, not just a small elite.

The emergent aesthetics has been defined as a shift from an elitist to popular film, from an interest in national to international themes, or from an Auteur film style to commercial cinema. Despite conflicting diagnostic statements, there seems to be a consensus on the fact that a different style is emerging. Indeed, intellectual, economic, social, and political reasons may account for the emergence of a new aesthetics in Moroccan cinema. Ferid Boughedir relates the relinquishment of political cinema to the general


disenchantment of intellectuals with the post-colonial political regimes and systems of governance and filmmakers' need to appeal to a wider public. He argues that the Maghrebian filmmakers' concern about the financial turn-out of their films can be seen in their desire to cast European actors and actresses.¹

In addition, the social and political changes which have occurred in the societies of the Maghreb have also contributed to the emergence of new film style. In Morocco, fractures in the dominant societal system are already visible by the end of the 1980s as more spaces of contestation and deliberation have become available to marginalized groups and communities. The symbolic mode which is the dominant figure of expression in the political film has been gradually displaced. Film narratives which have met with general acclaim are more focused on aesthetic reconstructions of the contradictions and ambivalences characteristic of everyday performances and worldviews than on transcendental and symbolic political messages. In fact, the post-traditional spectator is as much interested in being confronted with his/her self-contradictions, anxieties, and desires as in class and gender conflicts.

b. The Politics of Film Production in Morocco

Recent quantitative and qualitative indicators bring evidence to the belief that Moroccan film industry has eventually effected its take-off. The aesthetic and thematic turn-out of films has greatly improved, the public seems to have been reconciled with its cinema, and more investors are now interested in film industry. However, this optimistic view should not mask the reality about the various and complex problems which impede the development of Moroccan cinema. In fact, the diagnosis evoked by the anecdote above is still valid. The state of film theatres, the type of films projected, the conditions in which filmmakers work, the shortage in specialized film technicians and engineers, the lack of educational infrastructures to train film professionals, and the extreme shortage in funding resources all reveal that film industry in Morocco is still in a fledgling state. In what follows, I analyze a sample of quantitative data in an attempt to give an overall mapping of the context in which Moroccan film

industry functions. Though the statistics provided are not totally reliable, they still provide a view of the reality of cinema in post-traditional Morocco.¹

There are about:

a. Sixty (60) film production companies.
b. Forty-five (45) distribution companies.
d. One-hundred and seventy-five (175) film theatres in 1998.
e. Three (03) specialized screen-play writers.
f. Zero (00) sound engineer.

A surface reading of these statistics would yield the following conclusions:

1- Compared to the number of films produced, there is an inflation in film production companies. Each film company has produced about one and a half feature films over the last forty years. A logical deduction from this bizarre situation is that film production companies have been more interested in other audio-visual industries like advertising or in hiring their services to foreign film companies which shoot in Morocco. This may explain why most filmmakers are compelled to create their own production companies to produce their films.

2- Each distribution company has distributed about two films, a fact which indicates that the Moroccan film has tremendous problems reaching its public. The repercussions of this is that, in great part, production companies run at a loss. As a case in point, for a three-million dollar film to break even with its production cost, it must be distributed in about sixty film theatres (i. e. eighty weeks).

3- Each film theatre has shown less than two Moroccan films over forty years. This shows that from the viewpoint of theatre owners, the Moroccan

¹ Another major problem which impedes the development of Moroccan cinema is the inaccessibility of reliable data and quantitative research about the different processes related to film industry. The lack of a valid institutional system for the collection and documentation of data has created a situation of chaos in which each film institution provides the figures which serve its immediate self-interest. Consequently, it is very difficult to make out the exact state of filmmaking in Morocco and by extension, to propose alternatives to the status quo. In fact, most of the statistics I use in this brief survey are collected from newspaper articles.
film is not considered a marketable commodity, which leaves out the public almost exclusively exposed to foreign productions. It must be noted that out of two-hundred and twenty-five (225) film theatres in 1990, only 178 have remained, a fact which has led to a substantial drop in the number of spectators from twenty-six million (26 m) in 1990 to about fifteen million (15 m) in 1997. Furthermore, 63% of film theatres is owned by eighteen (18) individuals and more than one-hundred (100) film theatres have become specialized in showing only Indian films. This situation has further jeopardized the distribution of Moroccan films.

4- Each screen-play writer has written thirty-two (32) feature films. The shortage in professional screen-writers reflects on the quality of cinematic writing. A general observation is that Moroccan film narratives and storytelling reveal fundamental structural flaws, a fact which makes it difficult for the spectator to sit through the film projection, let alone come out with the impression that Moroccan cinema is positively contributing to the articulation of an emergent societal vision.

5- Moroccan filmmakers have either managed without sound engineers or they have had recourse to European professionals. This situation is due to the lack of a national educational infrastructure which could train Moroccan film technicians and, thus, alleviate the financial costs of filmmaking and end the dependency on foreign production companies.

In addition, the shortage in funding resources generates deplorable working conditions which bracket the artistic and aesthetic talents of filmmakers and postpone the anticipated dynamic relation between Moroccan cinema and its publics. In fact, to cut down on the cost of production, most filmmakers also convert into producers, screenwriters, editors, actors, camerapersons, and even critics of their own films. The accumulation of responsibilities, which shows the degree of amateurism that prevails in the sector of film industry, compromises the aesthetic quality of the cultural product and marginalizes emerging talents. H. Noury's recent feature film "She Is Diabetic, Tensed up, and She Refuses to Die" was shot in a record time of twenty-five (25) days, a fact which seems to have strained the
relationship between the filmmaker and his lead cast who boycotted the film première.

The dependence on public funding seems to have participated in the "institutionalization" of an unhealthy ambiance in the sector of film industry as much as it has contributed to its development. It has almost become a ritual practice that at each annual selection of the films to be funded, diatribes are unleashed against the funding commission which seems to be unanimously accused of favouritism and clientelism. In turn, this situation encourages a spirit of suspicion towards the institutions which are supposed to promote film industry and among filmmakers themselves. Furthermore, the funding policy is ruled by subjective criteria which undermine the legitimacy of the selection process. The attribution of funding in the form of installments conditional upon the faithful materialization of the submitted project restricts the creative expression of the filmmaker who finds himself concerned more about accommodating the commission's vision than his. Indeed, quite often, the commission may conclude that the production has deviated from the statement outlined in the initial project and may, consequently, cancel the payment of the final installment.

Daoud Aoulad-Syad, for example, was refused the fourth installment for his film "Good-bye Fair." The Commission justified its decision by arguing that "the film has not managed to pay the expected homage to the institution of the fair" and that "neither the film's production nor its editing has reflected the fairy ambiance of the fun fair nor the life of its showmen." The filmmaker's response underlines the problematic relationship between cineasts and the funding institution:

The funding Commission was wrong to judge the film on the basis of those criteria. As stipulated by its statutory text [...] the Commission must pass judgments only on the technical side of the film, that is, the aesthetic quality of image, sound, and the degree of faithfulness to the proposed screen-play. It is a pity we can not appeal the Commission's sentence and defend our project. For us, the fun fair is simply a pretext to tell about the

1 Quoted in Daoud Aoulad-Syad, interviewed by K. Raiss in L'opinion, vendredi 29 Janvier, 2000, p. 6.
lives of the people who create this fun. We never stated that we intended to do a documentary on the fun fair.¹

The ambiguity which underlines the relationship between filmmakers and the funding Commission does not play out to the advantage of Moroccan cinema. While the Commission members position themselves as guardians of the patrimonial cultural order, filmmakers rightly think that their freedom for expression is encroached upon. In addition, the funding process itself which consists of selecting from the projects submitted to the Commission does not guarantee that all the funded projects are of high quality.

In addition, the cineast’s creative freedom is further curtailed by the Film Control Commission, the most controversial institution in the film industry sector. The Control Commission acts as the ultimate gatekeeper of an imagined public morality. Put differently, this Commission’s mission is to censor the works which fail to correspond to its members’ moral, ethical, and political worldviews. Because it is licensed to block the release of films judged subversive to the dominant order, this Commission plays an active role in curbing the emancipation and expansion of Moroccan cinema. Investors are reluctant to adventure in the film sector and filmmakers are subjugated by the anxious feeling that their works may be censored. In fact, the mere existence of this Commission may explain the predominance of the symbolic in the Moroccan film text. The filmmaker’s self-monitored expression makes it incumbent upon the spectator to piece together disparate symbols and hints to sort out the meaning intended by the author. In a way, by smoothening up the film text, the cineast contributes to the legitimation of the status quo. By failing to generate a direct confrontation between the spectator and his/her dominant everyday practices and performances, the Moroccan film falls short of its role as an active mediator of a post-traditional worldview.

The Commission’s handling of the case of Abdelkader Lagtaa’s “The Closed Door” reveals the degree of arbitrariness which characterizes its approach. This film was denied the license of commercialization for more than a year because of scenes judged obscene and immoral. In fact, the genesis of “The Closed Door” crystallizes the various problems Moroccan filmmakers are likely to encounter. Shot in 1993, the film was held for years in France due

to the bankruptcy of its co-producer. Since the film was partly funded by the Commission, Lagtaâ had to get a special derogation from the ministry of Communication to be able to submit other projects for funding. He had to wait four years before he could lay claim to his film. When it was ready for release, the Control Commission censored it for one more year. When it finally came out in May 2000, it had already hibernated for seven years on the shelves of censoring institutions. Eventually, a compromise was reached between the filmmaker and the Commission whereby two scenes of masculine nudity and homosexuality were cut off:

One scene shows the homosexual instructor undressing and giving caresses to the intoxicated and drowsy protagonist. The caresses have disappeared. In the second scene, the protagonist comes out of the bathroom with a towel wrapped around his waist. Surprised by the unexpected visit of his mother-in-law, he lets go of the towel and, consequently, reveals his pubic hair. Well, the pubic hair has also disappeared. In “A Love Story in Casablanca” (Lagtaâ’s first feature film), the Commission did not censor a scene in which we see the pubic hair of the same actor. Do we have, then, to conclude that the ‘basrian system’ was more tolerant of pubic hair?1

The controversy generated by the film compelled the distributor to opt for a low-key circuit of theatres reputed for catering to a select public, a fact which led a journalist to state ironically that Moroccan mainstream public “can only stand profane nudity on satellite television.”2 Lagtaâ has stirred the ire of the powers that be because he has dared transgress the superficial and arbitrary barriers which regulate the Moroccan cinematic discourse.

It may be too early to claim that Morocco has set up its national cinema. Pessimistic views would even insist that the achievements made over the

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1 Abdelkader Lagtaâ, interviewed by A. Rahmouni in Le journal, no. 120, du 29 Avril au 5 Mai, 2000, p. 36. Lagtaâ’s “basrian system” is a reference to the ex-powerful minister of Interior who was at the head of this administration for over two decades and who was notorious for his hegemonizing control over all sectors of public life. The recent dismissal of Basri opened the floodgates for the people’s long repressed and oppressed dreams for freedom and emancipation.

last decade are only disparate initiatives by inspired filmmakers. There is also some truth in the claim that the anticipated dynamic between the Moroccan film and its public(s) is not yet fully-fledged. However, there is enough evidence to state that the anticipated dynamic between the Moroccan public and its cinema is taking shape. It is not my intention here to delineate what must be achieved for this symbiosis to emerge for it is obvious that the Moroccan film industry needs a grassroots restructuring at all levels. What is important to underline at this stage is that the construction process of both the emergent post-traditional cinema and its public has started. Though in-depth qualitative and quantitative studies are needed in order to better grasp the contours of the emergent cinema and its public, one can safely state that, on the basis of the positive reception of quite a few films over the last decade, the post-traditional public expects the cinematic aesthetic expression and discourse to interpellate its everyday reality and articulate its desires, anxieties, and anticipated worldviews. In what follows, I analyze a sample of three films which have approximated this ideal. I do not argue that this sample is representative of post-traditional Moroccan cinema for the project of post-tradition itself is still in the process of making. However, it is my contention that Mohammed Abderrahmane Tazi's “Badis” and “In Search for a Husband for My Wife” and Daoud Aoulad-Syad’s first feature film “Goodbye Fair” manage to mediate aspects of the contradictions, anxieties, and desires which construct everyday life in post-traditional Morocco.
c. The Post-Traditional Film and Its Aesthetics: A Sample

1. “Badis:” Save the Last Dance for Eternity

In A. Tazi’s “Badis,” the female body is a hybrid construct which interpellates the binaries of public versus private, desire versus fear, the sacred versus the profane, and the self versus the other. Conflicting forces of tradition and emancipation compete for its appropriation. Its vacillation between a contemptuous bodily submission and an intense desire for liberation generates a convergent space for contradictory social, cultural, and psychological trajectories. In the face of the prison-house of tradition and cultural taboos, it resources itself through a re-creative narcissistic force which converts exclusion into celebration, marginalization into resistance, and death into an eternal dance. Its reflexive performance is a source of self-empowerment against self-alienation and conspiring spatial and temporal practices. In a circumscribed spatio-temporal context, the female body embraces dance as an expressive form of resistance and liberation. Through dance, the body celebrates its femininity and self-identity.
In the narrative world of "Badis," the construction of the female body as a prism is mediated through the juxtaposition of a narrative of desire and antagonistic powers which conspire to block its generative processes. The female body is simultaneously a subject and an object of desire. As a subject of desire, it assumes the role of the principal mover of the narrative and the originator of a feminine enunciative space in the film. As an object of desire, it is the space where masculine enunciation is inscribed and the male desire for power and control is naturalized. At a symbolic level, the female body becomes an ambivalent construct viewed simultaneously as a source of attraction/chaos (fitna) and a mediator of freedom and liberation. Its dance performance is an emancipatory spatial inscription in a socio-cultural context which seeks to put a veil on its femininity.

The ambivalent and contradictory traces inscribed on the female body are mediated through a simple narrative texture and a straightforward style of enunciation. The spatial construction of the female body seems to overrule all other forms of extradiegetic narration. The film recounts the story of a primary school instructor who, in an attempt to subdue his wife, asks to be transferred to an isolated northern village in Morocco. Through this transfer from the metropolitan city of Casablanca to a secluded fishing-village, Badis, the instructor seeks to circumvent the liberating spatial possibilities urban space offers the female body. Casablanca is a city without memory. The frenzied commotion which animates its streets and the hectic lifestyle of its inhabitants portray a city always already on the verge of confusion and disorder. In fact, ordering the urban space of Casablanca has been a major concern for planners and state authorities since the times of the French Protectorate.1

While the reconstruction of spatial production and distribution in this metropolitan city has recreated other signs of power and control, it has also brought about a serious challenge to the status quo. New opportunities for the marginalized have emerged. People immigrate into Casablanca with the

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1 "Although Casablanca was never reputed for its cultural or intellectual contributions, it was known for its commerce, for its role as a catalyst for popular revolt, and for the nouveau rich display of its successful businesspeople and administrators. It is no surprise that the 'Marechal' Lyautey actively disliked this port town, where the marks of money and power were clearly visible from the first. The brute force of wealth, and the potential for disorder among the merging working-class or lumpen proletariat populations, too clearly revealed the duplicitous nature of the Protectorate's harmonies" (Susan Ossman, Picturing Casablanca: Portraits of power in a Modern City. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994, p. 29).
dream of improving their social status. By removing his wife from this city, the instructor seeks to deprive her from the possibilities this urban space may open for her. His is a desperate attempt to reproduce hierarchicized spatial mapping in which the female body is cloistered within walls and narrow labyrinthine streets. As Susan Ossman puts it:

In Casablanca, where men's and women's roles and spaces have changed rapidly and where the "traditional" elite culture of older cities like Fes and Sale is losing its primacy, a rough social hierarchy is established by money. People are ranked according to the quality of their cars, jewels, and clothing. Yet the social hierarchy marked out by such objects is often fragile [...] Amid the bright lights of the modern city, it is the individual who picks and chooses among his or her past to decide how to act. Often people resent the more restrictive customs of their past - for example, expectations about marriage or personal behavior - while cherishing others [...] Those whose existence is categorically denied by the central image, those who call for social diversity and social change, feel the strain between social practice and legitimate representations of the community.¹

Conversely, life in the village moves along lines set by centuries of traditional practices. Space is bounded and limited. Badis is surrounded by a chain of mountains, on one side, and the vast sea, on the other. Access to the nearest urban space is within hours and the road is in such a deplorable condition that traffic hardly takes it. In this space, time seems to freeze because motion is almost inexistant. Before the arrival of the instructor and his wife, the last event which disrupted the monotonous life in the village was the elopement of Muira's mother, a Spanish who was married to one of the village notables. Muira lives with her authoritative father who tries hard to subdue her to the suffocating lifestyle of the community. His major concern is to make of her a good Muslim who does her prayers and recites the Qu'ran. In parallel, his major worry is his daughter's passionate love for dance, a vice, he believes, that she has inherited from her mother's genes. In

¹ Susan Ossman, Picturing Casablanca, 1994, p. 164.
fact, he hires the services of the instructor to teach her the Qu’ran but she ends up being more interested in the friendship she strikes with Touria, the instructor’s wife. Both women nurse an insistent longing for freedom and experience similar persecution at the hands of their male tutors.

The filmmaker relies on medium close-up and medium shots to delineate the circumscribed space in which the characters move. The camera tracks the slightest details which make up the world of their everyday life. In this space, people are not “visible.” The film’s closing scene which brings out the village population compels the viewer to wonder where those people have been hiding. This is no romantic or nostalgic representation of village life. In Badis, people do not act but seem to wait for things to happen. They wait for the tide to go up or down, for rain to fall, for the mail to arrive, and for the weekly visits of the “Grand Taxi” to see which other soul is cast in this desolate area. More importantly, the viewer too has to wait for nightfall to get a glimpse of the network of sexual relations woven under the cover of darkness. The postman, for example, visits his lover, the café owner, after dark and has to leave before sunrise. The villagers know about this illicit relation but do not talk about it openly. In fact, people in Badis do not communicate but gossip in secret. Private lives are done and undone through gossip and rumour but everybody goes about his or her life seemingly unconcerned. However, there seems to be an implicit consensus among villagers as to the boundaries, spatial and behavioural, that must not be trespassed.

In this barren and motionless space, the female body dances for its freedom and liberation. This is not only a metaphor. In traditional communities, the female body is confiscated and dance is not only coded along gender lines but it also obeys strict spatial and temporal regulations. From the dominant viewpoint, a dancing female body can be fatal to the stability of the community because it can open the floodgates to a repressed sexuality. Indeed, dance is considered as the most subversive language of the female body. For the female body, dance interpellates the politics of spatial production and distribution, and by extension, the normative model of sexuality. Furthermore, dance is not a play or rather, it is a play which entails a risk for one’s life. As Helene Sixous has put it: “by writing herself, women will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her. [...]
Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time [...] Write your self. Your body must be heard” (for Cixous’s “write,” read “dance”).

Through dance, Muira reconciles herself with her body and her femininity. One of the most beautiful and ambivalent scenes in the film is the dance she holds with a broom. It is obvious that the implications of this dance play out to the erotic desire of the male gaze. The eroticism which emanates from this scene is accentuated by the inside/outside cuts of the scene which frame the female as a fetishized object of desire and puts the viewer in the position of a voyeur who follows the action through the window. The medium close-up shots on Muira’s hands holding tight to the broom stick and the playful caresses she simulates with the broom on erogenous parts of her body commodify the scene (seen) for male phantasmagoric consumption.

However, this scene also depicts Muira’s reconciliation with her femininity and her libidinal identity. At a more symbolic level, Muira’s aesthetic dance is a rehearsal for a more implicating public performance. Liberated from the authority of cultural taboos, she casts off fear and apprehension and claims control over her body. The sexual relation she holds with the Spanish soldier does not only constitute a transgression of the belief system and the cultural mores which organize the lifeworld of the community. Rather, it is an act of resistance to a stifling social system which circumscribes the female body to spatial and behavioural constraints. Her “sacrilegious” act sets at defiance the dominant construction of the female body. In the patriarchal viewpoint, a woman’s body is the community’s property. Sexuality is regulated by the institution of marriage and the female body’s utilitarian function is foregrounded at the expense of any representational autonomy (least of all aesthetic autonomy).

Within a system of absolute values, the female body is either reified as an object of desire or deified as a maternal body. In the eyes of the community, Muira has committed two irredeemable sins. By having sex outside the institution of marriage, she has transgressed against the laws of society and by giving up her body to a non-Muslim, she has offended against the moral and ethical laws of the Umma. At this stage, Muira’s quest for freedom comes full

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circle. As a last alternative, she tries to follow in the footsteps of her mother but her attempt to elope with the Spanish soldier is undermined by the community’s more pressing urge for revenge. In the final scene of the film, the villagers close in on Muira on the beach as she is about to board the boat with her lover. In an attempt to preserve her self-dignity, she confronts the crowd and gives the performance of her life. Out of solidarity, Touria steps inside the circle and the two women are stoned to death.

The ambivalent construction of the closing scene blurs the boundaries between the sacred and the secular, spectatorship and performance, play and tragedy. The circle the villagers draw around the female protagonists is reminiscent of the halqa (circle of spectators), a form of entertainment in the marketplace. Thus, the villagers become active spectators in a live entertainment show performed by two female dancers. The two protagonists’ effort to protect themselves from the stones thrown at them by their audience members comes across as a choreographic writing on an empty stage. From a different perspective, this ceremonial is a reenactment of the sacred ritual of stoning performed by pilgrims in Mecca. This ritual consists of throwing seven stones at Satan, the sworn enemy of humanity. From this viewpoint, the social construction of the female body as an incarnate of evil and temptation is reinforced.¹

The divide between the dictates of tradition and the desire for emancipation is further reinforced by alternate close-up cuts on the faces of the two protagonists and their executioners. While the tense faces of villagers convey a placidity which betrays a mechanical reproduction of inherited practices, the ecstatic expression the two tragic characters bear on their blood-dripping faces inscribes their determination to initiate an irrevocable cut with inherited suffocating traditions and beliefs. Both Muira and Touria have given up their lives to perform the post-traditional woman’s dance for freedom. Interestingly, the screenwriters, one of whom is the Moroccan woman filmmaker Farida Belyazid, have opted for two hybrid female identities to mediate the Moroccan woman’s need for a more liberated social

¹ The stereotyped conception of the female body and the female world as a realm of evil and sorcery legitimates women’s exclusion from the public domain. In the words of the Egyptian feminist Nawal el Saadawi: “The female world [...] is looked upon by men as an area surrounded by, and peopled with, obscure and puzzling secrets, filled with all the dark mystery of sorcery, devilry and the works of Satan” (Nawal El Saadawi, The Hidden Face of Eve: Women in the Arab World, Boston: Beacon Press, 1982, p. 147).
space. Muira (played by the Spanish actress Maribel Verdu) is born out of a mixed marriage, a fact which seems to predestine her to a subversive role. As for Touria, she has grown up in a post-traditional urban space where the fracture in the body of inherited spatial practices has already been initiated. What is also interesting to note is that the first stones thrown at Muira come from the hands of women villagers, a fact which highlights the self-alienation of the female within the patriarchal structure. The final dance of the female body is an anticipated celebration of a more liberating future. The fade out on the sea horizon hints to the long struggle awaiting post-traditional communities. However, it also suggests the determination of post-traditional groups to fight for a more emancipated social space. The Badis traditional community, just like the film’s audience, will have to renegotiate the course of their historical itinerary in the light of the new directions indicated by the tragic dance of the female body.

Finally, it should be underlined that A. Tazi’s “Badis” does not offer a radical feminist critique of Moroccan patriarchal structure. On the contrary, there is enough room for arguing that the film’s social criticism of gender relations and the politics of spatial production is mitigated by the construction of female characters who, by and large, remain subservient to male rule and authority. Touria does not call into question her husband’s decision to transfer from Casablanca to an isolated and secluded village and even less the normative model of spatial organization in her new community. Similarly, Muira does not openly challenge the lifestyle her father imposes on her. More importantly, the two women eventually opt for escape rather than an upfront rebellion against the system which oppresses them. Neither do they attempt to expose their worldview to other women villagers, a fact which might have won them the solidarity of a few members of their female community. On the contrary, they seem to act with the elitist assumption that the villagers are unable to share in the dream of freedom they nurse. Furthermore, their subversive performance is mostly carried out within closed doors or under the cover of darkness, a fact which legitimates the dominant worldview in Badis.

However, put in the historical perspective in which it was first released (1988), the film’s contribution to the “resurrection” of Moroccan cinema and to debate on the post-traditional project is quite important. In fact, “Badis” came out at time when the Moroccan film public had deserted movie theatres.
because of the weak production which prevailed throughout the 1980s. The researcher himself had more than once the experience of watching Moroccan films with two or three other spectators. The public complained about the weak quality of production, acting, image, and film scripts. Distribution was insignificant because film theatres played Moroccan films at a great loss. The release of "Badis" resurrected a spark that almost everybody thought had died away for good. The film was praised by critics and the public for its good handling of content and cinematic techniques. Moreover, its release coincided with the debate in the House of Parliament on a series of amendments concerning the Moroccan code of personal status (marriage, divorce, custody, inheritance). The media and academic spheres used "Badis" to keep the debate on gender relations and women's status on the public agenda. More importantly, the film reconciled the Moroccan public with its cinema. In "In Quest for a Husband for My Wife," A. Tazi will revisit the issue of gender relations through the representation of a polygamous household in the urban setting of Fez.

2. "In Search for a Husband for My Wife: Everyday and Everynight life in a House of Polygamy

The idea of A. Tazi's "In Search for a Husband for My Wife" (SHMW) is inspired from a clause in the Islamic law concerning the institutions of marriage and divorce. The Islamic legislation stipulates that a man is allowed to divorce and then return to his wife twice. In the case the couple divorce a third time, the divorce is final unless the wife has first been married to and consummated a marriage with another man.\(^1\) In "SHMW," the polygamous patriarch Hadj Benmoussa finds himself in a similar situation. He has divorced his third wife, Houda, for the third time. When his other two wives stand steadfast against his marrying another woman, he consults with a

\(^1\) The Qu'ranic verse on which Muslim jurists base their judgment reads as follows: "Divorce must be pronounced twice and then (a woman) must be retained in honour or released in kindness. And it is not lawful for you that ye take from women aught of that which ye have given them; except (in the case) when both fear that they may not be able to keep within the limits (imposed by) Allah. And if ye fear that they may not be able to keep the limits of Allah, in that case it is no sin for either of them if the woman ransom herself. These are the limits (imposed by) Allah. Transgress them not. For whoso transgresseth Allah's limits: such are wrongdoers. And if he hath divorced her (the third time), then she is not lawful unto him thereafter until she hath wedded another husband" (2:229-230).
religious scholar who enlightens him about the leeway the legislator has left for the believer in such situations. Thus, Hadj Benmoussa embarks on a quest for the ideal candidate who would marry his wife and immediately divorce her so that he could return to her. In exchange, he offers to pay the candidate a sum of money and take care of the wedding expenses. Eventually, he concludes an arrangement with a young Moroccan immigrant who would be returning to Europe shortly. To Hadj Benmoussa’s misfortune, the night of the wedding, the groom, who is a notorious smuggler, gets word that the police are after him and decides to escape in the middle of the night. The next day, Hadj Benmoussa finds himself in the worst scenario possible. He can neither take back his “wife” because she is still married to the other man nor can he lay his hand on the groom who has crossed the border back to Europe. He cannot even get the visa to go look for him in his host country. The film ends with Hadj Benmoussa boarding a pareja (small boat used for “smuggling” immigration candidates across the Mediterranean) determined to risk his life to take back his wife and restore his honour.

Besides its exotic plot structure (it is exotic even by Moroccan standards because the practice of having a woman marry and immediately divorce a man in order lawfully to remarry a husband from which she has been triply divorced hardly ever occurs), “SHMW” attempts a reconstruction of everyday life in post-traditional Morocco. The film takes Hadj Benmoussa’s family as a representative social unit and traces the complex itineraries of its female and male household members. The choice of a traditional house in the historic medina of Fez foregrounds the cinematic chronotope of the filmic narrative world. The architectural organization of the medina and its houses is highly

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1 A. Tazi has repeatedly expressed his opposition to an elitist approach of filmmaking. In a recent interview, he has stated that “there is enough evidence to claim that a page of the numerable cinema has been turned. The days of the cinema which targets friends or a minority [i.e. cinema d’auteur] have elapsed for six or seven years now. Today, cinema is more interested in television audiences [i.e. mass audience] but also in an innovative approach to cinematic language and expression” (Mohammed Abderrahmane Tazi: à la recherche du patrimoine” interviewed by Abla Ababou in Le Journal, no. 110, semaine du 19 au 25 Février, 2000, p. 44).

2 As explained in New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics, the notion of the chronotope (literally “space-time”) was first devised and used by Bakhtin to “refer to the constellation of distinctive temporal and spatial features of specific genres which function to evoke the existence of a life-world independent of the text and its representations.” The authors of New Vocabularies in Film Semiotics go on to argue that even if “Bakhtin does not refer to the cinema, his category seems ideally suited to it as a medium where ‘spatial and temporal indicators are fused into carefully thought-out concrete whole.’ Bakhtin’s description of the novel as the place where ‘time thickens, takes flesh, becomes artistically visible’ and where ‘space becomes charged and
symbolic of the politics of spatial production and distribution and the dominant worldview which orders everyday life in Morocco. Susan Ossman gives a succinct description of the organizing principles which structure the architecture of a typical house in the medina:

The Moroccan home turns its gaze inward on itself. One moves through this ideal home in a circular way. Its rooms around the courtyard are long, rectangular. In the patio itself old homes often had wells, with kitchen facilities either in this central area or in a separate area outside the main living quarters. Windows, and all activities, face the patio, spinning around the center. Windows on the street, if they exist, are tiny. The only openings are toward the patio, or on the roof, where the women do the laundry or socialize.¹

The self-reflexive organization of the Moroccan home underlines its gendered identity. The home is a feminine sphere. It is the space of the female world and as such it is veiled and protected from the public domain of men. Lalla Hobbi, Hadj Benmoussa’s first wife, leaves the house on one occasion when she visits her neighbour (played by the Moroccan feminist sociologist Fatima Mernissi) in an attempt to talk her into accepting an arranged marriage between Houda and her handicapped son. Lalla Rabia, the second wife Hadj Benmoussa has married because Lalla Hobbi did not bear him sons, has very few opportunities to leave the house. Houda’s excursions into the public domain are always chaperoned and even her dreams of romance are disrupted by her husband’s rough snoring. Hadj Benmoussa is the mediator between this feminine space and the outside world. Male intrusions into the sphere of his women stir his anxiety. Even the visits of his son-in-law cause him considerable disquiet. Thus, when he finds his wife Houda interacting

¹ Susan Ossman, Picturing Casablanca, 1994, p. 52.
with an errand-boy at the entrance hallway, his patience wears out. This incident generates a dispute between the couple and leads to their divorce.

More specifically, the architectural structure of the traditional home and the medina acts as a chronotope of the female body and the erotic pleasures associated with it. E. Combs-Schilling has underlined the similarity between access to the home and to the promising pleasures of the female body:

Even after gaining access to the initial opening, one is not yet within the main part of the household, but rather one must first follow a dark, circuitous hallway that finally breaks forth in the central courtyard - a place of great pleasure. The image is clear. Entry into the female is difficult, but if one gains access, then pleasures abound.¹

The feminine world of the domestic sphere is protected from the external gaze so as not to reveal the disjunctures existing between public and private performances. Hadj Bennoussa is a good believer. His pilgrimage to Mecca has won him the title of “hadj” and has comforted his status in the community as a reference in moral uprightness and rectitude. However, within the premises of his jewelry shop, he can afford to flirt with his female clients and, at home, he is a confirmed bon-vivant. His nights are calendrically divided among his three wives with a preference for Houda who he visits with a bottle of whisky. If pleasures abound inside the domestic sphere, they are meant for the exclusive satisfaction of the household head.

Similarly, like the feminine space of the hammam, the narrow and serpentine streets of the medina have erotic connotations in the imaginary of the male. The ambivalence suggested by the presence/absence of the female in the street stirs the male’s erotic phantasms. A. Khatibi, for example, gives an erotic description of the activities which animate the street of the medina:

The street engulfed me and I sneaked into the labyrinth where anything could burst out in my face: wandering street cats, women’s eyes behind front doors, djinns (ghosts) behind Barbary fig trees [...] My archetypal neighbourhood: A glimpse of a

woman’s swift hand gesture as she pulls against her the front door -a feigned obstacle against rape- refreshed my memory.¹

Like the narrator in Khatibi’s novel, Hadj Benmoussa’s swift and determined pace as he walks the labyrinthine streets of the medina suggests his sexual potency and authoritative control over the female body. The world of the medina has no secrets for him. He has had it mapped out and domesticated. Children in the streets run to hide away when they see him and shopkeepers are always eager to greet him. In short, Hadj Benmoussa’s status of power transpires from the realm of his harem to the public world of the medina, or at least, this is the view he desperately holds to.

Figure 32. Bachir Skiredj and Amina Rachid in “In Search for a Husband for My Wife”.

However, the hierarchical power relations Hadj Benmoussa has carefully institutionalized inside his domestic sphere are jeopardized by the presence of a third-generation subversive female. Unlike Lalla Hobbi and Lalla Rabia, Houda is a post-traditional woman who, though she has consented to marry a polygamous man old enough to be her father, she stubbornly resists the traditional lifestyle he imposes on her. The film’s opening scene sets out the socio-cultural split between her and Hadj Benmoussa. In this scene, she dreams that she is on the roof terrace hanging the laundry on the clothesline to dry while a young man dressed in an Egyptian costume reads her love poems and woos her in the Egyptian dialect. However, when her lover tries to climb up the wall to join her, she starts screaming and begs him not to approach her because she already belongs to another man. Upon the young man’s insistence, she startles out of her sleep to her husband’s heavy snores.

This dream scene, which sets out the tone for the internal tension Houda has to negotiate throughout the film, can be a read as a double disavowal of her “real-life” situation but also of the alternative which her unconscious fantasy produces. The disruption of her dream-wish does not only speak to the power of social and cultural censorship but also to an unconscious denial of her image as a sex object that both her husband and her dream-lover seek to bracket her within. In fact, in her relations with men, she insists on playing the role of the seducer. She decides when to dance for Hadj Benmoussa and she is the one who tries to seduce the errand-boy. Furthermore, one of her favourite pastimes when she is visiting at her friend’s is to stand at the window and gossip about the men walking down the street. In fact, she has consented to marry Hadj Benmoussa only because of the strained circumstances of her family background. A paralytic stroke has confined her father to bed and her family exists on a subsistence level. Houda’s capital is her youth and her seductive femininity which she adopts as subversive and resistance strategies against the power and domination of the patriarch Hadj Benmoussa.

The dispute scene reveals the fractured worlds of the two antagonists. In the face of her husband’s excessive tyranny and overstated show of authority, Houda fights back. Her rebellion brings to the surface the accumulated frustrations and resentments she has been repressing. By taking an oath to cut her off from all contact with the outside world, Hadj Benmoussa makes a fundamental error in judgment. Houda’s desire for freedom and liberation
proves to be stronger and more powerful than the restrictive chains of the dominant social and cultural worldview. She has tried to negotiate a compromise between her post-traditional worldview and the normative lifestyle imposed by Hadj Benmoussa but the fracture is too deep for any reconciliation to happen. Moreover, the fact that Lalla Hobbi and Lalla Rabia are both witnesses to Houda’s rebellion further weakens the patriarch’s position in the realm of his household. Indeed, they both stand up in solidarity against Hadj Benmoussa’s expressed desire to marry another time. His decision to go back to Houda at the risk of exposing himself to gossip is also to be read as an act of concession he makes to his two other women.

Following her third divorce, Houda shows a strong determination to make a clear-cut break with her past lifestyle. She gets a new hair-cut, redecorates her parents’ house, changes her dress wardrobe, and decides to look for a job. As a declaration of her new status as a free woman, she stays at her friend’s until after dark. When her mother tries to rebuke her, she reminds her that she is determined to assume her responsibilities as a self-dependent woman. Meanwhile, Hadj Benmoussa’s orderly world has collapsed. The pleasant ambiance which reigned in his home has made room for a tense atmosphere. His debonair attitude has eclipsed and he has even lost heart in his commerce. He has become the laughing-stock of the community. His ultimate misfortunes with the husband of “his” wife will further enhance his downfall.

“In Search for a Husband for My Wife” has met a wide acclaim by the Moroccan public. Though statistics are not available, the film’s success can be measured by the fact that it has drawn to movie theatres a diverse public that has been for long marginalized.1 In fact, it allowed a large segment of Moroccans to experience cinema as a family outing to which parents and grand-parents were invited. In addition to its narrative story about polygamy which taps in the collective conscious of Moroccans regardless of gender, class or age considerations, the filmmaker managed to bring together an all-star

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1 I am not referring to commercial success because, for many reasons, I do not think that any Moroccan film can yet claim a commercial profit. As a case in point, a three-million dollar film has to be distributed in about sixty theatres (the equivalent of eighty weeks) to break even. However, according to statistics, the most widely distributed film, “Women and Women,” was distributed in twenty-three movie theatres out of a total of one hundred and seventy-eight. In addition, the most widely distributed films do not hold more than three weeks in the same movie theatre.
cast which the public is familiar with either through cinema, theatre, television or radio. Amina Rachid, who plays the role of Lalla Hobbi, has featured in more than three thousand performances in theatre, radio, and television. Naima Lamcharqui (Lalla Rabia) is a popular theatre and film performer and an ex-hostess of a successful radio programme. In addition to its important cast, well-wrought script, excellent image, and editing, the film's spatial setting in the medina of Fez and the traditional house in which it is shot have all contributed to its success. In short, the film has succeeded to construct wide and diverse publics from three different generations. Today, "Lalla Hobbi" is a household name ("Hobbi" means "my love" while "Lalla" is a title of respect and reverence used to address female saints).

However, the film leaves out too many loose ends in its treatment of the issue of polygamy, a salient signifying practice of the traditional lifestyle in the Arabo-Islamic world. At a time when Moroccan feminists are lobbying very hard to pass a legislation banning polygamy, "SHMW" turns out an almost "nostalgic" treatment of this practice. The film-text mediates an ambivalent construction of the character of the patriarch and renders very problematic the subject-positioning of the spectator. It is difficult for the spectator not to identify with the cherubic face of Bachir Skiredj, who plays the title-role of Hadj Benmoussa. His innocent-looking smiles and babyish attitudes disarm both his opponents and the spectator. When he is with Houda, he takes on playful attitudes which obliterate their age difference, like when he lies in bed and starts playing with his feet in a nonchalant manner. With Lalla Hobbi, he is a child who needs nursing. After his dispute with Houda, it is in Lalla Hobbi's arms that he cries out his heart. In addition, he never fails to show a genuine generosity in his dealings with his kin and his community. Houda, for example, admits that he has been very generous to her and to her family. In addition, he also enjoys a prominent narrative privilege. He is the optical and psychological subjective centre of the narrative. His control of the point of view makes it very difficult for other characters to emerge independently of his personality. Even when the camera momentarily moves out to report about Houda's new life, Hadj Benmoussa's presence is constantly felt. In short, his personality traits and his monopoly over the optical and psychological point of view of the narrative construct him as a likable character.
The predominant construction of female characters as subservient and submissive also adds to the film’s ambivalent critique of gender relations in Morocco. The subjugation of Lalla Hobbi and Lalla Rabia is already implied in their status as concubines in a polygamous household. They belong to a category of women held in social derision because “they have accepted to be second-class women.” Their devotion and obedience to Hadj Benmoussa negate their individual identities and make of them mechanical executioners of their husband’s whims and desires. Instead of unequivocally condemning their submissiveness, the film narrative contributes to its legitimation, a fact which adds to the ambivalent construction of the spectator-positioning. While no woman wishes to be in Lalla Hobbi’s position, female spectators can not hide their genuine admiration of her character. In fact, her popularity with Moroccan audiences has encouraged the filmmaker to produce a sequel to “SHMW” entitled “Lalla Hobbi.”

Neither is the construction of the post-traditional female Houda free from ambivalence. Her rebellion against patriarchal tyranny is mitigated by the compromising decisions she makes. First, she, too, consents to a polygamous marriage. Second, more than Lalla Hobbi or Lalla Rabia, she self-consciously constructs herself as a sex object ready for consumption. The seduction scenes she performs for Hadj Benmoussa/the spectator legitimate the stereotyped view of the female as a subversive temptress and, in a way, justify the patriarch’s desire to further restrain her spatial freedom. Her provocative dress and erotic dance movements demarcate her as a fetishized sex commodity that can be bought and sold. Her framing as a commodity is highlighted in a bargaining scene in which she contests the value of the gold jewelry hadj Benmoussa offers her in exchange of the fulfillment of his fantasmatic desires. More importantly, the fact that she accepts to be part of the scenario through which she is to return to Hadj Benmoussa after transiting through the nuptial bed of another man further problematizes the implications of her subjectivity and her self-identification as a post-traditional woman.

Finally, through a detailed representation of everyday life practices and performances of a Fassi (native of Fez) household, A. Tazi’s “In Search for a Husband for My Wife” traces the problematic and ambivalent processes which characterize the transition to a post-traditional lifeworld. This transition process generates contradictions and oppositions which may prove
difficult to negotiate. However, as suggested in the name of the city of Fes ("Fass" literally means "ax"), the dominant patriarchal worldview has been "axed" and split. The emergence of post-traditional subjects may still be difficult to mediate but commutable identities are already positioned in the cracks.

3. "Good-bye Fair:"

Cross-Dressing As a Transvestite Space

Daoud Aoulad-Syad's first feature film "Bye Bye Swirty" ("Good-bye Fair") is an innovative and daring exploration of the subculture of the fair and the world it mediates. Initially proposed as an homage to the dying institution of traditional entertainment, the fair, the film ends up being a psychological probe into commutable subjectivities and displaced identities. As a transvestite space, the fair becomes the mediating site for individual and communal subjectivities caught in a complex web of repressed memories, marginal realities, and the dream for spatial liberation and freedom. Eventually, the film pays tribute to a resistance lifeworld condemned to live at the margins of the dominant culture.

The cinematic travel narrative of "Good-bye Fair" reconstructs the lifestories of three characters brought together by the institution of the fair. Larbi, the owner of the fair, can not overcome a dark past that keeps haunting him and that he desperately seeks to drown in alcohol. He is the last survivor of a generation of entertainers for whom the fair is not only a business opportunity but an artistic passion and a moral commitment to the marginalized communities they entertain. After his death, the fair is broken down into pieces and sold to a wood wholesaler, thus, indicating the end of an era.

Kacem, Larbi's only son, is a brute. He is tough, cruel, and a compulsive liar. His coarse language and vulgar manners make it impossible for him to get involved in close or intimate relationships. On his first encounter with Rabii/Hanane, a cross-dressed dancer who has just been recruited by Larbi, he hastens to tell him/her "not to believe that they would ever become friends." He does not even bother to assist his father who lies agonizing in a room next to his. Kacem, too, is trapped in a dark past that he desperately seeks to reinvent. His tales about his life experiences in Belgium are fabricated lies
through which he attempts to adorn a past blighted by a three-year stay in jail. However, unlike his father, Kacem seems to derive an incommensurable force from his dream of immigration. This dream, which borders on obsession, allows him to negotiate the spatial limits imposed by the life of marginalization he leads.

Rabii/Hanane is a transvestite dancer. His/her cross-dressing and impersonation of a female dancer underline his/her hybrid gender identity. On stage, she is Hanane ("Hanane," literally "tenderness," is a female's name), the cross-dressed performer who impersonates a female dancer to entertain a sex-mixed audience at the fair. Her role consists of dancing to a play-back music, distributing lottery tickets to players, turning the wheel of fortune, and offering prizes to winners. Off-stage, he is Rabii (literally "spring"), a caring, tender-hearted, and mannerly young man whose sole dream is to go to Hollywood. His/her hybrid identity positions him/her as a mediator between Larbi and his son, the institution of the fair and its audience, and between the spectator and his/her childhood world.

Rabii/Hanane is excluded from the world of male communities. Except for Larbi, who bestows on him a fatherly attention, Rabii/Hanane does not relate to any other male character in the film. His/her relationship with Kacem is irrevocably fractured. Only the stage brings them together. Though they share the same room and intermittent excursions to the outside world, the rift between their two personalities is so stiff that the slightest interaction between them brings to the fore their conflictual and contradictory worldviews. Hanane/Rabii's feminine performance subverts the image of the virility and misogynist masculinity that Kacem strives hard to give of himself. From a psychological viewpoint, Kacem's resentment against Rabii/Hanane may be read as a self-defense strategy to repress an unconscious desire for a feminine world he has lost with the death of his mother (in fact, his hatred of his father is explained by the fact that he holds him responsible for the death of his mother). Rabii/Hanane's only male friend has already left for Hollywood. His absence from the narrative world of the film is an indication of Hanane/Rabii's irreconcilable marginalization from the realm of male communities.

By contrast, Rabii/Hanane has a number of female fans and admirers. On stage, he is the fair's centre of attraction. His/her audience is mostly female. Off-stage, his success with female characters stirs Kacem's jealousy. The café
waitress/prostitute does not hide her admiration for him/her and prefers his/her company to Kacem’s. Even if she accepts Kacem’s invitation, she shows more interest in Rabii/Hanane. The village female instructor, too, transgresses cultural taboos by seeking out Rabii/Hanane’s company and inviting him/her to her house while she ignores the advances of Kacem who shows a genuine sexual interest in her. In fact, the contradictory reactions that Rabii/Hanane’s hybrid gender identity generates find explanation in the conflicting interests which motivates males and females in his/her entourage. The statement that Michelene Wandor makes about theatre audience’s response to cross-dressing may explain, in part, female characters’ response to Rabii/Hanane:

For men, perhaps, there was the suggestion of subtextual homo-eroticism; for women, perhaps, a kind of displaced and contradictory narcissism, in which they could see their sex ‘played’ by a young [man], who could simultaneously represent innocence and potential virility.¹

In addition, female characters’ admiration of Rabii/Hanane may also originate in their awareness of the double marginalization they are both subjected to. In addition to the fact that the fair caters to communities marginalized from the dominant cultural practices in Morocco, female characters and Rabii/Hanane are also subjugated to male domination in their immediate space.

To the Moroccan spectator, the character of Rabii/Hanane also summons up the image of the transvestite dancer whose presence is central to the ceremonial ritual of hdiya (the groom’s gifts to his bride). The cultural practice of hdiya, which is dominant in low-middle class neighbourhoods, consists of publicizing the groom’s presents by displaying them on a horse-cart and taking them in a festive ceremonial ritual from the house of the groom’s family to the bride’s. The ceremonial practice of hdiya carries symbolic implications with bearings on the groom’s and the bride’s status among their kin, neighbours, and communities. The hdiya is accompanied by

the groom's female relatives and kin, a group of folk musicians, and a cross-dressed performer who dances on the cart while playing to the tune of musicians by rhythmically hitting on a pair of scissors with a rod.

Figure 33. Cross-dressing and the fun fair: A. Didane as the transvestite dancer in "Good-bye Fair".
The hdiya has priority in public space. Traffic is detoured or slowed down and intermittent stops are made to allow the transvestite dancer to perform. Surrounded and adulated by a festive female audience which shows their appreciation of his/her performance by sticking bank notes in his/her belt or chest, but offered to the gaze of both women and men who stand on the pavement or look out of their windows and roof terraces to admire the performance, the crossed-dressed dancer brings the ambivalent issues of sexuality and gender identity to public visibility. While the cross-dressed male dancer is tolerated by society which uses him/her to perform a social and cultural function women are not allowed to do in public, his/her gender identity is also bracketed by the social stigma attached to it. If in the dominant worldview, dance is a feminine practice, as implied in the popular saying “he who dances does not have a beard to hide,” the sexual identity of a transvestite dancer is doubly negated. Moroccan popular culture thrives with imaginary stories about the sexual impotence (and castration) of cross-dressed males.

However, cross-dressed male performers are nonetheless subversive figures which bracket the dominant representation of sexuality and reveal that gender is socially constructed. Lesley Ferris’s point about the implications of cross-dressing on theatre audiences is also valid for the cultural figures of cross-dressed male public performers and transvestite entertainers at the fair:

A cross-dressed performer -for example, a man playing a woman- can be read as a woman, or a disguised male, or as a man who longs for other men, or as a mixture of all three. Depending on the variety of people in the audience, and depending on each individual’s gender and sexual preference, each spectator will have their own personal response to such a performance. Since theatre exists in time, the responses of each spectator can shift and transform during the course of a performance. Such theatrical transformation can highlight another potentially subversive characteristic of cross-dressing:
the cross-dressed actor reveals that gender is socially constructed.\(^1\)

The transvestite space created by the hybrid identity of cross-dressed male performers allows society to negotiate the contradictions and fractures generated by a strict ordering and hierarchization of individual and collective behaviours. Cross-dressing is used to contain collective fantasmatic sexual desires while it is simultaneously bracketed as an “abnormality.” This ambivalence reflects on the social status of the transvestite performer and the ambiguous response of the audience to his/her gender identity. Rabii/Hanane lives in the margins of society and is excluded from the realm of male communities in his/her immediate community context. However, he/she also exercises a kind of attraction on male gazers. On one occasion, Rabii/Hanane is approached by two young men who make blunt sexual advances to him/her. This incident adds to the implicit references to homosexuality that the character of the transvestite dancer inevitably evokes. Daoud Aoulad-Syad insists that his intention was not to represent the character of the transvestite dancer as a homosexual but to reconstruct his/her off-stage everyday life. However, he is right to underline the unavoidable ambiguity which originates in the mind of the spectator.\(^2\) This is because the social construction of sexuality relies heavily on the arbitrary significations of costume and dress. In addition, the ambiguity that cross-dressing generates is revealing of the large gamut of cultural voices and noises which are implicated in the processes of the construction of sexuality and gender identity in a predominantly male society.

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\(^2\) “When we were writing the film script (the script was written in collaboration with the filmmaker A. Bouanani and the playwright Y. Fadel), it was not our intention to represent the character of the transvestite as a homosexual. Rather, we were interested in his off-stage life. I think there is a confusion in the imaginary of the spectator which makes it that whenever he sees somebody with make-up on and dressed in a woman’s costume, he immediately thinks that he is homosexual” (Daoud Aoulad-Syad, interviewed by K. Rais, *L’opinion*, vendredi 29 Janvier, 1999, p. 6).
In juxtaposition to the circumscribed and limited lifeword of characters, "Good-bye Fair" builds up a boundless and infinite aesthetic realm. The marginal world of the institution of the fair and the village communities it is associated with is constantly interpellated by the unlimited horizon of desert space. Set in the south of Morocco with the mythical city of Marrakech as a backdrop, the film traces the psychological and emotional solitude of the film’s protagonists by contrasting their everyday routine and internal conflicts with the meditation-inspiring natural landscape surrounding them. Long and wide shots of desert sky and dunes punctuate the limited scope of the protagonists’ spatial performance. The filmmaker’s photography talents allow him to negotiate quite successfully the thin line between meditation and boredom the film narrative positions the viewer in. Except for show performances when the pace slightly picks up, the characters’ lack of communication and interaction results in long silent shots which freeze time and institutionalize a mood of sadness. The tracking of the characters’ everyday routines in a space where nothing happens (the seasonal visits of the fair is the most anticipated event in the life of village communities)
highlights the world of solitude the characters are trapped in but also tests the viewer's patience in keeping up with a pace in which time is frozen. In fact, the slippage between the circumscribed world of characters and the unlimited natural space of the desert connotes the characters' desire and longing for freedom while it simultaneously suspends the probability of change in their lives. The protagonists' outdoor excursions always end up in the circumscribed world of their lodgings. They seem to be condemned to a life of eternal travel. After the death of Larbi, Kacem and Rabii/Hanane part at the cross-roads. Each carries his world of solitude but also the hope that the infinite road will eventually end with self-reconciliation and reintegration into the social world from which they have been excluded.

Conclusion: A Cinema for All

The vignette above summarizes some of the structural problems which impede Arab and African filmmaking. The deplorable conditions of film theatres, film distribution policies, and the politics of spectatorship are only the tip of the iceberg. For African and Arab national cinemas to emerge, profound changes must be implemented. In fact, the audience's behaviour must be read as an indication of their ascending frustrations and disappointments with the institution of cinema. In the absence of a cinema that anticipates their desires and anxieties, spectators convert the spatial practice of film theatres into sites of contestation and protest.

In fact, one of the major problems facing Arab and African cinemas is the rift which separates filmmakers from their publics. While 75% of Moroccan cineasts believes that the public is interested in the national product, 50% admits that it is disappointed by the aesthetic and thematic output of the Moroccan film while 31.81% thinks that the Moroccan public is alienated. Conversely, 42% of the Moroccan public is not happy with the Moroccan film but still 46% would go to see a Moroccan product to support national film production. More importantly, 52% of the Moroccan film public is constituted of groups with very low or no income at all (26% workers, 22% students, 4% jobless) and 92% of the public is aged between 16 and 35 while 76% lives in

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working-class neighbourhoods.1 These figures show that the public of the Moroccan film is predominantly young and low middle-class, two important indicators about the material sacrifices the Moroccan public makes to support national film production and about its expectations and anticipations of the national cinematic product.

A grassroots restructuring of the cinematic industry at all levels is needed if Arab and African filmmaking is to compete with international production. By creating the appropriate context, Arab and African states can give impetus to their national cultures and economies. In fact, the potential economic revenue of film industry is hardly taken into account in the governments’ fiscal policies while the resounding success of the Egyptian commercial cinema indicates the potential market size for national cinemas in the Arab world. In Nigeria, the Yoruba cinema has a potential audience of ten million spectators. Moreover, as the case of the Yoruba cinema shows, the commercial film does not necessarily mean cheap melodramas or romance adventures. Films can be simultaneously entertaining, subversive, developmental, and commercially successful. In the Economics of Indian Cinema, Oomen and Joseph conclude that:

A sound film policy is highly desirable to guide the cinema as a means of artistic expression and as an instrument of popular entertainment in the context of the economic involvement in the production and the exhibition of the motion picture. Being a media based art, the cinema is having a wider impact on the society at large in shaping the social, economic, political and cultural life than the other forms of art. The various interests have to be accommodated on well-balanced basis in shaping such a policy.2

One other major impediment for the development of Arab and African cinemas is the gender bias which prevails in their film industries. Except for a

1 Ahmed Najim, “A Fieldwork Survey on the Public of the Moroccan Film” [text in Arabic] in as-Sahifa, no. 65, January 1-7, 2000, pp. 26-27. This survey was conducted in Casablanca during the first three weeks following the first release of Abdelkader Lagtaa’s “Bidawa” (“Casablancans”).

very few women filmmakers who have been able to break through a masculine institution, Safi Faye (Senegal), Assia Djebar (Algeria), and Farida Belyazid (Morocco), the female voice is still muted. Women's concerns and desires are mostly constructed from male perspectives, a fact which often contributes to the legitimation and reinforcement of gender stereotypes even in the most emancipatory film. After centuries of marginalization and subordination, cinema must give women the opportunity to come to grips with their self-identity and to communicate their anxieties and desires. Abdellatif Ben Ammar stresses this point:

I think the women's perspective is more interesting than men's, for it is that which is finally responsible for what we are. Men have always directed society, and women have always been passive. Now they are aware. And in women I find [...] lucidity [...] Women are the alternative, who just might provoke a marvelous and positive explosion in our society.¹

Literature, too, may contribute to the development of a cinematic aesthetics of Arab and African cinemas. As a matter of fact, some of the best Arab and African films are adaptations of literary works. Sembene Ousmane is himself a novelist. Cinema and literature are complementary forms of expression and communication. While some of the limitations of the literary discourse find more effective representation through visual mediation, the literary exploration of individual psychology and social relations remain key elements to the understanding of human character and societies.

The post-traditional film is drawing a road-map for the development of Arab and African filmmaking. More importantly, post-traditional cinema is constructing its publics and audiences and proving that while it mediates the debate on the anticipated societal project, it is also aesthetically and commercially viable. Its imperfections are integrated part of its processes of reconstruction and mediation and its subversive pleasures are also sites for collective identification, negotiation, and perpetuation. As Moumen Smihi has put it, if "the Arab image were to fail, to be lacking, or if it were to disappear and could not be reconstituted and perpetuated, all human culture

would be amputated. There have been enough amputations in human history."¹

Conclusion

This study has endeavoured to re-present resistance in its performed dimensions and as it relates to people's everyday life in post-traditional Morocco. The significance of the project is not to be sought in its underlying claim that subordinate and subaltern communities develop alternative media of resistance. Rather, what I hope I have accomplished is a re-presentation of moments of emergence, liminality, indeterminacy, hesitancy, and contradiction of constructed resistances as they surface in people's everyday communication and performance. The spheres of women's hammam and the café reconstruct the category of communal agency as a subversive, ambivalent, ambiguous, and conflicting mediator of the performance and emergence of subaltern communities. Similarly, post-traditional film aesthetics foregrounds the ambivalence which underlies the performed resistance of individuals and communities. In addition, communal spheres of resistance are not to be viewed as functional solutions to social problems but as grass-roots alternatives to homogenizing and hegemonizing systems of cultural representation and communication.

At an immediate level, this study has argued that the ambivalence which characterizes communication and everyday performance speaks to people's pressing desire for a more emancipated social space. Caught between a traditional normative model of behaviour which controls everyday performance and a homogenizing discourse which brackets public participation of women, the poor, and the illiterate, post-traditional communities struggle to negotiate a space where their myriad identities can emerge. The spatial practice in women's hammam celebrates the resistance of silenced voices and marginalized performances. Café culture mediates a subversive worldview which brackets the dominant representation of reality while post-traditional aesthetics reconstructs life-stories written off by the master narrative of the power structure. Furthermore, these spheres of resistance promote forms of organization and association which socialize participants into an ethic of collective solidarity.

At a conceptual level, this study opens new borderlines in the debate on the public sphere and on alternative forms of social organization in the age of globalized capitalism and liberalism. One important implication of this study
is that it widens the cracks in the boundary line which insists on a strict and formal separation between the "public" and the "private." Nancy Fraser has insightfully noted that formal restrictions are not the only impediments to an equal participation in the public sphere:

[...] the lifting of formal restrictions on public-sphere participation does not suffice to ensure inclusion in practice. On the contrary, even after women and workers have been formally licensed to participate, their participation may be hedged by conceptions of economic privacy and domestic privacy that delimit the scope of debate. These notions, therefore, are vehicles through which gender and class disadvantages may continue to operate subtextually and informally, even after explicit, formal restrictions have been rescinded.¹

The communal spheres of the hammam and the café are not insulate spaces where the scopes of communication and performance are delimited along a strict normative model of behaviour and conversation. On the contrary, the etiquette of performance and the protocol of discursive interaction are constantly rearranged and reconstructed. Issues about privacy, domestic life, and intimacy converge with debates on more general concerns. More specifically, what is of "general concern" is decided by participants themselves. This process of vacillation and reorganization of public performance and communication can be seen more clearly in the ambivalent status of the café as a metaphor of duality which simultaneously produces and reproduces, writes and rewrites, constructs and reconstructs, represents and makes present the changing social relations.

Another implication of this study is that it unpacks a cluster of assumptions about social organization and everyday performance. Resistance is not only mediated through institutional and institutionalized forms of organization. Rather, as I have attempted to show, informal association and unconstructed co-mingling can generate performed and concrete resistances. In fact, informal collective associations may be as effective as formal

¹ Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy" in Craig Calhoun, ed., Habermas and the Public Sphere, Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1992, p. 132.
legislation in implementing a parity of participation in the public sphere. The post-traditional young men and women who are reordering spatial practices inside cafés are participating, at a practical level, in the reorganization of gender relations and spatial production and distribution. Furthermore, informal grouping can translate abstract ideals, such as solidarity and collective participation, into a lived experience. Conversely, unconstructed co-mingling can reveal the gap between the anticipated project of an emancipated society and the reality of everyday performance as in the case of the young men who speak out their commitment to a more equal participation in the public sphere but show the limits of their tolerance at the sight of a female relative at a café terrace.

Similarly, a conceptualization of the public sphere in its strict Habermasian dimension and a rigid application of the normative model which upholds rational-critical debate at the expense of other forms of communication would automatically eliminate more than half of the population whose worldview is shaped by material conditions and mediated through "spontaneous philosophy" and the "wisdom of intuition." In addition, a unidimensional interpretation of "public debate" would marginalize issues of immediate and pressing concerns to subordinate groups. Women's struggle, for instance, is more centered on private concerns and issues which relate to the domestic sphere. Excluding such issues from public agenda on the ground that they do not represent a "general interest" would reinforce the status quo and delay the emergence of emancipated post-traditional communities.

Conversely, the communicative act in communal spheres does not discriminate against the various forms of discursive interaction. Noise, silence, gossip, rumour, jokes, pranks, play, and body performance are integrated components of the act of communication at par with rational and critical debate. More than that, it is the mélange of voices and noises, of reflection and meditation, of gossip and chat, of play and ribald jests which mediates liminal moments and allows post-traditional myriad identities to emerge from within the cracks of a monolithic and standardized worldview.

I have also argued that communal spheres are to be problematized rather than idealized. The moments of emergence they mediate are also punctuated by a reproduction of the existing power relations and social contradictions. Women's hammam does not only celebrate emancipated femininity but can
also reproduce the hegemonic ideology of patriarchy. In this feminine space, women's vulnerability to rumour and gossip renders the dance of the female body a dangerous play and turns "the fun of playing" into "playing with fire." Likewise, café space does not only mediate alternative worldviews but this space is also used by the power structure to contain the subversive drives of subordinate groups. In fact, cafés are notorious hang-outs of under-cover agents who exploit the laxity this space invites to gather information on the general trend of unofficial public opinion. Similarly, the ambivalent reconstructions of everyday reality post-traditional aesthetics mediates can also contribute to a reproduction of the status quo. Abderrahmane Tazi's "In Search fora Husband for My Wife" can be simultaneously read as a critique and celebration of polygamy. This is why performance in communal spheres must be kept in perspective for resistance is not automatically mapped on specific sites.

Since I started this project, quite a few political and social changes have come to confirm my thesis that post-traditional Morocco is historically oriented toward social emancipation. A change in political leadership and easier access to new technologies and global media are contributing to a more accentuated liberation of social space. Issues which have long been excluded from public debate have drifted over from café terraces to news headlines. Debates on the personal status of women, human rights issues, the environment, the disabled, the poor, the marginalized rural population, the homeless, the working class, the unemployed, and the case of single mothers have integrated mainstream debates along with bureaucratic malfunctions, the role of the intelligentsia, political parties, civil society, and the status of religion in post-traditional Morocco.

Similarly, more meeting places are now available to women. In addition to the hammam, beauty salons, fitness clubs, and women's associations are a sample of feminine spaces where post-traditional women can meet, talk, chat, gossip, and resource themselves. Access to the new technologies and global media is also contributing to a reordering of gender and power relations in post-traditional Morocco. The pre-set melodies and tunes of mobile phones have become an integrated element of the music tapestry which animates the ambiance inside cafés and hammams. Cybercafés are now competing with the

salons de thé and computer-mediated communities are converging with café mediated groups. Indeed, two of the cafés I have extensively researched have converted the upstairs sections into cyberspaces.

In a recent radio broadcast of a religious programme, the fiqh (a traditional religious scholar) listed the cybercafé as a potential space which can protect the youth from alienation, a statement which underlines the ongoing negotiation between the sacred and the secular, the potential of emancipation and the risk of alienation, the promise of post-tradition and the threat of globalization. As I sat in my neighbourhood café pondering on the trajectories mapped by the fiqh, I realized that my roaming thoughts were taking me back to the initial problematic which started this project. I paid the waiter and I hastened back home to finish a book I was reading. I share this book's concluding paragraph with my post-traditional readers:

Culture, as it is seen through its productive forms and means of mediation, is not reducible to a fixed body of social value and belief or a direct precipitant of lived experience in the world but grows into a space on the side of the road [or in café terrace or the dim-lighted rooms of the hammam] where stories weighted with sociality take on a life of their own. We “see” it, as Agee (1941) insisted, only by building up multilayered narratives of the poetic in the everyday life of things. We represent it only by roaming from one texted genre to another - romantic, realist, historical, fantastic, sociological, surreal. There is no final textual solution, no way of resolving the dialogic of the interpreter/interpreted or subject/object through efforts to “place” ourselves in the text, or to represent “the fieldwork experience,” or to gather up the voices of the other as if they could not speak for themselves. When people[...] say, “I don’t have no ideal,” they are speaking the truth; culture isn’t something that can be gotten right. At best it is a point of entry, like talk itself. Truth claims emerge in the performative spaces where signs (talk) and meanings (ideals/ideas) collide -the space on the
side of the road. But this is the very motive for telling the story and its point in the end.¹

¹ Kathleen Stewart, A Space on the Side of the Road: Cultural Poetics in an “Other” America, 1996, pp. 210-211.


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