

Imported Religious Sartorial Markers and
the Beard:
Perceptions and Politics in Morocco

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Abstract

This independent study project aims to explore the perceptions and politics associated with Moroccans who choose to wear religious dress, hijab or a beard. The topic of this research was based on the question, are physical markers that one chooses to wear related to a specific identity? And, more specifically, are any of these things related to a political Islamist identity in Morocco? The methods used in this research consist of interviews and surveys.

During the first half of this research project, in-depth interviews were conducted with established academics and officials living in Rabat and Casablanca in Morocco. The objective of these interviews was to acquire concrete historical and contemporary facts and opinions regarding religious and political dress in Morocco.

During the second half of the project period, surveys were distributed to English Studies students at University Mohammed V and Islamic Studies students at Dar El Hadith El Hassania. The responses provided valuable yet diverse answers regarding the perceptions of young intellectuals on the intertwined issues of religion, tradition and politics in Morocco. However despite the varied responses, there was a common perception that affiliation to a specific group or ideology cannot be determined based on physical dress or markers alone, but rather must be examined on an individual basis.

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Introduction

“Morocco has always been a fusion country; it takes what it likes and runs with it (David Brownstein, US Embassy).”

We live in a world where appearance matters; what you wear and how you present yourself makes a statement whether or not it is intentional. Because the world has become such an interconnected place, people everywhere are inevitably informed and influenced about the lifestyles and conflicts of different cultures. Nowhere is this more evident as the case of Morocco, a country which has been influenced by Europe, Africa and the Middle East throughout its long history. The Moroccan people have experienced a wide range of religious, political and social trends over the course of its history and the importation of various global trends has only increased in the past one hundred years. Today, the trend of radical Islam is one which the global media and its listeners cannot seem to get enough of. There is constantly a new story about a long-bearded Muslim’s potential connection to a terrorist plot and since the Casablanca terrorist attacks in 2003, Morocco is not immune to these accusations. In my research, I explore the perceptions and politics associated with Moroccans who choose to wear specific religious sartorial markers such as hijab, the beard, Afghani and Saudi Arabian dress (see defining terminology).

The topic of this research was conceived while exploring Morocco in my first few weeks studying here. It was impossible not to notice the different styles of clothing of Moroccans walking around the medina in Rabat. I noticed that there were many women in hijab, some in full black dress reminiscent of images I have seen in media coverage of Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia or Iran. I also noticed while some men wore a beard, it was

not particularly common, especially not a long beard. Thus, I began to wonder, how certain styles of dress are connected with the identity of the wearer. Did people wear hijab, the beard or certain clothing styles for religious obligation, familial obligation, as a fashion trend, or furthermore were they some kind of expression of a specific political identity connected to an Islamist ideology?

The topic of this research was based on the question, are physical markers that one chooses to wear related to a specific identity? And, more specifically, are any of these things related to a political Islamist identity in Morocco? The purpose of this research was to explore these questions keeping in mind the general information I have gathered from Western news and media outlets.

In the United States it is widely known that the media tends to sensationalize news stories and generalize the actual issues at hand. However even with this knowledge there are many misconceptions and misunderstanding about Muslim culture and politics. According to David Brownstein, a Political Associate in the US Embassy of Rabat, the United States Government follows this trend as well. "In the U.S. government we make a lot of generalizations based on limited data." Commonly held views about Muslim societies tend to be related to politics, specifically radical Islam and terrorism. Within this particular viewpoint all women who cover their heads in the name of Islam and every man who wears a long beard is associated with radical politics in connection with Al-Qaeda or other terrorist organizations. It is clear that these generalizations are not completely true; however do they hold any truth at all in Morocco? It has been recorded that public opinion in Muslim countries on issues such as radical Islam and terrorism are

quite divided. Some people view it as legitimate and others view it as completely abhorrent and inapplicable to their societies and Islam as a whole.

The topic set forth in this paper was explored through a few written sources but the majority of the information used was obtained through interviews of accomplished officials and intellectuals living in Morocco as well as surveys distributed to Moroccan students. In this paper I will first discuss the methodology used in the research of this paper as well as limitations and problems encountered in the research process. I will then define certain terms used in this research to avoid any confusion in the meaning of my research terminology.

I will then move onto discuss my findings through in-depth interviews about imported religious dress and the beard. I will first show the rules that the Qur'an lays out for dressing in Islam and will then move on to explore the history of imported dress in Morocco during the past one hundred years. Next I will discuss the history and politics of the hijab, the beard and Afghan and Saudi Arabian dress in Morocco. After laying out the basis of my research information I will discuss the perceptions of young Moroccan university students on the connection of religious dress to politics in Morocco. Each portion of this research paper will show that there are varied perceptions on interrelatedness of religious sartorial markers including the beard and Moroccan politics. However there is a consensus that each case must be examined on an individual basis rather than generalizing the complicated and intertwined issues of religion, tradition and politics in Morocco.

Research Methodology

The information used in this research paper was obtained primarily through in-depth personal interviews with established officials and intellectuals in Rabat and Casablanca. Interviews were conducted in a three week period with various Moroccan and American experts on the issue. All interviews with the exception of one were conducted in English and consent for the use of personal opinions and ideas in my research paper were obtained verbally. Sample interview questions are available in the appendix.

In addition to these in-depth interviews I utilized a six question survey which I distributed to students at various intellectual institutions in Rabat. This survey was used to gauge perceptions of university students on the idea of imported religious dress in Morocco and its relation to political identity. I used these surveys to compare and contrast their ideas with ideas commonly held by the American public. American media tends to simplify Muslim culture and enforce untrue ideas. I wanted to use my survey to see if Moroccan students had any views that were similar to these common American misconceptions and how they came to their conclusions on the issue.

I obtained consent from students to use the information they provided in this research paper with a signed consent form which I explained before they completed the survey. All surveys that were distributed were in English, thus there were some questionable answers provided to due to a lack of English proficiency of some of the students.

Research Limitations

This survey used in this research paper was distributed to Islamic Studies students at Dar El Hadith El Hassania and English Studies students and University Mohammed V. At the time of conception, I intended to distribute my survey to Political Science students at University Mohammed V as well. However, I was unable to meet with a group of students there and thus was forced to limit my research only to Islamic Studies and English Studies students which limited my research to a group of students who are characteristically liberal and another group that is characteristically conservative.

I chose to limit my research to the geographical area in and around Rabat, excluding one interview in Casablanca, due to limitations in my list of contacts. The people who I wanted to interview were all located in Rabat and I was able to distribute my surveys through contacts I had developed throughout my semester in Morocco. In addition, I chose to limit my research to Rabat and Casablanca due to financial limitations.

This research project was also limited an interview and survey population that consisted of highly educated intellectuals. In this decision, many valuable perceptions of the uneducated population of everyday Moroccans were not included in this research. I made this decision in order to limit my field of research due to time constraints. I thought that broadening my interview and survey population would make this research project a task beyond its four week period. In addition, my choice to limit my research to English-speaking Moroccans influenced the deliberate decision to constrain my research to the community of educated Moroccan elites.

Defining Terminology

(Images available in the appendix)

- **Islamism:** a term that denotes a set of political ideologies holding that Islam is not only a religion but also a political system that unites Muslims and governs them on the basis of Islamic jurisprudence.
- **Hijab:** although traditionally referring to the female head and body, the contemporary use of the term and the meaning in this research refers specifically to the covering worn to hide the whole head and chest excluding the face. This conception of hijab was exported from Iran in 1979.
- **Jalaba:** traditional and common Moroccan hooded outerwear for both men and women; a style unique to Morocco.
- **Afghan Dress:** a certain style of dress imported to Morocco that is characterized by its looseness and dark colors; it sometimes denotes an Islamist political identity. For men it is a top with long sleeves that goes down to the knees over loose pants. For women it is a black or dark grey head covering that goes to the middle of the body and a long gown with simple shoes. Everything is covered including hands and often a black face covering.
- **Saudi Arabian Dress:** a conservative style of dress, often for women, with which she is covered from head to toe in either black, light blue or white cloth. Only her eyes are revealed.

Imported Religious Dress and the Beard

“We may dress in jeans and t-shirts and we may speak French and Spanish,’ says a young tailor in the maze of the marketplace. “But inside we are all for the Islamic movement. We want our women to dress the Islamic way and we want an Islamic state (Barber).”

When a visitor steps off the plane to enter Morocco, its identity as a Muslim country is immediately clear. One can hear the call to prayer five times a day booming from the many Mosques in every Moroccan city and one can see Moroccans walking around in physical markers of their Moroccan religious and cultural identity. However one might wonder why do people wear certain forms of dress or a beard? I think that it is the immediate conclusion of some Western visitors that Islamic dress immediately tied with certain political ideologies. However, through this research I have discovered that there are a multitude of reasons one may wear hijab, a beard, Afghan or Saudi Arabian dress in Morocco. Some of these reasons are connected to politics, however many are not. It was found that broad conclusions cannot be drawn as to the relation of religious sartorial markers and the beard and their connection to politics, rather each case must be examined individually.

In this section I will examine specific religious clothing which is common in Morocco and perceptions of their connection to political identity. I will begin by discussing the rules of dressing that the Qur’an has set forth and how they are interpreted today. I will then discuss the importation of clothes and styles in Morocco in the last one hundred years to give a perspective on the current trends in Morocco. I will then, in three sections, discuss the history and politics of the beard, hijab, and Afghan and Saudi Arabian dress in Morocco. These three sections aim to clarify and discuss the research question set forth in this paper.

Islamic Rules of Dressing

Although there may be diverse reasons for wearing different styles of dress, according to strictly religious Muslims the rules for dressing are clearly dictated by the Qur'an. According to Mohammed Darif there is no such thing as Islamic dress, rather there is an ideology about clothes in Islam. The traditional clothing of all Muslim cultures is based on the Qur'an and its call for modest clothing for both men and women.

According to Mustafa Khalfi, there are three general rules on which clothing styles are based. First, clothes for both men and women should be loose and have no rigid shape that hugs the body. Second, clothes should act as a form of mutual respect between men and women that eliminates the intimacy of any interaction between them. Third, clothes should show respect for certain religious events and rituals, in particular Hajj. Khalfi said that these rules form the basis of traditional clothes worn by Muslims. Although clothing styles have changed throughout the history of Islam, these rules remain intact and are considered important by pious Muslims all over the world (Darif, Khalfi).

Similar to Khalfi's three rules of dress dictated by the Qur'an, Ahmed Abbadi explained that Islamic dress includes two basic pillars: *s'tahr* and *z'nah*. The first pillar, *s'tahr*, means to cover oneself in public and when in the presence of strangers. The second, *z'nah*, means beauty of clothing in the form of certain motifs and colors. However included in *z'nah* is also *k'hast*, meaning moderation as to not attract unwanted attention. In addition to the rules and pillars which Khalfi and Abbadi point out, other religious scholars interpret the need for Muslim women to cover their heads and chests in the form of some kind of headscarf or the hijab (Abbadi, Darif, Halim).

Although these rules seem strict, they are only guidelines that suggest a specific shape and purpose of clothing for Muslims. However, how one responds to these rules and pillars is based on geographical differences as well as personal preferences. According to Abbadi, clothing of various Muslim cultures varies but is ultimately complimentary. Thus, the clothing which is indigenous in Morocco is inevitably quite different from that of Saudi Arabia, Libya or Egypt due to geographical limitations and cultural differences. Through various globalizing factors which have made our world a smaller place, clothing styles have moved fluidly from one location to another in the last century. And, as one can see, nowhere is this clearer than in the Muslim world because of its inherent interconnectedness through a common language, religion and Arab identity. This interconnectedness is intensified in a place such as Morocco due to its connection to so many cultures and societies due to its geographical position between Europe, Africa and the Middle East (Abbadi, Saqi).

The Importation of Dress in the last One Hundred Years

The movement of ideas and styles of dress has always existed throughout the Muslim world because of its inherent interconnectedness. The concept of the *umma*, unity among all Muslims, has contributed the fluid movement of people, ideas and things among people of Muslim countries. Ahmed Abbadi said that it is inappropriate to speak of importation in the styles of dress among Muslim countries even today because of the inherent unity among Muslim countries throughout the world. Rather, Abbadi said that it is more suitable to speak of the movement of ideas among the Muslim world, not importation. However it is important to notice that one speaks of the movement of clothing styles among Muslim countries it largely has to do with politics and religious

movements. Thus, because Morocco has been such a stable Muslim country for so many years, there tends to be a greater amount of importation of clothing styles into Morocco rather than exportation from Morocco. I have found that in many cases where people in other countries make the conscience decision to wear a style of dress from another place, it often originates from the desire to show support for a particular political cause.

However this is somewhat limited because different styles of clothing have been imported into Morocco through intellectual, religious, social and political movements throughout history and have only intensified in the last one hundred years due to global media, technology and other globalizing factors (Abbadi).

Despite the increase in the importation of clothing styles on the last one hundred years, which most interviewees agreed upon, a certain adherence to Moroccan styles and traditions has remained. According to Ahmed Abbadi, the jalaba is still one of the most common forms of dress in Morocco and it has its origin in Morocco. However even clothing styles which may not originate in Morocco change somewhat to apply to Moroccan tastes and concepts of modesty. According to Khalfi, it is impossible for clothing styles to become popular without this process. However he said that the vehicle used to spread these clothing trends across the Arab and Muslim world is religion. He says that Moroccans will refuse to wear clothes that non-religious groups bring to Morocco. However this contradicts the fact that Western-style clothing is probably the most commonly worn imported style of clothing in Morocco. This fact is not connected to a social, religious or political movement but rather the colonial presence of the French in Morocco during the first half of the twentieth century (Abbadi, Khalfi).

The modern history of Morocco is inevitably intertwined with the colonial presence of the French from the years 1912 until independence in 1956. The French had a huge cultural and economic impact in Morocco and their presence is certainly important to the evolution of clothing styles in the last one hundred years. Before 1912 clothing styles in Morocco were based on regional customs and traditions which had developed through the Amazigh (indigenous Moroccan) history as well as the rules of dressing in the Qur'an. However the colonial presence in Morocco brought European influences which have had a long-lasting impact still present today (Saqi).

Before the colonization of Morocco in 1912, Moroccans had their own individual identities, ideas, styles and behaviors. However when the French arrived in Morocco, its unique culture was immediately Westernized. According to Dr. Khalid Saqi, at the time of colonization, Morocco was at a period of a great economic low and thus Westerners were idealized and there was a shift from old traditional practices to modernity that was associated with prosperity. Although this change permeated Moroccan society, in the realm of styles of dress, things changed for men much faster than that of women. This was because men were working with Europeans and were forced to interact with them on a daily basis. One such traditional practice which was abandoned was keeping a beard (Henry, Saqi).

The History and Politics of the Beard in Morocco

As discussed, the presence of the French in Morocco completely changed the concept of the beard for men in Morocco. In the years before 1912 the beard was common among Moroccan men and for the most part it wasn't associated with religion or politics, rather it was just the style of the day. In fact, according to Abbadi, it was

humiliating not to have a beard and every Moroccan king before Mohammed V followed this tradition. However in addition to these followers of tradition and style there were also men who chose to wear the beard as a sign of reverence for the prophet Mohammed because he wore a beard when the Qur'an was revealed to him (Abbadi, Saqi).

Despite these customs entrenched in Moroccan society, when Moroccan men were forced to interact with the French during colonization many began to shave their beards in order to fit into the new urban Moroccan society which was so heavily influenced by Europe. The French saw the beard as a rural practice which was associated with un-cleanliness; this idea spread to the Moroccan psyche and still exists somewhat today. Thus in the 1940s and 1950s the beard was still seen as a sign of traditionalism, religion, or certain positions such as judges or rulers of rural areas. However in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, having a beard was an exception to the norm and to some extent, is still unusual today (Saqi).

Walking around Moroccan cities today, one can observe that the beard is still not very common. Although there are men wearing beards, both long and short, it is more common for a Moroccan man to be clean shaven. According to Nadia Halim, the beard is not an obligation for men, as she views the hijab for women. And due to the Western association of the beard with Islamism, these findings beg the question, what are the reasons why some men choose to wear a beard today even though it does not seem to be in fashion? Through interviews with various intellectuals and officials in Morocco, it was learned that although each case needs to be evaluated individually, there seems to be a common perception a man wearing a beard today is somehow connected to Islamist political ideas (Halim).

According to Brownstein the concept of a connection of the beard to radical Islamist thought is a direct result of the situation in Algeria and Morocco's geographical proximity to it. He said that the beard has a very specific political meaning in Algeria; it is connected to radical thought. However in Morocco this connection is vague and it is unclear whether the men wearing a beard in Morocco are even Moroccans or if they are from Gulf countries and have come to Morocco in an effort to spread theories of Wahabbism or Salafism. However, because it is difficult to tell the difference between physical markers which show a person's respect for Islam or for the prophet and marking a specific political identity, each case must be taken on an individual basis and generalizations should be avoided (Brownstein).

Mustafa Khalfi, an Islamist himself and member of the Party for Justice and Development, said that the beard has no specific association in Morocco. However he also commented that many people associate the beard with Salafist groups in Morocco. Salafism is an ideology which believes that the time of the Prophet Mohammed was the era in which Islam was at its purest form and there should be a return to this way of life. Abbadi added to this concept saying that the long square beard is a political statement associated with the Salafi movement and Al-Qaeda doctrines. He said that the connection of this particular style of beard to radical Islam is the same in many other countries, it is always political. This association of the long beard and Salafism began in the mid-1900s when people from Saudi Arabia came to Morocco to implant certain Islamic ideologies and according to Mohammed Darif, this still exists today (Darif, Khalfi).

However Darif also said that there are not a lot of Salafists in Morocco today; there are, however a lot of Islamists. He said that many Islamists choose to wear a short

beard to mark their specific political associations. However, the short beard is not required and not all Islamists choose wear this physical marker of their political identity. Thus, Islamists in Morocco tend to blend into society easily and thus one may not know if he or she is a moderate or radical Islamist. The connection of the beard to Islamist politics in Morocco may be oversimplified and over-exaggerated in the Western media; however many Moroccan also perceive that there is a correlation between the two.

One can see that officials and intellectuals see the beard as connected to politics in Morocco. However many also note that people may wear the beard for religious reasons or because it is a trend they have seen other people wear. Thus, there needs to be exploration on this issue on Morocco, however judgments about the affiliation of individuals with certain political ideologies must be taken on an individual basis. Although there is less political affiliation with the hijab in Morocco, a similar conclusion on the need to evaluate each circumstance individually was made about the reasons why Moroccan women wear hijab (Darif).

The History and Politics of Hijab in Morocco

Head coverings for women have been common in traditional Moroccan dress for thousands of years; they were religious but also very dependent on regional customs and fashions. Many intellectuals would argue that it was not religion that guided the practice of Moroccan women covering their heads, but rather customs which had been present for generations. However this concept changed in the 1970s and 1980s when intellectual Islam swept the Middle East and North Africa.

With the Iranian revolution and the concepts of Arab nationalism which flourished in the late 1970s, a new concept of intellectual Islam developed. The younger

generation created new meanings for certain Islamic practices which gave birth to a new kind of Islam that was studied and practiced rigidly rather than just inherited. This new strict and intellectual Islam rejected the Islam of older generations which mixed cultural and religious meanings of various practices and holidays. The shift created by young intellectuals in the 1980s created a clash between tradition and religion which still exists today and is seen in various aspect of Moroccan society, including styles of dress and specifically the hijab for women (Darif, Saqi).

In this research I use a very particular definition of hijab (see research terminology) that is a fairly recent phenomenon to penetrate Morocco. The hijab is a specific head covering that is very tight around a woman's head and exposes only her face. This concept of hijab originated in Iran with the revolution in 1979 and came to Morocco beginning in the 1980s. At this particular period of history, the hijab had a particular intellectual religious and political meaning. The first young girls who wore hijab in Morocco did so because of extensive readings and research on the topic. It was a deliberate and sometimes difficult decision.

Nadia Halim explained that she chose to wear hijab after studying particular readings of the Qur'an. Khalfi said that one such reading could include Qur'an 24:31:

“And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what must ordinarily appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husbands' fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers, or their brothers' sons or their sisters' sons, or their women or the servants whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex, and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O you Believers, turn you all together towards Allah, that you may attain Bliss.”

Careful readings of Qur'anic verses such as this one influenced many young girls to wear hijab in the 1980's. Halim explained that she was very young when she chose to wear hijab and that it was a difficult thing to do because it was not common yet among young girls. However she said that for her, she saw the hijab as an obligation rather than a choice to mark her religious or political identity. She continues to wear hijab to this day. However since the 1980s when young intellectuals such as Nadia Halim began to wear hijab, it has taken on a new, and maybe less complex, identity. It is no longer new or radical; rather, it is very common and has become a social phenomenon among young Moroccan girls (Halim, Khalfi).

Since the intellectually based commencement of the hijab in 1979, its meaning has greatly changed in Morocco. No longer is it associated with the intellectual religious elites who brought it to Morocco, rather both educated and uneducated women choose to wear hijab equally. And, according to Darif, although the presence of hijab in Morocco indicates the existence of Islamism in Morocco, not everyone who wears it is an Islamist. However there are people who believe that the modesty of women is directly related to the presence of Islamic thought. "...there are other clear signs of the rapid Islamization of Moroccan society. Nowhere is this more apparent than in women's dress. In just a few years, Moroccan women have gone from the miniskirt to the hijab (Guitta)." Although this is an important phenomenon to keep in mind for the political future of Morocco, the hijab and Islamism do not have a direct and simple correlation. Other people have said that the meaning of hijab today has shifted away from these religious and political meanings towards a meaning which is much less scholarly and more socially driven within Moroccan society (Darif, Guitta, Khalfi).

The social nature of clothes in the form of trends cannot be ignored when looking at hijab in Morocco. Khalfi explained that it is not the religious or political ideology associated with hijab that caused its popularity to increase since the 1990s; rather it became a social phenomenon and a fashion trend among young girls to wear hijab. He said, “Clothes cannot become a social phenomenon without adapting them to the Moroccan culture.” Women adapted the hijab and mixed with both traditional and Western styles of dress. The reasons for wearing hijab in Morocco today are as diverse as the clothes they choose to wear it with (Khalfi).

Mohammed Darif Explained five reasons apart from religious or political motivations, why Moroccan girls may choose to wear hijab today. First he said that there is an economic factor of the hijab: a girl may wear hijab to hide the fact that she does not have enough money to buy trendy clothes or because she does not wash her hair everyday. Second, Darif said that unmarried older women (over the age of thirty) may choose to wear hijab in order to find a husband because it is perceived that men like the perceived chastity of women who wear hijab. Third, some girls choose to wear hijab to gain trust from their parents so that they are given more independence and freedom. Fourth, girls may wear hijab to attract men because of the Moroccan male’s fascination with modesty. And fifth, Darif said that prostitutes may wear hijab as a way to trick the police. Thus one can see that there are a multitude of reasons why girls may choose to wear the imported hijab from Iran that are in no way associated with either religion or politics. In contrast, the Afghan and Saudi dress which I will discuss in the next section has an inherently political nature to it which is connection to Islamic religiosity (Darif).

Afghan and Saudi Dress in the Moroccan Political Context

Morocco is a country which has long been seen as one of the most moderate countries in the Arab world. However when terrorist attacks struck Casablanca on May 16, 2003, the world watched in surprise. People began to wonder, has extremist Islam even reached its way to Morocco? The attacks were carried out by Moroccan citizens who were members of the Moroccan Islamic Combatant Group; an association affiliated with Al Qaeda. They fit the economic profile of a terrorist group; they were from the slums around the metropolis of Casablanca. However, according to Brownstein, their clothing styles did not fit the common American perception of a terrorist because they proved to be professionals dressed in Western-style clothing. So this begs the question, is clothing style related to a radical Islamist identity in Morocco? Or is it solely a perceived association that holds no real truth? (Guitta, Brownstein)

Although there are many reasons for people to dress in Afghani and Saudi Arabian dress which are based on personal circumstances, there have also been undercurrents with a shift in reasoning toward the political. With the advent of intellectual Islam in the Arab world in the 1980s, Moroccans began to carefully choose what they wore based on certain religious and political principals. However since then there has been another shift towards radical Islam and the use of Islam to justify radical political acts such as terrorism in the last ten years (Brownstein).

Radical versions of Islam in Morocco have been imported from other countries with their own struggles. Countries wrapped up in wars such as Algeria and Afghanistan have had an important impact on Morocco. Concepts of terrorism and radical Islam may have been brought into Morocco by members of Gulf States radically trying to convert

Moroccans to the ideologies of Wahabbism or Salafism which are both associated with radical and fundamentalist groups in the Middle East (Brownstein).

Radicalism in the form of Salafism or Wahabbism has obviously spread to Morocco. It is difficult, however, to determine the actual political impact these people have had on Morocco because religion is so intertwined with these philosophies. But there is a wide perception within Morocco that the Afghan style of dress is associated with political modes of thought. According to Khalfi, religious or political meaning is added to styles of dress originating in Afghanistan or Pakistan. In their places of origin it is just a style because everyone wears it, but in Morocco those styles of dress have become specific symbols associated with explicit beliefs. Ahmed Abbadi commented that Afghan dress had a political association in Morocco when they were fighting the soviets—the Afghan dress was seen as a sign of solidarity with the Afghans. Today, the meaning has shifted further in association with radical Islamist groups in the Middle East who vehemently promote the use of Islam in politics (Abbadi, Brownstein, Khalfi)

Darif said that there are no specific clothing styles for men who are Islamists but that certain trends are characteristic of certain modes of thought. Darif said that the long beard and Afghan dress are worn by Salafists in Morocco. In contrast, Saudi Arabian dress is associated with strict religiosity. This is due to the fact that Saudi dress is perceived to be linked to the origin of Islam and the time of the prophet because Islam was founded in the geographical area which is now known as Saudi Arabia. There was a consensus among the intellectuals and officials interviewed for this research that there has been an increase in the importation and popularity of these styles of dress in the last twenty years. However whether this is due to an increase of global media or an increase

in radical Islamic thought in Morocco remains to be seen and thus must continue to be observed in the future (Brownstein, Darif, Halim).

Despite the importation of radical ideas, terrorism and its justification through Qur'anic verses and Islamic tenets, dissatisfaction and dissent is nothing new to Morocco. However, it is how this anger is expressed which is actually important. Political Islam allows Morocco to focus the dissatisfaction with their society, culture or government in a focused forum and according to Brownstein, radical Islam follows trends of a revolution. Revolutions are movements which aim to gather people for a certain cause and usually aim to recruit the most dissatisfied members of society. According to Brownstein, "Every movement has its own style of clothing." Ahmed Abbadi made the comment that members of political groups tend to look like each other. However in addition to those who deliberately wear certain trends to associate themselves with certain political movements, they are always people who wear them just because they think the look is fashionable (Abbadi, Brownstein).

It is a dangerous practice to assume that every Moroccan who wears Afghan dress is associated with a fundamentalist or radical Islamic movement. Rather, there are many reasons why someone may choose to wear it, including the presence of a certain fashion trend among Moroccan society. David Brownstein said, "There is an element that is just kind of cool." Multiple people whom I spoke with mentioned Che Guevara t-shirts and other paraphernalia as a trend which originally had revolutionary affiliations but today is just a fashion statement. The revolution in Cuba had distinct political meaning however many young people who wear Che Guevara t-shirts today do not even know who he is or what he may stand for, they just think the shirt is fashionable because they have seen

other people wearing it either in the street or in the media. This could also apply to Afghani or Saudi styles or dress because there is so much media coverage in both Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia through Western and Islamic TV channels. However as discussed previously, the movement of clothes across borders is nothing new nor is the presence of Islam in Moroccan politics (Abbadi, Brownstein).

According to Clement M. Henry, the presence of Islamism in Morocco is directly related to the colonial presence of the French from 1912 to 1956. “The principal oppositions to the postcolonial regimes assumed Islamic forms adapted to their respective contexts...[It was] the ideological vehicle of protest (87).” In the case of Morocco, moderate forms of Islam were utilized to appeal to a broad audience and create a united front against the French. They succeeded and formed a successful post-colonial society based on French governmental structures still in existence such as parliament mixed with uniquely Moroccan ideology based on the monarchy. However since Morocco achieved independence in Morocco, there have been various periods of dissent and disagreement with the current political system. Today, that opposition comes in the form of Islamism. This is a dangerous ideology for the current political structure of Morocco because if Islamist ideology is strictly adhered to, it rejects the idea of the monarchy in favor of a system based on religious law with no greater authority than Allah himself. However none Brownstein said that the government is stronger than it thinks and that it does have the ability to withstand the Islamist presence in Morocco (Brownstein, Henry).

Perceptions of Moroccan Students

In addition to the in-depth interviews used to obtain information on which the previous section was based, surveys were distributed to students in Rabat in order to compare the perceptions of Moroccan youth on the issues at hand. The questions used in the survey are available in the appendix. The objective of the survey was to see what kind of religious, political or cultural dress young people are wearing today. In addition they were used to see if students view certain forms of dress as distinct markers of a religious or political identity. These surveys were distributed to eleven English Studies students at University Mohammed V and fourteen Islamic Studies students at Dar El Hadith El Hassania. The responses of the English Studies students tended to have similarities as did the responses of the Islamic Studies students, but as one might expect, the two groups of students only has some similarity to each other.

English Studies Students and University Mohammed V

The English Studies students provided me with 11 viable surveys. The survey was separated into two pages. The first page was answered by students who wear any form of dress or physical markers that they associated with their religious, political or cultural identity. The questions on the second page were answered by students who did not wear any form or dress or physical markers associated with their religious, cultural or political identity. Of the 11 surveys answered, 4 students answered that they do wear a form of dress that they associate with their identity and seven students answered that they do not wear any form of dress associated with their identity.

Of the four students who answered the first page of the survey, all four listed hijab as the form of dress they choose to wear that is related to their religious, political or

cultural identity. When asked their reasons for choosing to wear hijab, three responded that they wore it because it is a religious obligation, two answered that they wore it because they had a desire to be respected, one answered that she wore it as a marker of her religious beliefs and one answered that she decided to wear hijab as a personal decision (students were allowed to choose more than one response for all questions).

When asked how they became influence to wear the hijab, the English Studies students answered that they were influenced by readings in the Qur'an and other intellectual documents, one student was influenced by Islamic TV channels and one student was influenced by fashion advertisements. When asked where the hijab originates, all four students answered that it is not original to Morocco. Two answered that it is from the Middle East generally, one answered that it originated in Egypt and one answered that it originated in Saudi Arabia. No students gave the correct answer of Iran. When asked how people view them for choosing to wear hijab, two answered that people encourage them to wear it, saying that it is the right thing to do. Two students did not answer the question.

Seven students answered the second page of the survey, meaning that they did not wear any form of dress or physical markers that they associated with their religious, political or cultural identity. When students were asked why they chose not to wear hijab, a beard or particular styles of Islamic dress, four students answered that it was simply not necessary, two answered that they had the freedom to make their own decisions, one answered that these styles were not compatible with his/her religious views and one answered that there was no family pressure to wear these items of dress. When asked how they viewed the people who wear these styles of dress, three students said they view them

favorably, one student viewed them negatively and three students said that they cannot judge these people. When asked how they think those who wear these styles of dress view themselves, students gave a multitude of answers (many gave more than one answer). Three students said that those who wear hijab, a beard, Afghani or Saudi dress view themselves as followers, three students said that those people see themselves as very religious, two students said that they see themselves as traditional, one said they see themselves as intellectual elites, one said that they see themselves as normal people and one student said that these people see themselves as deserving respect.

When these English Studies students were asked if they view Afghan dress or the long beard as outright markers of a specific identity, four students answered that those who wear Afghan dress are part of a religious movement with a specific religious identity, two students answered that they associate this style with a particular political identity, two students answered that they just saw Afghan dress as a particular style of dress with no affiliation, and one student answered that the people who wear this style are part of a different culture and society than Morocco. When asked if this style of dress was associated with radical ideas such as terrorism or overthrow of the monarchy, two answered yes, four answered no, appearances do not give away these views and one student did not answer the question.

When asked if the meaning of certain styles of dress change across borders and are associated with different things in places such as Afghanistan, Saudi Arabia or Iraq than in Morocco, all English Studies surveys (both those who answered the first and second pages of the survey) gave varied responses. Three students said that styles of clothing have the same meaning in all Muslim countries; four students said that the

meaning of these clothes change across borders; three students did not answer the question.

Conclusions: From the surveys distributed to English Studies students and University Mohammed V it can be determined that of those who do wear religious, cultural or political markers, hijab is the most common marker to choose. Of those who wear hijab, the most common answer as to why they choose to wear it is due to perceived religious obligations that they discovered through readings. This coincides with the perceptions of the students who do not wear these styles of dress because they responded that they view those people who do wear the markers as very religious and as followers. Thus, it can be determined that most students view the hijab as a religious clothing item that is not related to the individuals political identity. One can also see that the meaning of hijab has changed since the 1980s because no students who answered the first page of the survey knew that the hijab originated from Iran in 1979. The social phenomenon of the hijab has clearly taken hold, and although students may legitimize their choice to wear hijab through various Qur'anic passages it is not a purely religious decision but rather one that is made through social connections and the apparent current popularity of hijab.

Of the students who answered the questions on the second page of the survey, only two students answered that they saw Afghan dress as a marker of a certain political identity. Rather, students said that it was a marker of a pious religious identity. One can see that most English studies students do not identify Afghan dress with radical politics. This contrasts with the answers of the officials and intellectuals interviewed for this research that did associate Afghan dress with radical political movements. One must wonder, are the students just uninformed on the issue and therefore unaware of this

connector. Or, rather, are students more in touch with the realities of Moroccan society and thus do not judge people as harshly because they are not as entrenched in a job or lifestyle which is threatened by these potential radicals? These questions deserve further research in a different project but may achieve some clarity with the answers given by Islamic Studies students at Dar El Hadith El Hassania.

Islamic Studies Students at Dar El Hadith El Hassania

The Islamic Studies students provided me with 14 viable surveys. The survey was exactly the same as the survey given to the English studies students; it was separated into two pages. Of the 14 surveys answered, 12 students answered that they do wear a form of dress that they associate with their religious, cultural or political identity and 2 students answered that they do not wear any form of dress associated with their religious, cultural or political identity. One can already see that the survey population at Dar El Hadith El Hassania proved to be very different than the survey population at University Mohammed V. This is somewhat due to the fact that English Studies students are perceived to be some of the most liberal young intellectuals in Moroccan society while Islamic Studies Students tend to be some of the most conservative. However this is somewhat of an oversimplification proved in the research project only because my survey population was so small.

Of the twelve students who answered the first page of the survey, seven listed hijab as the form of dress they choose to wear that is related to their religious, political or cultural identity while five listed the beard. When asked their reasons for choosing to wear hijab or a beard, all twelve responded that they wore it because it is a religious obligation and one gave the additional answer that it is a marker of his/her religious

belief. When asked how they became influenced to wear hijab or the beard, ten Islamic Studies students answered that they were influenced by readings in the Qur'an and other intellectual documents, one student said that he/she was influenced by personal contacts and two students provided other answers. Such answers included, "I am free to choose, but I must respect the religious conditions of dressing," as well as "I am a Muslim so I knew that hijab was obligatory when I was very young."

When asked where the hijab originates, ten students answered that the hijab or beard that they wear is Islamic and therefore Moroccan, one student answered that it is not Moroccan and two students said that it doesn't matter which geographical location it originated because it ultimately originates from Islam. When asked how society views them for choosing to wear hijab or the beard, five answered that society respects them, three answered that society views them just like anyone else and one person said that society views them as a believer. One person answered that he/she did not know how he/she was viewed in society and three students did not answer the question

Two students answered the second page of the survey, meaning that they too did not wear any form of dress or physical markers that they associated with their religious, political or cultural identity. When students were asked why they chose not to wear hijab, a beard or particular styles of Islamic dress, both students answered that it was simply not necessary and one specified that there is no relationship between clothes and religion.

When asked how they viewed the Moroccans who wear these styles of dress both students said that they viewed them positively within society. When asked how they think those who wear these styles of dress view themselves, one student thought that they view themselves as very religious and traditional and one student thought they viewed

themselves as normal people. When the students were asked if they view Afghan dress or the long beard as outright markers of a specific identity, one said that it was directly connected to the religious conviction of the wearer while the other did not answer the question. When asked if this style of dress was associated with radical ideas such as terrorism or overthrow of the monarchy, both students did not think that they are directly related, but rather need to be examined on a personal basis.

When asked if the meaning of certain styles of dress change across borders of Muslim and Arab countries, the Islamic Studies students (both those who answered the first and second pages of the survey) seemed to be fairly informed on the issue. Only one student said that styles of clothing and the beard have the same meaning in all Muslim countries while seven students said that the meaning of these clothes change across borders. One student answered that he did not know the answer to the question and five students gave no response.

Conclusions: It is interesting to first notice how only four of the eleven English Studies students wore religious, cultural or political styles of dress while at Dar El Hadith, twelve of the fourteen total students surveyed wore it. One can draw the conclusion that there is not necessarily a correlation between hijab and religiosity but there does seem to be a direct correlation with the beard and religion. There were more bearded men in one classroom at Dar El Hadith El Hassania than I had seen in most other contexts. Of these bearded men in the classroom none of them noted on their surveys that their beard had anything to do with political affiliation. Rather it was a religious gesture with the Prophet Mohammed as their model. It is also interesting to note, that of all of the students surveyed, none wore Afghani or Saudi-style dress. These two styles are perceived to be

more radical in their religious and political identities in Morocco than either the hijab or the beard. The answers given by Islamic Studies students were also much more religiously motivated than the English Studies students, although this seems obvious because Dar El Hadith El Hassania is a theology school.

It is also interesting to note that the Islamic studies students were more knowledgeable as to the origin of the beard or hijab than the English Studies students. Perhaps they have conducted more research as to the origins and history of the hijab and beard than the English Studies students. Of the two students who did not wear religious, cultural or political dress, neither associated the Afghan-style of dress in Morocco with radical ideas. That means that no students who took part in the survey answered that the Afghani dress is directly related to radical Islamism. All students seemed to be very democratic about the issue, saying that each situation must be taken on an individual basis.

Conclusion

Morocco is a geographical and cultural intersection between Europe, Africa and the Middle East which has resulted in a Moroccan society influenced by international styles and ways of life. However Morocco is currently at an interesting point in its history; it has more connection with Europe and the Western world than it ever, but it also holds important ties with the Middle East. These ties with Gulf States mean that there is a certain amount of Islamic religious and political influences being imported from countries that are not viewed favorably in Western media. Thus Morocco has been grouped with other Islamic states and Moroccans who wear certain religious dress such as the beard, hijab or Afghani dress are associated with certain Islamist political ideologies.

The purpose of this research was to learn about the politics of religious dress in Morocco and gain various perspectives from officials, intellectuals and university students about the correlation between religious dress in Morocco and Islamism in both its radical and moderate varieties. Through in-depth surveys with older officials and surveys given to students, it was found that there is a perceived correlation between religious dress and politics by accomplished officials; students did not see as strong a connection between religious markers and political identity. However it was a common theme that each case must be taken on an individual basis and broad generalizations saying that everyone who wears Afghan dress is a radical Islamist. It was found that the intersections between religion, tradition and politics in Morocco are too complicated to be oversimplified by general assumptions.

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Interviews

- 4/15/2008: Dr. Khalid Saqi, Assistant Director of Dar El Hadith El Hassania
- 4/15/2008: David Brownstein, Political Section at the United States Embassy in Rabat
- 4/17/2008: Mustapha Khalfi, Director of Publication at Attajid
- 4/18/2008: Ahmed Abbadi, Member of the Moroccan Religious Council
- 4/18/2008: Mohamed Darif, Professor of Political Science at Faculté de Droit Mohammadia
- 4/23/2008: Survey distributed to English Studies students at University Mohammed V
- 4/24/2008: Nadia Halim, Professor of English at Dar El Hadith El Hassania
- 4/24/2008: Survey distributed to Islamic Studies graduate students at Dar El Hadith El Hassania

Appendix

Sample Interview Questions

1. In your opinion, what are the most prominent forms of Islamic dress in Morocco?
2. Do you think these are indigenous to Morocco?
3. What are the most prominent forms of Islamic dress that are imported from other Islamic states?
4. What is the meaning of the beard in Morocco? What is the meaning in other Islamic states?
5. What is the meaning of Afghan and Saudi Arabian dress in Morocco? What is the meaning in their countries of origin?
6. Has imported religious dress to Morocco become more common in the past 10 or 15 years? How have perceptions changed over this time period?
7. Who are the people who choose to wear imported religious symbols and what statement are they choosing to make? Is it a religious or political statement?
8. Are there specific forms of dress associated with Islamist thought?
9. Do you think that Islamist thought is indigenous to Morocco or imported from other countries and political contexts?
10. If Islamist thought poses a huge threat to the monarchy sometime in the future do you think that a future King would ever impose restriction of Islamic dress in the public sphere?
11. How do you think religious dress in relation to politics will look in 15 to 20 years from now?

Student Survey Questions

1. Do you wear any forms of dress or physical markers related to your religious, political or family identity? If answered no, answer questions on the next page.

- Hijab
- Beard
- Jalaba
- Saudi Dress
- Afghan Dress
- Other (Explain)

2. Why do you wear it?

- Family Pressure
- Tradition
- As a marker of religious belief
- Pressure from Father
- Personal Decision
- As a marker of political views
- Desire to be respected
- Religious obligation
- Fashion/Look
- Other (explain)

3. How did you become influenced to wear your style of dress?

- Readings
- Islamic TV Channels
- Fashion Ads
- Other (Explain)
- Personal Contacts
- Western Media
- People on the street

4. Do you think it is a form of dress originating in Morocco? If not, where do you think it comes from?

5. Do you wear anything that marks your political views or support of Islamist political parties? If so, which political party?

6. How do you think society views you for wearing what you do? (Parents, Friends, Neighbors, the King, Foreigners, people in the street, others)

7. How do you think these modes of dress translate across borders from the Middle East (Afghanistan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia) to Morocco? Do you think they have the same meaning to those who wear it in both places?

1. What are your personal reasons for choosing **NOT** to wear a particular style of Islamic dress (Afghan, Saudi), hijab or grow a beard?

- Freedom
- Not compatible with my religious views
- Not compatible with my political views
- Other (Explain):
- No family pressure
- Not necessary

2. Who are the people who choose to wear religious dress and how do you view them within Moroccan society? (Positively or negatively and for what reasons?)

3. How do you think Moroccans who wear religious dress view themselves?

- As normal people
- As intellectual elites
- As radicals
- As followers
- Other (Explain):
- As trendsetters
- Very religious
- Traditional
- Deserving Respect

4. Do you view Afghan dress or a long beard as outright markers of a specific political identity?

5. Do you associate these modes of dress with dangerous political ideas or actions (terrorism or instability to the monarchy)? Why?

6. How do you think these modes of dress translate across borders from the Middle East (Afghanistan, Iraq and Saudi Arabia) to Morocco? Do you think they have the same meaning in both places?

Images of Clothing Styles Imported to Morocco

Saudi Arabian or Afghani head-covering for women



Afghani dress for women



Modern girl in Hijab



Saudi Arabian dress for women





Both male Afghani dress



Long beard and skull cap for men

