

Fall 2014

Who Are You Wearing? A study of Moroccan fashion discourse, identity performance, and social change

Leah Michalove
SIT Study Abroad

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection

 Part of the [African Studies Commons](#), [Critical and Cultural Studies Commons](#), [Fashion Design Commons](#), [Gender, Race, Sexuality, and Ethnicity in Communication Commons](#), and the [Social and Cultural Anthropology Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Michalove, Leah, "Who Are You Wearing? A study of Moroccan fashion discourse, identity performance, and social change" (2014). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 1935.
https://digitalcollections.sit.edu/isp_collection/1935

This Unpublished Paper is brought to you for free and open access by the SIT Study Abroad at SIT Digital Collections. It has been accepted for inclusion in Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection by an authorized administrator of SIT Digital Collections. For more information, please contact digitalcollections@sit.edu.

Who Are You Wearing? A study of Moroccan fashion
discourse, identity performance, and social change

Leah Michalove

Academic Director: TaiebBelghazi

Emory University

Middle Eastern Studies and Anthropology

Africa, Morocco, Rabat

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for MOR, SIT Abroad, Fall 2014.

Abstract

Clothes and their consumption become almost invisible in their very ubiquity, yet fashion acts as a sort of optical litmus test for the mood of society. Clothing can express cultural norms, serve as shorthand for social grouping, and provide a kind of corpus of visual allusion; in short, clothes and how we wear them constitute a system of signification, a visual language as dynamic, complex, and arbitrary as any spoken communication. I set out to investigate the grammar and syntax of Moroccan fashion, to explore what the diversity of observed choices meant to the people who made them and how those choices served as visual expressions of broader societal conversations. I investigated how Moroccan young people interact with their socio-political environment through fashion, and to what extent choices regarding style, textile, modesty, color, and cultural influence are politically and culturally charged. Gathered through observation and interviews, my data points to a complex discourse on modernity, nationalism, progress, political repression, globalization, feminism, and group identity politics, all played out in the sweaters and leggings so abundant on the streets of Rabat. For Moroccan youth, fashion choices reflect and reinforce social binaries: Traditional vs. Modern, Western vs. Moroccan, Liberal vs. Conservative, Young vs. Old; visual incarnations of Moroccan culture are exoticized and re-orientalized as young Moroccans consume their own culture according to colonial norms and values. Moroccan fashion then constitutes a symbolic battlefield on which today's youth fight over the signs and symbols of modernity and attempt to construct an authentic individual identity free from the baggage of nation-building and the politics of social cohesion.

Keywords: Design and Decorative Arts, Cultural Anthropology, Regional Stu: Middle East

Acknowledgements

This research would not have been possible without the kind and consistent support of a diverse cast of characters, here in Morocco and around the world. My special thanks go to TaiebBelghazi for his intractable support of my project and patience with my many moments of self-doubt. I would like to thank my advisor here in Morocco, SoumayaBelhabib for both making herself available and giving me more than enough space to try and fail on my own, as well as my advisors at Emory University, RoxaniMargariti and Rkia Cornell for giving me the full support of the MESAS department, emotionally and financially. And of course I can never thank NawalChaib sufficiently for quiet literally keeping me alive over these past four months. I wish to thank Maria Angela Jansen, whose work on fashion and modernity in Morocco provided an invaluable basis for my own research. Thank you to Alyssa Reid, Sydney France, and Micah Budway for putting up with my living room nesting habits, and thank you to Simone Prince-Eichner for talking me through both stress and celebration. Thanks are due to His Majesty King Mohammed VI for allowing me to conduct research in his beautiful country of Morocco, but most importantly I need to thank the Moroccans who made my research possible. To Khaoula, Nadia, Ahmed, Yasmine, HOV, Latifa, Hassan, Khalid, and Sara go my unending thanks; this research exists entirely because of your generosity and willingness to answer the silliest of my questions, and for that shukranb'zaaf.

Table of Contents

Snapshots.....	5
Introduction: Questions, Methods, and Challenges.....	6
Background: Definitions, Histories, and Discourses.....	8
Theoretical Underpinnings and Semiology.....	13
Fieldwork.....	16
Analysis	17
<i>Narrative Dichotomies</i>	17
<i>Time-Space, the Internet, and the value of “Internationalism”</i>	21
<i>Clothing as Resistance</i>	25
<i>The Orientalist Gaze Reimagined</i>	29
Conclusions and Reflections.....	32
Works Cited.....	36

Snapshots

I pull into the train station in Casablanca and give Yasmine a call – she answers this time, voice scratchy and distant as we navigate the English-French-Arabic dance that is talking on the phone in Morocco. Basically, she’s on her way. I head into the train station and sit down, mooching off Starbuck’s free wifi. After about ten minutes she arrives, and I find her sitting in a black VW outside. Climbing into cars with strangers? Why not. I jump in, and we lean and kiss in greeting. Sure enough, my phone call woke her up, and I am regaled with the story of her horrific hangover, proportional to the amazing party she was at until 5am. We zoom and weave through the crowded streets of Casa, Yasmine texting, gesturing, smoking, gesticulating, driving with her knees - I see my life flash before my eyes. We are headed for the mall, MoroccoMall, the largest in Africa. But it is Friday and we fight our way through mosque traffic and around cars parked two lanes deep in front of some of Morocco’s most beautiful masjids. Yasmine bitches about the traffic, the leniency of the police on mosque-related traffic violations. We race past the ocean, grey and angry as ever, and finally come up on a towering, bulbous construction. Morocco Mall does not loom like Hassan II mosque but rather sprawls, like an aquarium or a football stadium. Like all things it seems in Casa, the scale is outrageous, and we drive from one shrine to another.

- - -

A friend needs pants and so we have ventured into Agdal on a shopping trip, four white girls in search of jeans. We meander through designer stores with French attendants and euro price tags, taking quick glances at racks of clothing we cannot afford. I see a Guess boutique, that mid-level American denim label so loved by teenage girls, so we go in. The space is

arranged like Prada or Fendi, one shirt per rack, lit like fine art. The effect is more unsettling than high-end, like an outlet going out of business, or the grocery store right after a forecast of snow. We move, finding our way to a Mango, Europe's answer to Forever 21 or Zara. My friends spend what feel like hours here. The clientele are terribly international even for Agdal – Asian tourists, French expats, American students. American top 40 hits blast from hidden ceiling speakers, and the store sells boxy vintage-inspired winter coats and pleather mini skirts. Everyone except us speaks French, including the few Moroccans who come through.

Every day, my host mother comes home from work late, rushing into our house exhausted and winded by the stairs. On these days she wears trousers, a blouse, a cardigan, and a matching hijab – her paradigm of professionalism. It must have something to do with professionalism as the rest of her time – evenings, weekends, vacation days – are spent in djellaba. Errands are run in djellaba, parties attended in djellaba, guests received in djellaba. One evening we are invited to a family event, and my host mother smiles excitedly as she hands me her djellaba to wear. I throw it on over my clothes, standing in the only mirror in our house trying to keep it from sticking to my jeans. I catch a flash of light out of the corner of my eye – my host mom is snapping pictures of me, beaming.

Introduction: Questions, Methods, and Challenges

Clothes and their consumption become almost invisible in their very ubiquity, yet they act as a sort of optical litmus test for the mood of society. Clothing can express cultural norms – black for mourning in the West, white in Morocco and India; it can communicate religious observance as “black hats” signify Hasidic Jews and turbans indicate Sikhism. Clothing serves as

shorthand for social grouping – one pair of jeans screams “hipster” while another reads “gangster,” and provides a kind of corpus of visual allusion as a single back sweater suggests Kerouac, spoken word, bongo drums, cigarettes and subculture. In short, clothes and how we wear them constitute a system of signification, a visual language as dynamic, complex, and arbitrary as any spoken communication. And so just as language changes across continents, so too, I hypothesized, must the language of fashion. Upon arrival in Morocco, amid the noise and the spices and the shoving on the street, the incredible diversity of women’s clothing stood out. And so I set out to investigate the grammar and syntax of Moroccan fashion, to explore what this diversity of choices mean to the women who make them and how those choices serve as visual expressions of broader societal conversations. I investigated how Moroccan young people interact with their socio-political environment through fashion, and to what extent choices regarding style, textile, modesty, color, and cultural influence are politically and culturally charged. I wanted to understand what these choices communicate to other women and to Moroccans in general, in short to decode and translate Moroccan fashion.

Of course no research plan has ever been realized without obstacles and detours, and I will admit to my fair share challenges and struggles. As an American university student in her early twenties, I somewhat instinctively chose to focus on young women of similar age and education, both for convenience and in response to my observation that these women possess the widest array of fashion choices and in many cases exhibit the greatest fashion diversity. With some Arabic and no French abilities, I was both limited to and blessed by the international camaraderie of youth and the exuberance of English language students to practice their skills. All of my interviews were conducted in English, and so reflect the opinions and experiences of those young people academically and culturally engaged with the English-speaking world.

Furthermore, this project like all endeavors in Morocco, never failed to remind me of my own femininity and of the weighted nature of gender relations here. More than once, a male research participant mistook my academic interest as romantic attachment, and inevitably men were more willing to volunteer to speak with me – not ideal for a study originally meant to focus on the female experience. My findings are preliminary and cursory at best, but my data points to a complex discourse on modernity, nationalism, progress, political repression, globalization, feminism, and group identity politics, all played out in the sweaters and leggings so ubiquitous on the streets of Rabat.

Background: Definitions, Histories, and Discourses

First I would like to define what I mean when I use the term “fashion.” In her 2009 essay *Colonialism’s Clothing*, Victoria Rovine cites Jennifer Craik, and writes:

Symptomatically, the term ‘fashion’ is rarely used in reference to non-Western cultures. The two are defined in opposition to each other: Western dress is fashion because it changes regularly, is superficial and mundane, and projects individual identity; non-Western dress is costume because it is unchanging, encodes deep meanings, and projects group identity and membership.” (p. 46)

In order to subvert the Orientalism of this frame, most contemporary scholars, among them Rovine and Angela Jansen, pointedly refer to the clothing of the third world as fashion, thereby giving it the same dynamic, ephemeral, and modern characteristics associated with European Couture. In fact the history of denying street clothes and particularly Moroccan street clothes the designation of “fashion” is fraught with questions of symbolic violence. As Rovine asserts “Who has, and who does not have fashion is politically determined, a function of power relations.” (p. 46). So as to reject this colonial framing of dress as culturally bounded and static and to

emphasize the individuation processes both evident in and essential to Moroccan clothing choices, I will use the term “fashion” rather than “style of dress” or “costume.” Furthermore, I use the term in its broadest sense to encompass all clothing choices, not only what one could deem “high fashion.”

Fashion in Morocco then manifests as the result of a complicated colonial history and specific political environment, coupled with international trends in globalized consumption and political Islam. The colonial enterprise itself organized the world into the “traditional,” that is non-European, and the “modern.” This binary formed an essential piece in colonial ideology, crafting a narrative in which the culture and society of the colonized was eternal, unchanging, and outside the timeline of European progress. It is from this narrative words like “costume” take on their derisive quality; as “in a parallel to the much-discussed division between ‘art’ and ‘artifact’— the latter term describing African and other non-Western visual expressions before their influence on the work of Western artists validated them as ‘art’—fashion serves as a measure of cultural attainment” (Rovine 2009, p. 46). Meanwhile, while the French were constructing Moroccan fashion as culturally irrelevant, they were happy to appropriate Moroccan shapes and patterns for French consumption. The “ethnic look” heavily influenced the Art Deco style of the early twentieth century as designers looked towards the Orient, and particularly North Africa, for inspiration. Rovine cites the example of the French designer Paul Poiret, who in 1920 created a woman’s dress closely based on the akhnif, a style of man’s cloak from the High Atlas region. “By shifting the garment’s gender associations, from male cloak to female dress,” she argues, “Poiret distinguished the garment from its African origins in order to make it his own. Rovine insists that Poiret’s design cannot be separated from the power relations at work between colonizer and colonized; “transforming a male African garment into a female Western

one reverberates with the Orientalist discourse of the day, one element of which was a feminization of African culture” (Rovine 2009, p. 56-57).

And so as the French appropriated and monetized “traditional” Moroccan fashion, those Moroccans with means eagerly adopted the dress and manners of the colonizers. By the 1950s, the Moroccan bourgeoisie had enthusiastically embraced French style for daily and professional life, keeping the Moroccan djellaba and caftan for religious or ceremonial occasions. As Angela Jansen states in her 2012 lecture titled *Casablanca: Past, Present, and Future as Fashion Capital*, “Moroccan dress was simply not adapted to an active cosmopolitan life. Numerous layers of heavy velvet and brocade fabrics, decorated with weighty metallic thread, in combination with large brocade belts and wide cuts, literally limited women in their movement” (Jansen 2012, p. 2). The Moroccan elite, like their peers across the colonized world, took on the clothes of occupation, forcefully and visually associating wealth, social mobility, and taste with Europe. The Moroccan middle classes would proceed to emulate the wealthy, and European dress came to signify class, worldliness, and even education. Of course this narrative would not go unchallenged in the decades following independence as Moroccan artists and intellectuals strove for a more “Moroccan” mode of modernity. Jansen cites this discourse as the impetus for the creation of modern Moroccan fashion magazines, claiming “They made it their primary goal to propose an alternative to a ‘European type of modernity’ by creating a ‘Moroccan type of modernity’ and they used Moroccan urban dress to illustrate this” (Jansen 2012, p. 5). In her later lecture titled “*The Moroccan Fashion Media and the Construction of a Moroccan Type of Modernity*,” Jansen quotes a personal interview with Aisha Zaim Sakhri, former editor in chief of the Moroccan magazine *Femmes du Maroc*. Sakhri explains “Especially in the early years of the magazine the idea persisted that everything that was modern was coming from Europe. In order

to stay true to one's Moroccan identity, women thought they had to stay traditional. We wanted to break with this idea by showing our readers that modernity can come from within and that what is considered traditional today, might have been modern fifty years ago" (Jansen 2013, p. 2). Her final point resonates as one considers the history of the Djellaba, the garment that now signifies traditional Moroccan femininity but was once exclusively menswear.

As Morocco and Moroccan fashion moved into the twenty first century, the modernity discourse of the post-colonial era endured, only to fracture in the face of generational gaps and an increasingly globalized, internet-based fashion conversation. From the colonial era onward, Moroccan fashion focused on the intersections of "traditional" and "modern" and designers sought ways to modernize the traditional or traditionalize the modern, in other words to engage and build on Moroccan visual heritage. But by the twenty-first century, Moroccan designers seemed fed-up with the constraints of the traditional-modern dialectic, and rejected the exoticizing frame that expected them to be inspired exclusively by "traditional" Moroccan forms. Jansen argues "this new generation wants to break with this 'colonial heritage' where non-Western art needs to be 'exotic.' They want to express themselves 'freely,' which does not mean that they are looking to deny their cultural heritage or their Moroccan identity, but to interpret and materialize it as they see fit" (Jansen 2012, p. 6). This choice resulted in a design aesthetic far less bounded by a commitment to "Moroccaness," and more engaged with the international fashion conversation. This trend in Moroccan fashion mirrors a much broader global trend as traditional attachments to nations and nationalism fade in the face of transnational affiliations. Fashion and youth can certainly be thought of as one of these burgeoning international networks, fostered and united by the internet and social media sites like Pinterest, Lookbook, Facebook, and Youtube. At the same, with the explosion of international manufacturing through the end of

the 20th and into the 21st century, cheap European-style clothing has become both accessible and ubiquitous even in the most remote corners of the country, in effect democratizing fashion in Morocco. And in 2011, the largest shopping mall on the continent, *MoroccoMall*, opened in Casablanca. The mall, with a total surface of 250,000 square meters and over 600 foreign brands stands as a monument to the successes of international business and the popularity of European brands to Moroccan consumers. It is however important to note that “it is estimated that only 10% of the Moroccan population can actually afford to shop in these stores” (Jansen 2012, p. 5).

Finally, in contrast to the progression of European fashion in the Moroccan context, or perhaps in response to it, the past couple decades have seen the rise of so-called Islamic fashion and an explosion in the numbers of young women adopting the veil. In her most recent book, *The Quiet Revolution: The Veil's Resurgence from the Middle East to America*, Leila Ahmed argues the increased popularity of the veil, and of a very specific and entirely modern style of hijab, reflects an international reaction to the increased hegemony of American culture and suggests more an anti-imperial zeitgeist than a fundamentalist resurgence (Ahmed 2012). She identifies specific historical moments, particularly the Iranian Revolution, as rallying moments that spurred not only the creation of what Asef Bayat labels Islamism, but also broad cultural engagement with transnational Islam as a modern phenomenon. Her analysis reinforces the narrative in which hijab does not gauge personal piety but rather reflects international trends surrounding women's engagement with Islam, the increasing cultural hegemony of the Saudis and Wahabi-Salafism, and popular resistance to the image of Islam propagated by the West. The explosion of non-traditional veiling in Morocco, as observed personally and anecdotally, behaves like any other modern fashion trend while drawing on a philosophy of moderate Islamism by which Islam offers a viable alternative to the values, development strategies, culture and

products of the Christian West. Noor Al-Qasimi, in her 2010 piece titled *Immodest Modesty: Accommodating Dissent and the 'Abaya-as-Fashion in the Arab Gulf States* ties modern displays of “Islamic Modesty” to nation building and identity politics. She writes “the preservation of ‘the self identity of national culture’ is posited in relation to a threat posed by the rapid pursuit of modernization in the Arab Gulf and the increasingly disproportionate ratio between national and expatriate communities” (Al-Qasimi 2010, p. 49). While her analysis focuses on the Gulf, a similar frame can be applied to the rhetoric of Djellaba and hijab in Morocco, as “national [women’s] dress is rendered the visible signifier of the nation’s ‘true identity’ in the face of its relationship with the ‘modern material world’” (Al-Qasimiciting Chatterjee, 2010, p. 50). In effect, the classical trope of woman-as-culture-bearer endures but with the added stakes of globalization as a westernizing force. Al-Qasimi’s analysis extends to the “fashionizing” of modest clothing, a process evident in both the development of the ‘abaya, djellaba, and veiling in general. Many young Moroccan women wear the headscarf, but pair it with leggings and fashionable blouses, while the modern incarnation of the djellaba is often fitted and highly decorative. As Qasimi points out, “modesty is displaced, whereas the symbolism of the veil—the visual signifier of modesty—continues to be upheld” (p. 63). In this way, women’s adoption of religiously modest clothing constitutes not a bowing to fundamentalist patriarchy but rather a subversion of that authority and perhaps a reappropriation of feminine religious expression.

Theoretical Underpinnings and Semiology

Much of the theory underlying this paper and my research in general comes from structuralism and poststructuralist philosophy, particularly Roland Barthes’ work on fashion and myth. From Barthes and his colleagues I will borrow the vocabulary of signification, examining

how clothing itself functions as signifier for a culturally specific collection of signifieds. In his essay *Blue is in Fashion This Year: A Note on Research into Signifying Units in Fashion Clothing*, originally published in 1960 but cited here in the 2004 edition, Barthes outlines a framework for analyzing fashion the way Ferdinand Saussure structurally analyzed language. Barthes identifies the “morphemes” of fashion, which he calls “vesteme,” including material, colour, motif, detail, and physicality. Like the smallest elements of signification in language, signs – those units comprised of a single signified and signifier - in fashion are natural, essential, and arbitrary. When speaking of the ways in which fashion magazines demonstrate this kind of signification, Barthes explains “Sometimes the rhetoric presents the signifieds (fashionability, slinkiness, springtime) as qualities inherent to the forms it proposes, suggesting that there is a kind of physical causality between fashion and the colour blue, between the accessory and spring” (p. 38). In this construct, short baggy jeans naturally, obviously, and indisputably signify “gangster,” and a string of pearls naturally, obviously, and indisputably signifies class and sophistication. These designations are of course arbitrary – nothing about the chemical makeup of pearls irrevocably links them to wealth and bourgeois consumption. And as these links of signification are arbitrary, they are also variable. A signifier can possess one signified in one system and an entirely different signified in another; for example, in the United States, we “will be led to think that red is the natural, essential, eternal colour for stop” (Barthes 1960, p.46), but there is no reason why red could not signify “go” or “slow down” say in France or in Morocco. This philosophy of semiology yields a particularly useful framework for looking at fashion in Morocco, where many of the signifiers match those in the United States – t-shirts, jeans, boots, sweaters, scarves, dresses – while the context of signification yields radically different signifieds.

Barthes' essays as collected in *The Language of Fashion* describe what would later be called "first order signification," that is a closed system made up of only one layer of signs. The theorist also explored the functioning of a second order of signification, myth, and his work in *Mythologies* lends particularly interesting methods to my analysis of fashion as visual discourse. Myth functions as a second level of meaning, made up of sign, signifier and signified. Myth's signifier already exists as a sign, which already possesses a previous signifier and signified. For example, the sign "tree" is made up of the linguistic signifier "T-R-E-E" and the essence "tree." In myth, that same sign "tree" itself becomes a signifier, signifying growth, maturity, life or even gallows, winter, and death. This second sign is myth, and Barthes' construction of multi-order signification opens the gates of poststructuralism and the construction of signification as fluid and infinitely layered. Barthes insists the peculiarity of myth is its absolute assertion of authority; myth does not suggest a perspective on truth, but rather presents a comfortable, natural, and incontestable reality. He insists "the *meaning* is already complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, and decisions" (Barthes 2012, p. 226-227). Barthes describes the reality created by Myth as "depoliticized;" it stands devoid of controversy and nuance and represents a kind of ahistoricity, in other words "myth is a *value*; truth is no guarantee for it" (Barthes 2012, p. 233). Fashion, like all art, simultaneously reflects and creates the myths of the collective imagination, and so to understand fashion one must examine the myths at play and ask which reality fashion engages with: the mythical or the real (if there is such a thing). Morocco, Africa, Andalucía, the West, America, Europe – all these are both real and mythic spaces, and the fashion that invokes them does so mythically more often than not. Barthes touches on this kind "Othering" national myth, remarking "China is one thing, the idea a French petit bourgeois could have of it...is another: for this peculiar mix of bells

rickshaws and opium dens, no other word possible [sic] but *Siniess*” (2012, p. 230). In parallel, one can speak of a sort of Occidental Myth, one that manifests repeatedly and aggressively in Moroccan fashion discourse. Barthes theories of signification, single and multi-order, then lend a useful lens for examining the elements contained and the narratives at stake in Moroccan fashion.

Fieldwork

I sit quietly in a café on Avenue de France, sipping a coffee and watching pedestrians stream past. I feel vaguely like the men who sit in the same cafes and watch me walk by with a little too much attention; participant-observation always feels a little voyeuristic. I power through. The day is cool but not yet chilly, and the sun shines with a distinctly autumnal force. Women walk past me dressed in every style imaginable. Older women in sharp business suits hurry by, clipping along in designer heels. A few younger women stroll by, draped and wrapped in outrageously colorful veils made of long bolts of floral prints and neon patterns – some are sub-Saharan African, but most have distinctly Moroccan features. There are a few women in niqab, of indiscernible age for obvious reasons, who tend to hurry by as if off to an appointment scheduled for five minutes prior. Middle-aged women in djellaba amble past my fellow coffee drinkers and me, usually trailing just behind a gaggle of chatting teenage girls – daughters, nieces, and neighbors maybe. The girls wear what research participant after research participant will describe as something akin to the female Moroccan uniform: skinny jeans, usually in a medium to dark wash, ballet flats or high ankle/mid-calf boots, cute blouse in a dark color, frequently black, or a sweater. Roughly three in four wear hijab, though the draping of each headscarf varies from the very Moroccan tied-around-the-neck-under-the-ear method, to the

voluminous, stylishly-messy wrapped-around-the-head-and-under-the-chin look. The scarves always match the outfit and rarely determine each woman's style so much as accent it. These women, in their veils and djellaba and occasional tank top, co-exist in a kind of fashion ecosystem – the system self-regulates and strives for a kind of elusive social equilibrium. Fashion acts as the visual plane of the shifts and conflicts that pull on Moroccan society – debates surrounding language, religious expression, feminism, individuation, and free speech surface in the clothing choices made by Morocco's youth. The sweaters, jeans, boots, and tank tops then act as moments of resistance, of political engagement, and of subversive expression as Moroccans make visual statements on the value of communal homogeneity, nationalism, and gender roles.

The following data constitutes a collection of observations, interviews, and primary text sources gathered during my time in Rabat. Most names have been changed, though a couple of my participants asked that their names be included; all interviewees were between the ages of 20 and 25, native to Morocco, and university educated. All interviews were conducted in English in mid to late November of 2014, and were digitally recorded with participant permission. All quotes within quotation marks come verbatim from my transcripts of those recordings, without editing or translation.

Narrative Dichotomies

There are few things Anthropology loves more than binary structures. East vs. west, feminine vs. masculine, modern vs. traditional, individual vs. collective – one can almost imagine Boas and Malinowski standing at the edge of social science, raising a staff, and splitting the human experience like the Red Sea. And while anthropologist-imposed dichotomies hold

little academic standing in this day and age, I find the same binaries embedded in the social imaginations of my participants, who faithfully and without prompting reproduce an ideology that segments the world into the most classical of oppositions.

Khaoula and I sit talking on a curb behind her university, adjacent to a vacant lot-parking area, which quickly fills up with students who sit and chat, or stand and smoke. Young Moroccan men dressed in hipster-tastic flannel lean languidly against parked cars, smoking white cigarettes while their friends joke and laugh in a mixture of English, French, and Darija. Just next to me, a girl and two guys (who declined interviews) hang out and riff on one girl's boyfriend problems. She is dressed in skinny jeans, and a beautiful motorcycle jacket – tailored and detailed in black leather with puffy, checked detailing. The boys wear similar skinny jeans, fashionable boots, band T-shirts. Youth oozes into the air, and I am warmed by its loud, cheerful, pot-scented energy (Field notes 20.11.14). Khaoula and I get down to business, or at least the elusive anthropological business of productive hanging out, and I ask about her outfit. She wears jeans, ankle boots with American flags on them, an oversized white sweater peppered with black stitching, and a black motorcycle jacket, all set off by severe liquid eyeliner with no other makeup. Khaoula thinks seriously for a moment before describing her style, finally asserting “Pretty western, a little bit - not necessarily Moroccan.” I am always intrigued by this particular rhetorical quirk – using “western” to refer to the classical West from Morocco, which stands further west than nearly the entire European continent. But still she posits this contrast – Western vs. Moroccan - and will repeat the same construction throughout our conversation. She claims “People are, in the Moroccan culture in Moroccan society are getting used to like Western clothes and stuff,” and later asserts “[they think] djellaba it's just like all what Moroccans wear, which is not true. All these young Moroccan wear just like western clothes.” When I ask her

about getting dressed for social events, she replies “I would wear like a dress, not necessarily a Moroccan dress but just like a dress.” Khaoula implies a default, a fashion reality in which “just a dress” directly opposes “a Moroccan dress.” The question of categories then arises – if all of Khaoula’s clothing is purchased in Morocco, and much of it possibly manufactured here as well, what makes some Moroccan and some western? I suspect the answer lies somewhere in the long history of marketing and the colonial vestiges of fashion hegemony that linger in the Moroccan market.

My interviewee Nadia offers more insight into the binary-making process. Her outfit consists of the jeans and sweater combo, and my notes read “skinny jeans again, black top, covered up with colorful thin-stripe sweater and braided chunky scarf. Lots of texture and textile, really cool. Hair curly (like mine) and up. Some make-up.” Towards the beginning of our conversation I ask: “Do you think your style is Moroccan?”

Nadia: No. No it's far away from Moroccan. You can see some girls here just putting hijab and wearing long things.

Me: Is that Moroccan style?

Nadia: The majority yeah. But you can just, in the university, in the young population they wear this style of wearing - far away from Morocco.

Nadia then identifies “Moroccan style” as “hijab and wearing long things;” in short, Moroccaness is defined by religiosity. Religion and religious dress come up repeatedly as indications of Moroccan style; one participant, Ahmed, insists that there is no such thing as Moroccan fashion, only “a Moroccan wearing, not like a style but like traditional like djellaba and just like the veil. So other things are not Moroccan really.” Yasmine, the Moroccan blogger and fashion professional I interviewed agrees; she informs me “there is not a lot of Moroccan

designers who sell modern clothes. But there is like another brand on Morocco, Moroccan brand but it's for the traditional clothes.” Again and again participants invoke this dichotomy, Moroccan, Traditional, Religious on the one hand, and Western, Modern, Youthful on the other.

The issue of youth itself remains in the forefront of my participants’ minds throughout our interviews, and forms a binary with the older population, but also with an ill-defined amorphous Moroccan mass. This group stands in for those elements of society my interviewees dislike, and is inevitably associated with “antiquated” attitudes and positions, whether based on actual age or education. In my conversation with HOV, we talk about rap culture and American music, which he contrasts with “like the traditional music. When there is no meaning there is no perfect usage of words. People who eh, the majority of people who eh, because the majority of Moroccan we still have the illiteracy. So people, it gets affected, side effect of their illiteracy.” Moroccan music (which is inherently ‘traditional’) is automatically connected to illiteracy, ignorance, backwardness, not of a particular population but of this anonymous Moroccan collective. This group – alternately labeled “society,” “people,” “the majority,” – seems constantly in a state of confrontation with my participants. Khaoula says of her own clothes “So people would give me weird looks, people would think it's like something other young people would wear.” When I ask her about her experience wearing caftan and djellaba, she again refers to the young v. old binary: “Me: do you know anyone that wear like Caftan or Djellaba most days? KH: well most of the times like old people, or just like adults you know? Not like young people.” I asked Nadia a similar question, and she exclaims emphatically “no I can't. it's for old women!” She later insists “in the young population they wear this style of wearing far away from Morocco. Married women and this stuff they wearing 100% Moroccan clothes.” Moroccan clothes then, particularly the caftan and djellaba, signify age and adulthood, clothingakin to

orthopedic shoes. What's interesting is that this society of "adults" who discursively represent the Moroccan, pre-globalization, past is a primarily mythic group harkening to a primarily mythic past. The French (forcibly) introduced European fashion to Morocco over a century ago, and as Yasmineremarks:

When I saw my mother's pictures, my family pictures it look funny because now, I saw something that my mom wears and I think wow! I want the same one! Fashion is all about being back to the 90s, the 80s the 70s and no no there's not a big gap...Like when I saw my mother's dress or my mother's leggings. In the pictures when she was young, there is not a gap, not a huge gap because when I saw it, it's like okay! Nice! I want the same! And now you can get exactly the same thing that my mom wore when she was 18.

This Moroccan past inhabited exclusively by quiet women shrouded in djellaba is constructed, in some ways a product of Orientalism and in others a result of the post-independence nationalist project. Moreover, more young women veil today than did when their mothers or even grandmothers were young, yet veiling and the hijab are inevitably associated with a continuous past and traditional culture. These binaries then reveal more about the narrative realities of Moroccan youth than about demographics. Their importance to my interviews draws into question the ideologies that frame my participants' worldviews, and highlights the role of fashion as a visual expression of the conflicts created by these dichotomies.

Time-Space, the Internet, and the value of "Internationalism"

In *Colonialism's Clothing*, Victoria Rovine writes:

Wilk conceptualizes the distance between colonizer and colonized using a temporal metaphor: "colonial time." The metropole—whether Paris, London, Brussels, or another European capital—was presumed to be on the cutting edge in every element of cultural

expression, while the inhabitants of the colonies were deemed to be perpetually out of date; their cultures frozen in the stasis of “tradition,” remote from the contemporary. The notion of chronological as well as physical distance is particularly germane to an analysis of fashion, arguably the art form most closely associated with the passage of time. (2009, p. 50).

Time/Space and this notion of fashion’s temporality provide an interesting lens by which to analyze the fashion discourse with which my participants engage. The idea that certain types of clothing have certain “times and spaces” recurs in my interviews, and indicates a complex partitioning of social time and space into distinct and measured categories. The djellaba and caftan particularly seem bounded by temporality; Nadia asserts “I love our traditional clothes. But I wear them especially on Friday,” and later insists “not too much, just in ceremonies, or in their times. If we have wedding or in a ceremony.” Khaoula echoes her emphasis on timing, and admits “well, I wear Caftan for like several occasions, like marriage ceremonies and stuff but not when I’m out or hanging out with friends.” Yasmine, while talking about her experience winning a fashion contest, puts it more concisely: “I would not wear djellaba, I mean hello!?” In contrast, when asked what she wears to parties, Khaoulamuses “I would wear like a dress, not necessarily a Moroccan dress but just like a dress. Or like leggings or like boots. Just something that for me looks like pretty at the same time like practical, something that you would walk with like even run with. Not a djellaba of course cause, like yeah.” Nadia agrees, answering “Dress. Tiny [tight] one! [laughing] I don’t like to show my body, I dunno, I’m not comfortable so, just to be tiny and long and look sexy. And dress my hair and makeup. And the red lipstick!” Again, a binary appears: Djellaba for religious or “traditional” times, preceded over by authority figures – weddings, Friday couscous, family gatherings – and “western clothes” for gatherings of peers, parties, classes, hanging out. On another interesting note, Nadia repeatedly refers to her style as

being “far away from Moroccan.” Her reference to space may only be the result of a language barrier, but still it reveals an intriguing conception of fashion space, akin to the theory Rovine cites. Paris, London, Madrid – these fashion capitals are realistically not geographically far from Morocco, and yet European fashion is imagined as truly a great distance from caftans and djellabas.

Even more intriguing is what becomes of the problem of discursive time/space in the age of the internet. In many ways, the world wide web dispersed and democratized authority – fashion-related and otherwise – and anyone with a computer sits equidistant from the cultural ‘metropole.’ For Moroccan youth, fashion instruction comes less and less from tradition sources of authority like magazines or fashion shows, and comes more and more from social media. Sites like lookbook and youtube serve as spaces for fashion instruction, social networking, and democratized social exchange, particularly for young people. Take for example the following exchange with Ahmed:

Ahmed: I like, just like German style? I'm into German style.

Me: What does that mean?

Ah: I don't really know, just I like how the British and the German people dress, and the then I dress the way they do. I like it cause, you know...

Me: Where is your exposure to German fashion from?

Ah: I just google and I get pictures and watch videos on youtube.

Me: so do you particularly like the youtube videos that come out of Germany? or like Berlin?

Ah: yes. I watch like the fashion series like people just like this one. Like the person interviewer just like pick persons on the street and ask them about why they dressing like that. So from there I just pick like images and buy the same.

This process, of seeing images and video from abroad and imitating that fashion seems almost omnipresent in my interviews. Khaoula says she takes inspiration from “facebook-famous people who dress like a certain way that impresses” and “just people that I know and that they have a lot of fans, they're not really like famous people in the media and stuff they're just like famous people on facebook or youtube who do channels and like do tutorials on how you do your hair, how you like go out with this outfit.” Khaoula says her facebook-famous friends are “Usually German, or American. Like British sometimes.” HOV cites exactly the same references, claiming “the influence of youtube, the influence of the American culture you know, you try to imitate the style.” Nadia states “I get inspired from the website Lookbook. Yeah, a lot inspired by lookbook because it's international and you can get a lot of choices and I look at the pictures and the specific things similar to it, is like how can I use it. That's why. And I love the Korean pop, Korean style.” Yasmine as a blogger refers to the same process as research, and tells me a story: “‘My friend yesterday was like ‘oh my god, when you wake up til you sleep, how many pictures did you see? Like, 100?’ I say what? Just in one page, I see 100. I saw all the fashion tumblr and I can stay like hours and see picture picturepicture. Really more than thousand thousand picture by day.’” She too calls her influences ‘international.’

The importance of the internet as an international forum then cannot be overstated; more than any other form of media, online social media both influences Moroccan youth and includes them in a multi-national discourse on fashion, as well as an increasingly universalized experience

of youth. The difficulty of my participants to define ‘Moroccan fashion’ makes sense in the face of this kind of influence; their style, taste, and sense of fashionability comes not just from media streaming out of Europe and the United States but from individuals broadcasting their tips in German, in English, in Korean. Ahmed asserts “We just like receive [fashion] from other cultures. Turkish, girls wear Turkish clothes. Guys wear American style. German style, some people like French, nice clothes, classic clothes. French people.” In this frame, to be fashionable is to be international, globalized, and digitally engaged. Morocco, particularly a mythically constructed Morocco of rural villages, Islam, and somber djellabas, then becomes the very antithesis of fashion. This struggle between globalized, international youth culture and traditionalism (real or imagined) creates a master narrative in which fashion itself constitutes a visual battlefield, complete with sides, uniforms, and rallying cries.

Clothing as Resistance

What then exactly are the terms of battle? And how do Moroccan students express their ideology through fashion choices? For my participants, issues of individuation and socio-political repression underscored conversations on fashion. When asked “do you think your style is Moroccan?” HOV replied:

Absolutely not. Absolutely not. Besides all these facts, in here we, all we have, they try to control people, to do the same things. Because we have policy of corruption. Don't let them make you believe that Morocco is a developing country. There is no development. Maybe, you can call it primitive. I'm Moroccan, I admit this, you can call it primitive. If you want to take more evidence, go check the system. [talking about the University] there is no web profile, no schedule, no support for the students. Some books are very expensive. If you don't have a part-time job where you gonna get the money to buy

clothes? To take the tram? I find it sometimes, this thing is frustrating disappointing. That's why I told you Morocco is the graveyard of talent.

His frustration with society as a repressive, controlling force seems intimately linked with his decision to dress “like a rapper,” and indeed to study English. Fashion for him becomes a kind of escapism, as well as a form of resistance to the state itself, of which he says “it's not Morocco where people are free. Morocco is the cemetery of the talents.” All of my participants echo this frustration with the state and with society in response to my fashion questions, though the way this discourse manifests varies. Khaoula and Yasmine as women bring up street harassment and modesty expectations. Khaoula says “sometimes if you wear more masculine then people will probably respect you? And the girlier you dress up the more you are like subject to harassment, like street harassment for instance? And like if you dress masculine and the way you walk and stuff is like masculine just like then you're trying to say to other people like don't talk to me, I'm not that type you're looking for. So like, stay away.” Gender expectations play a repressive role in this frame, enough so that Khaoula genders not only her clothing but power itself as masculine. We talk for a while about whether masculine style translates to greater social respect (it doesn't) and she explains “they assume that all females are the same so like they classify females into two categories. The so like religious category and the liberal category and if you are liberal then you are okay with street harassment and if you're dressed up differently then what your culture or your religion like asks you to do then, street harassment is like acceptable to be like on you.” Yasmine speaks in a similar vein: “there are more and more violence and more and more things that everyone sees on TV, for all of that, you cannot wear like mini-things, but my mom was wearing that in the street like cool. And now you can't.” Both women describe a social situation inundated with gender politics, and a society that uses harassment and other forms of

actual and symbolic violence as a lever to force conformity – a conformity, as Yasmine points out, born entirely of modernity. Both women’s portrayals of this power interaction rely on negative reinforcement; Ahmed describes essentially the same system, though as a man he relies on positive reinforcement. He says: “I like it when people say 'you look awesome!' just like, people say. Because we dress - I know we dress in a way just because we like it, but at the same time we care about what people say. We are going to buy something- Like, you put that question in your mind: How do people receive it?” The question of social approval takes on a darker tone later in the interview as he acknowledges “the majority of people just want to sound cool, but at the same time not criticized by society. You know because if you're just going to wear something - girls and guys - at the same time haircuts that just, something that people might not like, it's going to hurt. Society has values and just like religion, so you should always be careful...we still live within a community, you can't just like do what you want.” Only minutes later, at the end of our conversation, he gives voice to that anonymous community: “And just the moment you start dressing a different way like European, American people you just like no longer wanted. ‘It’s not that good, we have values! Come on guys, we have religion! Do not dress like the Jews. So we have our values, so you are going to lose your identity, so stop it!’”

The social reality painted by my interviewees feels dark and repressive, yet these are not pessimistic people. In fact, my participants and their peers have created strategies of transgression, and the extent of that transgression is intimately linked to coolness, fashionability, and social status. The existing literature on fashion similarly links deviation to social capital, and Bourdieu insists “In order to make sense of personal style we must first form a sense of the common ground of style at the level of social class and social epoch. Personal style is above all a deviation from this norm, which, in the process of deviating, draws attention to its relation to the

common style” (McMurray summarizing Bourdieu, 2013, p. 72). As if in agreement, throughout our conversation Ahmed distances himself from his political assertions, exclaiming “I’m not talking about myself, I don’t give a shit,” and “I don’t care, no I don’t care It’s like I used to have Mohawk, and piercing here.” He even emphasizes “I love Nietzsche, Spinoza, Sartre. All of those extremist thinkers that the community don’t like to read.” The antidote to social repression as expressed by my interviewees is individuation, a process characterized by an emphatic rejection of society’s constraints and total avowal of “not giving a shit” about what other people think. Yasmine explains “they’re all like, ‘no, it’s going to be this, or I will stay classy, or no I can’t go red hair color! No no, I can’t!’ but me, I, no, it’s the opposite. Pink hair? Yeah I want it! Yes, when it’s original, I want it!” Nadia is more concise, and she repeats throughout our conversation simply “I love to be unique and different from the others.” When asked what she wants to express through her fashion, she replies “Just I mean, I’m free, I’m independent. About freedom, I’m cool that’s all.” Freedom, independence – these are not the words an American student would use to describe fashion. They are givens, not attitudes to be expressed. But Nadia’s assertion of these traits through fashion indicates their importance to her self-image, and they stand in contrast to, and indeed in conflict with, the repressive picture of society expressed in the same interview. “Coolness,” which interestingly Moroccan youth only express in English, rests on this base of what Nadia labels “freedom and independence,” what Yasmine calls “originality,” and what Ahmed paints as subversive rebellion. And freedom, independence, originality, subversion, coolness - all manifest in “western clothing;” traditional clothing, by implication, signifies the opposite traits.

The Orientalist Gaze Reimagined

Fashion magazines are in the business of myth making, Orientalist and otherwise. In the November 2014 issue of *Femmes du Maroc*, the magazine devotes a double-page spread to the season's must-have items. The spread is titled "Enchantment" with the subtitle "Pour que la magie (noir) opérée, zoom sur les it-pièces, déco, beauté, mode et les accessoires maléfiques du moment;" in English, roughly: "For (black) magic effects, zoom in on it-pieces, decor, beauty, fashion accessories and the evil of the moment." The spread is a collection of items in black – the color of the season – and includes onyx and gold earrings, black sunglasses with gold filigree, a black brocade coat, a black brimmed hat, Poison by Dior perfume, studded black boots, and a copy of *Magie & Religion dans l'Afrique du Nord* (Magic and Religion of North Africa). Like all fashion spreads, "Enchantment" constructs a fantasy, one that the reader can attain should she purchase all of the items included. This particular fantasy relies on a series of mythical signifiers; the monochromatic black palette, the gold and diamond embellishments, lace and brocade, intricate details set off by hard lines – all evoke images of film noir, Victorian horror, witchcraft, the occult – in short, a classic European trope of Woman of Mystery/Femme Fatale. The inclusion of *Magie & Religion dans l'Afrique du Nord* changes the dynamic of the myth. The reference to Moroccan culture is meant to add an exotic accent to the collection; the darkness of the spread's palette becomes almost an allusion to Conrad's African "heart of darkness" and the viewer is reminded of Aisha Kandeisha as much as Lauren Bacall.

The same month's edition of *Ousra* includes a 8-page spread titled "7 Reines de Beauté (7 beauty queens)," which shows make-up looks inspired by different eras and empires including "Medieval," "African," "Hindu," and "Asian." Our "African Queen" is clothed exclusively in jewelry, and peers menacingly out of the page over long, claw-like gold nails; Reined'Asie has

an elaborate hair-do supported by paper fans. “China is one thing,” Barthes tell us, “the idea...is another” (2012, p. 230). As these spreads show, fashion deals not with geography but with ideas, with myths; for fashion, China is, essentially and eternally, Barthes’ “peculiar mix of bells, rickshaws and opium dens” (2012, p. 230). The magazines mythologize other societies too – London becomes “the capital of hipsters and the underground movement, always timeless” (FDM November 2014, p. 45), and is represented by union jack sweaters, mod sunglasses, red telephone booths, and topshop inspired hard-rock accessories. This year’s Caftan edition of FDM, focused entirely on the Caftan festival put on by the magazine, which could supply enough material for a paper in and of itself, includes a feature on the show’s dance performance. This year’s show focused on “empires” and included dances and costumes meant to represent the British Empire, Russian Empire, African Empires, Chinese Empire, Roman Empire, and Ottoman Empire. The performances invoked exactly the myths one would imagine – red coats and furry Buckingham Place guard hats, animal print loincloths, imperial red dresses with scarf sleeves and triangle rice hats plated with gold. In effect, fashion creates a dual universe, one composed of physical spaces and the other of myths. Fashion choices constitute moments of creative signification as each wearer/buyer/photographer/designer/stylist simultaneously constructs and succumbs to a highly mythicized narrative reality.

Perhaps more than any other Western country, America lives a double life, the actual and the mythic. The Myth of America dates back to before Europe’s maritime stumbling across the Atlantic, and has for centuries relied on poetry and foreign hopes for its existence. Moroccan youth may not speak of streets paved with gold, but their construction of the United States feels just as symbolic. For HOV, America is the land of rappers, Eminem, big labels, and economic development. Nadia calls it “the first country,” and claims that English is “so emotional and it

makes you express your feelings more than Arabic or French.” Khaoula says her friends liken her style to American rock stars, while both her and Yasmine have the stars and stripes emblazoned on some of their clothing. American culture supplies the name of Yasmine’s blog “Hipster Square,” and she narrates “So the name Hipster was just in the apogee (?), here, we didn't used to use it. And it's, when we saw the TV, like MTV or something it was like ‘fashion fashionfashion hipster hipsterhipster’ and I go to looking for the meaning of hipster and I thought ‘nice! They looking like me.’ Okay hipster, but hipster what? Hipster square!” In her Abercrombie sweatpants, Yasmine seems a far cry from my conceptions of hipster, but the sheen of America, of MTV and Hollywood transform this word – American subculture turns to American culture only to be made subversive again. Signification in the age of the Internet puts every word’s meaning in flux, and postmodernism manifests in every tweet and blog post. This Morocco-specific myth of American makes sense in the face of Moroccan discourse on coolness, itself a term borrowed from the American vernacular. If freedom, independence, and individuality constitute the foundation of Moroccan cool, one can logically jump from “cool” to “American,” particularly if that America is the America of myth, built on Manifest Destiny, American Eagle ads, and rock music. And while my position as an American student cannot be discounted, my participants emphasis on the United States seems more genuine commitment than pointed flattery.

Even deeper than the myth of America lies the Moroccan conception of Morocco. The image of Morocco and Moroccan fashion expressed in my interviews mirrors that presented in Ousra and Femmes du Maroc, and surprises me in its avid adoption of an orientalist narrative, one in which Morocco is simultaneously mythical, traditional, illiterate, undeveloped, quaint, and exotic. Moroccan fashion discourse in effect Otherizes Moroccan culture itself, only to re-

approach that same material culture with a gaze similar to that of a European consumer. In talking about her shopping habits, Nadia explains “I go to the North or to the South to find something different. And then put it with something else, yes.” Yasmine calls this approach the “Moroccan touch,” and tells me: “we don't have the Moroccan style. We have the Moroccan touch! You can wear like an American style, but with a Moroccan hat, or with a Moroccan ring or with Moroccan accessories. So just like Moroccan touch. And umm, broach or like belt or something. It's Moroccan, but just baby touch.” These women’s descriptions inevitably remind me of “ethnic” styling in the United States, when stylists use Latin American textile belts, chunky sub-Saharan African wood jewelry, and even Moroccan Amazigh-style earrings to invoke a “well-traveled” look. Rovine connects this tendency directly to colonial practice, and claims “Africanisms in French and other Western fashion design continue to emerge out of a globetrotting, decontextualized, and ahistorical practice of borrowing that differs little from early- twentieth-century practices” (2009, p. 59). Moroccan absorption of this paradigm reflects a deep internalization of the orientalist narrative presented by the fashion industry at home and abroad, and indicates the importance of mythic reality to the establishment of fashion norms.

Conclusions and Reflections

As you can see, I have reached the section in my paper labeled “Conclusions.” Over the past thirty pages or so I have outlined the various ideas, ideologies, narratives, and myths at play in Moroccan fashion discourse as I experienced it. The young people I spoke to answered my clothing questions with political diatribes, family pictures, song lyrics, shopping strategies, and pick-up lines. They introduced me to corners of the internet I, as an American, had never seen, and spoke back to me stories created by thinkers I have been trained to refute. I set out expecting

to find evidence of the conflicts that pull at Moroccan politics and of the conversations that consume academics. And so where is the battle between secular and Islamic feminism? For that matter, where is the secular vs. religious binary I was so trained to expect? I imagined my research would reveal some insight on a kind of uniquely Moroccan modernity lived by uniquely Moroccan twenty-somethings. I naively expected modern djellabas and old-fashioned dresses, a complex visual performance of evolving national culture or some sort of self-conscious inversion of the prejudices I as an American was supposed to hold. In retrospect, my expectations speak as much to my own Moroccan myth as to the very preconceptions I was hoping to subvert. What I found was a confirmation of the transnationalism the internet is rumored to create, and the young Moroccans I spoke with prided themselves on open-mindedness and an international outlook. Modernity then was neither Moroccan nor European, but digital and globalized.

A few questions stick with me, nagging as I find myself unable to answer them. The question of internalized Othering haunts me; how have Moroccans so naturally adopted a perception of themselves and their material culture as exotic and commodifiable? Is this attitude simply a fine imitation of European “globalized” fashion sense, or is it truly ingrained in the collective imagination? Can we even talk of a Moroccan Orientalist gaze or is a mythic conception of one’s own culture natural? Would I get the same flavor of discourse asking Americans about American fashion? I remain concerned by the corporate interests at play in this discourse of globalized-as-modernized, and still find the ubiquity of American brands chilling in a deeply visceral way. As an anthropology student, I have been taught to have faith in the resilience of culture and the eternal ability of societies to imbue objects and art with distinct cultural significance, but still I worry what becomes of a civilization that replaces its own material culture with the consumption of mass-produced product. Perhaps this is the hipster in

me. My participants' use of the Internet still peaks my curiosity, and if I had more time I would like to explore the ways in which Moroccan youth culture operates on social media and interacts with transnational youth culture. Meanwhile, I am constantly reminded of the limitations of this research. My position as a Female American Student surely colors my data, as interviewees undoubtedly played to my sympathies, attempting to supply me with the answers they thought I sought. Gender most definitely affected my interactions – both of my male participants pointedly asked me on dates and continued to message me on facebook in the weeks following our interviews. Some of their answers too may have been directed flattery or contrived self-presentation. Furthermore, I could not collect nearly enough data to speak definitively on any uniform social trend, and my sampling left out large segments of student society, most notably the very religious. Conducting my interviews in English surely changed the tone of the students' responses, as well as limited the kind of students I was able to approach. I have done my best to present results as circumstantial and limited, but even my limited data speaks to an intriguing narrative being formed in the social consciousness of Moroccan youth.

Ahmed, Khaoula, Nadia, Yasmine, and HOV, their testimonies supplemented by the reality I observed, introduced me to the grammar of Moroccan fashion discourse where the least contentious clothing items of my culture signify the very essence of youth rebellion and free expression. My participants protest a closed-minded, ignorant, and patriarchal society with German youtube videos, K-Pop, instagram, Eminem, red lipstick, and skinny jeans. They construct a Moroccan myth complete with rural women, religious repression, dangerous streets, put-upon mothers, illiteracy, provincialism, and “primitive” development – all signified by the djellabas on the street and the caftans on the covers of the poshest fashion magazines. The material culture of this Morocco supplies quaint accessories and exotic touches, but remains an

inappropriate source for any real fashion material. Fashion is an art form of the now and the mythical construction of Morocco as timeless and traditional cannot lend itself to the constant innovation of Couture. Jansen says of my participants and their peer “they want to express themselves ‘freely,’ which does not mean that they are looking to deny their cultural heritage or their Moroccan identity, but to interpret and materialize it as they see fit” (2012, p. 6). My interviewees then bind their identities not in terms of any national heritage but in twitter handles, lookbook accounts, and facebook names. The debates that surround the proper incarnation of Moroccan nationalism are antithetical to a near and visible future totally devoid of geopolitical cultural division. The battle my participants fight with their jeans and hoodies is not over the soul of Morocco but rather over the need for defining such a soul at all.

Works Cited

- Ahmed, L. (2011). *A quiet revolution: The veil's resurgence, from the Middle East to America*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Al-Qasimi, N. (2010). Immodest Modesty: Accommodating Dissent and the 'Abaya-as-Fashion in the Arab Gulf States. *Journal of Middle East Women's Studies*, 6(1), 46-74.
- Barthes, R. (2012). *Mythologies*. (R. Howard, Trans.) . New York, NY: Hill and Wang. (Original work published 1957)
- Barthes, R., & Stafford, A. (2004). *The language of fashion* (English edition, Bloomsbury Revelations ed.) (A. Stafford, Ed.). London: UK
- Enchantment, (2014, Nov). *Femmes du Maroc*, 30-31.
- Jansen, M. A. (2012). *Casablanca: Past, Present, and Future as Fashion Capital* [PDF document]. Retrieved from author's Academic.edu page: <https://fashion-arts.academia.edu/MariaAngelaJansen>
- Jansen, M. A. (2013). *The Moroccan Fashion Media and the Construction of a Moroccan Type of Modernity* [PDF document]. Retrieved from author's Academia.edu page: <https://fashion-arts.academia.edu/MariaAngelaJansen>
- McMurray, D. (2013). Thinking about Class and Status in Morocco. In R. Newcomb & D. Crawford (Eds.), *Encountering Morocco: Fieldwork and Cultural Understanding* (pp. 56-76). Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Rovine, V. L. (2009). Colonialism's Clothing: Africa, France, and the Deployment of Fashion. *Design Issues*, 25(3), 44-61.
- Tableaux Artisques. (2014, June). *Femmes Du Maroc*, 275-285.
- 7 Reines de Beaute, (2014, Oct). *Ousra*, 56-63.