

PART THREE

CONTEXTUAL
DETERMINATIONS



7

Moroccan Sociology: Epistemological Preliminaries

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The researcher interested in sociology is, after a certain period of investigations and reflections, undeniably faced with a series of interrogations and questions of an epistemological nature which shout out to him and which are based on his scientific practice and the status of this science in his country. These interrogations and questions are gaining more and more legitimacy and relevance today after the birth and proliferation of the so-called “national” sociologies. It is in this framework that we should ask ourselves whether a so-called “Moroccan” sociology exists.

As sociology has become a plural science, it would be futile and even imprudent to want to return it to a single discipline (Balandier 1981). The ramifications and divisions which are ongoing within this discipline mean that it can only be conceived of today as the corpus of an infinity of sociologies: political, religious, economic, rural, urban, etc., but also French, English, Mexican, Indian, etc., according to the fields and diverse cultural realms that it takes as its subject. Nevertheless, within this plurality, there are specificities which result in each of these sociologies particularizing by method, subject, or purpose.

How then Can We Describe Moroccan Sociology?

In our opinion, it can only be characterized by the “national” ends and strategies which it makes its own. So when the native sociologist considers creating his own sociology, he is faced with a rich and cumbersome sociological literature: such a work is one by foreigners of which he is obliged to make the inventory and critique, in view of disentangling the scientific from the ideological. This task which first falls on the national sociologist, places him or her in front of the thorny problem of objectivity in sociology, a problem which still arises for both national and foreign researchers.

From the Sociology of “The Other on Oneself” to the Sociology of “Oneself”

The fundamental problem with which the national sociologist is confronted when he considers the study of a social phenomenon is first his dependence and familiarity with the phenomenon, which could at times lead him to consider it as one of the daily trivial matters. And yet the everyday sometimes conceals the real, because “what is familiar is not necessarily known,” said Hegel.

The national researcher, submerged by the social phenomenon that he is dealing with runs the risk of coming up short with respect to the exteriority guarantor of objectivity required by the “scientificity” of the 19th century. How, then, can a native make his own anthropology, some ethnologists asked themselves? Is it possible from the perspective of the social sciences to be object and subject at the same time?

To attempt to provide some answers to these questions, we will content ourselves in the following pages with drawing up an outline of the “identity” of the sociologists who have been interested in Morocco, and we will then see the difficulties which lead to the fact that objectivity in sociology – the example of which is borrowed from physics – still remains a subject of controversies and all-out debates.

Sociologists who have examined the history of sociology in Morocco have agreed to divide it into two main periods:

- sociology of the colonial period;
- sociology post-independence.

Sociology of the colonial period

This sociology was the work of foreign researchers – mainly French – and had as its main objective the knowledge of Morocco, all the better to dominate it. With this backdrop came the establishment of the “Morocco Scientific Mission,” a research entity established in 1903 in Tangiers by Alfred le Chatelier, well before the creation of the protectorate in 1912.

In 1913, the role of the scientific mission was made official by an order of the first resident general in Morocco, General Lyautey. We can read in this decree:

The notices established in the various regions on the ethnographic, historical, sociological, economic and administrative of cities and tribes in Morocco, and the other work of agents of the protectorate on indigenous sociology or politics will be made available to the Morocco scientific mission, responsible particularly for the preparation of a documentary collection published under the auspices of the general residence (Nicolas 1961:187).

The establishment of this mission was also a part of the “new positivist confidence in social analyses (which) made a scientifically-based colonialism (pacifistic and inexpensive) possible” (Burke II 1979). Thus, colonization of Morocco “was to take place, according to the protagonists of colonizing action, not by force and armed occupation but in a “pacifistic” and “scientific” way” (Halim 2004:6). As a result, the historian interested in this sociology is faced with “an enormous corpus of knowledge formed over more than a half-century by this “Muslim sociology”¹ and which seems to be unusual in more than in more than one respect” (Roussillon 2002:193-221).

Once the protectorate was established, the role of the scientific mission and the “sociologists” of the general residency² remains the same, but the objectives more specific, which we will limit ourselves to extracting from the work of two eminent sociologists of the residency: Michaux-Bellaire and R. Montagne:³ the main concern of the former was to show that the total Islamization of Morocco was a false idea that must then be rejected: As we more deeply penetrate the Moroccan system”, he says, “we are able to realize – through the veil which covers it with a uniformly Islamic appearance – that a large number of institutions which make up this system originated before the Islamization of the country (Michaux–Bellaire 1927).⁴

The survival of some pre-Islamic customs and traditions not in accordance with Muslim orthodoxy in some regions of Morocco is quite evident, but the conclusions that sociologists during the residency drew from them are false. Customs and rites not in accordance with the *shari'a* (Islamic law) existed and still exist in Morocco in various forms, without, however, stripping the practitioners of these mores their faith in Islam⁵ or their Islamic identity. In this framework, the attitude of defense of the “Azerf” (traditional Berber law) adopted by the authorities of the protectorate was also an integral part of the segregationist aim of the Berber policy conducted by these same authorities, because:

Beginning in 1914, the promise had been made to the dissident populations that they would be governed by traditional law applied by “djemaâs.”⁶ A census was taken of the Berbers to learn which tribes followed tradition and which the *shari'a*. The assemblies worked to the general satisfaction. A commission met, from which came the famous “Dahir” (law) of 16 May 1930, thereafter called the “Berber law” (Coatalen 1970).

This Berber policy of colonization was definitely based on the knowledge compiled on the “cities and tribes of Morocco” and “it was Michaux-Bellaire who was the first to so clearly articulate the double opposition on which was constructed both the compilation of colonial knowledge and the “Muslim policy” of the protectorate:

The Arab/Berber opposition that intersects that between mountains and plain and nomads and sedentary groups which continues in the representation of an Islamity which was said to have been imposed on the

indigenous populations and their “residual paganism” behind which this sociology was close to seeing a “secularism,” or even a “republicanism” – to the point of attempting, with the promulgation of the “Berber Dahir” in 1930, to bring these supposed divisions into play to consolidate the colonial stranglehold” (Roussillon 2002:193-221).

This “*Dahir*” was the result of the Berber policy of the general residency which made the *Azerf* official with the objective of dividing the Moroccan society into two fractions: one the pagan Berber governed by tradition and not by the sha’ria (Islamic law), forming a linguistic group hostile to Arabization, living in chronic political anarchy (*Siba*) (anarchy) because of their refusal and opposition to central power (*Makhzen*); and the other composed of Muslim Arabs, subjected to “Makhzenian” authority. This opposition between *Bled Makhzen* and *Bled Siba* “appeared to observers including Michaux-Bellaire, as the “formula” which presided over the operation of the Moroccan political system that the Protectorate should be interested in preserving” (Roussillon 2002:198) in order to successfully conduct its policy of local administration.

Thus, it appeared that the defense of the Berber originality was adopted only to serve as an arm against Islam, against the Arabic language and Islamic law:

“We must avoid Islamizing or Arabizing the Berbers; if it is necessary for them to evolve, we will direct their evolution towards a clearly European culture and not purely Muslim,” was stated in the 1914 report (Coatalen 1970:6).

To speak of total pseudo-Islamization of Morocco and to cast into doubt its religious unity was aimed at rallying a part of the population to Christian civilization. At least, this is the conclusion that young Moroccan nationalism drew from the clauses of the “Berber Dahir,” and this is what comes out in Michaux-Bellaire’s remarks when he states that:

The Muslim period is one of the periods in the history of Morocco, let us even say its principle period, but it is not all of its history (...) I am certain that this clarification will allow us to locate, through often deceptive appearances of official and classical Morocco, the true body or more precisely the diverse bodies of which, in reality, the Moroccan State is composed, and which it is in our great interest to be familiar with” (Michaux-Bellaire 1927:1-25).

The objectives targeted by the sociology of Michaux-Bellaire coincide with those of Robert Montagne’s sociology through what P. Coatalen qualifies as false evolutionism which “consists of attributing to a foreign culture to the western observer a period of history in the West” (Coatalen 1970:8).

Thus, M. Bellaire tries to show, through a “religious archeology” that Morocco has gone through several pagan, roman, Islamic periods, and why not a new European (Christian) period as the evolutionist laws claim?

The evolutionist approach of R. Montagne proceeds, according to the terms of A. Laroui, with a “political archeology,” faithful to the same objectives. And it is from Masqueray that Montagne borrowed the idea that the Berbers are in the social state of the Greeks before Athens or of the Latins before Rome: “In our view, the inhabitants of Souss,” he says, “should maintain up until the present, in their remote valleys, the obscure and agitated life that the people of the Mediterranean knew before the development of the cities and empires of Greece and Rome” (Montagne 1930:53).

It was thus in the Berber mountains in the South of Morocco where Montagne went to look for what A. Laroui calls “the institutional tribe of classical history, the tribe that Rome destroyed in Europe ” (Laroui 1977:168). This tribe maintains its “purity” thanks to its independence and its refusal of central power (Makhzen), thereby forming “republics” living in the “Siba.” This “Siba,” which is to become, according to A. Laroui, “an institution: it was the delight of anarchy; the less the tribe is “makhzenized,” the more quickly the institutions of the past can regroup” (Laroui 1977:70).

R. Montagne, in the foreword to his thesis on the Berbers and the Makhzen, elucidated his objectives which are the same as those of Michaux-Bellaire:

Going through often rapid transitions, prescriptions of particularly primitive customary law – although very much alive and sometimes marvelously adapted to the economic circumstances of existence – to the rigid rules established by the holy legislation of the Qu’ran, these Berbers see, after their submission, the quick ruin of traditions to which they were secretly the most attached” (Montagne 1930:XI).

The protectorate’s Berber policy, with which the sociologists of indigenous affairs were associated, was crowned by the promulgation of the Berber “*Dahir*” which distinguished Berber regions from Arab regions ; the former were governed by tradition (Ürff or Azerf), the latter by Islamic law (*Chraâ*). As P. Coatalen accurately notes, this “*Dahir*” provided new Moroccan nationalism the chance that it was waiting for, and “the fiasco of the Berber policy illustrated the falseness of the theses on the Berbers” (Coatalen 1970:8).

Colonial sociology had as its motto “Divide to conquer,” but after all, as Edmond Burke says: “It is hardly surprising to note that colonial sociology was colonialist, what else could it have been? (Burke III 1979:38).

It would therefore seem useless to restate here the inventory of criticism of which sociology has been the subject, because our goal was to define the objective, which can be summarized as follows: attempt to update and restate the underlying or apparent antagonisms which govern or seem to govern the Moroccan organism. A sociology of national obedience should, in our view, serve opposite ends.

Sociology post-independence

Up until the independence of Morocco (1956), Moroccan sociology was the work of foreigners: “Without questioning either their good faith or their value, we can still lodge the criticism that they had only an extrinsic knowledge of their subject,” said André Adam who adds: “Such is without fail sociology in Morocco, the work of the French, Spanish, English, Germans, and Americans. The time for this paradox is over” (Adam 1972:41).

But is this paradox really outdated? Can we argue that fifty years after the political independence of the country, the study of the Moroccan society has become the work of Moroccans?

We doubt it, although the number of Moroccan sociologists continues to grow and they continue to conduct research on various phenomena and regions of the country.⁸ In fact, we note that at the same time, an increasingly larger number of foreign sociologists continue to be interested in Morocco, and they benefit from means and opportunities not always at the disposal of the national researcher. It is the English-language researchers especially who have appeared in ample numbers since the 1960s and who continue to produce an increasingly abundant sociological literature, more and more advanced, theoretically speaking, and dealing mainly with political, ethnic and religious fields. In our opinion, this sociology is continuing and enriching the projects and objectives conceived by pre-independence French-language sociology, without, of course, expressing its goals and objectives as formally and clearly as the French-language sociology of the colonial period.

Without going so far as to accuse this new foreign sociology of being neo-colonialist, we question its secret objectives, and this is what is driving the new generation of Moroccan sociologists to mention the need for epistemological vigilance, which should lead to a decolonization of Arab and Moroccan sociology which can only be accomplished, according to Abdelkébir Khatibi, from the standpoint of a double critique:

- a A deconstruction of logocentrism and ethnocentrism, this word of self-sufficiency, par excellence, that the West in the process of developing, has developed on the world. And we have much to ponder from this side about the structural solidarity which links imperialism, in all of its iterations (political, military, cultural) to the expansion of what is called social science. (...)
- b This also assumes, and requires just as much a critique of knowledge and discourse developed by the various societies of the Arab world about themselves” (Khatibi 1983:48-49).

“We are thus targeting,” adds Khatibi in another article, “a double coordinated movement only capable in our opinion of surpassing simple reproduction and

opening up to sociologists the possibility of a less alienated, practical knowledge, more adapted to the specificity of the subject analyzed” (Khatibi 1975:1).

This double critique initiated by Khatibi (1983) continues to rally several other Moroccan sociologists, including the late P. Pascon and Abdellah Hammoudi, among others. But we believe that this double critique should neither absorb all of the efforts of Moroccan researchers nor make them forget their main task, namely the pursuit of the study of their own society. This task is linked to the birth of Moroccan sociology, and to the definition of its theoretical subject. Therefore, we believe that after having revealed the objectives and the “divisionist” and “segmentarist” underside of colonial sociology, we should in its place substitute a national sociology with a more scientific purpose, guided and mobilized by the concern with emphasizing the unifying elements of Moroccan society,⁹ which make for a one and single nation, and that the colonial sociologist tried to hide, neglect and push aside because he recognized the dangers that these elements presented with respect to his plans.

We cannot currently define Moroccan sociology by a specific subject which is peculiar to it, therefore we will settle for defining it by certain aspects of its objectives. From this perspective, we can argue that Moroccan sociology should have the objective of consolidating the unity of the nation state. This objective will remain nothing but wishful thinking if we do not translate words into action. The ball is now in the court of Moroccan sociologists who, according to A. Adam, “benefit by right of birth from the privilege of knowing their own society from the inside, but who must acquire the difficult art of detachment” (Adam 1972:42). “They possess assets that foreigners did not have. They should remember to watch out for what they think they know. “Science,” said Gurvitch, “is the knowledge of the hidden” (Adam 1972:72).

“Detachment”, “Objectification” and “Commitment”

“Insofar as it is reflection about society, sociology implies detachment, i.e. the realization of this minimum of rupture with respect to oneself and one’s own group, which is necessary for objectification” (Pascon 1986:61).

This detachment necessary for objectification is thus a distance in relation to the subject. Classical anthropology provided this distance to the researcher to the extent that he or she had to travel to another place to search for the subject, which allowed him or her to acquire the sense of comparison, relativity, and thus a certain degree of neutrality:

“By developing itself through the study of small societies foreign to ours and geographically distant, anthropology, to a large extent, saved the cost of the necessary divestiture, and freed itself from the subjective aspects of philosophical anthropology” (Breteau & Zagnoli 1983:8).

It is this detachment in relation to the subject which allowed for the birth of the science: "In fact, generally, sciences were developed from what brought us the least into question, by freeing themselves from the projective identification which centered the environment on man, and led him to see it in his own image" (Breteau & Zagnoli 1983:8).

But spatial distance is not all, and cannot always free us from certain prejudices and preconceived notions:

In fact, "There was a time, which is not behind us yet, when anthropology professors asked researchers to 'have no idea' before beginning the study of a society, as if the mind could become the blank slate that it never was" (Cresswell & Godelier 1976:8).

And it is for this reason that Breteau and Zagnoli note that in addition to distance, a 'decentering' is necessary, i.e. of guaranteeing a "distance both with respect to the other and to oneself" (Breteau & Zagnoli 1983:8). And all with the goal of this "objectivity" which is the condition *sine qua non* of 'scientificity':

"Classical science is founded on objectivity, i.e., a universe made up of isolated objects (in a neutral space), subjected to objectively universal laws" (Morin 1977:96).

It is this idea of objectivity which was the source of the birth of positivist sociology: Saint Simon and A. Comte took as their objective the creation of a social science whose archetype always depends on physics: thus the creation of social physics which is a science like any other, if not the "supreme science":

A. Comte said, "I mean by social physics the science which has as its particular subject the study of social phenomena considered in the same way as astronomical, physical, chemical and physiological phenomena, i.e., as subject to invariable natural laws, the discovery of which is the special objective of its research" (Comte 1972:86).

Durkheim, whose sociology remained faithful to the same positivist tradition, had the same inspirations and aspirations, in considering that social facts: "consist of ways of acting, thinking and feeling, external to the individual, and which are endowed with a power of coercion by virtue of which they make their presence felt to him" (Durkheim 1977:5).

The exteriority of social facts in relation to individuals goes hand in hand with the first and the most fundamental of rules of the sociological method, according to which "social facts should be considered as things." In both cases, the goal is to create a certain distance between the sociologist and his subject. This distance, adds Durkheim in the preface of the 2nd edition of the "Rules," can only be "mental attitude," because the principle of "conscious negligence" is hardly respectable in social science.

Thus, the eternal problem remains open: should science cast off ideologies that reflect the consciousness of a group or class? With respect to this question, the response of the Moderns is that:

the sociologist has a responsibility with respect to the society which he is examining (whether he lives in that society or is visiting it) and this responsibility binds him both vis-à-vis the investigation and the explanation that he proposes (Rivière 1969:20).

Because, according to M. Grawitz:

the absence of objectivity implies a number of nuances, from erroneous description, bias, down to the simple fact of the preference for such and such a field, and the use of such and such a technique, the degree of necessary objectivity varies according to the field and the type of observation in question. We must carefully distinguish between the description of facts, which should always be objective, and the interpretation which can be more personal” (Grawitz 1976:321).

True objectivity is not then adopting the most neutral posture possible, but “consists of recognizing one’s own commitments and personal biases which may result.”

For comprehensive sociology, objectivity does not lie in a pseudo-detachment, the search for which could, on the contrary, be an obstacle to the study of social action, a study which should be as intrinsic (subjective) as extrinsic (objective), and be so without questioning the ‘scientificity’ of the mode of sociological knowledge. Objectivity in sociology then becomes, in the last analysis, a question of ethics (or moral responsibility), or axiological neutrality which comes under a certain ethics of the profession of sociology rather than *a priori* respect for certain given methodological precepts. It is the very essence and the primary objective of all sociology of a national and nationalist persuasion, and an academic and activist persuasion at the same time. This being the case, and all the while indicating the persistence of this line of thought, we can advance the diagnostic that current Moroccan sociological literature shows that this nationalistic “commitment” is losing followers, given that sociologists of the new generation, following the example of their peers in the Arab world, are adopting the most varied postures and positions.¹⁰

Notes

1. Alain Roussillon has stressed the paradox of the term “Muslim sociology,” adopted by the precursors of this sociology and which took the form of an “accumulation of knowledge for others” (Roussillon 2002).
2. Rare among these were those who were sociologists by training. The majority were military leaders or civilian comptrollers who converted into sociologists at the request of colonial officials.
3. We limit ourselves to the example of these two sociologists because they were more involved along with the colonial officials. The work of certain other sociologists (J. Berque and Ch. Leceour, for example) was more concerned with truth and clearly distinguished itself from colonialist sociology.

4. Cited by Georges Nicolas (Nicolas1961:187).
5. Paul Pascon deals with some customs and beliefs not in accordance with Islam, and still existing in Morocco. See his article: "Myths and Beliefs in Morocco," in: *70 Years of Sociology in Morocco*, B.E.S.M. n° 155/156 (1986). In another article entitled "Anthropology and Colonialism," Pascon notes that Islam as an ideology of the State and citizen was ferociously attacked by the colonialists following the example of Edmond Doutté, for whom "the more primitive a people is, the more religion invades all of its institutions; I do not believe that this principle is seriously contested today; it is one of the best established principles in sociology." Pascon comments on this principle, saying "except that still today, we do not know what primitivism is. As for religion, we have a tendency to extend the meaning to it. Capitalist Ideology discredits religious forces and accuses them of Barbary when they stand in the way of colonial barbarism" (Pascon 1982:253).
6. *Djemaâ*: tribal representative assembly in Morocco.
7. In his article op. cit A. Roussillon, basing his remarks on A. Laroui, gives the following definition of the idea of "Makhzen" by saying: "Lit.: store, warehouse. More than the State itself or the administration, this term for the stranglehold of central power on society, including representatives of the sultan to the different levels on which his authority is exercised."
8. This research is often the subject of university theses. Moroccan sociological production remains weak with the exception of these theses, which can be explained not by any lack of nationalistic fervor, but by the absence of well-defined research projects which respond to any scientific or social demand.
9. In our thesis on "Rural Exodus in Morocco," we attempted to highlight the contribution of a sociology of current migrations in Morocco to such a national sociology.
10. Ali El-Kenz distinguishes the three following categories within the community of current Arab sociologists: the academic, the activist and the consultant: "These three figures, he says of the researcher in social sciences, can be found today in all Arab countries through the most varied combinations, depending on the disciplines and the countries. We can even sometimes observe with the same researcher, a mix of different postures – academic and activist, academic and consultant, or even activist academic and consultant, depending on the most varied proportions" (El-Kenz 2004).

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