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Maghrebi audiences: Mapping the divide between Arab sentiment, Islamic belonging and political praxis

Introduction

This chapter attempts to illustrate the ways in which the shift towards Arab satellite television has re/opened a number of questions related to identification, identity affiliation and belonging. Indeed, the advent of satellite television in the Maghreb (Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria) has generated a number of new practices and has led to new identity affiliations, which call for careful analysis due to their impact on the ways people negotiate their beliefs, bring forth their identity affiliations (particularly their Arab and Islamic belonging) and define how to live together. This and other new communication technologies compel us to reflect on the ways identity affiliations are expressed and shaped. I draw on the work of various authors who view identity not as much as a starting point defined by an origin, but rather as multiple stations that the individual takes, or is compelled to take, while dealing with crossroad encounters in his or her daily life (Deleuze & Guatari 1980; Bayart 1996). In his seminal article, 'Ethnicity and Identity,' S. Hall (1991) gives preference to the term 'identification' over 'identity.' The processual functioning of the former prevents any pretention of a given fixed origin, and more importantly, precludes assigning and imposing identity to groups and individuals. This argument, which has gained consensus, is instrumental in supporting my approach toward Maghrebi people and the ways they construct their identity affiliations and belonging in relation to new media technologies.

Few works, if any at all, have been concerned with the intricacies of identity construction of Maghrebi (and Arab) audiences and satellite television. Fewer still have investigated the relationship between these two elements, nor questioned the social and political issues at stake they have generated, as satellite television broadcasting is a relatively recent phenomenon, especially when approached from a sociological point of view. In this study, I argue that new media technology, in particular satellite television and the massive flow of images it has produced, constitutes an unprecedented moment in which a novel space has taken shape and new forms of belonging are elaborated and developed. Through the viewing of satellite images, large sections of the Maghrebi population have

come in close contact with images of people from other nations, particularly Westerners, possibly for the first time since the region's period of independence. This is not to say they had not had representations or images of the West in the past, but rather that they now have continuous and direct contact with Western visual worlds. The main issues studied in this chapter are how, on the one hand, the image of the Self portrayed and produced by Arab satellite channels enables more self-accepted identity affiliations, while, on the other hand, these affiliations release a voice that reinforces the critique of political regimes. Already knowing that neither criticism, even when it is forcibly repressed, nor the issue of identity affiliations are new phenomena, how do Arab satellite channels sketch them out in a novel way in the Maghreb? Finally, how do satellite television programmes highlight the relationships that these audiences construct among themselves and with others?

Elements of Context

To provide some context for my arguments, I will begin by giving some general insights on the introduction of satellite television to the Maghreb. I do not discuss the issues of political economy surrounding the arrival of satellite channels or the power struggles that have accompanied their introduction (and generally oppose them), as a number of books and articles have already documented these aspects.¹ Belkacem Mostefaoui's 'La télévision française au Maghreb' (1995) is the first account of the political economy of the media in the three countries of the Maghreb. The author has documented the initial phases of satellite television and the 'mini cable networks'. The arrival of satellite television in the Arab world prompted a number of research works that highlighted the political economy and the guiding lines of television programming, economic investment and financial strategies. It also led to industry analyses, particularly on insiders such as programme designers and producers, as the connection of satellite television to the political world, particularly to political parties and politicians. Ethnographic work on television viewing, however, remains marginal. Lila Abu-Lughod's book (2005), although not specifically on satellite television, could be considered the first ethnography on state-controlled television and its audience in Egypt. Indeed, a few published research studies have targeted specific audiences (Salamandra 2005) but have remained limited in scope. Despite the importance of this topic, research on Maghrebi audiences is even spottier, almost nonexistent

1 For an updated bibliography, see N. Mellor et al (2011).

save for a few contributions (Chouikha 1995; Hadj-Moussa 1996, 2003; Sabry 2010). The present study is but a modest contribution to this vast, controversial and open field.

Satellite television was introduced in the Maghreb in the 1980s. In Morocco, the King's palaces were the first to be equipped with satellite dishes. People living nearby benefited from being in proximity to the palaces and enjoyed the *de facto* 'foreign images' (Poindexter 1991). In Tunisia, an influential businessman introduced satellite television privately (Benbelgacem 1999: 39), which prompted authorities to try to regulate dishes purchases and attempted to require individuals wanting to have it obtain authorization; however, this restriction soon became meaningless due to the popularity of satellite television and its high demand. In Algeria, it was a high-ranking military officer who installed a dish in a very symbolic site (Hadj-Moussa 1996), called *Makam al-Shahid* [Martyr's Shrine]. In all cases, attempts to regulate satellite television in Morocco and Tunisia have been unsuccessful, and in Algeria the regime was thwarted.

A short history of satellite television in the Maghreb requires taking into account how this technology unfolded temporally and chronologically, its technological changes and the launch and emergence of new (Arab) channels. From the late 1980s to 1996, European and Western channels were predominant², and the only Arab television available during this period was MBC TV, which was broadcast from London. The technology initially employed a parabolic antenna, the 'collective dish or parabola' (called 'la parabole' in the Maghreb), to which groups of neighbours collectively subscribed, sharing the costs and selecting together the channels received. Each subscriber's residence was connected to the 'parabole' through a cable. This collective parabola was used in Morocco and Algeria. In the former, the upper-middle classes were among the first who could afford it, whereas in the latter, the bureaucratic elite acquired it first and then were followed by the other classes. In Tunisia, access to the parabola was individual and required official authorization until the late 1990s. With the later decrease in dish prices, Maghrebi residents began acquiring individual dishes. Although not always explicitly expressed, I believe the main reason behind the keen interest for the dish was the arrival of Arab satellite channels in 1996. In general, Maghrebians had a very negative reaction to Operation Desert Fox, which was orchestrated from the air by the Americans, and cheerfully endorsed by the coalition

2 Due to their knowledge of the French language, Maghrebians watched French channels, such as Antenne 2, TF1, Arte, M6, Canal Plus (a pay channel) and TV5. Tunisians also had direct access to RAI UNO, and Northern Moroccans to the Corporación Radio Televisión Española (RTVE).

which included Morocco. During this period, the ‘foreign channels’ broadcast only ‘bright spots in the sky’ rather than showing Baghdad being bombed. Tunisian viewers living along the Algerian borders and Algerians have indicated in interviews that I conducted with them³ that they were able to see a reality other than that of ‘the war controlled by CNN,’ thanks to Algerian television, which had sent Algerian journalists to the field ‘who did a good job.’ Since then, Maghrebi viewers have had access to hundreds of television channels, in addition to the ones they had before. Parallel to the arrival of Arab channels, another major technological change occurred: the transition from analog to digital broadcast allowed viewers to choose more specialized satellite programming in specific languages. The majority of North Africans have chosen Arabsat (Sabry 2010). The word used by Maghrebians when referring to the selection from the satellite provider is ‘couloirs.’⁴ The wording is significant insofar as it refers less to the house (the known) than to the borders and boundaries that it presupposes. These ‘couloirs’ protect them from seeing anything undesirable. Maghrebi audiences have finally accessed Arab satellite channels and almost all of them have turned their dish in the direction of the Middle East.⁵ Indeed, Arab satellite television arrived at a time when most viewers were deserting national television channels,

3 This research project consisted of a series of interviews I conducted between 1994 and 2009. I first started in Algeria, because at that time I was intrigued by the fierce opposition of Islamic armed groups to the parabola. I extended the research to Morocco and Tunisia in the beginning of the 2000s. Between 1994–1995 and 2009, I interviewed 193 people: 101 women and 92 men. Two thirds of the participants were youths, aged between 16 and 32 years old. The ‘snowball’ was privileged, as I wanted to have access to their houses, i.e., their intimate spaces. The fieldwork was built one element upon the other, and I relied on participants to introduce me to other participants, while being very attentive to not remain in one area or group. However, I was not looking for any representativeness, but rather for a certain interpretative depth from the participants.

4 In the English meaning of ‘hallways’ and not ‘corridors.’

5 The reliability of the surveys on the trends and audience habits is highly problematic in the Maghreb. When they exist, they are incomplete (see http://www.ipsos.com/mediact/sites/ipsos.com.mediact/files/MENA_AudienceMeasurement.pdf) or rely on government statistics. In terms of information and communication, the caricature prize should be given to the Algerian Ministry of Communications whose page ‘communications’ is... blank! (accessed 2 December 2011 and 12 February 2012).

Aziz Douai (2010) has documented the difficulties and pitfalls in doing audience fieldwork in Morocco. His remarks could be applied to the three countries of the Maghreb as well.

and criticizing their programming for having a repressive political stance, as well as for their poor technology and outdated equipment.

Thinking the shift...

The answers to the issues raised above on the ways identity affiliations are being reformulated through contact with Arab satellite channels and in the relationships that television programmes incite among these audiences, are informed, I argue, by social actors' experience of these channels and their discourse – not on conclusions built upon general observations. To better grasp how identity affiliations unfold and what paths they take, the concept of experience appears useful. Experience is central to some disciplines, such as sociology (Durkheim 2003; Goffman 1991). Likewise, inspired by François Dubet (1995), I consider experience as part of the sociology of action, which sees it as the way in which social actors experience their practices and organize them in plural and diffracted environments. In other words, experience is not located in an external relationship to the actors.

Experience is central to the understanding of the relationship between what people say they are and what they *do*. Indeed, identifications are not depleted in the 'saying' [le dire] or representation and they are not contained in or limited to the 'saying.' They are also expressed in acts and practices, however practice is not devoid of reflexivity. Joan Scott, among others, warns against the temptation to seize experience as evidence, that is to say, to subscribe to the idea that factuality has in itself an interpretative virtue, an 'authoritative evidence.' She suggests that experience is produced through historicity, which in its turn allows it to be interpreted: 'It is not individuals who have experience, but subjects who are constituted through experience' (1991: 779). However, Scott's insistence on the discursive dimension precludes us from reflecting on the importance of small acts and practices in the processes by which experience is constituted. The 'practical aspect of experience' is not a secondary element in the affiliation and identity processes; at times it validates the representational identification, and at other times, it displaces and challenges them. To allow experience to emerge, for example, I privileged the use of open-ended questions while conducting interviews, letting the participants tell their own 'story with television.' Thus, while most of the questions were the same, participants could use their own knowledge and perception of the situation to develop what was important for them. This direction was crucial, as it helped to integrate specific and 'peripheral' information that concerned not only the representation of a given programme but also the acts and practices that parallel its viewing. Given the nature of my fieldwork,

I spent much time in participants' personal spaces, sharing with them their daily chores and discussing all sorts of matters, so that I could acquire in-depth knowledge on what has constituted that experience. However, although the separation of the latter from other types of experience (e.g., hosting a tea/coffee afternoon, working) is not delineated with certainty, there are often moments where 'something from satellite television' springs up. To give an example, wearing the Islamic scarf while being at home with other women was highly intriguing to me, knowing that a little more than a generation ago women went freely 'bare headed' and hardly wore the traditional scarf, which was associated with older and rural women, until I was told 'this is what Islam teaches us,' or 'what I saw' or 'heard' [in the religious television programme].

Political modes of affiliation: On being citizen

The issues of belonging and affiliation are central to my approach because they help us understand how international television programmes inflect their viewers' positioning vis-à-vis the West, local and regional political regimes, as well as cultural politics. By cultural politics, I refer to the ways in which some practices that characterise specific societies – such as television viewing practices, aesthetic preferences, living emotions, the selection of valued artefacts, artistic production, and types of belonging claims, among others – produce a certain kind of 'sensible,' to use Jacques Rancière's term (2000). This 'sensible' is no less political than any political rules insofar as it shows how the distribution of places and positions is organised, what is 'sayable' and not, what is audible and not.

In my analysis, I provide some examples of the ways these viewing and interpretative practices function, as well as their effects on processes of identity affiliations. In so doing, I show how, in the context of the globalization of images, regional identities are emerging and how they coincide with specific national histories, inclinations and regional sensibilities, whether these relate to gender relations, geographical entities, supra-national ideologies or religious identifications. Relying on the elements of the context stated above, one can argue that from the inception of satellite television, the most important constituent relation in the identity process was the positioning of the 'Maghrebi Self' towards the Western world, notably France. The specificity of the relation to France did not only arise from historical and subjective factors, but also from objective ones, as the majority of channels available at that time were French (e.g. Antenne 2, M6, France 1, TV5, Canal Plus). Beyond the vicissitudes of representation conveyed by the French channels and criticism of them by Maghrebi audiences, the challenge, according to participants in my research, relates to the difficulty Maghreb countries experience in overcoming the

political difficulties associated with implementing democratic rules that include their citizens' views, ending their blatant and less visible repressive methods, as well as actively promoting political accountability. Indeed, although France is said to be biased towards the Maghreb, and the West is said to perceive the Arabs only through the prism of 'terrorism,' the West does have democratic political institutions along with transparent and open television networks. The desire for democratic rule among the people I met cannot alone sum up the complexity of their affiliations; these people were made to feel rejected or ignored as citizens not so much at higher political levels but in everyday and mundane situations. The democratic model as implemented in France and in the European Mediterranean countries such as Italy and Spain, with which North Africans feel geographical or linguistic proximity, is more evident in their public spheres, including the relationship between citizens and politics, civility and a certain sense of equality. For example, Murad (29 years old, from Morocco), a translator who works for an international organisation in Tangiers, said:

Inhabitants of Tangiers feel more Spanish than Moroccan.

He adds that he only watches Moroccan television 'when obliged to.' He much prefers Spanish television and admires it for its presenters' finesse and professionalism, and the choice of subjects. He particularly likes 'a show that is broadcast every Monday and hosted by a woman.' He adds:

I found the idea great because the show pays tribute to the people who worked hard in their lives even if they are unknown.

Murad insists on the importance of the shows, which, in contrast to the 'garbage television that focuses on the dating of this and that [celebrity],' teach him 'how to talk to people, and how to frame certain types of questions.' As he elaborates:

I learn that there is no difference between a minister and a vagabond, whose TV host does not distinguish between a celebrity and an ordinary person and who asks them the same type of question about their lives.

Similarly, for Najib (32 years old), a Moroccan participant, who was a sympathiser of the Islamist movement *Jamaa't al-'Adl ou al-Ihsan* [Justice and Charity], said that, for him:

Obviously, [I prefer] the foreigners [the French programmes]. I like watching the debates and the ways that each participants tries to convince the others. [...] This does not exist here. We, the Arabs, are not taught how to respect the other's opinions.

However, without completely disappearing, identification with the French political and social model and those of certain other countries bordering the

Mediterranean splintered in the 2000s and has become more complex since the advent of Arab satellite channels that have given rise to a new constellation of identity without totally overturning the pre-existing one.

Feeling who we are: Images of our own

By referring to the choice of Western channels made by Maghrebi viewers during the first period of satellite television, I have deliberately ignored the normative issue that characterizes the viewing of those channels, that is, the 'prescriptions' that orient the actors' conduct and actions, and whose frames are shaped by the family and the household. At this point, it is important to analytically distinguish between two dimensions in the process of belonging: the first is related to the social level, and the second to the political one. I will dwell upon the first level in discussing the meaning and location of television sets within the home as well as the relation between textual content and an embodied and gendered viewership. Additionally, I will discuss the second level by analysing the processes through which Maghrebians identify themselves with Arabness.

First, if Maghrebians are able to consider themselves, even partially, as pupils eager to conform to the initiation of democratic rule, they could not (and do not want to) see themselves deprived of what constitutes their 'culture and tradition' – in this case, a certain codification of the body and sexuality. Indeed, as stated in the interviews and according to my own observations, it is hardly conceivable to collectively watch underwear items, sexual relations, or even a 'benign' love declaration. However, these restrictions apply less to the body and sexually related signs themselves than to their visibilization and, thus, to their viewing. They need to remain within the confines of privacy and intimacy. The idea that certain things or scenes cannot be seen in a family setting without subverting the gaze one has on oneself and one's relation with others is a starting point in a series of avoidances. But, as stated before, things that should not be watched in the company of others does not mean that they cannot be viewed privately. Viewing, therefore, is a variegated practice that adjusts itself to various situations: time of day, space within the home, gender (there are distinct modes of reception attributed to men and women with regard to various textual genres), selected channels, number of television sets available in a given location, etcetera.

How are such viewing adjustments performed? For example, it is not uncommon to find in each household two, if not several, television sets located in the house according to their use – be a shared set for a family or group, or a separate set used by either the men or the women. In most cases, the television set used by the family is located in a common room, which is also a space for women

and visitors alike. Family viewing is generally geared toward national television channels or Arab satellite TV, but rarely Western satellite channels. The location of the television sets falls under the logic of what can be called ‘cultural proximity.’ Considered to be closer to national channels insofar as they conform to general viewing norms, Arab satellite TV is the most viewed⁶ when watched by the whole family. The television set that serves as a mediator and an agent of cultural proximity is located in the shared spaces of the home. On the other hand, the television set that receives ‘foreign’ television programmes is put in places that are either occupied by couples (often the eldest brother and his wife), or by young men, who do not necessarily use it together. However, the rules that otherwise dictate what ought to be said or kept silent with regard to particular topics related to romance, the body and sexuality, are not, as a matter of fact, followed *à la lettre*, and their ‘implementation’ varies from one family to another, from one individual to another. These rules, nonetheless, situate those who adopt them, even if only partially, within a specific cultural sphere in which they express their belonging and their relative or strong adherence to the ‘values of [their] society.’ The viewing practices that are framed by and integrated in such rules on a daily basis indirectly ‘compel’ social actors to self-identify – that is to proceed to self-recognition while positioning themselves vis-à-vis the others.

The political level⁷ is based on the Arab world’s political history and the meaning given to Arab identity or ‘Arabness’ [al-‘Urubiya].⁸ An in-depth discussion

6 According to my field observations and the quasi-unanimous interview responses.

7 The political level could be divided into two dimensions: the internal and, for a lack of better word, ‘generic,’ on the one hand, and the trans-historical/trans-regional, on the other. I will not be dealing thoroughly with the former in this chapter, because it would take us away from our primary purpose, i.e., the relationships between identity affiliation and satellite television. The relation of the social dimension, mentioned above, and the ‘internal’ political dimension has been discussed by several authors under the intertwining of women’s locus in national political projects. In this debate, the consensus was that women, specifically their bodies, are subsumed in the national project (among many, see Yuval Davis and Anthias (1989)). Although this approach illuminates several angles of the relationships between nationalism and women, to which I myself have adhered, it seems now limited; in particular when one considers the paradoxes and the various positionings which characterize women and their bodies, whether the latter are integrated within society or marginalized (prostitutes, lesbian, etc.). Film and fiction in general are the most interesting loci to understand this debate (Hadj-Moussa 2014).

8 Arabness is by no means a simple phenomenon. Some Arab speakers refuse to consider themselves as Arabs, while [some] Berbers or Jews claim their Arabness (cf. Naima Bendris 2005).

of this notion warrants more space than possible in this chapter; it is difficult to provide a succinct, intelligible definition. Arabness is indeed reversible and multiple, but it can be approached from two elements, namely the shared history and the common language. Despite the diversity of vernacular languages, the modern Arab language constitutes a cultural and civilization foundation for the Middle East and the Maghreb (Berque 1976). It has been a powerful ideological motive for nationalist and independence movements. Muslim reformist movements have used it as well in strategies to counter colonial powers and to define the specificity of Arab nations. Later, all three countries have adopted linguistics policies and laws that promulgated Arabic as the national language. Furthermore, the Arabic language has played an important role in all nationalist claims, in particular that of pan-Arabism. Historically, the first Pan-Arab political parties (Choueiri 2000; Hourani 1993) emerged well before the rise of Nasserism and Ba'athism, following the political project initiated by England, as early as 1916, to divide Palestine. The anti-colonial sentiment, aroused mainly by the 'Palestinian question' and by English and French hegemonic redeployments in the region, was a major marker of Arabness. Notably under Nasser's rule, radio played an important role in propagating Pan-Arabist thought and claims (James 2006). Radio programmes, such as the *Sawt al-Arab* [Voice of Arabs], broadcast from Cairo and received via shortwave radio in Arab countries, served as a channel for Arab national movements and as a clarion voice of the then-triumphant Nasserism.

One way to discuss the sentiment mobilizing the concept of *Arabness* is to address the feelings people experience as they watch events unfolding in the Arab world and broadcast on Arab channels. The latter are described as 'efficient, professional, but do not hide their sympathies [as do Western channels]'. Sami (29 years old, Tunisia-TUS) 'senses' these 'sympathies.' He says:

We saw this during the Gulf War. We felt it. Not in the images, which are the same [as on other channels].

Sami uses the word '*hamas*' (enthusiasm, passion) and '*houzn*' (sadness) to express the sentiment conveyed to him not by the image but by the 'texture of the voice,' to use Roland Barthes' expression (1981). *Hamas* is not necessarily located in the content but in, for example, an *al-Jazeera* journalist's voice on 11 September 11 2001: 'The reporter talked about Sept. 11th in '*hamassi* tone.' We also felt *houzn* [sadness] on April 8th, 2003, just before the fall of Baghdad,' to quote Sami again.

The identification with the Arab world hinges on a sensibility that nourishes the political stances participants take. The emotion one feels during a programme

broadcast, be it *hamas* or *houzn*, also leads to an identification with Arab or Muslim worlds. This emotion resembles *baav*, which Purnima Mankekar (1995) pointed out in her work on television in India. Like *baav*, blending emotion and understanding/reason, *hamas* and *houzn* do not undermine the critical stance. In fact, they remain parallel to it by stabilizing the identification and anchoring it within a shared feeling.

Without question, the television station that conveys that feeling is *al-Jazeera*. From its inception, it has positioned itself within a 'double identity' frame: Arab and Muslim (Lamloum 2004: 32). *Al-Jazeera* helps recover a self-image perverted by the Other's gaze. The image produced by this channel is one that comes from inside, from an imagined territory named *al-Umma al-'Arabiya* [the Arab nation] or *al-'Alam al-'Arabi* [the Arab world], which pertain to shared overall categories that 'make a culture.' In François Roussillon's words (1992):

The relation to the historicity that allows the inscription of the Self in an environment defined as a system of proximities and antagonisms, and helps to express the signification of the collective existence.

In this specific relationship to the historicity shaping the Arab world, Palestine occupies the forefront. The 'Palestinian question' is not a banal issue; it is a concern shared by the majority of Arab populations and crosses all social classes, religious and ethnic boundaries. Like culture, Palestine is what remains after all is forgotten. The Palestinian question reactivates affiliations and awakens 'Arabness,' even when the latter is denied, and even among the most distanced Berber who rejects Arab culture and Arab identity (Hadj-Moussa 1996).

The success of Arab satellite television networks, particularly *al-Jazeera*, stems from them giving more in-depth coverage to a question debased and reduced to its simplest expression by the repetition of the same imagery. Marc Lynch shows that the Arab television networks devote considerable airtime to events in Palestine, keeping Arab sentiment and outlooks alive (2006: 79–80). The participants in this research appeared to be very sensitive to the daily images of Palestinian victims. *Al-Jazeera* is seen as the station at the heart of the action, with the live broadcast of 'the abuses experienced by our brothers,' as one participant puts it. The centrality of Palestine, as the principal bonding element of Arabness, is political, in other words a principle based on the will and desire for emancipation and autonomy. Attached to this 'question' in which Arab satellite networks play a major role, a certain ethos is at play, an ethos and feeling accompanying it nourished by 'consciousness' [*wa'y*] and political events, as well as by the idea that Palestinians are abandoned and left under the power of others.

Even if we agree with Olivier Carré (1996) that pan-Arabism, with the defeat of Nasserism and the fatal fall of Ba'athism, is dead and buried, its themes do persist and remain present in people's daily life representations. Thus, the sense of Arabness relies on the concept of an 'Arab people' with a meaning very similar to its role in Pan-Arabist ideology;⁹ at the same time, quite far from it insofar as it supersedes or ignores states. Therefore, identification with Palestine does not rely on recognition of its leaders, with the exception of Arafat as a 'historical' figure. Likewise, Iraqi leaders are also sidelined, while Iraqi people are seen as the victims. A young Algerian activist told me that during the first Gulf War, aid sent to Iraq was clearly meant for the 'Iraqi people'. This was also said, more than ten years later (2003), by a Moroccan high schooler, Dahbiya (16 years old), who explained her participation in the big rallies against the second Gulf War to warn Moroccan authorities against any implications on their part and to show her 'solidarity to Iraqi people and not Saddam.' The ethos is reinforced here by the pathos, the one that considers the 'orphan people.'¹⁰ Solidarity is shown to the people first, and it is a principle shared by participants in this research who addressed the Iraqi 'question.' It is thus based on identification; it relies on analogy ('they are like us') and is defined by 'brotherhood' ('they are our brothers'). Along with this identification process, Arabness is problematic. It is the locus of extremes, of victory ('al-Jazeera is better than CNN') or of defeat (Palestine, Iraq, lack of democracy, corruption, poverty).

However, Arabness is not a myth. It is a shared universe – if only through the use of a common language. It remains an expectation and a horizon, including for those who claim it. As Benedict Anderson (1991) reminds us, the efficacy of the nation concept lies in the imaginary projection that it allows. Anderson argues that fiction is constitutive of the idea of nationhood; it is neither a misconception nor an evanescent idea far from reality. But like the nation, which needs to see its elements reiterated or invented (borders, an ethos, language, politics, culture and identity), Arabness is revived by the return to the stage of the Palestinian

9 In a remarkable article, François Roussillon (1992) highlights the issues raised by pan-Arab ideology in Egypt and its impact on the Egyptian identity.

10 The figure of the orphan produces, especially in popular Islam, a deep compassion, echoing the Prophet who himself was an orphan. Among the younger generation, this biographical element, while still well known is not mobilized in the same way. Indeed, instead of departing from the figure of the 'abandoned,' this generation targets those who abandon and do not care about their people. They are the ones who are fiercely criticized. According to this political critique, it is thus the Arab states and Arab politicians that have failed in their duty of solidarity.

question, Iraq, Maghrebi immigration, etcetera, and reactivated by Arab satellite televisions and news media in general. One imaginary link, writes Anderson, is the relationship established between the media and the market (1991: 33), with a specific stress on readership. The strengthening of Arab identity and its constant reactivation are facilitated by the many messages widely broadcast by satellite televisions and by the 'mass ceremony' dimension (ibid.) of listening to and viewing daily television. In the formation of identity-based affiliation, choosing one television station over another will orient the interpretation that the Self entertains with the Other.

The context in which Arab satellite television emerges globalizes the production of identities more than ever before, but in doing so, it splits them into several layers whose importance is anchored to specific contexts, moments¹¹ and conjunctures. The plurality of identifications does not only occur at the level of representation, but is also carried out through action and practices that may help to better reflect on the formation of social ties at micro and macro levels.

Islamicities: On opening and closure

In the present analysis, I see evidence in the practices and ideas of what Jocelyne Dakhli (2005) has called *Islamicities* (islamicités), which reflect the diversity of thinking of oneself and being Muslim. Although Dakhli's main purpose of the use of the concept of islamicities is to counter homogenizing and damaging views, this notion has some heuristic value. Indeed, it calls for a transversal of practices that are open to mobility and syncretism, and serves as a link between the context, the structure and the circumstances. Indeed, what is more pervasive than the flowering of these Islamicities? Since the meteoric rise of Islamism (which is, by definition political), all eyes have been focused on the violence it has generated and left in its wake; very little has been said yet about the ways of doing and viewing that have fuelled Islamism and, more importantly, that have been reformulated by contact with it.

Let us review a few key facts: an increasing number of women now wear the *hijab* (headscarf); the phrase *bismillah* [in the name of God] has become commonplace and above all falsely discreet; more and more inscriptions of Koranic verses and religious CDs hang inside cars; Koranic recitation has spread to market days (now daily ones); the *hijab* is often worn even indoors even when women visit one another or perform household chores; women and men of the same

11 I use this term to refer to a configuration that exceeds the event and/or the temporality of an event.

family impose more restraint upon themselves and avoid kissing each other in countries where such contact was not so long ago a sign of decorum or respect; some men wear *khamis*, the outfit ‘imported from Afghanistan’; the *djalaba* is worn on Fridays; and finally, the ‘common prayer’ that ‘pleases God and is more rewarded by Him’ has become a new practice conducted in homes by a leader who recites the prayers. All these practices are novel, as are composite practices particularly noticeable in choice of clothing. Incongruent combinations, such as young women wearing headscarves with skinny jeans, pregnant women wearing leggings, or veiled women wearing showy ‘Lebanese’ makeup, reminiscent of the flamboyance of Middle Eastern pop singers. These practices and imperceptible changes will be better understood if we rely on a diachronic interpretation of television viewing.

In Algeria in the mid 1990s, without being invisible, the ‘Islam’ adopted by the people I interviewed was ‘dormant’ (Moussaoui 2006), meaning it was integrated, without poorly timed and repeated *bismillah*. The participants did not attempt to make an ostentatious show of devotion. Their Islam was so much part of what they were that they had nothing to show off, but simply to ‘be’ – often in paradoxical and ad hoc ways. For authors such as Mohamed Benkheira (1997), this quietist Islam is named ‘popular Islam.’ The Islamicities (Muslimness) reviled and criticized were in fact those of the state and Islamists because their visibility meant constraint and imposition, superficiality and the obligation to abide to them. For one woman I interviewed, Baya (36 years old, Morocco), who rejected the *hijab*, her faith transpired in her behaviour and her beliefs – not in the *hijab*. In my research, this instrumentalisation of Islam was at the heart of participants’ concerns, especially for youngest ones. During that period, the new Islamic practices ‘imported’ by those that Algerians nicknamed ‘Afghans,’ were considered ‘foreign to Algerian customs’ (Djamel, 51 years old, Algeria). Afghanistan was far off the map of identifications, as was Iran, with its unusual practice of ‘marriages of convenience’ [*djaouz mout’á*], performed on women kidnapped by Algerian Islamists who justified it as a Muslim practice. During the Algerian Civil War (1992–1999), some television stories released by official state television, often with the aim of winning people over, documented the distress of helpless parents and the poignant, heart-breaking testimonies of young abducted women. As Hassina (47 years old, Algeria), a feminist and democracy activist told me in 1996, during one of the worst periods of the civil war:

We cannot dialogue with the fundamentalists who call into question the symbols [of the Algerian nation], the State, our way of life, and even our traditions. They introduced garments. They introduced ways of life: rape, ‘marriage of convenience’ unknown to us

and that we should not know. We are not Shiite, we are Sunnis. Iran and Afghanistan are far away. It is miles away geographically and in every respect.

A few years later, the landscape of geographical affiliations changed. With the events of September 11 and the Iraq War (2003), not only were the events in Afghanistan watched closely, thanks to *al-Jazeera*, but that country had become, as stated by most of the participants to my research, a 'Muslim country we care about and whose events trouble us,' as became Iran once it was threatened by U.S. aggressions. The interviews I conducted in Morocco already showed a concern for Iran and above all, a visionary reading of developments in this country's relations with the West. Lalla (56 years old, Morocco) evokes the region's future after Iraq:

They attacked Iraq and Afghanistan. Now, it is Iran's turn, to ensure Israel's security. Afterwards, they will attack Syria, protect Israel from all sides... They kill people to ensure Israelis live in peace. And other people, don't they have the right to live too?

With the shift in news reporting carried out by Arab satellite television networks, in particular by the channels that are considered to be more politically charged, the Islamic world has become more visible to Maghrebi audiences who consider that their understanding, closeness and shared experiences solidify their ties to the rest of the Islamic world. As I will show it in the next paragraphs, this 'political' identification intersects with the more individual sense of belonging. Afghanistan and Iran, like Bosnia and Chechnya, are now included within the identity-based Self, fuelled by emotion and memory of the colonial experience in the Maghreb. My aim in this chapter is not to provide an exhaustive list of the reasons which contribute to increasing affiliation with Islamicity or Arabness, but rather to trace how certain practices and representations are related to the rise of Arab satellite television.

The wind from the East

The present study demands deeper reflection on what viewing audiences make of the Arab satellite channels and their programmes in order to follow their identifications, often contradictory and saturated with tensions as they are, and to understand the ways in which individuals define their place within their societies. Ten years after the arrival of satellite television to the region, the Islamicities of our research participants were no less quietist. This quietism, however, was no longer located in the same register. It had lost its innocence or naivety, so to speak. It pervaded other common areas that were, and are still, louder and more visible than the quietist version of Islam. In Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia, practices

and beliefs are now not only justified 'by the customs and traditions,' but also by sermons watched on television or listened to on cassettes or CDs. In these three countries, popular Islamicities have become globalized and have turned more towards the Middle East. In terms of satellite television, the Maghrebi public, especially its younger age groups, choose to watch religious programmes such as those by Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi and Amr Khaled, who had dazzling success before being surreptitiously censored by the Egyptian authorities and forced into 'exile' in London. Indeed, religious figures and new preachers mobilize an extremely varied and vast audience.

Star preacher Amr Khaled's programmes have many viewers and a strong following among young people, particularly young women, in the three countries in question. Amr Khaled is young and modern, in stark contrast to traditional sheikhs schooled at al-Azhar, such as the very famous above-mentioned Yusuf al-Qaradawi. Amr Khaled has managed to gather a following among youth from various social backgrounds (especially the urban middle classes and women) and convinces them that Islam can be modern. His fame and influence astonished, for example, the three female professors I interviewed in Rabat, who described his reach as 'the sudden contagion.' A high school teacher voiced her alarm off the record that her pupils were increasingly wearing the *hijab*. The impact of Amr Khaled is so strong that it has encouraged young girls to defy their parents' advice by wearing the veil. The 'newness' of Amr Khaled, who presents himself as an ordinary person, is based on the distance he takes vis-à-vis the Islamic establishment, both in terms of the language he uses, which is closer to spoken language, and his clean-cut, 'modern' look. On the other hand, his language and look distinguish him from the austerity and the intransigence of radical Islamists. His commitment is not political; he refuses to issue *fatwas* unlike sheikhs, limiting his contribution to merely encouraging his supporters to 'love Islam.' The runaway success of his first video, *Kalem al-Qalb* [the words of the heart] propelled him from Cairo sidewalks to *Iqraa* (Wise 2006). In a nutshell, unlike the other rhetoricians, he speaks more of heaven than hell, avoiding doctrinal political Islam and focuses on everyday Islam, the Islam of the heart and brotherhood.

A novel development is that more women are watching *Iqraa*, an Islamic television channel, as well as other Islamic television networks.¹² Religious television programmes have superseded religious programmes broadcast on the radio. Some women told me that while in bed, they 'listen to Koranic recitations [broadcast] on satellite television programmes.' However, it is among the younger

12 For an overview of these channels, see Kraidy and Khalil (2009).

ones that the attraction is more visible. Nawal, a 23-year-old woman whom I interviewed in Tunisia, had been wearing the *djilbab* for 'a year and a half,' and practically only watched *Iqraa*. She was first 'convinced' by Amr Khaled, but she subsequently favoured the 'lessons' provided by *Iqraa*. Nawal, 'who does not like reading,' built much of her religious knowledge from television by comparing the programmes of various television channels. She learned how to 'behave with her parents [and] in [her] religious conduct.' She did not like *al-Manar*, Hizbollah's channel, because they asserted that 'the Koran could not be held by a woman during her period,' while 'many people [on other channels, including *Iqraa*] stipulate that a woman may hold the Koran if she covers her hands with a tissue or gloves.' She watches *al-Jazeera* with her parents, but refuses to watch films and other programmes 'where women are naked,' including when she is alone. Even when it comes to music programmes, if she watches *Melody* (an Egyptian music channel), she prefers the videos of the young religious singer Sami Yusuf. Nawal's life is almost totally orientated towards a religious ethic fuelled mainly by satellite television. Her positioning and the learning she acquires from religious channels bear similarity to the experiences of those encountered by Hirshkind (2006) who have adopted the ethic of *Da'wa* and whose main medium is the audiocassette. Nawal started wearing the veil after having 'heard' tapes and 'viewed' sermons on CDs and CD-ROMs. Neither Nawal nor other interviewees ever referred to the *Da'wa* movement. Nevertheless, their behaviour and discourse have remarkable similarities to it. Nawal did not just watch but shared and 'discussed' her discoveries and questions with her brother and 'some friends,' who provided her with cassettes and CDs. The identification with the ideas of what I believe to be a *Da'wa* 'ethics,' in Hirschkind's sense of the term, supposes that both individual practices and conduct are projected onto the public sphere. Indeed, having noted that the movement merges 'two types of agency' – an ethical one based on Koranic moral psychology and a political one – the author recalls that the teachings of the *Da'wa* 'have come for many to provide a model for the attributes of Muslim-Citizen' (2006: 116). Thanks to media technologies, as exemplified by Nawal's case, ways of doing and the identifications that accompany them have shaped and inflected a shift to individual interiority or to shared spaces.

More so than in Algeria and Morocco, where Islam has been greatly instrumentalised and where wearing the *hijab* is accepted in public institutions, it is liberal Tunisia that seems to shed a clearer light on the issues surrounding the new forms of Islamic affiliations. Two newly veiled Tunisian girls told to me that in adopting the Islamic veil, not only were they obeying God's law, but also were also qualitatively 'better Muslims.' As one interviewee said, 'Watching *Iqraa*

allows me to be a better Muslim and helps me to think as a Muslim,' (Nadya, 23 years old, Tunisia). They knowingly practise a certain Muslim ethic without which they cannot claim to have found their 'Islam.' In other words, they construct their Muslim identity and are appealed to on this basis. Charles Taylor (2001) argues that this operation is typically modern. Indeed, just 'being' does not suffice; it requires that the subject proceed to a self-reflection that is more ethical than psychological. This posture does not resemble New Age teaching, but is closer to the practices advocated by the supporters of the *Da'wa* movement (ibid.) whose aim is to establish a just society based on the precepts of good and virtue. The introspection is at once a desire and an obligation to project oneself into society, as we have just seen. But, unlike the *Da'wa*, this projection is not followed by action, however minimal. Watching *Iqraa* and other religious television channels consists of both connecting themselves to others and feeling that their faith is shared. These women are involved in on-going self-revision. They make their piety visible and audible, but, more importantly, they do not do so based on a comparison between what is said and heard with what is written. They relate mainly to television and discussions they have with their friends.

In her work with young Muslim women (and men) in France, Jocelyne Cesari (1998) contrasts traditional 'Islam of the parents' with 'Islam of youth,' as one of 'scriptural reference' (see also Benkheira [1997]) in which knowledge and adherence to Islam are based on autonomous individual interpretation. The Islam of youth is ultimately scholarly driven but is not generated by a body of established knowledge. Individual knowledge forms the basis of the identification to which these young people aspire. In my case study, the Koran is hardly consulted, as the sources for these young women are mainly television programmes on Islam or Islamic television channels. These present either 'on-trend Islam' as promoted by Amr Khaled, or 'orthodox Islam' as conveyed by the sheikhs. But the divide between the latter two sources is not clear-cut. Indeed, these women could either compare them, oppose one to the other, or they could successively rely on one and the other, depending on the circumstances.

Alongside this adherence to religious discourse, especially of young girls, a plethora of other channels is also part of their daily viewing. These broadcast loops of Arabic classic films (e.g. *Rotana Cinema*), Arab soap operas, music videos (*clippettes* in Tunisia), reality shows, and other popular programmes, such as *Star Academy*. It would be misleading to claim that only young people watch these religious programmes, because that would arbitrarily divide a very complex dimension that crosses the various generations with subtle distinctions and unduly homogenize them. The 'we,' fed by Arab satellite channels (one might say

the political 'we') is also based on new forms of religiosity and beliefs, although we must stress that these televisions only accentuate an existing movement supported by old media, such as audiocassettes (Hirshkind 2006), videos and book publishing (Eickelman and Anderson 1998; Mermier 2005). These new forms of religiosity are relatively unstable phenomena and are constantly being redefined and reframed. Thus, some behaviours, such as wearing the veil, are threatened and challenged on all sides, even among those involved in them as was the case with Nabila, a 21-year-old Tunisian student. Nabila wears the headscarf despite her parents' opposition and is reluctant to comply with the guidelines of the university where she studies that stipulate she covers her hair with a 'cap' (sic). Nabila is not a devout shrouded in the multiple folds of the so-called Islamic dress. She was dressed very 'young and trendy' when I met her, wearing a beautiful headscarf that enhanced her facial features, and stated:

By God, I, for example, for clothing... I like... I wear what is original, what is new. [...] I mean, fashionable, contemporary, of our time. I'm not going to wear something archaic or time... or something that does not fit... I still love fashion. But fashion is my fashion. I am the one who designs things for myself, that go with what I wear. Something new, that is not worn by too many people, and that is modern.

Nabila sees her salvation in Amr Khaled, as if she was 'a born-again Muslim,' discovering Islam for the first time, as if her spirituality or her deep belief was faulty and had to be constantly regenerated. Recognizing that satellite television has changed her life, she adds,

Nabila: For me, [it is] in the field of religion. It [television] changed my life a lot. It has taught me many new things. You can see in my country, wherever you turn [your eyes], you see nudity. [...] It is television and people on it... For example Amr Khaled, I do not know if you've heard of him? [...] Amr Khaled, by God the Almighty, thanks to him, [I got to wear the hijab]. He guided me in the right way, as he did with many others. Without television, without digital [television], without Iqraa, I would... Without Iqraa and al-Majd [another religious channel], I would be myself... I do not know...

Ratiba: Ignorant?

Nabila: Exactly! You understand that? It changed my thinking a lot.

Ratiba: What do you find in Amr Khaled?

Nabila: His ambition. [...] Yes, his ambition because he wants to reform an entire nation. The Muslim nation. [...] Khaled for me and for many others, is like the charger. I speak on behalf of those who listen [to him], like me, he gives you a charge. He will recharge you inside. By God, yes! God bless him! [...] He made arrangements in several countries. Because there are several... For example, in Egypt, the khemar [another name of the veil] is not banned, in Lebanon neither. It is only Tunisia [that it is prohibited]. And they say it is a Muslim country! You understand? It is a Muslim country in name alone... And you see, even at the university, they will not let you wear the hijab!

The 'Muslim nation' extends without doubt beyond the Arab world, but in terms of comparison it is very strongly centred on Egyptian and Lebanese shows. If it is difficult to divide world outlooks into exclusive categories, it is nevertheless possible to point out that in identity configuration, the 'regional,' (e.g. the Eastern Mediterranean region) has become an important referent of youth identifications. This process is not strictly endogenous, especially if we consider Arab channels' mimesis of European and American programmes (Kraidy 2008), however the referring forms need to be from the region. Indeed, it does not matter that the dances in the clips (hip hop and R&B especially) are Western. What matters is that they are performed by young dancers who are recognized as local people. These young people are from 'our part of the world,' despite their non-conformity to normative behaviours. This is not the least of many paradoxes.

Conclusion

Arab satellite channels have undeniably reactivated a sense of 'regionality' that calls into question the concept of global images. It is within this very frame that Arab satellites television reaffirms Maghrebi audiences' affiliation to their Arabic roots and culture. How does this appropriation occur? What does it allow us to understand in terms of Maghrebi identity affiliations and political culture? These are the central questions that the present chapter has addressed in a field that is vast, controversial and open.

It is presumptuous to think that the advent of Arab satellite television has completely changed the spectrum of the identifications of Maghrebians to Arabeness and Islam. This would be a terrible blindness to the historical reality that binds the Maghreb to the Arab and Islamic worlds. Similarly, it is methodologically difficult to assert any strong causal relationship between media content and identity affiliations. Yet, in this chapter, I have shown that the unprecedented exposure of Maghrebi audiences to the images broadcast by the Arab satellite channels has produced a new awareness of Islamness and Arabness, along with new ways of thinking about the self and the collective. The fact that it is no longer the enemy, for example, a colonial power, who dissects the information and interprets it for them, or shows 'negative' or 'distorted' images of themselves. Now, Arab satellite television enables not only an indigenous creativity of the Self, but it also helps to shape the parameters of being Muslim and/or Arab. Needless to say, these parameters vary according to the subject matter and the actors that are involved (e.g. an admirer of Amr Khaled could also like and apply the teachings of the more conservative Sheik Yusuf al-Qaradawi and wear, if she is a female, a very trendy hijab or a combination of what a Moroccan participants to this research

called the ‘Nancy Ajram sister’). While religious channels have had an impact on religious practices, as shown in the audience ‘awakening’ to Islam (see especially Nabila’s case), its major effect is the public visibilization of the social arena.

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