

## **The Muslim Identity of the Moroccan Migration in France: Confluence between Culture and Religion**

**María Teresa González Santos**

### **Abstract**

The study deals with the phenomenon of the transformation of the Muslim identity and the religious practices carried out by the Moroccan community that emigrated to France. The period covered by this research study ranges from the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The identity changes practiced by these communities generated new social and labor behaviors, resulting in the spectacular integration of a significant number of Moroccans into the French society. The performance in the labor market varies to include technicians, both average and superior, managers, merchants, researchers, artists and intellectuals, it even reach the highest levels of political power, forming part of some governments of the country of destination. The study carried out an analysis the Muslim identity and culture of the Moroccan immigrant community in the French country, completing the study with a description of the changes oriented towards the full integration of this community in the French society.

**Keywords:** Muslim identity, Moroccan migration in France, culture, transformations, integration.

### **Introduction**

The study addresses an analysis of the cultural and identity changes that took place in the Moroccan Muslim community in France after the migratory processes that took place between both countries during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The methodology used to carry out the study is of a descriptive-analytical kind and the general objective is to analyze the transformations suffered by the Muslim Moroccan immigrant communities in France. As for the specific objectives, they include the following: finding out the Moroccan Muslim population installed in France; revealing the origin of class in the social structure of Morocco of these emigrants; investigating the cultural and religious practices of these migrant communities in the country of destination; and describing the cultural and religious transformations operated by the insertion of Moroccan immigrants into the target society. Thus,

after this introduction, the first section treats the reproduction of the cultural and religious structures at the beginning of the first migratory waves within the Franco-Moroccan migratory space, that is, from Morocco to France; the second section describes the Muslim identity based on four main axes represented by faith, practice and spirituality; the understanding of the texts and the context; education and transmission; and finally, action and participation. The third section undertakes a brief description of the disposition of religious power in the society of origin of these communities, to make known the nature of Islamic religiosity. The fourth section analyzes the exercise of the culture and the Islamic religion of the Moroccans in the destination society and the transformations operated in these communities by the insertion of these immigrants. The study ends with some conclusions and the bibliography.

## **The Cultural-Religious Structures in the Franco-Moroccan Migratory Space**

The Moroccan population in France represents 8% of the total population, which also includes the Muslim immigrant community that has the greatest presence in politics, administrations and in the field of art (INED, 2016).

Moroccan immigration in France has undergone a different evolution in several stages and mutations, from an immigration of labor exclusively to family immigration. It has always been formed mostly by subjects from the working classes and the less favored layers of the society of origin, but it has also left the middle classes that sought to escape from social control and the family as fundamental pillars of Moroccan culture to achieve a modern lifestyle away from the cultural constraints of the society of origin. Other migrant subjects to France have been represented by the elites that show over qualification and prestigious degrees.

Thus, successive descendants of Moroccan immigration in France, are mixed and are located in all social classes of the country of destination as managers, middle and senior technicians, businessmen, merchants, politicians, officials, artists or researchers and intellectuals who present themselves as secular Muslims and more open to the world compared to their predecessors.

The first generations are the ones that have more cultural ties with the society of origin and are more observant of the divine cult, practicing Orthodox Islam, while the last generations have the

least relationship with Morocco because of their unwillingness to undertake an installation there and exercise a less rigid Islam. The acquisition of the culture of their ancestors by the most recent generations is guided by the influence of the family and by the commercial activities of the Moroccan community and, to a lesser extent, by the religious cult, they are shown as lay Muslims (Lamchichi, 1999; Bekouchi, 2003).

## **The Identity of Moroccan Muslim Migration in France**

The Muslim identity is based on four main axes that Ramadan (2002: 263) describes in the following way: "faith, practice and spirituality; the understanding of the texts and the context; education and transmission; and finally, action and participation".

Faith is the main pillar of the Islamic identity and it focuses on the unique existence of God unrelated to anything else, its existence and its uniqueness. The practice follows the faith and it is composed of prayer, almsgiving, fasting and the pilgrimage to Mecca. Spirituality is the way of how faith is lived; it is the constant memory and the intimate effort to have God always present, endowing life and beyond meaning, is to be with God permanently.

The understanding of the texts and the context must be interpreted by all Muslims and the knowledge must capture the sources like the *Qur'an and the Sunnah* in relation to the context where they live. The understanding of the texts must match the teachings to the reality of the Muslims in a kind of dialectical dialogue between the teachings and the environment to achieve a balanced life, that is, between the contingencies of daily life and the sacred texts.

Education and transmission are an obligation to every good Muslim as he must transmit the Islamic texts and tradition to his descendants. This function of transmitting faith in God is mandatory for the children and their whole family, even though the conversion is no longer a matter of theirs, but rather, a matter of the relation of each individual with God and the discovery of their existence. However, the Muslim must bear witness to this revelation not only to his family and friends but to extend it to all humanity from the sacred texts and, even more, through his behavior.

The action and the participation of the Muslim should be translated into actions that seek good not only among his relatives but towards all people. These actions must revert to a development of the spiritual life in society, always acting in accordance with the values of justice and equity among all human beings, both believers and non-believers, promoting solidarity in favor of the most onerous. Participation in the world as a social being is another aspect that complements the practice of faith and commitment with the fellow citizens, progressing in the action of commitment to the social group (Ramadan, 2002).

These four axes are the main bases of the exercise of the Islamic religion and involve all the levels that shape the Muslim identity and culture of the individuals, in an open relationship and in a continuous connection with the environment where they live and develop as a community and as individuals.

## **The Disposition of the Religious Power in the Society of Origin**

The disposition of the religious power in the society of origin has been made from the *caliphal* jurisprudence that devised the union of religious power with political power, held by the same figure in which temporal power and divine power reside. Thus, the community of believers or *umma* was united to the monarch like center of the religious power, while the *ulemas* or doctors in Islamic jurisprudence invested it like the king of the *caliphal* power or "Commander of the Believers" through article 19 of the Moroccan Constitution of 1962 and the recent arrival to the throne of Hassan II.

The meaning that the *caliphal* power entails, is that its legitimacy is granted by the Prophet, as this was the first leader of the Islamic community and, later, the *Alawite* dynasty had been erected heir to that power through the condition of direct descendants of Muhammad. This operation is based on the Muslim theology that establishes a system, which connects tradition, Islamic ideology and political power. In this way, the monarch proclaims himself as God's representative on earth, but with the premise that power belongs only to God. Therefore, the monarch is the mediator between the community of believers and God. From this perspective, each year the monarch updates the commitment of union between the people and the king, that is between the ruler and the governed; this ceremony is called *baia* (Waterbury, 1975).

After this description of the royal power and the position of the monarch in the scaffolding of the exercise of authority within the religious power, the next part discusses the disposition of religious power below the vertex of the pyramid within which religion is organized in a Muslim country like Morocco. Due to the absence of power separation, religion is imbued in each structure. In this sense, the State has created the Ministry of the *Habus* in 1976 with the purpose of organizing the exercise of the cult in the country and to manage the properties and the infrastructures for the development of the cult. The management of spaces, the organization of religious festivals and the transmission of religion through the publications and textbooks are regulated by the Ministry. Regarding the *ulema* as doctors of Islamic jurisprudence, they are the ones who estimate the lawfulness of conduct, social relations and they maintain intact respect for faith and religious practices.

Until 1981, they enjoyed a great influence on political power, but from that date on, the "Regional Councils of *Ulemas*" were founded and they were separated from the political scene of the country. Although they continue to enjoy great legitimacy and consideration, they have been transformed into state officials with a fixed salary, as they perform functions as teachers of higher education in Islamic universities and also hold leadership and representative functions in one of the conservative political parties.

The rest of the bodies that are part of the religious organization of the State in Morocco are the imams who are the delegates of the *ulemas* and are dedicated to the management of the daily life of the mosques, the *murchidines* and the *murchidat*, who instruct at the religion Islamic schools and develop their activities in schools, Islamic centers and associations surrounding mosques (Ramadan, 2002; Pérez, 2015).

## **The Culture and the Islamic Religion of the Moroccans in the Country of Destination**

The exercise of the Islamic culture and religion of the Moroccans in the target society has been based on the principles of emigration to France in the position of subordination of women with respect to men and is sanctioned by the sacred texts. This finding breaks down when considering the repercussions that the colonizing process has had on Moroccan society with the introduction of communications, capitalism and migration. This consideration is without effect if one takes

into account that women have access to education and training and, therefore, have become part of the labor market, both in the society of origin and in the society of destination.

Reactions by Moroccans have materialized in a mutation of behavior, both in men and women, in response to contradictions arising between traditional Moroccan cultural values and the values of the French society in which they are inserted.

At first, the pioneering waves of Moroccan immigrants in France maintained the postulates of the official model of Orthodox Islamic culture and religion where the family model was patriarchal and where man represented the head of the family, the holder of authority, the one that decided the marriage of the daughters and the one that rejected the unorthodox religious practices, the behavior of the Moroccans coming from the successive migratory waves and the birth of the generations would undergo great changes that were negotiated so much within the family and the Moroccan immigrant community as in the target society (Weibel, 1995; Hayeur, 1998).

In an approach to Islam practiced by the Moroccan immigrant communities in France, this can be organized in a dual structure represented, on the one hand, by a moderate, calm and domestic Islam, and on the other, by a claiming, politicized, aggressive and radical Islam. Both aspects intermingle and form a cloud that manifests its presence more and more in the target society. Moderate Islam is considered a cultural element that is part of the heritage of the Moroccan immigrant community and has an incidence that is in continuous progression and is in function of its precepts that a culture is practiced and has its maximum implication in the exercise of the everyday existence, constituting a genuine lifestyle. In this sense, the main characteristic of this lifestyle lies in the impulse generated by the capacity to act within this moderate Islamism that represents a tenuous and subtle Islam (Weibel, 1998).

In relation to the cultural traditions of the country of origin and the values of the target society, there is a change in behavior on the part of women that affects two issues: the first is the feminization of public spaces and the second is the masculinization of private spaces as factors that have unleashed great mutations in the female behavior of Moroccans in the target society.

This immediately leads to the approach of using the hijab or scarf by the Moroccans in the French society. On this, Weibel (1995: 222) articulates that:

The hijab, as the name suggests, means sealed, separate, isolated and is at the same time the marker of community identity and gender identity. Because the essential objective of the hijab is to preserve men from the attraction that women can exercise on them, is the agent of a form of desexualization or de-socialization of society and particularly of the spaces susceptible to the crossing of men and women. For women are seen as inciting to the lust and the looks of men.

But one must not forget that the separation of the sexes goes far beyond clothing and includes gestures, language and looks that continue to practice the effective separation of genders. The de-socialization of the society is the factor that has allowed this community to cross the "red lines" of the spatial division marked by the traditions and cultural values of the society of origin and which have accompanied the Moroccan immigration since the beginning of the migration and the end of colonialism.

Thus, there are three main consequences as a result of these mutations of the Moroccan immigrants in the target society and they are: the access to mosques, as women were gradually removed throughout the history from worship spaces par excellence in the patriarchal interpretation of Islam; the acquisition of knowledge, and knowledge, is a claim raised by the feminist movements in the society of origin, since the universal education law was adopted by the Moroccan State and practiced in the country of destination in a generalized manner; and finally, the training in the Islamic legal sciences and in religion, women have now real access to the word of sacred texts and to Islamic law (Weibel, 1998).

All these factors generated multiple changes in the Moroccan immigrant women in the country of destination, producing several dysfunctions in accordance with the functioning of the cultural and identity values of the Moroccan community. These factors caused distortions in the patriarchal structures at different levels: the response of these structures by the secular Muslims in the country of destination; the emancipation of the immigrants of the last generations and recent



migratory waves; the *hallal* married couples; the processes of individualization and exogamy in the target society; and the integration of Moroccans in the French society.

In this way, the rejection of the traditional family structures by the Muslims who do not practice Islamic religious worship is a sign of disconnection with the country of origin as they do not contemplate a hypothetical return to it. The emancipation of the immigrants from the primitive migratory waves and the last generations of immigrants from the struggle to open a space within the destination society, their insertion in the labor market, the access to the benefits that are derived from formalized work, learning the language of the country of destination and ruling out the return to the country of origin enjoying a remunerated retirement, while the new generations limit the exercise of the customs of origin and the Muslim religion, is seen as a differentiating cultural feature.

*Hallal* marriages in Islamic legal terminology are very often practiced by Moroccan immigrant men, as the above factors cause men to resort to the society of origin to perform Muslim marriages with women residing in the country of origin this guarantees purity and family practices that provide prerogatives to men within this marriage, but with the counterpart of their enjoyment in the society of destination.

The processes of individualization and exogamy in the target society are two conditioning factors that move Moroccans away from the practice of traditional cultural values of the society of origin, since the processes of individualization fostered by capitalist and consumerist societies result in the acquisition of the values of modernity in line with the traditional values of Muslim society based on the model of extended family and community solidarity (Bauman, 1999).

The integration of Moroccans into French society is faster than the integration of Moroccan immigrant men who do not hesitate to migrate autonomously, since they have a great capacity to adapt to the target society after a first phase of submission and of declassification. Overcoming the constraints of their cultural community leads to a struggle and to obtaining their rights and their imposition outside their home, which translates into economic, social and even political participation that can lead them to obtain high levels of success in the French society. Being



Moroccans the immigrant collective that best adapts to the country of destination (Daoud, 1997, Bekouchi, 2003).

## **Conclusion**

The different waves of Moroccans who have emigrated to France have made different mutations ranging from an exclusively working migration to a family migration. The original classes of this migration traditionally came from the lower and less favored classes of Moroccan society. However, it should not be forgotten that the middle classes also undertook migratory itineraries to this country with the hope of escaping family constraints and avoiding social control, since these social structures constitute the main elements that characterize Moroccan culture. These middle classes undertook a mobility to France to achieve a modern lifestyle away from the cultural constraints of the society of origin. Other upper social classes, such as the elites, have also undertaken an installation in this country of classic Moroccan migration destination, which is characterized by high work qualifications and by having diplomas and degrees of great academic prestige.

The modern descending generations of those waves of Moroccans have been inserted into French society in all its fields, from technicians, businessmen, merchants or officials to researchers, artists, intellectuals and even politicians. These Moroccans have been implanted in the society of destination as secular Muslims and open to the world; transforming their cultural habits. In this sense, the primitive generations are the ones that practice the most orthodox religious cults and the ones that have more links with Morocco, while the most recent generations practice a more open and moderate Islam, constituting the migrants who have a lesser disposition to return to the country of origin and contemplate a final installation.

However, the acquisition of the Muslim culture by the most recent generations is carried out by the family, by commercial activities and by religious worship. These generations consider themselves to be secular Muslims. The main bases of the Muslim culture involve all the levels that shape the Muslim identity and culture of the individuals, in an open relationship and in a continuous connection with the environment where they live and develop as a community and as individuals.

The Islam practiced in France by the immigrant communities of Morocco presents a dual structure: on the one hand, there is a moderate, domestic and calm Islam; and on the other, a politicized, radical and aggressive Islam. Both facets are intermingled and present in the community and, therefore, in the destination country, resulting in different acceptances from public opinions, provoking different considerations within the resident Muslim communities.

The friction between the identity practices of Moroccan Muslims and the values of the target society affect Moroccan immigrants; resulting in changes in their behavior, such as the use of foulard, due to the feminization of public space and the masculinization of private spaces.

This and other factors have generated multiple changes in the identity of the Moroccan immigrant communities in the country of destination, emerging several distortions in the practice of the cultural and identity values. These factors have caused distortions in patriarchal structures. These dysfunctions are a consequence of the integration of Moroccans in the French society; the emancipation of the immigrants of the last generations; *hallal* married couples; the exogamy in the society of destination and the processes of individualization derived from the modernization of the most developed societies.

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

María Teresa González Santos, Professor of Sociology, Department of State Law and Sociology, University of Malaga, Malaga, Spain. [maitesantos78@hotmail.com](mailto:maitesantos78@hotmail.com)