

Preface

As I told you from the beginning, an evening of poetry
is a party of fireworks that preys upon me and upon you at the same time . . .
Oh, my male and female friends, do not fear the fire
of poetry, a great human being is the human being that can burn . . .
— Nezar Qabbani, from *Birds Do Not Require a Visa for Entry*, 2000

About the middle of May 2003, I was preparing for a trip to Morocco and revising this manuscript for publication. During that week, four bombs hit downtown Casablanca, killing more than forty people and wounding dozens. These were places I knew, that I became familiar with during my many visits to the country and the three years I lived in Casablanca.

At the same time this horrific violence became part of a global confrontation, a confrontation consisting of multiple levels and actors, it also suggested how inseparable our interests and fears had become. Globalization implied not only interconnectedness through media, consumption, and terrorism, but also a more profound sense of being in a world where economic and political insecurity had become normal and no place remained singular or distinct.

When I first arrived in Morocco, I came with a plan to analyze how the global agenda of market reform had changed the specific comportment of the Moroccan middle class. Had the Moroccan middle class become more consumer-oriented, more attached to a liberal market economy, more

global in its perspective? After a few months of preliminary interviews, I changed my focus to address the alienation prevalent among young high school and university graduates. I changed focus due not only to the information I attained in my conversations but also to my own sympathy, in fact my own participation, in this alienation. I understood uncertain identity and economic insecurity and I knew that being an American of the same age had only relative value. The two experiences of facing transformation in national institutions, class identity, and economic opportunity had much in common.

Intellectually, I asked how this alienation related both to national identity and material circumstances induced by market liberalization. To find answers, I read political economy of development, economic sociology, cultural studies, and social theory. The concept of a middle class itself became a theoretical challenge for me. I searched for a way to integrate a sense of life possibility with social structure, returning, I thought, to the early Marx of *The Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts*, where consciousness directly relates to position in the labor market.

Eventually, I came to adopt the theoretical methodology of Critical Theory, intersecting a Marxist analysis of social relations and class within the evolution of market capitalism with psychoanalytic approaches to the constitution of subjectivity and social consciousness. Not completely satisfied with the ability of psychoanalytic theory to interpret the fragile subjective position inherent in global market capitalism, I turned to contemporary Arabic literature and philosophy and social thought. I borrowed from Mahmud Darwish's poetic image of the nomadic, unwanted traveler in *Yowmiyyat il-buzn il-'di* (Days of ordinary sadness) and the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas and Franz Rosenzweig. Levinas contemplated subjectivity without preceding, foundational totality (the nation-state) that brings together universal and singular in the same conceptual framework. Both Rosenzweig's and Levinas's discussion of the relation between the infinite and the subject allowed me to theorize the rise of an omnipresent, non-located global market and its consequences for individual subjectivity, social relations, and the stability of the global market as a social institution.

More specifically, the alienation of young Moroccan graduates became a symptom of underlying loss of attachment to the social structure, material possibilities, and the ideologically driven system of meaning offered by the nation-state. The push to join the global market economy as white-collar labor and the inability to conceptualize or experience identification with a historically and geographically located collectivity became the structure

and consciousness of the new middle class. Meaning came not from membership in a nation or, more indirectly, position within a hierarchy of social and political power, but rather from its converse, from nonlocation, from rootless participation in transnational paths of opportunity and social validation.

All of this theoretical labor was possible only as the consequence of years of research in Morocco and knowledge of research and theory in other disciplines. I went to graduate school to become a sociologist, yet the theoretical framework I developed for my dissertation reflects a long, aggressive pursuit for ideas across disciplinary borders. At the end of the process, I became convinced that the time in Morocco and the years of culling concepts and ideas from very diverse literatures allowed for a stronger, more insightful analysis of the social impact of global market capitalism. In other words, I became an advocate for interdisciplinary research methodology and social analysis. I also came to believe in distinguishing policy and material differences among local, national, and transnational levels while acknowledging conceptually and practically experiential inseparability.

For my research, I interviewed seventy unemployed men and women, bureaucrats, professionals, entrepreneurs, and managers over the course of almost three years (1995–1997). I separated the interviewees by gender, employment, education, and age. To single out the effects of market reform and allow time enough after university to stabilize professionally and personally, I distinguished men and women between the ages of 25 and 40 and above 40, the former maturing with market reform policies initiated in 1983. I also conducted ethnographic research and analyzed secondary sources on demography, social history, and economic and social development. I followed networks of friends and family members, people I knew well and people I met in passing during the years I spent in Morocco. I listened to conversations everywhere, from the homes of neighbors with unemployed children to the train, as a way of understanding the experience of this population.

Their alienation and economic difficulties did not in any way substitute for or overshadow the alienation or often worse material circumstances of farmers, factory workers, and merchants on the street. Their experience was distinctive because of attachment to the goal of social mobility through education, to the ideal of human fulfillment for the pride of family and individual. They represented transference of the modern ideal of progress from nation to globalization, and their discourse likewise offered insight into the existential implications and the social possibility of this trans-

ference. If moving through the institutions of social mobility set them apart from agricultural and industrial workers, it also set them apart from the children of elite families. These children could gain access to capital and to contacts to find a job or set up a company or, importantly, leave Morocco for better opportunity elsewhere.

In chapter 1, I outline the theoretical framework of the book and situate my analysis of a global middle class within sociological theory as well as political economy of development and cultural studies, the two dominant literatures on liberalization and globalization today. In chapter 2, I provide a more analytic-historic interpretation of the rise of a modern middle class out of colonial and postcolonial policies of modernization and development. With chapters 3 and 4, I return to the global middle class, analyzing its sociostructural foundations in the former and existential experience in the latter. I end with speculation on how an emerging global middle class might affect the evolution of global market capitalism. For this kind of study, of class formation, and this type of theoretical approach, drawn from Critical Theory, must consider the political consequences of social change for a system that engenders both unequal distribution of resources and pervasive and socially destructive alienation.