

6 When Europeans move to Morocco ‘for Love’

Navigating legislative and religious boundaries in a Muslim context

Catherine Therrien

Introduction

I would say that marriage is always difficult. With a mixed marriage there is added difficulty. It's unknown territory. At first, one has the impression that everything is good and easy but when you start moving forward, you come across turns, descents, shrubs and rocks ...

(Emilia,¹ Spanish, married to Anouar, a Moroccan)

Scholarly interest in mixed families is growing. However, the field is still geographically limited. The vast majority of studies are grounded in a European and North American context that has contributed to creating a Western-centred perspective (Britton 2013; Caballero et al. 2012; Collet and Philippe 2008; King-O'Riain et al. 2014; Rodríguez-García et al. 2015; Song and Gutierrez 2016). Few researchers have explored the experience of mixed families who have decided to live in the Global South. For instance, the counter-flow trajectories of Europeans moving ‘for love’ to Southern countries have been largely overlooked. One consequence of this is that we have little knowledge of the day-to-day experience of Europeans living in mixed families in Muslim contexts. This chapter addresses the experience of Europeans who joined a spouse in Morocco, a North African country where Islam is the official religion of the State under the Constitution and the majority population is practicing Muslim.

When an outsider enters a group, social cohesion comes into play and a whole system of social control (normative and legislative) is deployed to preserve the group identity (Therrien 2012). The anthropological work I conducted allowed me to observe that social cohesion, in Morocco, is first and foremost linked to the majority religion – Islam – but that other elements, like racial categories, also contribute in delimitating the symbolic and legislative boundaries of the group identity. It is therefore worth asking ourselves who is considered an insider, who is an outsider, and under what conditions an outsider might become a member of the in-group?

The above excerpt condenses the main idea of this chapter, which seeks to shed light on the major challenges experienced by mixed couples and their families living in Morocco. Emilia emphasizes the unfamiliar and challenging journey of mixedness ‘full of turns, descents, shrubs and rocks’. The metaphor she uses indicates that mixed couples face some significant difficulties and that they constantly develop strategies to cope with these obstacles. This excerpt also highlights the emotional cost of this journey.

After contextualizing the setting of this study by presenting a few words on the Moroccan context as well as the European migrants’ position within it, the chapter presents two aspects of family life that have often been presented as significant stumbling blocks by the participants in the study. The first section explores the challenges faced by these individuals regarding the legal dimension. Here, the Moroccan Family Code is of critical significance as it connects family rights and religion (Islam). While the Family Code presupposes social cohesion based on religion and leaves little room for personal choice, this section also sheds light on some of the strategies developed in order to gain legal rights. Living as a mixed family in a non-secular society, strongly regulated by Islam, not only has legal implications but also impacts the everyday religious practices within and outside the families. The second section highlights the complexity of religious intergenerational transmission for mixed families. It also explores how the mixed couples interviewed navigate social pressure and social convention. Ultimately, I will argue that beyond the challenges that these legislative and religious boundaries represent, the capacity to negotiate, the ability to be flexible and the possibility for adaptation of both migrants and Moroccan society (family, society and religious authorities) are indispensable elements for navigating the Moroccan context.

Theory and concepts

In scholarly literature, a couple is defined as ‘mixed’ when their union transgresses a collective norm, a symbolic boundary (Collet 1998; Streiff-Fenart 2000). From an anthropological perspective, mixedness refers to exogamy, in other words, a transgression of endogamous matrimonial norms. This explains why anthropologists interested in mixedness tend to explore the delimitation of symbolic boundaries (Le Gall and Meintel 2015; Rodríguez García et al. 2015; Therrien 2014; Waldis and Byron 2006). It is important, however, to underline the open character of the term (Therrien and Le Gall 2012). Researchers agree that the notion actually takes on different meanings depending on the time, place and context in which it occurs (Varro 2012). Whether a couple is considered mixed or not, depends on the time and place in which boundaries are drawn, but also on the point of view of the observers (Varro 1995). Mixed unions are not, therefore, objective facts. As stated by Dominique Schnapper (1998), working on mixedness implies examining who is considered ‘mixed’ in a given society. Mixed couples, by definition, transgress symbolic boundaries whether in terms of nationality, ethnicity, race, religion and/or social class. The most important of

which, for white Europeans in the Moroccan context, is religion. This chapter offers a view on where obstacles arise (in law and in social practices), and how these are negotiated/experienced etc.

The empirical data I collected is theoretically analysed through the concept of social navigation. The concept refers to how people move in uncertain circumstances and when focusing on the way they move under the influence of multiple forces towards better positions (Vigh 2009). So, social navigation refers to 'the way we move in an environment that is wavering and unsettled [...]. It directs our attention to the fact that we move in social environments of actors [...], individuals and institutions that engage and move us as we move along. [...] It grants us an alternative perspective on the intersection between agency, social forces and change.' (Vigh 2009: 420) The religious and legislative context in Morocco is relatively stable but is nonetheless perceived as 'wavering' and 'unsettled' (Vigh 2009: 420) by Europeans in mixed couples that settle in this religious country. The feeling of unfamiliarity and the obligation to constantly adapt to the social and religious context place them in an environment that feels as if it is always shifting.

Material and methods

This article is based on long-term ethnographic research. I first gathered life-story interviews from 31 mixed couples² during my PhD thesis (Therrien 2009). I also conducted semi-structured interviews with mixed couples in three other research projects: one on the transnational links between France and Morocco (Virkama et al. 2012), one on the trajectory of French migrants in Morocco (Therrien 2016a; Therrien and Pellegrini 2015) and, finally, one focusing on Spanish and Sub-Saharan migration in the city of Tangier (Therrien 2016b, 2017). I am also currently working on a new research project on the identity of mixed children in Morocco.³ The material and the analysis in this chapter are based on all these studies. I encountered individuals whose experiences differed in terms of several criteria: age, socio-economic class, religion, social status, family situation, length of relationship, length of stay in Morocco and so forth. In terms of nationality, I formally and informally interviewed foreigners coming from more than 15 countries. However, the majority of my sample was European and from different regions: France, Germany, Belgium (Western Europe), Russia, Poland, Austria (Eastern Europe), Spain, Italy, Portugal (Southern Europe), and Sweden (Northern Europe).⁴

Participant observation also play an important role in my studies, since living in Morocco and being part of a mixed couple myself allowed me to frequently encounter research participants in casual situations and to develop friendly connections with several couples. I frequently visit some of these couples (and their families) and speak with them on a more intimate level. I witness their conflicts, joys, struggles, legal and bureaucratic wrangling, and much more. This proximity has given me access to their daily lives in a more personal way that allows me to experience informative moments with them. My own personal experience

of mixedness not only places me in a privileged place for observation, but also gives me access to knowledge that is not only intellectual but also experiential (Hastrup 1995). This unity between the emotional experience and the intellectual aspect of the research invites reflection on the notion of researcher involvement within scientific investigation, on the permeability between personal and professional spheres, and on various ethical concerns, topics that I have explored in a recent article (Therrien 2017).

Settling in a Muslim context

As previously mentioned, Islam is the official religion of Morocco and the majority population is practicing Muslim.⁵ Although freedom of worship is enshrined in the Constitution, socially, this freedom is only granted to non-nationals (Jelmad 2014). For example, a Moroccan can convert to Christianity or to the Baha'i religion without being punished⁶ – proselytizing on the other hand is punishable – but socially it would be complicated to affirm and live openly with this faith. As a consequence of this, for any non-Jewish Moroccan, Islam is the only religion possible to transmit to their children. Religion, furthermore, is transmitted by paternal filiation, and in the eyes of the law, the children of a Muslim father – converted or by birth – are Muslim. The Family Code (the *Mudawana*) is a pertinent example of this strong imbrication of State and religion. As it includes all Moroccan Muslims and all mixed marriages involving a Muslim both in Morocco and abroad, it includes a large number of people and is thus considered the most important code of the Moroccan legislative arsenal (Mounir 2005). One of the aims of the Moroccan legislative system is to preserve the country's Islamic character and patriarchal structure (Therrien 2014). It should be noted that in Morocco, personal status is related to the religion of each individual. Muslim family law is regulated by the *Mudawana* and there are specific jurisdictions for Moroccan Jews. As for Christian couples settled in Morocco, they continue to be subject, for marriage, divorce and inheritance, to the laws of their country of origin, except when these laws conflict with Moroccan public order (for example, homosexual marriage) (Zeghib and Therrien 2016). This delineation of legislative boundaries – that are actually religious boundaries manifested in the law – indicates, as we will see in the second empirical section, who is considered an insider and who is an outsider, and under which conditions an outsider could be accepted as a member of the in-group.

Beyond the law, my ethnographic observations allow me to affirm that there is constant social pressure on Moroccans in general, but also on foreigners in mixed couples and on their children, concerning how they practice religion. Apart from the fact that eating during Ramadan (the Muslim holy month) is legally prohibited in Morocco,⁷ people will delicately send verbal (implicit and explicit questions) and non-verbal (positive encouragements) 'reminders' to their social circle to ensure that people who should fast, do fast. Social control, even when subtle, is very powerful. When mixed children reach puberty (the moment they are supposed to fast), some family members will explicitly ask them if they

have begun to fast, the question being more a social reminder than a real choice offered to them. Without putting clear pressure on foreigners in mixed couples, it is not rare to be asked – in a taxi, at the bank, at work – if they have converted or not to Islam and if they fast, etc. In this context, it is worth considering how Islam is practiced (or not) and transmitted to the children (or not) in mixed European-Moroccan families. Based on the interviews I conducted with mixed children, Moroccans take for granted that they are Muslim, and that they should be raised accordingly.

With regards to the welcoming of mixed couples in the Moroccan context, the historical period must be taken into account. The migratory movement of North African immigrant workers of the 1950s, which continued after National Independence in 1956, favoured the development of mixed unions (Déjeux 1989). Streiff-Fenart (2000) recalls that an intense campaign of denigration and protest against mixed marriages took place during the period following the independence of the North African countries. For reformist and Moroccan leader Allal el Fassi, mixed marriage was a means used by colonialism to perpetuate its hold on citizens. Having noted the proliferation of mixed marriages after independence, the author made clear what he thought of these unions in an article published in *Al-Alam* in 1974 (in Déjeux 1989). The argument of this article focuses on cohesion in Muslim society: society and family must be homogeneous. No virus, no stain. It was necessary to defend purity and to be protected from contamination. Children should not be passed around. They are secured in Islam through their father. The upbringing of a foreign mother could lead to a loss of religion and Muslim values (in Déjeux 1989). In 1996, Hassan II, the king of Morocco at that period, was clearly not recommending mixed marriages, claiming that these unions were unlikely. Nowadays, mixed couples are clearly more accepted and mixed weddings are increasingly openly celebrated in Morocco. Although society is more open to mixed marriages, we will see that many Europeans nevertheless face challenges regarding the religious and legislative context of the country they have decided to settle in.

The 'white privilege' of Europeans

Before delving into the experience and negotiations surrounding these religious boundaries of mixedness as expressed in legislation and social practice, it is worth mentioning that Westerners – and thus the Europeans – hold a privileged status in the Moroccan context. They are most of the time welcomed to the country, well-perceived by Moroccans in general (Therrien 2016a) and, if we compare to other ethnic groups, Moroccans are more open to marrying them (Harrami 2016), even if, as the fieldwork also showed, the welcoming of family members to these European-Moroccan couples may be experienced as cold. The negative reactions of Moroccan families regarding European partners are most of the time related to the fact that he/she is not Muslim. As a matter of fact, sharing the same religion as the majority group (Islam) is clearly perceived as a key point of common identity in Morocco. Interestingly, Westerners who converted

to Islam⁸ not only benefit from a privileged status, they are also considered as members of the majority group. Thus, a European national who converted to Islam will be first and foremost considered Muslim and thus closer to the majority society (Therrien 2016a). Khalid Mouna (2016) even argues that being European and converting to Islam places one at the top of this hierarchical classification of ‘others’. Having religion in common is generally regarded by Moroccan society as a factor that facilitates the development of successful relationships among mixed couples and the identity transmission to the mixed children. However, the fieldwork also showed that sharing the same religion is not always an element of rapprochement, and that racial categories are difficult symbolic boundaries to overcome in the Moroccan context (Therrien 2015). If Sub-Saharan migrants often suffer from racial discrimination (Alexander 2019), Europeans in Morocco clearly benefit from something Lundström (2014) calls ‘white privilege’. In other words, race matters, and white skin is generally seen as something more positive (and less of a transgression) than dark skin, even in Morocco. So, for Europeans, the transgression of symbolic boundaries matters, but not as much as religion.

Thus, nationality, religion and phenotype influence the way foreigners in mixed unions are generally perceived and welcomed in Morocco. The differences in terms of social class, age and gender also have an impact on social perception. Nevertheless, I do not consider any of these criteria to be a decisive factor in the duration of the relationship. As I argued in earlier work (Therrien 2014), the decisive factor which will have the biggest impact on the duration of the couple, is not related to the reactions and the welcoming of the family. These are clearly challenging elements, but the decisive factor is rather the couple’s capacity to navigate social perception. In Vigh’s words, the Europeans in mixed couples I interviewed managed to ‘move in a moving environment’ (2009: 420) and they succeeded in implementing ‘flexible and adaptive practice[s]’ (2009: 423). This chapter not only looks at boundaries that are perceived to be strong in terms of social cohesion, but also at how the couple navigates in this environment that also has an effect on duration and their relationship. The section that follows looks at how religious boundaries are found in the legislation, how it impacts family life and how they navigate this environment.

Gaining rights: navigating legislative boundaries

Individuals that grew up in Europe must learn how to navigate a non-secular environment where state and religion overlap. They have to navigate obstacles specifically related to the Moroccan Family Code (the *Mudawana*), which is based on Islamic law, because, when they get married to a Moroccan, they are subject to it. The Family Code was reformed in 2004, which was an historic turning point for the country as women gained rights and a more egalitarian status (Žvan Elliot 2015).⁹ However, apart from the simplification of marriage contract procedures for Moroccans living abroad, these changes did not simplify the daily life of mixed couples. Indeed, the fieldwork revealed that the majority

of them consider certain aspects of the laws as potential or real obstacles, but the data collected also indicate that they find strategies in order to gain legal rights.

A first obstacle relies on the fact that, according to the Mudawana, a Muslim man can marry a non-Muslim woman from one of the three monotheist religions, but a Muslim woman cannot marry a non-Muslim man (Article 39).¹⁰ As we will see in the excerpt below, it is thus socially and religiously more complicated for a Muslim woman to get married to a foreigner than for a Muslim man (Van Niekerk and Verkuyten 2018).

My father said to me, marry someone from China, Japan, whatever you want but marry a Muslim. In a way, it was the last bastion he had. I understand that you may bring me someone I don't know, I understand you may bring me a foreigner, I understand all that but there is just one thing; that he be a Muslim.

(Inès, Moroccan, married to François, a Frenchman)

In practical terms, this means that to marry a Muslim woman, a non-Muslim man has to convert to Islam. The simplicity of the conversion process in the Muslim religion when compared, for example, to a conversion to Judaism needs to be stated. It consists only of repeating the Shahada (confession of faith), choosing a Muslim name and signing the conversion form. According to ethnographic observation, it is easy in Morocco to find an adoul who is willing to pay no attention to personal religious conviction for the conversion, as it was the case for Marc.

- Have you converted?
- Yes, I've gone through the process ...
- How did it go?
- It was done in five minutes. I didn't have any problem! They asked me for a signature and so I signed. I didn't have to recite anything, nothing at all.

(Marc, French, married to Yasmina, a Moroccan)

Marc did not even have to recite the Shahada, which indicates the flexible position of some adouls. Patrice, a Frenchman, also benefited from the flexibility and the adaptivity of a Moroccan religious authority. The day of his conversion to Islam, he read the Shahada on his cell phone in front of the adoul in order to get the conversion certificate. It should be mentioned that Morocco is more a society of convention than a society of prohibition (Ferrié et al. 1994). For example, in the case of a Muslim Moroccan woman married to a European, conveying the information that 'he converted to Islam' is often more important socially than the veracity about the beliefs or the real practice of the foreigner.

While for some foreigners, the conversion process was perceived as a mere formality, for others, it was a hard decision to make since they perceived this obligation as harmful to their identity. Some lived an authentic identity transformation and changed profoundly as a result of their conversion (see Therrien

2014, 2019). Finally, some foreign men decided not to convert and so had to accept they were not considered married according to Moroccan law. It was the case of a Portuguese man, Flavio, and a Moroccan woman, Oumaïma, who were married by the Catholic Church in Spain but never got married according to Islamic law because Flavio absolutely refused to convert.

- Converts, what a joke that is ... I think so but maybe I'm wrong ...
- You don't believe that one can change ideas or discover new things?
- Not in this area, if one is reasonably intelligent, I don't believe so ... This is an agnostic talking to you [...]. They (The Muslims) are on another planet to me and everything concerning religion.

(Roberto, Portuguese-born in Morocco, married in Spain to Houria, a Moroccan)

In Morocco, the only marriage certificate recognized legally is the one called the '*acte adoulaire*', registered by a traditional notary (*adoul*). Consequently, Flavio and Oumaïma were not considered married according to Islamic law, thus they were not only living together illegally on the Moroccan territory, but we will see later that Flavio's decision to not convert impacts the family's possibilities to gain legal rights.

Contrary to Flavio and Oumaïma, the majority of the Europeans I interviewed were married according to Islamic law, but not always from the beginning of their relationship. Many lived in a non-marital relationship for several years abroad and in Morocco, despite the fact that cohabitation is not allowed in the country. The decision to get married was often directly linked to the administrative Moroccan context. Many of them decided to formalize their relationship once they had children for different administrative reasons (to get a family civil status book, to register their children for school, to get a residence card) because all these institutions require a marriage certificate to issue such documents for the children.

Another obstacle for Europeans in a mixed couple is the fact that the children of a Muslim man are considered Muslim from a religious and legislative point of view. In concrete terms, a child of a mixed couple, with a Muslim father, is socially and legally Muslim. Of course, one can be considered Muslim as an assigned social identity without personally identifying with Islam. In the case of Nadia, a Franco-Moroccan woman that I interviewed, she was outraged by the fact that her European partner had to convert to Islam in order for their marriage to be recognized in Morocco since she did not identify as Muslim. Nevertheless, whatever the religion one identifies with, the legal status of being Muslim pertains to benefitting from – or being denied – certain rights granted by the state. Contrary to the majority of mixed children in Morocco, Flavio and Oumaïma's child, Pedro, was not considered Muslim (because his parents were not considered married in Morocco) and so will not benefit from certain rights, in particular inheritance rights. Since a Muslim and a non-Muslim cannot inherit one another's assets and properties located within Morocco, Pedro (considered Christian) cannot inherit from his mother (Muslim) and his mother cannot inherit from him. Nor can

Oumaïma and Flavio inherit from each other. Oumaïma never thought that the refusal of her partner to get married according to the Islamic law would impact the transmission of her legacy.

It should be noted that the majority of foreign men I interviewed decided to convert to Islam in order to get married, so for these couples, inheritance is not a problem. For several foreign women, however, conversion, even if not mandatory from a religious and legal point of view, was the solution they found to be part of their husband's legacy. I interviewed a Russian woman who converted to Islam after the death of her husband in order to inherit from him.

The conversion was done afterwards (after the death of her husband). And there's nothing to it, you just say a phrase. I never changed religion, I did it for the paperwork. When the *adouls* came to the house, the family was there for the inheritance and we did it at the same time.

(Karla, Austrian, widow of Eussa, a Moroccan)

As with the interviewees who talked about conversion as a mere formality, this last example, also shows the flexibility of religious authorities. The majority of European women I met thought about conversion, though not all of them decided to convert. For Francine, changing religion for instrumental reasons was a limit that she could not surpass.

I don't think I could have lived with this contradiction. Doing it ... just for the paperwork, I would have felt it was like a betrayal. It would have been as if I was letting myself down and I don't think I would have been able to do it.

(Francine, a French woman, married to Salim, a Moroccan)

In face of such legal norms, making donations to their spouse during one's lifetime is another legal possibility that many mixed couples chose in order to circumvent legacy issues. It is also possible for a Muslim to sign a will in which he/she bequeaths a third of her assets to someone who is not part of his/her legacy. This latter solution is unknown by the majority of mixed couples, and, as I observed, the *adouls* are not always aware, or willing – although qualified – to legalize these wills, which add to the complexity of the inheritance within the mixed families.

What is the commonality among these major legal obstacles faced by Europeans in mixed couples? My analysis suggests that this delineation of legislative boundaries indicates who is considered an insider, who is an outsider and under which conditions an outsider could become a member of the in-group, thereby exposing the demand for what could be termed 'forced legal assimilation' (Therrien 2015). As already mentioned, the main goal of the Moroccan Family Code is to preserve the Islamic nature and the patriarchal structure of the country (Therrien 2014). Being legally recognized as Muslim – whether practicing or not – is the condition not only to be considered as an in-group member but also for benefiting from the law (marriage, inheritance).

To return to the navigation metaphor, one can argue that the Moroccan Family Code represents, for the research participants, a ‘context of insecurity’ (Vigh 2009: 420). Even if the legal framework is stable, the unfamiliarity and the concrete consequences of the law make the European in a mixed couple feel insecure so they find ways ‘to escape confining structures [...] in order to direct their lives in an advantageous direction’ (Vigh 2009: 420–3). In the next section, we will see how this capacity to constantly adjust to their unfolding social environment is a critical asset for these Europeans when it comes to intergenerational religious transmission within a Muslim country.

Religious practices and transmission within mixed families: Navigating social pressure

As the material shows, mixed families have to make delicate choices in terms of the values, identity markers (i.e. first name, language, religion, nationality, etc.) and social practices they want to transmit to their children. These decisions, that manifest themselves as ‘parental identity projects’ (Meintel 2002), aim to orient the identity of their children. A significant body of research has focused on parental identity projects of mixed couples and the strategies developed to implement them.¹¹ Studies have focused, for example, on name(s) (Cerchiaro 2017; Collet 2019; Edwards and Caballero 2008), language(s) (Joshi 2014; Kim 2014; Lacroix 2014; Unterreiner 2014), nationality(ies) (Unterreiner 2015), and religion (Arweck and Nesbitt 2010; Cerchiaro et al. 2015; Froese 2008; Mathieu 2009; Meintel and Le Gall 2009). The impact of the national context on these parental identity projects has, however, largely been neglected in the literature (Therrien and Le Gall 2017).

This last section will discuss precisely the impact of the Moroccan context on the transmission of religious belief and social practices within the family, a second challenge mixed couples are facing in Morocco. We will see that these practices are considered (or not) a transgression of the symbolic boundaries put in place to ensure religious cohesion. As expressed by Salim (excerpt below) the religious identity of the offspring is the number one concern, not necessarily of all mixed couples but of their extended family.

As far as the religion is concerned ... it’s the big question everyone asks. Will there be a religious agreement? Will the children be Muslim? Will they receive an Islamic education? That is really the main worry in all this, our relationship is not necessarily the most important issue, it’s how are we going to educate the children? You see, the question is about what will happen with your offspring? Will they be Christian or Muslim? Will they be ours or theirs?

(Salim, Moroccan, married to Francine, a French woman)

In this context, it is worth considering how Islam is practiced (or not) and transmitted (or not) to the children in mixed European-Moroccan families.

The fieldwork revealed many configurations regarding religious transmission: non-practicing households, families where both parents share a common religion, those where only one partner practices and others where two religions are practiced and/or transmitted. Each of these social practices will now be described. As will be seen, not transmitting Islam at all, transmitting Islam as a 'choice', or transmitting a different religion (Christianity, Bahaism), requires the European-Moroccan families to navigate their environment amidst the majority society.

Interestingly, despite the dominant religious model, in many of the mixed households there was no direct religious transmission, neither by the father, nor by the mother, unlike in the majority of non-mixed Moroccan families. This does not mean that the children were not exposed to any religious practice or knowledge. First, if they go to a Moroccan school¹² they receive a religious Islamic education since it is subject on the curriculum. Second, the children are often exposed to religious education through the extended family and the majority society. These families often celebrate Aid el-Kebir (the main Muslim holiday) as well as Christmas, but they give these celebrations a traditional and familial significance and not a religious one. Within these 'non-practicing households', some of these parents mentioned to us that they identified with a certain form of spirituality, but that they did not engage in any religious practice. For example, the religious prohibitions linked to Islam (on the consumption of alcohol and pork) were not followed. The fasting during the month of Ramadan, if practiced (some do not fast, while others do sporadically), was not followed as a religious practice, but rather as a social convention. The fast was often not followed outside of Morocco (while on holiday or travelling, for example) and the public sphere.

My children know very well that I do Ramadan when I am in Morocco. I do it socially because I don't want to cause offense. We are in a Muslim country. But when I'm in France, I don't do Ramadan. The girls must have Christian notions but they must have Muslim notions as well. That is to say, to know what's necessary in order to be socially integrated in both countries.

(Salim, Moroccan, married to Francine, a French woman)

For Salim, fasting thus did not have a religious significance. It was a way to culturally adhere to Moroccan social norms and conventions, 'to not offend'. Outside of the country, no one in the family was fasting.

This strategy of not transmitting any religion within the family is perceived by many mixed children I interviewed as a freedom that they appreciate but which adds to the complexity of making their own choice.

Living in a Muslim country without any religious transmission within the family leaves you a little bit ... Who am I in terms of religion and identity? They are people who identify themselves as Muslim or Christian ... It would have been easier for me to choose between the two or the three religions¹³ if I had received a religious education.

(Khadija-Andrea, daughter of a Spanish-Moroccan couple)

While Khadija-Andrea declared herself to be atheist, in some other non-practicing households, the children were practicing Muslims. It was the case of Neil, the son of Nour, a Muslim non-practicing Moroccan woman and Gregory, a British man converted to Islam, a believer, but not practicing. None of them follow the religious prohibitions (as they drink alcohol and eat pork). They neither fast nor pray, and they never encouraged – nor discouraged – their children to engage in any religious practices. Neil, who is now fifteen years old, came back from school one day and told his parents that drinking alcohol was haram (sin) in Islam. They both explained to Neil that there exist different ways of thinking and living and that the most important thing was to not cause any harm to anyone and to respect all people as equals. Neil went through different phases. There were times when he decided to not eat pork anymore; other times when he ate it in England but not in Morocco and other times when he ate it with his family in Morocco. At puberty he decided to fast, to be in the same rhythm as his friends, to be part of the group, as his parents explained to me, he was free to make his own way in this conventional Muslim country within this atypical mixed family.

In some other families, one of the parents is (more or less) a practicing Muslim while the other partner does not practice any religion. In many of these households, but more often when the Moroccan Muslim is the father, the religious prohibitions are followed by the practicing parent, (and sometimes even by the foreign spouse for the sake of family harmonization) and these prohibitions are most of the time transmitted (although not imposed) to the children. The Ramadan fast is followed by the practicing parent who encourages (more or less implicitly) the children at the age of fasting towards this practice, but the possibility of not fasting for children exists within these families, which is not the case in the majority of Moroccan families. The family members, those fasting and those who are not (parents or children), sit together for the breaking of the fast. In these families, religious transmission is done indirectly (by observing the practicing parent doing their prayers, for example). Several of the Muslim partners interviewed, like Yasmina, explain that transmitting some religious practices to their children matters to them, but that the children will make their own choice in adulthood.

It's not up to us to impose religion on her. Each does his own. When she's grown-up, she'll decide what she wants...

(Yasmina, Moroccan, married to Marc, a Frenchman)

Like the mixed couples interviewed by Le Gall and Meintel, these couples make transmission 'an open-ended affair, whose final outcome will be determined by the choices their children will make later in life' (2015: 124).

The daily lives of a minority of mixed families were centred on faith and religious practice. In these cases, the two partners practice the same religion (Islam or Baha'i) after the conversion process of one of them (often prior to the romantic encounter). Not only are the prayers, the fast, and the religious prohibitions respected, but also the religious values and principles are transmitted to the children

on a regular basis. These couples see religion as the common foundation of their family. If the families where both partners were practicing Muslims felt a greater cohesion with the majority society, the European partner who converted to Islam, nevertheless, often felt the pressure to justify their choices in their country of origin where Islam was not always well-perceived (Özyürek 2015).

I also interviewed some families where the European mother was a practicing Christian while the Moroccan father was a non-practicing Muslim. I observed that, in these cases, the transmission of Christianity to the children is more complex given the country's Muslim context. I met, for example, Daya, a Christian woman, who transmits the principles and values of Christianity to her children within the private sphere, unbeknownst to her Moroccan husband who is a non-practicing Muslim.

- I practise my religion in the sense that I'm a believer and all that. For example, my husband told my children that they should never go to church. Maybe it's through fear of them being seen.

- But you got married in church, isn't it?

- Yes, but it was far away.

(Daya, Swedish, married to Abdellah, a Moroccan)

Daya and Abdellah got married in Sweden at a Catholic Church, but once living in Morocco, he forbade her from taking the children to church with her or from transmitting Christianity to them openly in fear of what others might say. The fear of perceived apostasy and of stigmatization in the eyes of the community is so strong that this father – atheist in private – prevented his wife from transmitting her religion to their children, considered Muslim by the Moroccan society.

In some families, the parents share common religious values and principles, but have different beliefs and practices. In the majority of the households where the two spouses practice different religions (Islam and Christianity), some mothers freely practiced their religion but without transmitting it to their children (considered Muslim by paternal filiation). There was a more or less implicit agreement within the couple that Islam will be the religion transmitted to the children. It was the case in the family of Verena, an Austrian woman and a practicing Christian, and Youssef, a Moroccan man and a practicing Muslim. Verena goes to church regularly for mass, but alone. On some occasions, for Christmas for example, the family (including her husband) accompanies her to the church. They celebrate Christmas and decorate the house with a Christmas tree, but without a Christmas nativity scene. The religious education is based on common points between Christianity and Islam, and on Islam. Verena transmits some Christian values but without referring to the Christian faith and talks in general about charity, forgiveness, etc. Youssef practices and openly transmits Islam to his children. As the father, they pray, fast and follow the Islamic prohibitions. What matters for Verena, and other Christian women like her, is that religious values are transmitted to their children. Contrary to other families who decided

to stay neutral and not transmit any religion to their children in order for them to choose once they were adults, she does not want her children to be without any religious education. They will choose later, but at least they will have received a religious education. The latter examples demonstrated that not only the context, but also gender dynamic should be taken into consideration in the analysis because of its influence on religious transmission.¹⁴

The families where the two parents were practicing their own religion and transmitting both religions to their children are quite rare in Morocco. I only met two of them.

My father and mother are both practicing but they never imposed one religion on us ... My father is a practicing Muslim, he does his five prayers a day, and my mother goes to church every Sunday [...]. In fact, they left the door open for us. Nobody pushed forward their own side of things.

(Rania, daughter of a Spanish-Moroccan couple)

We see, in this excerpt, that not only the parents feel free to practice their religion and to transmit it to their children, but they also offered them the possibility to make their own choice. Lahcen, a 27-year-old French-Moroccan I interviewed, was raised in the same religious configuration. He has a practicing Christian French mother and a practicing Muslim Moroccan father. Both parents were freely practicing their religion and Lahcen was exposed to both religions equally: he attended the Sunday mass with his mother and accompanied his father to the Mosque. They celebrated both Aid el-Kebir and Christmas (with the tree and the nativity scene). His parents never asked him to engage or to not engage in any religious practices. But he was living, like all mixed children in Morocco, in a Muslim context. He fasted when he was young to be like his friends – and still fasts today in presence of his father – but from a young age asked himself many questions about religion. He identifies as an atheist but wants to let the mother of his future children transmit what is important for her, including religious beliefs and practices (whatever the religion). For him, respect and freedom of choice are the most important values that were transmitted to him by both his parents and it is important to him to continue this chosen path.

All these examples show that the Moroccan Muslim context clearly impacts religious transmission within mixed families: social control, fear of apostasy, pressure from society and families to follow the majority religious group. However, while the socio-religious contexts must be taken into account in the study of identity projects, its influence must be nuanced. As concluded in earlier work: ‘A permissive context (Quebec) makes the pluralistic character of the mixed identity project legitimate and facilitates its expression, whereas a strongly standardized religious context (Morocco) produces parental projects that are on display on a social level, but that leave the mixed identity projects in the private sphere’ (Le Gall and Therrien 2017). In other words, all the couples I interviewed in the Moroccan context had to learn to navigate social pressure and

social convention. The emotional cost of this journey is significant. Many of the interviewees had very difficult periods including intense questioning; fatigue related to the constant adjustments and moments when navigating a Muslim environment was very challenging. These individuals 'not just act in but interact with their social environment and adjust their lives to the constant influence of social forces and change' (Vigh 2009: 433). They find ways to transmit (or not) what is important for them, whether it be leaving the choice of religion to their children, or even transmitting a religion different than Islam.

Conclusion

This chapter aims to fill a gap in the literature by exploring the daily life of Europeans in mixed families living in Muslim contexts. We saw that despite their white privilege, they still face many challenges in Morocco, with the religious boundaries – manifest in the law and impacting social practices – being the more challenging part of their journey. The capacities of individuals in mixed couples to develop coping strategies in order to adapt to the Moroccan Family Code or to gain rights have been highlighted. The complexity of religious transmission in a non-secular country has been described, thus making visible how they socially navigate within a Muslim context. Social navigation is a continual learning process that refers to a capacity deployed by people 'to disentangle or to free themselves of difficulty' (Vigh 2009: 424), 'to "adapt" and "read" "capricious environments"' (Scott 1998, in Vigh 2009: 425), and this is a capacity that the majority of Europeans in mixed couples that I interviewed clearly demonstrated. Beyond the challenges raised by these legislative and religious boundaries, this chapter presents the 'ability to negotiate', the 'flexibility' and the 'adaptability' of Europeans in mixed couples as indispensable elements for their continued journey, with these abilities being at the core of the social navigation process described by Vigh (2009).

Emilia's metaphor of the unknown 'territory' introduces this chapter by emphasizing the difficulties face by mixed couples in Morocco and their adaptability. On a final note, I would like to underline the fact the flexibility developed by mixed couples is not a one-sided movement. As stated by Vigh (2009), when we look at the way agents act and move within their social environments, it is also important to take the transformations of the social environment into consideration. As a matter of fact, we saw that flexible practices are not only the case for the individuals in mixed unions but that Moroccan society – and specifically individuals who welcome a foreigner within their family and religious authorities who apply the law – also adjust to these foreigners who undermine social cohesion. Inès' words perfectly illustrate this social transformation process.

What I personally find interesting about mixedness, is that there is everything to gain from it because it makes things move. Chucking a load of mixedness into a society blows away the cobwebs.

(Inès, Moroccan, married to François, a Frenchman)

Notes

- 1 All names used in this chapter are anonymized.
- 2 For 21 of the couples, the two partners were interviewed together. I interviewed the woman only for the ten other couples (some women were separated, divorced or widowed). (A few men refused to be interviewed or were not available).
- 3 Catherine Therrien (2019–21) ‘Plural identity of mixed children in Morocco: transmission, agency and social constraints’, Research Project funded by Ibn Khaldoun program (CNRST). It is a comparative project research with a Canadian team led by Josiane Le Gall.
- 4 The majority of foreigners in Morocco are from European backgrounds. French people represent the largest group. Northern Europeans are quite rare (Pellegrini 2016).
- 5 99 per cent of Moroccans declared themselves to be Sunni Muslim (Elmoudni 2016).
- 6 Speaking at a conference on the draft of the Criminal Code on 6 July, the Minister of Justice said that Morocco’s penal code does not explicitly prohibit apostasy (Arbaoui 2015).
- 7 Article 222 of the Moroccan Penal Code states that ‘anyone who is widely known to belong to the Muslim religion, and who ostensibly breaks the fast in a public place during the time of Ramadan, without a reason admitted by that religion, shall be punished by imprisonment from one to six months and a fine of 200 to 500 dirhams’.
- 8 The conversion does not have to be visible; when a European is Muslim everyone knows it because the fact that he/she converted to Islam rapidly and broadly circulates.
- 9 The new Code now speaks of equality within the family, of mutual responsibility. The family is under the joint tutelage of both spouses. This Code marks the end of guardianship (*wilaya*): the adult woman can now marry with or without a guardian. The age of marriage is now the same for boys and girls (18). Severe restrictions on polygamy make it legally almost impossible and consensual divorce has been established.
- 10 It should be mentioned that cohabitation is prohibited (article 490 and 493 of the *Mudawana*). One must be married in order to live together on the Moroccan territory, but the authorities are less strict if there is no Moroccan partner involved (two Europeans living together for example) (Zeghib and Therrien 2016).
- 11 See Le Gall and Meintel 2014 for an extended literature review.
- 12 The majority of mixed children in Morocco are registered in foreign educational system (French, Spanish, American, Belgium).
- 13 Her father, atheistic, came originally from a Jewish family converted to Islam.
- 14 The women interviewed seem to share the idea that transmitting a part of themselves to their children does not necessarily mean the attribution of a social identity such as a religious identity, which explains their greater flexibility in terms of choice of social markers. Men, Moroccans and foreigners, seem to attach much greater importance to the social identity of their offspring. This social identity makes membership of a group (name, religion, circumcision) visible to other people (Therrien 2009).

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