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Safaa Monqid

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Heavy wings: women's urban lives in deprived neighbourhoods of Rabat, Morocco

Safaa MONQID

Translator: Claire Hancock

Abstract

This paper considers different forms of appropriation of public spaces and ways of inhabiting the city on the part of women living in deprived neighbourhoods of a Moroccan city, Rabat. I look at their uses of space, different from those of women of other socio-economic backgrounds, and the material and symbolic difficulties that they encounter in a city traditionally seen as a masculine sphere. However, women do seem to be finding their place, both by strongly appropriating their neighbourhood, and by gaining access to the city centre, particularly for younger women.

The survey on which this article is based was carried out in Rabat between 2000 and 2003, mostly with women though some men were also interviewed. The aim was to give a hearing to a group generally neglected by urban studies. The sample of 53 women, aged 19 to 70, was diverse in terms of social background, origin (rural or urban), profession, education, family situation, area of residence, housing type and duration of presence in the city. I was careful to diversify, most of all, the places of residence of interviewees: some lived in the medina, in the area formerly known as Petits Blancs and now called l'Océan, and neighbouring areas Diour Jamaa, Qbibât and Akkari, others in the area of Hassân, formerly Petit Jean, and the Yaqoub el Mansour area. Further surveys were carried out in the residential areas of Agdal and Hayy Riyad, and a few in Hayy el-Fath and Hayy el-Menzeh. Each woman was interviewed separately and in some cases would go into her life story and digress freely. Interviews generally took place in the woman's home. With the younger, educated women of the sample, interviews took place in French at their own request, because they felt more comfortable in that language, or in a mixture of French and Arabic, but with other women Arabic was used. I also carried out participant observation, walking along with women in their daily pursuits, either in the local neighbourhood or in other parts of the city.

The city, as it is collectively experienced, can be read as embodying normative systems, and gender norms in particular, as they are made manifest in women's modes of appropriation of urban space. Historically, Moroccan cities were strongly divided spatially (between inside and outside, private and public), with women confined to private, domestic space, for reasons both religious and social (patriarchy, endogamy, the code of honour...) (Ghallab, 1990 ; Borrmans, 1977 ; Lacoste-Dujardin, 1985 ; Mernissi, 1983). However, there have been major changes, as women have entered the public sphere through education and paid work, and have access to public spaces. They are now more visible in urban environments, as rules prohibiting their presence outside have been gradually relaxed and proscriptions rescinded. Women's spatial range was expanded and they are now to be seen, either alone or accompanied, in multiple parts of the city: they are visible as individuals. The city is no longer a stronghold of masculinity and has been opened up to women who are able to establish better relations with it. However, women's situations vary considerably, since different women, with different backgrounds, have very different levels of engagement with the city, in particular in Rabat which is very diverse, with people of different origins and traditions.

The aim of this paper is to illustrate the changes in women's relationships with the city, and to show how these changes also bear witness to changing relations between men and women, and wide-ranging social change. The situation of women in the deprived areas of the city shows the limits of that change, and does not necessarily fit the narrative of a "conquest" by women of a fair and equal place in public space.

I will use the case of women of the Yacoub El Mansour housing neighbourhood as a case in point. Approximately twenty women were interviewed there, the majority of whom were married, illiterate or with very little education. Most were not employed outside the home, and half were over fifty.

1- Perceived constraints on the use of public space

My research dealing with women's strategies to gain access to urban space confirmed that women form a diverse group, with very different degrees of access (Monqid, 2011). Women from different walks of life do not utilize the same places, and do not engage in the same way with their local or more general environment: there are predictable differences between the housewives of Yaqoub El Mansour and slums, and residents of the wealthier Agdal or residential areas of Hay Riad, or intermediate areas like Hassan or l'Océan. The former seem to suffer spatial injustice, in that they are excluded from urban modernity. It is difficult to say to what extent this exclusion is imposed or self-imposed.

The inhibition of women's mobility through sexist social norms

Social norms which discriminate against women appear as a direct cause of spatial injustice, that affects women from deprived areas most powerfully. Women are subject to constraints in terms of their access to space, in relation particularly to the interiorization of each gender proscribed spatial boundaries. Pierre Bourdieu (1998) described the "embodiment" of the proscription of women from public space.

"My parents watch me, and my brother is very religious, though he means well, he tells me not to wear tight clothes, not to wear make-up, not to talk to boys. I can't wear what I want, he doesn't want me to, he says "I'm a believer and I advise people, they're going to say "Look at his sister"". We grew up with these traditions, you can't just answer no, or why, or how. I tell my mum where I'm going, I must return promptly, I can't stay out later, she's afraid for me. She believes because I'm a girl, boys are going to sweet-talk me, and for us honour is everything."

Maria (29 years old, unmarried, employed, educated to secondary level, lives in a house).

That the street is masculine territory is taken for granted by women themselves, as shown by the advice and admonitions of women to their daughters regarding the use of public space: they are not to go in areas where no one is in the streets alone, they are not to stay out late at night. They are not to respond to verbal aggression and they are to remain silent, this is women's only means to protect themselves and avoid trouble. Mothers therefore instil a fear of the outdoors, which inhibits girl's appropriation of public spaces and limits their mobility.

Most women interviewed stated a preference for staying indoors and said they would venture outside only if they had to. Their leisure is mostly passed indoors and confined to domestic space.

"I prefer to stay at home and cook or something, I don't go out. My free time, I spend preparing food, sleeping, baking a cake, or cleaning the house, or watching TV."

Zineb (40 years old, baccalaureat level, employed in the civil service, lives with parents in "affordable housing").

Thus, even as women have gained a place in public, they still define their own place and confine themselves to the home, curtailing their own freedom. Norms regarding the use of space are interiorized, watched over, and transmitted. Limits are self-imposed since proscriptions have been internalised and inhibit certain practices (Abrous, 1989).

In order not to cross the path of a group of men and be looked over by them (at the terrace of a café for instance), a woman walking alone will change sides of the road, and apply rules she has learned of "proper deportment", ways of holding her own body (head inclined, quick and discreet step...). From the youngest age, women learn they have to go unnoticed in the street, and therefore dress and behave accordingly (not laugh out loud or wear loud clothing), and that outings should be only for necessity and not for pleasure. Some women, housewives in particular, boast of their limited contacts with the outside world.

Financial, age-related and familial constraints

Economic means play an obvious part in mobility and affect women's access to public space and leisure. Those particularly affected are housewives in deprived neighbourhoods with limited means or no personal income. This also applies to young people who are dependent on their parents. These younger people have to engage in astute saving strategies in order to be able to afford the occasional outing to the cinema or to a café. Even employed married women encounter such difficulties, since most of their money goes to domestic essentials, especially when the household's income is modest. Women tend to spend more than their husbands on improvements that benefit the family (for example, home improvements, children's education or saving to buy a home).

Age also plays a major role. Some women consider they are "beyond" the age for outings, mostly older women who also feel excluded from the city. They'll state that it is time for them to "guard the home" (*tgless fi darha*) and to spend their time praying to prepare for their death, and they will limit their use of the street to purely utilitarian occasions.

"In Europe, they don't care about others, you'll find an old 70-year old woman wearing make-up and dressing up; here they're all ill. Over there, they enjoy life, they go out for walks, here it's considered shameful for an old woman to go out and spend an evening out, you're told a woman must stay home, on the Moghreb (fourth) prayer a woman has to be at home."

Keltoum (36 years old, married, civil servant, higher education, collective housing).

Older women's outings tend to be visits to friends and relatives, to saints' sanctuaries, to their neighbourhood's mosque and hammam, which function as places of female sociability. They see the street merely as a way of getting from one point to another, especially as there are no places in the city for older women to meet. However, they are subject to lighter social control, since they are seen as having passed their prime and unlikely to seduce anyone. They are respected in their role as mothers, unlike younger women who are seen as potentially dangerous, since they are still attractive.

In marriage, heavy responsibilities weigh on women's shoulders and reduce their mobility. The married women interviewed reported they had to inform their husbands of the places they went, and each outing had to be justified. The common phrase *mrat er-râjel* ("the woman of a man", i.e., a married woman) is quite significant of the way their status is understood. Most housewives report they were freer to come and go before marriage, despite the control of their family. While some saw marriage as a means to escape family pressure, it is also seen as a limit to women's freedom of movement. Some unmarried young women interviewed stated they did not wish to get married, and preferred to remain celibate rather than have to account for their actions and justify themselves every time they went out.

"Before going out, you have to ask for the guy's [husband's] permission and inform him, I couldn't just walk out the door. I have to tell him first where I'm going and stick to it. I couldn't, say, think "how about going to this other place". Say for instance I didn't find the people I was going to see at home, I can't go anywhere else, I couldn't, I'd have to go straight home, not because I'm afraid of him, but because I gave my word and I wouldn't want him to worry."

Wahiba (25 years old, married, housewife, baccalaureat, collective housing).

Married women have to behave in exemplary ways to preserve their husband's and their own honour.

"A married woman has responsibilities, she doesn't have time to walk about. A married woman is responsible for her house and many things, she can't go out, it's not done. There's a difference between a man and a woman, the man can go out any time he wants, not a woman. She can't just come in and go out without reason or permission, she'll earn a bad reputation, you know Moroccans, they have little else to do."

Habiba (23 years old, married, housewife, secondary education, slum resident).

This also applies to widows, seen as vulnerable since they are "women without men", or divorced women, who are subject to reinforced control, since they are not virgins. For these women, outings have different rationales. Since they no longer depend on men, their domestic workload is lighter, but they have to take on responsibilities that were formerly not theirs, such as dealing with the

authorities, the bank, and so forth. While being husband-free means some constraints no longer apply, social control, and control from the family, remain strong. These women also tend to remain within the private sphere because they are not used to going out, are unfamiliar with the city, or want to maintain some continuity with their former life, as if carrying on in the same way, on the same rhythms, provided comfort in a disrupted life (Flahaut, 2001). They engage little with public space and the private remains their major reference. Widows are wary of public space, to avoid gossip, but also to show respect for their deceased husband's memory. Some report feeling vulnerable and exposed in the street, and state that a woman needs "the shadow of a man". All the women interviewed professed a dislike for going out alone, and preferred company for all outings.

"Since my husband died, I've found it hard to go out, when he was alive, I would go out to do what I wanted, now, I feel as though something was missing, I imagine maybe one of his pals will say: "she's such-and-such's wife, she's out on the town". You can never tell what people will say, that's why I can't go out. I don't want people to have a bad opinion of me, and I don't want my husband's reputation to suffer, even dead, I want to preserve his reputation... After his death, I started hating the street, I don't enjoy it anymore and I can't go out alone, unless one of my daughters comes with me, I feel as if I've lost half of myself."

Umm Hani (55 years old, stays at home, widow, illiterate, collective housing).

Motherhood also curtails women's access to public space. Women state that they go out less, or no longer, once they have children, due to their increased responsibilities, because the burden of education is considered theirs.

"After having kids, you don't go out any more, and even if you do go out you can't see anything because they're all over the place and you have to watch them. I used to go the Avenue when I was free (unmarried), once you're married and have kids, you don't go out any more, each time you want to go somewhere, you feel your wings are heavy. Nowadays when I go out, it's just to see my parents or his, that's it."

Nour (29 years old, married, housewife, secondary education, lives in slum).

On the other hand, to have a child, in particular for housewives, also functions as a sort of "passport" to public space. Men will show greater respect for a woman accompanying children and are unlikely to harass her (which is why young women sometimes go out with younger brothers). Children build up their self-confidence and sense of legitimacy.

"Before I had my kids, I couldn't go anywhere without asking and if he refused, I wouldn't go. I couldn't go out alone, because, in his view, men would approach me if I was on my own, whereas, if you're with kids, you're respected for your kids. Before my daughter was born, I couldn't go out often, even to visit my family that lives nearby, now it's OK, I have the appropriate ID (laughs)."

Safia (30 years old, married, housewife, secondary education, lives in a house, Yaqoub el Mansour)

Perceptions of danger

Women's presence in the city at night is barely tolerated socially. Most women interviewed in the poorest areas agreed that men and women each have their place, and that a woman's place, at night, is at home. They reported that a woman out of doors at night would be considered to be advertizing her sexual availability, which was confirmed by interviews with men: women are not entitled to individual night time pursuits, except within the family. Most women therefore avoid staying out late, for reasons of security, and to preserve their honour and that of their family. The idea that women are "vulnerable" is firmly entrenched in many women's minds and is invoked to account for their preference for staying indoors. Fear of gossip is also a factor in their limited use of public space, especially in the more deprived areas where social control is strong.

"I don't go out at night because I'm afraid someone will stab me in the back, that's why I don't, even in another neighbourhood I wouldn't, my husband doesn't want me out at night. Proper women don't go out at night, there's a saying which goes "when the doors of the mosque close,

those of the prison open". 7.30 or 8 o'clock is the limit. You go home, lock yourself up and you're safe, otherwise girls can have lots of trouble."

Hadya (45 years old, married, housewife, illiterate, lives at in-laws' house).

"I'm home by 7.30, I can't come back after my brother, it's just not done, I'm a girl, it's a question of tradition. Noone will say a word about him, but a girl, they'll say "she got back at whatever time, God knows where she was!". At night you're always guilty."

Rabha (32 years old, unmarried, out of work, university graduate, lives in parents' flat).

Fear of violence inhibits women's relation to public space. Some complain they cannot walk in the street without being harassed, and they talk of forms of aggression which even affect women accompanied by men.

Aggression may be purely psychological and verbal, as is the case with insults, many of which involve references to animals (donkey, mule or cow, in reference to women's limited intellect, or monkey, gorilla, in reference to their ugliness, hen, with sexual overtones). Various other insults are sexual in nature, as the word *kahba* (bitch, whore) or brutal obscene phrases such as *nehwik* (I fuck you) or *nefr'a* or *netqeb din emmuk* (I burst, pierce, your mother's religion, a reference to rape). Women are exposed to verbal violence and unpleasant, rough comments on their body or dress. Women also complained of being followed around in public, being targeted by exhibitionists, or touched up. They talked of fears of being beaten up, stabbed and robbed or attacked sexually. There are also forms of institutional harrassment (for example identity document examinations or being disciplined for "misbehaving").

"I go out alone, but I can't go far. I don't mind going out alone, it's normal, but I don't like when someone follows me and addresses me because he thinks, being alone, I'm trying to hook up with someone. They have this notion, I hate the guys who do that: hey, let's keep each other company. Sometimes, I just want to be out on my own, breathe fresh air, they annoy me, there's no way of letting off steam, you feel you might explode."

Ikram (24 years old, unmarried, employed, university education, lives in parents' flat).

Women express a fear of being harassed or insulted when they are with their father or husband, since consequences can be dire (fights that might end badly). Hence their perception of the city as a space of lewdness and deviance, anguish and insecurity, which further reinforces women's self-exclusion from public space. In this context, what "right to the city" or spatial justice is available to women who are so exposed to routine violence and aggressions?

For all of the women interviewed, public space boils down to places they go to, generally for a specific purpose. Housewives from deprived areas discuss other parts of the city on the basis of hearsay: what their friends, family, and what men tell them, because they have no personal knowledge of them. They have indirect, sometimes shadowy notions of the geography of the city, and barely any personal experience of it. The city of Rabat is unfamiliar to them, beyond their local neighbourhood and places they are used to visiting. This also holds true even of women in employment, who always go out with a specific purpose.

"I don't really go to the medina except in special circumstances, because my kids are small. I don't go to the Avenue or the Agdal. I just drive through them in my husband's truck sometimes. I have no relatives there that I might visit. In Rabat, I know only my place of residence, places I've driven through and places where I know people. If I don't know anyone, I don't go to places."

Saida (35 years old, married, housewife, illiterate, slum-dweller)

However, there are ways in which women can use urban space as a resource: first, they appropriate the local neighbourhood very strongly; and second, some of them manage, despite the constraints on their behaviour, to develop a familiarity with the city centre, younger women in particular.

2- Strategies to engage with the city

Investment in local and neighbourly relations as coping strategy

It is obvious from the survey that local public space is the most appropriated in the case of women living in deprived neighbourhoods. Housewives are particularly attached to local urban space. The place where they live appears as both familiar and secure, where they feel at ease, unlike the rest of the city, which they see as hostile since it is unknown.

It is only in their neighbourhood and immediate surroundings that women are comfortable going out alone. They feel a sense of intimacy with their neighbourhood, because they are known and respected there. The local shop, the public oven and the hammam are essential references in their environment. These markers are part of their daily lives and activities. They will systematically go to those nearest to their home, to satisfy daily needs, but also because they allow for forms of sociability: women meet on the doorsteps to chat and "take a breather". Local sociability is intense for female residents in these areas. The neighbourhood allows people of similar backgrounds to meet there, which facilitates contacts. Their values and preoccupations are often similar, which accounts for the strong attachment they profess for their neighbourhood, deprived though it may be.

Beyond neighbourly relations, women are also attached to a places which are meaningful for the community, the local market, *jûtiyya*, for food purchases; and *qaysariyya*, which is more than a mere market, since it also includes jewellers, clothing shops, and wide ranges of goods for women and domestic needs. These commercial spaces are an outing for women, who, while shopping, walk about, chat, and catch up. They are an entertainment in and of themselves, with a distinctive atmosphere. In addition to offering vegetables, meat, second-hand retailers, repairmen and informal sellers of all kinds, each calling out to buyers, the *qaysariyya* is a place of sociability as much as of retail. It is a form of leisure for housewives in working-class neighbourhoods who enjoy a stroll there in the late afternoons. They also congregate in small parks, in the afternoon, where the children can play while their mothers chat and look at passers-by on the street. Women in these areas are on the lookout for the smallest patch of greenery where they can relax, even on roundabouts and crossroads, since homes are usually cramped. Some of them occasionally visit public parks in other parts of the city, which contributes to making them repulsive for other categories of people, who dislike rubbing elbows with the working-classes (Gillot, 2002).

Women are also frequent visitors to cemeteries, to pay respects to the dead, and the saints' sanctuaries where a variety of forms of worship and rites take place (idol worship, fumigations, ritual strolls, propitiatory sacrifices, ritual washings and so forth). They carry out regular visits, *ziyarat*, to benefit from the saints' supposed blessings. They are believed to heal a range of ailments such as mental or nervous complaints, convulsions or *ryâh*, put an end to sterility, celibacy, marital problems, unemployment or a curse, or ensure scholarly success for a child (Philifert, 2002, 2004).

Magical beliefs are part of traditional Moroccan culture, even though they are frowned on by religious orthodoxy. Sanctuaries are places to meditate and pray for women, playing a role similar to that of mosques. Going out to ask for a saint's blessing and his *baraka*, to pray in his sanctuary, is also an opportunity for women to leave their domestic environment, especially for housewives. It is a place for women to meet and let off steam, discuss their frustrations, worries and rebellions. Using trance and rituals, they "heal and comfort their hearts", in the words of one interviewee. They also confide in each other, express themselves and get a hearing from other women. This, as Mernissi has shown, helps channel women's discontent and vent their vengeful feelings. The sense of feminine solidarity soothes, supports and comforts them (Amiti, 1982).

Neighbourhood solidarity is another important aspect in women's relation to their local area (Navez-Bouchanine, 1988). It accounts for their strong sense of being rooted in their neighbourhood, in spite of difficult living conditions, and provides them with some sense of stability. They share many things, including a certain connivance, and meet up to catch up on local news. *Houma* (the place of residence, neighbourhood) is described by the women to a sort of extended family, an intimate and secure place, hardly outside the private sphere. They feel at ease

there, as is shown by the fact they all go about in their "home dress" (in their dressing gown or in a long cotton dress they sleep in). A number of domestic chores are carried out in the sociable environment of the doorstep, *fumm* or *bab ed-dâr*. Women collectively take charge of the cleaning of the alleyways in slums and poor neighbourhoods, which also enables them to appropriate a common territory, by pushing back dirt. Alleyways are also appropriated in the context of celebrations, marriages in particular, with tents. The local area is so strongly appropriated by women that a passer-by might get the impression he is trespassing on the privacy of local residents..

"Even if it's 9 at night and I need something from the shop, I'll go out, it's just here, which is handy, I go out in my home dress, no need to put on the *djellaba*, the shopkeeper knows us well."

Hiba (60 years old, widow, illiterate, rented room).

It must however be emphasized that even in this local *houma* space, and in neighbouring spaces generally, the code of honour still prescribes norms of behaviour (to keep one's eyes down and not look at a woman or girl of the neighbourhood, while women must be both modest and respectful in front of a male neighbour). The "women's spot" and the times at which they assemble there are known, as are men's meeting times: field observation showed occupation of public space to be highly codified.

The survey showed that the strongest neighbourhood relations are to be found in the most deprived areas. In these areas, solidarity and sociability are crucial, especially for women, who, beyond a sense of shared difficulties, are able to help each other out. This shows at times of celebration as well as in daily life: mutual visits, assistance for ceremonies or in difficult times (an illness or death for instance), loans of objects or money, help with cooking or accommodation when guests are expected, gifts of food, childcare, outings and moral support.

When asked about other areas of the city, most women will praise residential areas, which embody their urban ideal and offer better conditions, but many also criticize a perceived lack of social warmth and the individualism of their residents. They also mention their lack of vitality, and contrast them with neighbourhoods such as Yaqoub el Mansour, in which they enjoy the "no-frills" aspect, *sha^h b^h*: this term has no negative connotation in their mouths, it refers to a degree of socio-economic cohesion, and the relative affordability of the area. Interviewees praise the intensiveness of social relations, the residents' unpretentiousness and mutual assistance, though they do not gloss over the inconveniences of life in such a neighbourhood (such as overcrowding, incivility and insecurity).

visits to the city centre

Beyond local errands, women's outings in the city, in particular for residents of deprived neighbourhoods, are limited to occasional visits to the city centre, in so-called traditional places of the medina or *swiqa*¹. The medina is the place best known to all female residents of the city, and it is fundamental to their understanding of centrality. Several traditional-type places are to be found there (for example mosques, Coranic schools and Moorish baths). In addition to numerous shops and services (purchases of fruit and vegetables, meat, fish, cakes, fabric, clothes, jewels, spices, handicrafts, household appliances, furniture, etc), there are informal vendors peddling all sorts of affordable goods. Women enjoy going there for window-shopping, for jewellery in particular, and to try on clothes, even if they are unlikely to buy anything. For young women, shops selling music recordings are also an attraction. The medina is a focal point of female sociability. , which women visit with friends or relatives, they appreciate the atmosphere and the diverse commercial offerings. Women from the poorest neighbourhoods, however, only go occasionally, for a specific purchase, in

¹ From the verb *tasawaqa* which means to shop. It's the origin of the word *souk* (market), the masculine form of *swiqa*.

the company of their husband or a relative: the distance is dissuasive, and they may lack the means to take the bus, especially if they have children with them. They make do with their local market.

These women, in particular the housewives and older women, never go to the posh area of the Agdal or the "modern" centre, *shâri'* (l'Avenue)² which, with the medina, form the heart of the city³. It is not easily accessible to them, and they only go there for a specific reason, for some public service or medical appointment. When they say centre, they usually refer to the traditional city, the medina, which is a working-class area and suits them better than the modern city, which they find too posh. This is also where women tend to be dressed in a "modern", European style.

Different dress codes characterize the different types of space inhabited by women. In their local neighbourhood, women tend to wear traditional clothing. even the younger women who dress more conservatively than they do when they go to the centre (where they would choose to go dressed in a "modern" way). They frequently change styles of dressing, from the traditional *djellaba*⁴ to modern forms of dress, according to circumstances: the latter is used to go to work and for outings to the modern centre, the former is used locally, as well as on Fridays and during Ramadan, since it is considered suitably modest (it hides the whole body). It is also indicated in specific circumstances such as mourning, or places such as cemeteries, mosques or the houses of marabouts.

This ability to adapt dress to various places and norms is significant of a differential ability, on the part of women, to extend their range beyond the merely local: in this respect, housewives fare worse than educated women with a job, or younger women. Young people from poor backgrounds use a number of strategies to gain a "right to the city". Social performance and bodily care (borrowed clothes, hairstyling) enable them to escape, even if it is just for a moment, from their daily lives. Visits to the centre offer an outlet for their frustrations with their living conditions, with the lighting, shop-windows and hustle and bustle offering a welcome change. Young women are attracted to symbols of power and modernity and feel they can have their share of them, even if only briefly, and overcome their poverty and sense of exclusion.

Visits to the city-centre are a form of leisure for many women who live in deprived neighbourhoods, and one they claim despite economic constraints. They report walking there frequently⁵, or travelling there by bus, depending on how much time and money they have, the reason for the visit, whether they have company or not (sometimes one means of transportation will be used for the way there, and another for returning). Public transportation plays a crucial part in accessibility, in particular for women of the remotest parts of the city, who are able to travel more widely and extend their spatial scope. Buses function as factors of integration in urban society, by enabling residents of the poorest and remotest parts of the city to access the rest of the city.

"Yaqoub el Mansour isn't far from the centre. To go out with friends, I often travel by bus, but sometimes we go on foot, it's cheaper and we chat along the way, it doesn't feel that long. We often travel by bus on the way back. What I like is to go with my friends to the centre or to the Agdal, it depends. You see people, girls, the things they wear, you try to be like them, it's like

² The "modern" centre comprises commercial, banking, cultural, leisure and service activities (shops, cinemas, cafés, restaurants, snack-bars, dance halls, bookshops, doctors, lawyers, beauty parlours, medical laboratories, clinics, etc). Traffic, both pedestrian and automobile, is intense, especially at peak hours, and shops remain open late. It functions as a showcase of modern consumption, and a place to stroll, which has become a local tradition.

³ This modern centre also means there is always a shopping area open, since the medina closes on Fridays, but remains open on Sundays when the other centre closes.

⁴ A long, large dress, which covers the legs down to the ankle and the arms, with a hood (*qubb*) which covers hair and forehead.

⁵ M. Idrissi-Janati (2001) has shown that walking allows for a good knowledge of the spaces one goes through. Elements of landscape are memorized, and space experienced territorially. Walking therefore allows for a better familiarity with the city than other means of transportation.

coming alive again, it's a change from the neighbourhood, you meet guys, and so on. We all save to be able to go in a café to have fun."

Zahra (32 years old, unmarried, employed, secondary education, lives in affordable housing with parents, Yaqoub el Mansour).

There are therefore deliberate strategies on the part of young people, both girls and boys, from deprived neighbourhoods, to claim a place in the modern city-centre. Their full participation in city life is at stake, even if they have to make do with places that do not charge for access (public gardens, central square, etc). The centre and its shops, its fountains, gardens and cafés, beyond providing free entertainment, symbolizes a degree of participation in city life, and therefore citizenship. One can doubt the extent to which it actually promotes meetings and exchanges between people of different backgrounds. As emphasized by Navez-Bouchanine, social diversity places people in side-by-side anonymity, and interaction between them seldom occurs (Navez-Bouchanine, 1996). In addition, as Jolé has pointed out, the modern centre, as "valued place" is actually shifting, with many luxury outlets, upmarket pâtisseries, bookshops, and so forth, relocating to the Agdal. Wealth is shifting further west, where a new, socially selective urbanity is being constructed, toward Agdal, Hayy Riyad, Souissi (Jolé, 1999-2000). "Modern" centrality is being shifted according to the preferences of the wealthier classes, to distance itself from a centre where working-class youth is present. This distaste for contact with residents of deprived suburbs raises the issue of the right to the city of the poor, and that of urban segregation. This is illustrated by shopping centres which have sprung up around the city: though public, they restrict access, since housewives from the poorer areas do not go there, and do not even consider them as a possible destination.

Conclusion :

For housewives in deprived neighbourhoods, urban practices and engagement with their environment stops at their local area, which they seldom leave, and always in the company of their husband or a relative. There is little variety to the places they are likely to go, and their spatial knowledge is restricted. They identify with their own neighbourhood and imagine the rest of the city through it. They only occasionally visit the city-centre and feel out of place there, though there are many other places that answer their needs in terms of shopping and entertainment. With a patchy knowledge of the urban fabric, they divide the city between known and unknown areas, the latter having a fantasmatic remoteness and inaccessibility. However, younger women in these neighbourhoods seem to escape this confinement to the local and prove adept at defying it, to gain a right to the city.

While housewives with little education seem constrained by a traditional value system, and helpless when it comes to moving about independently, other women with more education and a job have a much better mastery of their urban environment. In this and other ways, women prove to be a very diverse group, with very diverse practices in the city, with different ways of life coexisting in the same city, and a strong sense of the dualism between tradition and modernity that seems to encompass many aspects of Moroccan society.

About the author : Safaa MONQID, CEDEJ, CNRS

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