

SEARCHING
FOR A
DIFFERENT
FUTURE

Shana Cohen

THE RISE OF A GLOBAL MIDDLE CLASS IN MOROCCO



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Contents

	Preface	vii
	Acknowledgments	xi
	Note on Translations and Transcriptions	xiii
1	Global Market Capitalism and Social Change	1
2	National Development and the Formation of the Modern Middle Class	35
3	New Social Groups for a New Era	67
4	A Generation of <i>Fuyards</i>	106
	Conclusion: Economic Insecurity and Social Formation	136
	Notes	145
	References	163
	Index	169

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 *Yawmiyyat il-huzn 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.

Acknowledgments

I once told a friend that I felt isolated defending my work. She responded, “At some point, you have to believe in your ideas,” meaning that I had to continue if I wanted those ideas to have life. I have remembered those words for years. I am grateful for her advice and confidence, as well as that of other friends and colleagues, during the period from dissertation research to book publication.

The research for the dissertation was funded by the Social Science Research Council, American Institute of Maghrib Studies, and the Fulbright IIE Fellowship. I received financial support during the writing period from the Department of Sociology at the University of California, Berkeley, as well as the Institute of International Studies. While in Morocco, I developed ideas for the thesis through many, many conversations with Aziz, Fatimah, Sofia, Mouna, Saïd, Omari, Chaoui, Katya, Aïcha, and my English-language students. I also relied on the counsel and intellectual guidance of Khalid Jamaï, Larbi Jaïdi, Nourredine El Oufi, Abdelhafid Boutaleb, Ahmed ben Chemsî, Amina Yazimi, Susan Ossman, Stefania Pandolfo, and Driss Benzekri. Susan helped as a friend and as a colleague, especially through her persuasion to reconsider a few conceptual ideas.

Anyone who has conducted research in a foreign country, particularly in a foreign language(s), knows how important it is to be able to turn to other researchers, even, or especially, regarding the simplest experiences. I am glad that I was in Morocco at the same time as David Zaffran, Sarah Levin,

Raffaele Cattedra, Katherine Hoffman, Bryan Daves, Luz Martin del Campo, Diana Davis, Jim Housefield, and Jamila Bergach.

To Marti, Rafi, and most of all Amina B. and Driss, I owe much more than gratitude.

In the United States, during the arduous and rewarding period of writing and revising, Nancy, Jane S., Jane T., Iona, Steve, Susan L., Jackie, Lynne, Will, Michelle, Eddy, Matt, Sarah, Emily, Gil A., and Barb provided generous encouragement. Todd Gitlin expressed appropriate doubt about some of my conceptual innovations but enthusiasm and conviction about the subject and its importance. Intellectually, I never would have taken the risks I did, struggled to articulate blurred ideas or refine immature theoretical instincts, had Peter Evans not been my advisor. His opinions and his advice contributed fundamentally to the theoretical framework presented here. Natasha Kraus, Jonathan Cutler, and Charles Lemert offered camaraderie and professional support during the process of revising for publication. Natasha, Jonathan, and Charles in particular played a critical role in maintaining the life of those ideas. Tracie and Annie pushed me to continue while handling phone calls and seeking job placements at Jubilee Jobs. Diana Bauer and Will Tiao just pushed me to continue, believing wholeheartedly in the necessity of the effort.

During the last stage of revision, Ivy Kennelly, Fran Buntman, Tom Medvetz, Matt Wray, and two anonymous reviewers for *Comparative Studies in Society and History* wrote insightful and very useful critiques of either specific chapters, related talks, or an article I published that was derived from the dissertation. Muhammed Kassab helped in translating both the quote from Nezar Qabbani at the beginning of the preface and the quote from Mahmud Darwish at the beginning of chapter 1. Our discussions concerning contemporary Arabic literature and Arab thought proved invaluable in refining and improving the theoretical framework of the book. My editor at Duke University Press, Raphael Allen, whose smile and teasing nature always proved reassuring, demonstrated a genuine integrity in his job. As I came to the end, relieved, happy, and surprised at hitherto unknown qualities of endurance and resistance, I met Rupert. He and my family have helped me to appreciate what this process can bring.

Translations and Transcriptions

The interviews cited in this book were conducted in French, the Moroccan dialect of Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, Spanish, and English. I have translated the interviews, occasionally retaining expressions in French that seem inadequate in English. I have also translated texts from French and Arabic, with the exception of those of Abdellah Laroui, that do not have an English translation. For transcriptions in Arabic, I have used ‘ to represent the ‘ayn except when citing other texts that use ‘a or â. Admittedly, my focus in the research was not on language per se and I thus must assume any and all responsibility for inadequacies in translation and less than perfection in transcription.

I

*Global Market Capitalism
and Social Change*

Economic insecurity is a broader and subtler question than it seems at first sight. — “Learning to Cope,” *The Economist*, April 6, 1996

Bend, *ya habibi*, until the storm passes.

In the force of the bow my back became a bow. When do you release your arrow? . . .

When the storm dispersed both of them, the present was screaming to the past: you are the reason.

The past was changing its crime into law. Yet the future alone was a neutral witness.

When the storm quieted, the arc was completed. It changed into a circle where you could not tell the beginning from the end.

— Mahmud Darwish, “The Bow and the Circle,” in *Yowmiyyat al-huzn al-di*, 1988

A hotel clerk in Morocco once explained how his friends would fantasize about the lives of relatives or friends working in Europe in order to temper anxiety about the present and find hope in the future:

When I was a kid of 14 or 15, Moroccans would come from Belgium with soap and chocolates. They were heroes. We never imagined that they would suffer during the winter because they came in the summer. We never imagined that they worked hard, that it was cold in Belgium during the winter. They were heroes. My friends that have gone to Saudi Arabia, they go just to get on a plane, to breathe, to have space. They say we want space. But most of them that have gone to Saudi

2 Searching for a Different Future

Arabia come back after four months. The pay was weak, they were near to the border with Yemen and they said that there were no cafés, no women, no movies. We couldn't breathe, they said. Driss stayed a year and a half. Sometimes when he is weak, he thinks about going back.

The problem in Morocco is a crisis of identity. People are afraid. Once they get a job, they want to take revenge. They go out and buy expensive clothes, shoes, a car. They are not cool. I say take it easy, calm down. They are afraid of being the last person on a full bus and being cheated. That is why they go to a public space like a park and they destroy it. They see it as being private, that when they return, it won't be there. They do this in buses. That they will come back and they won't have it.

A teacher gave her own impression of migration, real or desired, from Morocco:

I know people in a very good situation here, at least to me, who want to leave. They say that there is nothing to do in Morocco. But there are a thousand things to do. I have seven friends who are going to leave for Canada. One is a professor at the university. He wants to leave because he says that he cannot do research here. They have already left for Montreal to look for work. They are afraid that their children won't adapt, but the children don't want to come back. . . . There is a discrepancy in Morocco between what people see as their life and what is their life.

In the discussion that follows on the transformation of the middle class in Morocco during market reform, I attempt to analyze the restlessness and existential anxiety conveyed in these remarks. More broadly, I try to understand how younger generations in Morocco conceive of the present and future, how they interpret the material, social, and political conditions of their existence and their options to change them.

I situate individual interpretation of life circumstances within the study of class formation. Inherently, I am also suggesting that class analysis represents a viable and productive method of theorizing the social dimension of our contemporary era of globalization. In this class analysis, global market integration has led both to the decline of an older modern middle class fundamental to the legitimacy and historic evolution of the nation-state and to the rise of a younger global middle class critical in its alienation, awkwardness, and dislocation to the evolution of globalization.

In the theoretical approach outlined below, I distinguish conceptually between globalization as a period in process, and thus without precise definition, and global market integration. Global market integration implies the construction of a universal economic structure through the implementation of uniform reform policies, the dominance of neoliberal ideology, and the global production of consumer culture. Reform policies include liberalization of the financial sector, enforcement of efficiency and transparency in state management and corporate governance, establishment of an independent judicial system, deregulation of the labor market, and investment in general human capital through combating negative social trends like poverty and illiteracy. These policies contribute to the development of a liberal market economy by encouraging private sector growth while reversing historic political and social priorities in government spending and regulation. Ideally, market reform should attract greater foreign and domestic investment, provoke more domestic competition and consumption, and promote sufficient overall economic expansion to diminish social problems related to inequity.

If reform does not yield enough positive economic impact to compensate for declining state intervention and population growth, then it may lead to an increase in unemployment, poverty, and economic and social insecurity. Reform policies can also directly and indirectly affect critical social institutions like education and public health and disrupt social trends ranging from age at marriage to the transfer of funds between generations, whether formally through social security or simply through continued financial dependence.

This book is not a critique of market integration in itself, because market liberalization has produced positive results. Proponents of privatization and deregulation policies can offer plenty of examples of how good reform is for the general population, both regarding quality of life and educational and work opportunity.¹ Statistically, improvements in basic living conditions can correspond with economic growth induced by reform. For instance, Bangladesh's annual rate of GDP growth between 1990 and 2001 averaged 4.9 percent. From the mid-1980s to mid-1990s, access to an improved water source more than doubled in percentage, from 40 to 84. Although a crude comparison, between 1990 and 2001 Romania averaged a GDP growth rate of -0.3 and witnessed a decline in access to improved water source from 71 to 62 percent (*World Development Report 2000–2001*, 2003).

My concern is also not with the debate over the scope and speed of

4 Searching for a Different Future

reform or the sum of negative versus positive effects. Comparing reform in China and Russia, Joseph Stiglitz (2002) praises how China's gradualist strategy of reform yielded average growth rates of 10 percent during the 1990s. For Stiglitz, the consequence of reform in China was "the largest reduction in poverty in history in such a short time span"² and in Russia, "the largest increase in poverty in history in such a short span of time (outside of war and famine)" (181–82). He criticizes IMF management of reform in Russia, where average annual growth in GDP declined at a rate of -3.7 during the 1990s and poverty exploded, leading the World Bank to estimate that every percentage point drop in GDP places 700,000 more people in poverty (*World Development Indicators* 1995, 6).

Instead of analyzing issues like poverty as part of a discussion internal to the process of market liberalization, I am interested in how together the positive and negative consequences of global market integration provoke social change. Trends in unemployment, economic insecurity, and the consumption of luxury goods become not just the effects of market reform policies, but also factors in the organization of social structure and the formation of self-identity.

For instance, Driss, an unemployed doctorate I met through researching the social movement of unemployed university graduates, declared, "If there is an opportunity to leave, I am going. I regret that I left [France]. I could care less about being Moroccan. I do not have work. I do not play a part. I am not a citizen." Driss assumed a positive connection between job and citizenship based on the principles of modernization and modernity that informed the nation-building period of the 1950s–1970s. Likewise, his conscious negative equation of unemployment and noncitizenship reflected the decoupling of national institutions of social mobility and economic security from modern ideological concepts.

Liberal market democracy, the political model disseminated in global market integration, theoretically institutionalizes rights to opportunity, representation, and happiness. However, the trajectory of liberalization lacks clear articulation of these ideals. We might in fact question in the political economy of development if the liberal conception of equality has become like Calvinism in the twentieth century, surviving just as the set of ideas that once informed the evolution of political and economic institutions.

In the Arab World, market reform has corresponded with the popularity of conservative Islamic thinkers like Yusuf Qardawi and Abdessalaam Yassine, both of whom favor religious-political control to create societies alter-

native and opposed to those in the West.³ Liberal Islamic thinkers like Sadiq Nahum, who argues that conceptual and practical bases exist in Islam for popular government, and Mohammed Arkoun, Hassan Hanafi, and Nasr Hamd Abu Zeid, who encourage rigorous scholarship on Islam, have tried to fight conservative interpretations, but they have remained politically marginal. Liberal, secular thinkers like Farag Foda, who fought for a pluralistic, secular regime in Egypt before he was assassinated in 1992, have perhaps faced even worse opposition. In response to ideological battles over religion, socioeconomic problems like unemployment, and foreign pressure to reform politically and economically, states in the Arab World have pitted internal against external issues, using one at the expense of the other. Lost in ideological conflict and state action is a clear, overarching strategy for rejuvenating society.⁴ Rather, elites, local and global, compete for the allegiance or the identification of a distant social objective of the "masses."

In my analysis of the transformation of the middle class in Morocco, I delineate a more detailed and complex portrait of social organization and social difference during market reform. I argue that classes emerge during the process of legitimizing institutions and ideologies of economic, political, and social change, whether modernization or market reform. These ideologies and institutions reflect distinctive philosophical and material connections between economy and polity and likewise produce social structures and a subjective perception in the world that support the force of one relative to the other.

For example, during the nation-building period, nationalism and modern institutions inherently promoted internal social cohesion and equalization, if only in name, among citizens. The developing power of the nation-state as an idea and as a political economic system engendered the rise of a modern middle class that saw itself in terms of its function within the nation, the domestic economy, and the scope of state authority. Today, the social power of public institutions, the state, and nationalism have shifted to the firm, globalization, and global market capitalism, which together impose an atomistic, nonlocated vision of social order. In the legitimization process of global market capitalism, the synthesis between structure and consciousness within the enclosed nation-state has given way to sociostructural organization dependent on local economic growth and real opportunity and self-consciousness within the expansive, amorphous context of the globe.

In arguing that the alienation of young, urban, educated Moroccans