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SMHES TWO SHORES YOUTH SCHEME

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SESSIONS MÉDITERRANÉENNES DES HAUTES ÉTUDES STRATÉGIQUES
CYCLE JEUNES DES DEUX RIVES

SMHES TWO SHORES YOUTH SCHEME

COMMITTEE WORK 1

'MOROCCO ON THE WORLD STAGE: SHAPING CONTEMPORARY PERCEPTIONS OF ISLAM'

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Morocco on the world stage: shaping contemporary perceptions of islam

Abstract:

This study addresses the question: "In what ways has Morocco's engagement with the world shaped contemporary perceptions of Islam?". Through historical analysis, cultural insights, and contemporary case studies, this research demonstrates Morocco's strategic use of diplomacy, cultural exchange, and religious moderation to actively influence global perceptions of Islam. The kingdom has positioned itself as a model of moderate Islam by promoting interfaith dialogue, educational exchanges, and religious initiatives. Morocco's proactive engagement has successfully challenged prevalent stereotypes and contributed to a nuanced, inclusive, and moderate representation of Islam globally. By highlighting Morocco's efforts as a mediator and advocate for religious tolerance and cooperation, this research underscores the country's significant role in transforming international perspectives on Islam in the modern era.

I - Educational Reforms: Balancing Tradition and Modernity in Morocco

Morocco exemplifies a successful balance between its Islamic heritage and modern educational reforms. Historically centered on Qur'anic schools (Kuttab/M'sid), traditional Moroccan education emphasized religious instruction, classical Arabic, moral values and gender separation, reflecting deep-rooted cultural norms.

During the French Protectorate (1912-1956), Western educational models were introduced, creating a dual system: traditional Islamic in rural areas and secular, Western-style in urban centers. After independence in 1956, Morocco unified and modernized education by making Arabic the primary language, incorporating secular and vocational subjects, and expanding infrastructure, thus fostering national identity and gender inclusion.

Today, Morocco's education system blends scientific, technical, and religious knowledge, alongside languages like French, English, and Spanish. Reforms such as the National Charter (1999-2015) and Vision 2030 have notably advanced gender equality and increased women' access to education. The country's collaboration with international partners—like UNESCO, EU, and USAID—further enhances educational quality and cultural exchange.

Through institutions like the Mohammed VI Institute for Imam Training, Morocco promotes a tolerant, moderate Islam, countering extremism and reinforcing its role in intercultural dialogue. Education serves as a tool of soft diplomacy, enhancing

Morocco's global image as a stable, progressive Islamic nation. The strategic fusion of tradition and modernity fosters unity, social cohesion, and economic development. By equipping youth with modern skills and a rooted identity, Morocco strengthens its geopolitical influence and sets a model for educational transformation in the Islamic world.

II - King Mohammed VI: leadership as Commander of the Faithful

King Mohammed VI of Morocco has played a key role in modernizing Islam while preserving the country's religious and cultural identity. As both a political leader and the "Commander of the Faithful," he has the authority to lead Morocco through significant reforms that remain grounded in its Islamic heritage. One of his most effective strategies has been to adapt religion to modern society, particularly for young people, in a way that it doesn't feel outdated, rigid, or disconnected from everyday life. This is in contrast to some Western countries, where younger generations often drift entirely away from religion.

The King has promoted a moderate, open version of Islam that speaks to contemporary values while maintaining the spiritual depth and tradition of Moroccan Islam. He's made major reforms in religious institutions, such as restructuring the Higher Council of Ulema and expanding local religious councils across the country. He has also supported the training of both male and female religious guides,"murshid" and "murshidat", so Islamic teachings can be shared in a way that is relatable and inclusive.

A strong supporter of Morocco's distinct religious identity, King Mohammed VI has emphasized the Maliki school of thought, known for its tolerance and flexibility. This has helped Morocco present a unified religious stance against extremist ideologies while keeping a meaningful connection to spirituality and culture. His efforts extend beyond doctrine, he has restored historic mosques, invested in religious schools, and promoted national religious celebrations as part of Morocco's living tradition.
The King has also been a driving force for social reforms grounded in Islamic principles. Through updates to the family code, he has advanced women's rights in marriage, divorce and inheritance. He has encouraged peaceful coexistence by restoring Jewish heritage sites and officially recognizing Judaism as part of Moroccan identity in the 2011 Constitution. On a broader scale, he's worked with African scholars and global leaders to promote interfaith dialogue and counter religious extremism.

Overall, King Mohammed VI has found a thoughtful and successful way to modernize Islam in Morocco. By making it relevant and alive in today's world, especially for the youth, he ensures that the religion continues to thrive, not as a burden or obligation, but as a shared cultural and spiritual foundation for Moroccan society.

III - Moroccan identity and culture: influencing global islamic narrative

"Our religion is a religion of moderation, openness, and dialogue. Our culture embodies this message, reflecting our commitment to coexistence, tolerance, and mutual respect."

Culture provides the context in which religious beliefs are expressed and practiced, influencing religious customs and creating distinctive local expressions of global faiths (Geertz 1973). For example, wedding ceremonies or funeral rites often blend religious doctrine with specific cultural practices. Religion thus offers moral frameworks, while culture materializes these frameworks in daily life, art, and social norms. Religious narratives inspire renowned artworks such as Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel or Islamic calligraphy. Religious laws shape social etiquettes like the hijab or kosher dietary rules, while festivals such as Christmas and Diwali transform into major cultural events (Eliade 1987).

Moroccan culture vividly illustrates Islam's integration into everyday life. The monarchy's predominantly adheres to Sunni Islam through the Maliki school of jurisprudence, Ash'ari theology, and Junaydi Sufism, with the King recognized as Amir al-Mu'minin (Commander of the Faithful) (Cornell 1998). This religious identity visibly permeates Moroccan society:

Architecture and Visual Arts: Moroccan architecture incorporates Islamic aesthetics along with Andalusian and Amazigh influences. Iconic examples include the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca and Marrakech's Koutoubia Mosque, showcasing intricate geometric patterns, horseshoe arches, and Arabic calligraphy. Courtyard fountains symbolize paradise, reflecting spiritual ideals through visual beauty (Blair and Bloom 1994).

Music and Spiritual Festivals: Gnawa music, rooted in sub-Saharan African traditions and Sufism, employs rhythmic ceremonies for spiritual healing. The Gnaoua World Music Festival in Essaouira highlights this spiritual and cultural fusion globally. Similarly, the Fes Festival of World Sacred Music fosters interfaith dialogue among Muslim, Jewish, and Christian participants, emphasizing Morocco's spiritual depth and tolerance (Kapchan 2007).

Hospitality and coexistence: Moroccan hospitality aligns closely with Islamic teachings on generosity. The state actively preserves Jewish heritage sites such as synagogues, historic Mellahs, and the Museum of Moroccan Judaism in Casablanca. These efforts underscore Morocco's long-standing commitment to interreligious tolerance, reinforced by the King's protective role toward religious minorities (Gottreich 2020). Through strategic cultural diplomacy–highlighting artistic heritage, spiritual music, and traditions of hospitality–Morocco projects an image of Islam as moderate, tolerant, culturally sophisticated, and capable of positive interfaith interactions. This culturally-grounded narrative challenges negative stereotypes,

offering a nuanced portrayal of Islam in contemporary global discourse (Wainscott 2020).

IV - Tourism and religion: harmonizing tradition and modernity in Morocco

In 2024, Morocco welcomed 17.4 million tourists, exceeding its national target. The majority came from France (approximately 4.5 million), Spain (around 2.4 million), and Italy (about 921,000), reflecting the country's broad international appeal. This growing tourism sector plays a vital role in connecting Morocco's rich religious heritage with modern tourism development.

Morocco successfully blends modernity with tradition, particularly by using modern infrastructure and hospitality to showcase its Islamic landmarks. These religious sites, such as the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca, the Koutoubia Mosque in Marrakech, and Al-Qarawiyyin University in Fez, provide tourists with a unique cultural and spiritual experience. The country's Islamic architecture and design continue to attract millions seeking both historical and religious insight. A key example is the Zawiya Tijaniya in Fez, a global spiritual center that draws disciples and visitors from sub-Saharan Africa, Europe, and Asia, highlighting Morocco's influence in the Muslim spiritual world.

Tourism also plays a significant role in reshaping global perceptions of Islam. When tourists visit Morocco's Islamic landmarks and interact with local communities, they often experience the warmth, generosity, and hospitality that are core to Islamic values. This fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of the religion, breaking down negative stereotypes. Through these interactions, visitors often return to their home countries with a more authentic and positive image of Islam, encouraging intercultural dialogue and mutual respect. As tourism continues to grow, it strengthens communication and understanding between cultures, especially in regions like North and West Africa, including Mauritania and Algeria.

V - Morocco as a caliphate-in-waiting: building a new pillar of islamic diplomacy

Picture this: you're in a courtyard in Bamako, Mali. The imam leading the prayer was trained in Rabat, not Riyadh or Tehran. His message? Rooted in local traditions, grounded, and peaceful. That's Morocco's quiet religious diplomacy at work. See, Morocco doesn't just export oranges or phosphate. It exports a vision of Islam—based on Maliki law, Ash'ari beliefs, and Sufi spirituality. It's structured but open-minded and Morocco calls it "spiritual security." It promotes coexistence and helps fight extremism. (Baylocq & Hlaoua, 2016) At the heart of this is King Mohammed VI, who holds the title "Commander of the Faithful." (Kingdom of Morocco, 2011). That gives him major credibility in Muslim communities, especially across West Africa. To

turn this model into action, Morocco created the Mohammed VI Foundation for African Ulema. Scholars and imams from over 30 African countries gather in Fez, not just for theology, but for real issues—how to counter radicalization, or how Islam can address climate and youth challenges. They also train African imams in Rabat. When they return to places like Mali or Côte d'Ivoire, they bring back a Moroccan approach: calm, practical and in tune with local cultures. (Tadlaoui, 2015) These aren't just religious leaders—they're Morocco's soft power ambassadors. And Morocco doesn't stop there. It links religion with business and diplomacy. Once religious trust is built, it's easier to open banks, invest in agriculture, and deepen political ties, e.g. th Attijariwafa Bank expansion across West Africa, or OCP boosting regional food security.

But Morocco's not alone. Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey are all in the mix.
Saudi Arabia has been pushing Wahhabism for decades—funding mosques, schools, and clerics across the continent. But its strict style often clashes with the more relaxed, Sufi-influenced Islam of Africa. That's where Morocco steps in, offering something more compatible. (Tadlaoui, 2015) Iran promotes Shi'ism through scholarships and cultural centers, especially in Nigeria. But it's more than religion—it's geopolitics. In 2018, Morocco cut ties with Iran, accusing it of backing the Polisario Front via Hezbollah. For Rabat, this was a national security threat. Then there is Turkey. Under Erdogan, Turkey has been using a neo-Ottoman soft power strategy, promoting Sunni Islam through Diyanet, fund mosques, schools, and give out aid across East and West Africa. Their approach—mixing religion, development, and politics—is very similar to Morocco's. And that makes them a serious competitor, especially in places like Sudan and Somalia. (Ayhan Kaya & Amina Drhimeur, 2023).
To conclude, Morocco's not just sharing a version of Islam—it's shaping alliances, building trust, and gaining influence through faith. But in a region crowded with rivals, it has got to stay sharp. This is not just about religion, but it is about identity, strategy, and Africa's future.

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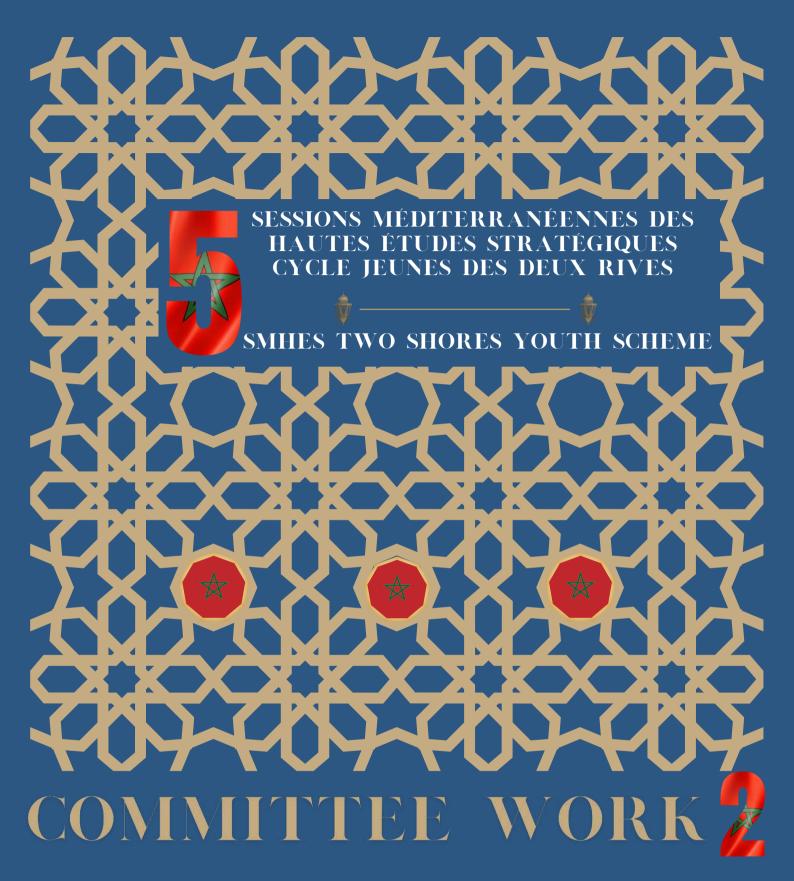Kingdom of Morocco. (2011). Constitution of the Kingdom of Morocco.

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SMHES TWO SHORES YOUTH SCHEME

COMMITTEE WORK 2

'HOW DOES MOROCCO COMBINE MODERN VALUES AND TRADITIONS IN THE PUBLIC SPACE?'

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How does Morocco combine modern values and traditions in the public space?

Morocco presents a compelling example of how a nation can balance modern values and traditional heritage in the public sphere. Cultural initiatives are not only tools for international engagement but also mechanisms for internal cohesion, allowing countries like Morocco to project a modern image while simultaneously preserving and promoting their rich cultural legacy . In the Moroccan context, this balance is evident across multiple facets of society. For instance, the evolving role of women and the changing structure of the family illustrate the dynamic interplay between progressive policies and traditional societal values. Similarly, Morocco's rich cultural landscape, exemplified by music and architecture, serves as a site where modernity and tradition converge. The country's education system, which strives to modernize while retaining cultural elements, and its foreign policy strategy, which leverages cultural diplomacy, further underscore this delicate negotiation between the old and the new. This paper explores how these various dimensions interact in Morocco's public space, shedding light on the ways in which the country navigates its identity amidst the pressures of globalization. Through these examples, we will examine how Morocco maintains a cultural heritage while actively engaging with global modernity, ultimately positioning itself as a bridge between East and West.

I - The example of the evolving role of women

The Moroccan feminist movement's origins can be traced back to 1946 when the Akhawat Al-Safaa (Sisters of Purity) issued a document with legal demands, including the abolition of polygamy and more visibility in the public sphere. This marked the first public voice of the Moroccan feminist movement in the public space. In the years following independence, feminist ideas were manifested through journalistic and academic writings, primarily sociological and literary. Women started to organize themselves into political parties and professional organizations.

Moroccan women in the public space often find themselves negotiating between traditional and modern identities. This Janus-faced duality is reflected in their participation in both public and private spaces. While women have increasingly entered the workforce and public domain, they often maintain their traditional roles at home.

The concept of public space in Morocco is deeply influenced by the tradition-modernity paradigm. Historically, politics and public affairs were considered men's domain, a view rooted in traditional cultural norms. The struggle for women's meaningful presence in the public space symbolizes the tension between traditional

views of gender roles and modern concepts of equal citizenship. The public domain remains a challenging environment for women's rights and their presence in the public sphere.

Despite women's higher voting rates compared to men, their representation in elected positions remained strikingly low, below 1%, until the introduction of a quota system in 2002. This disparity underscores the traditional barriers women face in gaining meaningful presence in public affairs.

The public space has been slow to accommodate women's participation. Even with the adoption of modern legal frameworks, including the 2011 constitution that explicitly decreed gender equality, a gap remains between legal reforms and social reality. Indeed, women remain underrepresented in decision making positions across various sectors, and issues like high illiteracy rates among them persist, particularly in rural areas. In this context, civil society organizations play a crucial role in advancing the agenda and the cause of gender equality in Morocco. We started noticing a shift, women activists changed their focus from working within political parties to forming civil society organizations. The aim is to bypass traditional political structures that were unresponsive to women's issues, and to create new spaces for themselves in the public sphere, outside of the traditional political frameworks.

II - The example of the evolving structure of the family

In Morocco, the family plays a vital role in shaping social and cultural life. The structure of Moroccan families reflects a unique combination of traditional values and modern influences. Traditionally, families are patriarchal and tightly knit, with deep respect for elders and a strong emphasis on community and shared responsibility. It is common for extended families to live together or nearby, and family gatherings are frequent, especially during religious and cultural celebrations.

Despite these long-standing customs, Moroccan society has experienced noticeable changes in recent years. Urbanization, education, and access to global media have introduced more modern lifestyles and ideas, especially among the younger generations. Today, many young couples prefer to live independently from their parents, and both men and women are increasingly sharing responsibilities at home. Women, in particular, are playing more active roles in both education and the workforce, which is gradually reshaping gender roles within the family.

Nevertheless, traditional values remain deeply rooted in Moroccan culture. Concepts such as respect for parents, loyalty to the family, and the importance of hospitality continue to be passed down through generations. Even in modern households,

religious teachings and cultural practices are preserved and respected.

This coexistence of the old and the new creates a dynamic family structure in Morocco—one that evolves with the times while still honoring its rich heritage.

III - The example of musical culture and the cultural diplomacy of festivals

In the context of analyzing the balance between modern values and traditional heritage in the Moroccan public space, musical culture emerges as a compelling lens through which to observe this dynamic interplay. Drawing on insights from Professor Amina Boubia's researches, the cultural significance of music in Morocco provides a profound illustration of how tradition and modernity coexist and evolve in tandem.

Morocco's musical landscape is characterized by its profound diversity, encompassing genres such as chaâbi – a popular style frequently played at weddings – and various Amazigh musical traditions that remain deeply rooted in the nation's cultural identity. These traditional forms of music are not mere relics of the past but constitute an integral part of Morocco's contemporary cultural DNA. However, since the early 2000s, a younger generation of artists has begun to infuse these traditional sounds with global genres, ranging from rap and electro to rock and jazz. Artists such as Hoba Hoba Spirit, Darga, and Don Bigg have pioneered this synthesis, blending electric guitars and synthesizers with traditional instruments, thereby crafting a new auditory aesthetic that resonates with both local and global audiences. This phenomenon signifies more than just a stylistic innovation – it represents a broader cultural shift, wherein modernity and tradition are not perceived as opposing forces but as complementary elements.

The emergence of major festivals such as Mawazine in Rabat and the Boulevard Festival in Casablanca further exemplifies this synthesis of tradition and modernity. These large-scale events attract both local audiences and international artists, positioning Morocco as a hub of cultural exchange. Yet, these festivals are not merely entertainment venues; they are also part of a strategic cultural policy led by the Moroccan state. By actively promoting its cultural heritage through globally-oriented events, Morocco endeavors to project an image of a nation that is both anchored in its traditions and open to global influences.

This strategy aligns with broader societal trends, particularly among the youth, who increasingly seek to innovate while remaining connected to their cultural roots. In this sense, the music industry serves as a microcosm of Moroccan society at large – a space where the tension between preserving cultural heritage and embracing modernity is negotiated and expressed.

IV - The example of the architectural aspects

Architecture as a form of cultural expression is essential because it reflects the history and the identity of the country. Especially in Morocco we can see the fusion between traditional elements like riad, Islamic decoration and local material with modern innovation.

In Italy one example of this reality is the Risorgimento palace where the old traditions of the Army are mixed with the new modern instruments to create a perfect harmony of a fundamental institution.

Morocco and its capital blend tradition and modernity in their architecture, creating a unique and vibrant urban landscape. The city's historical sites, such as the old medinas, showcase traditional Moroccan architecture with their intricate tile work, ornate wooden doors, and narrow streets. These elements reflect the rich cultural heritage and craftsmanship passed down through generations. At the same time, Rabat has embraced modern architectural styles, incorporating contemporary buildings with sleek lines and innovative designs. This fusion is evident in the city's government buildings, hotels, and residential complexes, which often incorporate traditional motifs and materials to maintain a sense of cultural identity.

It's very important to respect historical patrimony and also improve urban development. This coexistence between traditional and modern buildings makes an unique urban landscape that respects the tradition but it's also open to the needs of contemporary life. This architectural dialogue not only preserves Rabat's cultural roots but also promotes progress and development. It attracts tourists, fosters local pride, and demonstrates how Morocco values its heritage while adapting to modern needs.

The presence of traditional structure keeps the cultural identity alive while the modern one represents innovation and ability to adapt to changes. This synergy shows an example of how to enhance the past while looking for the future.

V - The example of the recent reform of the educational system

Morocco's educational system serves as a reflection of the nation's broader effort to balance modernity and tradition in the public space. Since its independence in 1956, education has been a pillar of national development, yet the reforms undertaken over the decades reveal a complex negotiation between progressive modernization and the preservation of cultural heritage.

The first major educational reforms took place during the post-independence period

(1956–1999), characterized by efforts to expand access to basic education and reinforce national identity. King Mohammed V's early initiatives aimed at providing widespread education, although issues related to infrastructure, teacher training, and curriculum development lagged behind the increasing demand for schooling. Arabization policies, introduced under King Hassan II, further symbolized this duality of tradition and modernity. While reinforcing the Islamic and Arabic identity of Moroccan education, these policies also led to structural divisions between public education and original (traditional) education systems.

The second wave of reforms emerged under King Mohammed VI with the launch of the National Charter for Education and Training (CNEF) in 1999, marking a strategic pivot towards modernization. Key reforms included the introduction of IT education, vocational training and decentralization of governance. The inclusion of Amazigh language instruction also symbolized an acknowledgment of Morocco's diverse cultural heritage.

The third phase, beginning in 2015, brought further emphasis on accessibility and quality. The Emergency Plan (2009–2012) was instrumental in expanding literacy and improving school infrastructure, although gaps remained, particularly in rural areas. Recent analyses have highlighted ongoing challenges, such as regional disparities, gender gaps, and the digital divide, which hinder the full realization of modern educational standards.

Despite these efforts, Moroccan educational reforms have managed to maintain traditional elements, particularly in the curriculum with Islamic studies and Arabic literature continuing to hold significant importance. This integration ensures that students not only acquire modern skills but also remain connected to their cultural and historical roots.

Moreover, Morocco's strategic use of education in cultural diplomacy has allowed the country to position itself as a bridge between modernity and tradition on the international stage. Through cooperation with African and Middle Eastern nations, Morocco has exported its educational model as a blend of progress and cultural preservation.

In conclusion, the Moroccan education system epitomizes the nation's broader strategy of harmonizing modernity and tradition. Through successive reforms, it has sought to modernize infrastructure and curricula while preserving cultural heritage, reflecting Morocco's unique position as a nexus of traditional values and contemporary aspirations.

VI - The example of the link between foreign policy and public opinion

The link between foreign policy and public opinion is often underestimated, yet it plays a crucial role in determining the success and sustainability of diplomatic initiatives. Morocco's normalization of relations with Israel exemplifies how strategic decisions at the state level can face significant domestic resistance, especially when they conflict with deeply entrenched national sentiments.

In December 2020, Morocco joined the U.S.-brokered Abraham Accords, agreeing to normalize relations with Israel in exchange for American recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara. Since then, cooperation between the two countries has expanded across several sectors. In November 2021, a defense memorandum enabled collaboration in intelligence, military training, and security technologies. The following year, an economic agreement aimed to develop Qualified Industrial Zones (QIZs), allowing Moroccan products to benefit from joint access to U.S. markets through Israeli partnerships. Additional agreements focused on civil aviation, cultural exchange, and tourism, reflecting an effort to institutionalize bilateral ties.

However, the normalization process has faced substantial public backlash. Moroccan public opinion remains firmly aligned with the Palestinian cause, rooted in religious, cultural, and political identity. During periods of intensified violence in Gaza or in the West Bank, thousands of Moroccans have mobilized in protest, viewing normalization as a betrayal of Morocco's long standing support for Palestinian self-determination. Criticism from civil society, political parties, and media outlets has intensified, leading to strained diplomatic gestures, at one point prompting Israeli representatives to leave Rabat amid public pressure.

This disconnect between state diplomacy and public sentiment reveals that foreign policy cannot be insulated from domestic pressures, especially on emotionally charged issues like colonialism, justice, and religious solidarity. While Morocco's government operates under a logic of realpolitik, many citizens see the Palestinian struggle as morally inseparable from their national identity. To manage this tension, Moroccan authorities have reaffirmed their humanitarian and diplomatic support for Palestine. King Mohammed VI, as Chair of the Al-Quds Committee, has consistently emphasized Morocco's commitment to Palestinian rights, channeling aid, medical supplies, and political support during periods of crisis.

The Morocco-Israel normalization thus illustrates the complex balancing act that modern states must perform: advancing strategic global alignments while remaining responsive to deeply rooted public values. In navigating between realpolitik and moral legitimacy, Morocco is emblematic of broader tensions facing states in the Middle East and beyond, where foreign policy is increasingly shaped by both international imperatives and domestic identities.

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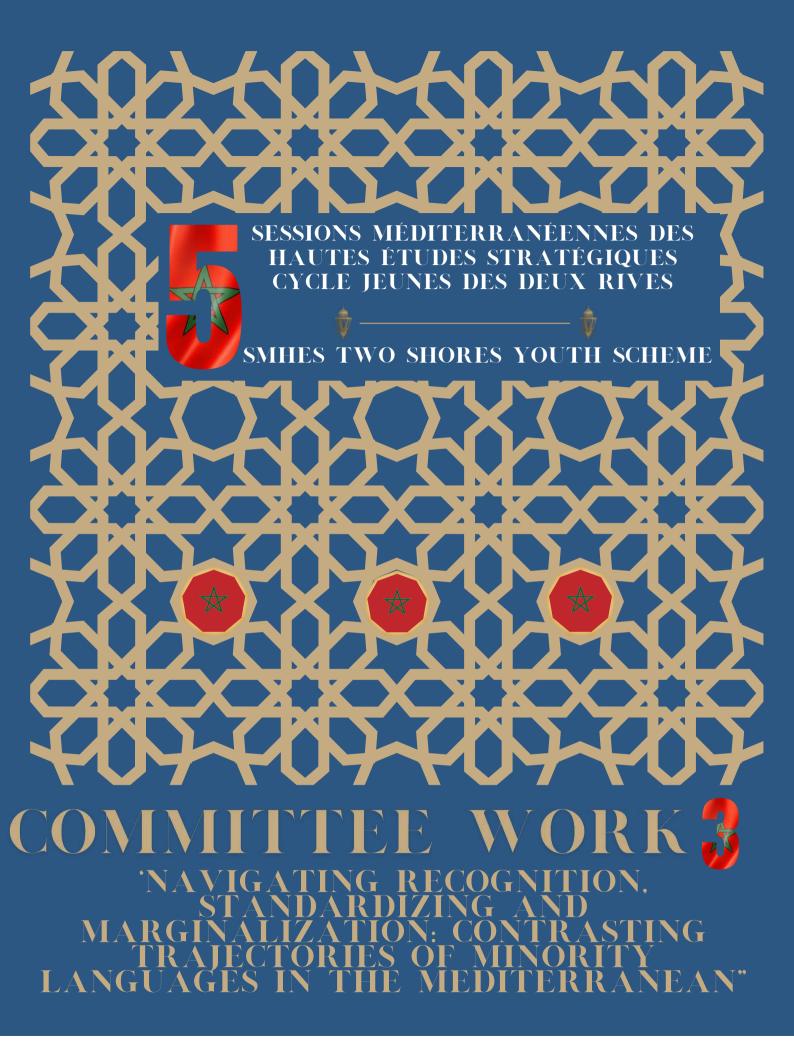
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COMMITTEE WORK 3

'NAVIGATING RECOGNITION, STANDARDIZING AND MARGINALIZATION: CONTRASTING TRAJECTORIES OF MINORITY LANGUAGES IN THE MEDITERRANEAN"

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Navigating recognition standardization and marginalization: contrasting trajectories of minority languages in the Mediterranean

Since the fall of the Tower of Babel, Languages dispersed across the Earth have formed both invisible boundaries and potential bridges between peoples. Each language carries within it a memory, an identity, a worldview, and a distinct way of engaging with reality. In this foundational cacophony, linguistic diversity embodies both the richness of a plural humanity and the ongoing challenge of coexistence.

This is especially true in the Mediterranean space, the mare nostrum, the sea of a plural "we", an ancestral crossroads of exchange and civilization, where languages have always been more than just tools of communication. In the mare nostrum, they serve as markers of identity, expression, and poetry, but also as instruments of power, and, at times, can even be objects of conflict.

As the states on both shores of the Mediterranean confront accelerated processes of modernization, driven by imperatives of unification, efficiency and international recognition, the management of linguistic plurality reactivates deep tensions between heritage on one side, and projection on the other.

This dialectic between linguistic plurality and the management of diversity, is particularly evident in Mediterranean countries such as Morocco, which navigates the coexistence of its two official languages: Arabic and Amazigh. Immersed in a paradoxical ambivalence, the millennia-old kingdom officially recognized Amazigh through the 2011 Constitution. Yet, behind this symbolic progress, patterns of functional marginalization and institutional sluggishness persist.

The aim of this study is to situate the Moroccan experience within a broader, comparative Mediterranean framework. In France, Tunisia, Italy, and Malta, other minority languages, sometimes officially recognized, often marginalized, follow divergent trajectories shaped by state policies, historical legacies and national projects. These cases provide a basis for exploring the following research question: To what extent do the language policies of different states in the Mediterranean region converge or diverge from the Moroccan experience, and how can these comparisons provide a critical framework for analyzing Mediterranean approaches to linguistic inclusion and diversity management?

This study is based on the hypothesis that, despite their apparent differences, Mediterranean language policies all face a similar tension: How to reconcile national unity with the effective recognition of cultural diversity. To offer insights and support

Mediterranean countries in the effective management of their linguistic diversity, this research combines a comparative approach, public policy analysis, and a critical reading of the institutions. It aims to develop a Mediterranean typology of linguistic strategies through five emblematic case studies: Morocco, Tunisia, France, Italy, and Malta.

I – Language Policy and National Identity in Morocco: Amazigh Between Constitutional Symbolism and Institutional Realities

The linguistic history of the Kingdom of Morocco is marked by structural plurality, shaped by both endogenous dynamics (Berber-speaking and Arabic-speaking communities) and exogenous forces (colonization and globalization). This diversity has undergone several phases. Initially nothing more than a de facto condition without political instrumentalization, it was later threatened as language became a tool for state legitimation, ideological homogenization and identity differentiation. Indeed, following independence in 1956, the Moroccan monarchy launched an Arabization project aimed at breaking with the colonial legacy while consolidating national unity around Classical Arabic. This orientation, deeply influenced by Arab-Islamic nationalism, effectively marginalized other languages spoken within Moroccan society, particularly Amazigh, despite its deep historical roots in the kingdom's sociocultural fabric.

This marginalization can even be traced back to the pre-independence period. Under the French Protectorate (1912-1956), a policy of population separation contributed to the entrenchment of linguistic hierarchies: French, as the language of administration and modernity, coexisted with Arabic and Amazigh vernaculars, the latter being confined to domestic or rural spheres and devaluated in institutional and educational contexts. This colonial stratification not only maintained Amazigh in a subordinate position but also led to the groundwork for its exclusion from the early post-independence national projects.

However, during the 1990s, at the twilight of King Hassan II's reign and the beginning of King Mohammed VI's, a radical paradigmatic shift took place. This was driven by both the mobilization of Amazigh civil society, and the new monarch's desire to break with certain past policies and to position the kingdom within a new political context, marked by relative liberalization. This intent was formally expressed by King Mohammed VI in the Ajdir Speech on October 17, 2001, which formed part of Morocco's broader democratization process. The speech marked, for the first time, the official recognition of the Amazigh component within Morocco's multicultural framework, by acknowledging its linguistic, cultural, and historical dimensions, while emphasizing that Amazigh identity cannot be excluded from the country's overall

cultural landscape. This speech was immediately followed by institutional measures and concrete public policies, the most notable of which include: The creation of the Royal Institute or Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) in 2001, the constitutional recognition of Amazigh as an official language in 2011, and, later, the adoption of Organic Law 26.16. This law provides for the gradual implementation, over a period of 15 years and through intermediate states, of the generalization of Amazigh use in education, administration, the justice system, media, communication and public life.

Despite these advances, it is important to note that numerous structural challenges persist. The effective implementation of the organic law 16.16 faces a series of political, institutional, and financial obstacles. The teaching of Amazigh, for example, remains largely unequal and dependent on the local will of schools, due to the lack of systematic teacher training. Moreover, Amazigh remains almost entirely absent from major judicial institutions, which limits its status as an official language to a largely symbolic level.

II - Language and Identity in Tunisia: The Non-Issue of Amazigh

Undoubtedly, Tunisia has historically been part of the Berber homeland, or Tamazgha. However, unlike in Morocco, the issue of recognizing Berber identity has not posed a major challenge in Tunisia.

Tunisia, with a population of 12.2 million, is currently home to around 500,000 Berbers – approximately 2.5% of the total population. Most of them reside in southern Tunisia, particularly on the island of Djerba, in Matmata, Tataouine, as well as in Gafsa, Kasserine, Kef, and Siliana.
As for the reasons and factors that led to the Berbers becoming a minority in Tunisia– unlike in its surrounding geographic region–because Tunisia was influenced in the mid-5th century by the Arab invasion during what is known as the migration of the Bedouin Arab tribes of Banu Hilal and their allies from Najd and the Hejaz who come to put a place in Kairouan … (the fourth Islamic capital after Mekkah and Medina in Saudia Arabia and Jerusalem in Palestine).

Since the promulgation of Tunisia's first constitution in 1861–the first Arab constitution –and up to the 2022 Constitution, the Tunisian identity has been defined as both Arab and Islamic. Article 5 of the 2022 Constitution clearly reflects this identity: "Tunisia is part of the Islamic Ummah, and the state alone shall work, within a democratic system, to achieve the purposes of Islam in preserving life, honor, property, religion, and freedom." Furthermore, Article 6 affirms that "Tunisia is part of the Arab nation, and the official language is Arabic."

Nevertheless, the Tunisian Constitution firmly upholds the individual's freedom to

choose their religion and doctrine—freedoms and to practice their religion freely that are inviolable under any circumstances. Tunisia stands as an example of peaceful coexistence, where Amazighs, Jews, and Christians live freely and harmoniously alongside Muslim Tunisians.

Thus, the constitutional texts demonstrate that Tunisia, while maintaining its Arab-Islamic identity and Arabic as its official language, also protects the rights of religious and cultural minorities and guarantees their freedom of belief and choice.
In conclusion, as stated in the Constitution, "The Tunisian people are the holders of sovereignty," meaning that sovereignty belongs to all components of the nation: Arab and Amazigh, Muslim, Jewish, and Christian alike.

III - France and Minority Languages: Between Recognition and Marginalization

France is often seen as the model of a centralized, monolingual country. Since the French Revolution, national unity has been strongly linked to the use of one common language: French. This idea comes from a long history of state control over language.

Two important moments show this clearly. In 1539, the Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts made French the only language allowed for legal and official documents. Later, in the 1880s, the Jules Ferry laws made French the only language allowed in public schools. Regional languages like Breton, Occitan, Basque or Alsatian were banned even in the playground. The aim was to create a unified French identity by removing local languages.

Today, the French Constitution still includes this idea. Article 2 says: "The language of the Republic is French." This makes French the only official language of the state. In 2008, Article 75-1 was added. It says that "regional languages belong to the heritage of France." But this is mostly symbolic. It does not give these languages real rights or official status in the courts, government, or national media.
Some efforts do exist. In some regions, students can study regional languages at school or take them as optional subjects in exams. There are also special teacher exams for languages like Breton or Corsican. But these programs are small, often underfunded, and not supported strongly by the national government.

In the French overseas territories such as Guadeloupe, Martinique, Réunion, French Guiana, or New Caledonia the situation is similar. Many people speak local languages such as Creole, Tahitian, or Kanak languages in daily life. But only French is official. In schools and government offices, these local languages are often discouraged. Local groups try to protect them, but they face the same legal and political limits.

This shows a clear contradiction. France recognizes minority languages as part of its

culture, but it does not give them real space in public life. The state wants to protect unity and prefers to keep French as the only official language. Minority languages are accepted but not given real power.

In contrast, other countries like Morocco have officially recognized more than one language. This shows a different way of thinking about language, identity, and inclusion.

In conclusion, the French model respects the cultural value of regional and local languages, but it does not treat them as equal. While they are part of the country's heritage, they remain in the margins. The question remains: can France find a better balance between unity and diversity in the future?

IV - The Sicilian Language: Marginalization and Cultural Resilience in Italy's Linguistic Landscape

The Sicilian language occupies a unique position within the Mediterranean linguistic landscape. Its history reflects a broader tension regarding language policies: the struggle to balance national unity with cultural diversity. Despite its rich heritage and distinct linguistic features, Sicilian has faced systematic marginalization. Understanding the trajectory of Sicilian offers critical insights into how linguistic diversity is managed within nation-states seeking cultural cohesion.

In Italy, the 20th century witnessed significant efforts to standardize Italian as the sole national language. Historically, linguistic nationalism became state policy, with Minister Francesco Ercole's 1934 reforms actively suppressing regional dialects, including Sicilian. Article 6 of the Italian Constitution, adopted in 1948, was intended to safeguard linguistic minorities; however, its implementation lagged for over fifty years. Only with Law 482/1999 did historical linguistic minorities gain formal protection, excluding Sicilian despite its recognition by UNESCO as a language at risk of extinction.

This delay, as noted by linguist Tullio De Mauro, stemmed from long-standing hostility toward multilingualism and a centralized vision of national identity. The Italian Constitutional Court later acknowledged Article 6 as a 'radical political and cultural shift, nevertheless, the legal framework remains selective, recognizing languages like Ladin, Friulian, and Sardinian, while Sicilian continues to face cultural and institutional marginalization.

Despite institutional neglect, Sicilian endures through cultural expression. Figures like Rosa Balistreri, known as 'the voice of Sicily,' revitalized the language through music, preserving oral traditions and regional identity. Her work symbolized resistance

against cultural homogenization, demonstrating how marginalized languages can serve as vessels of collective memory and identity even in the absence of formal recognition.

The legacy of linguistic centralism lingers, while cultural expressions like those of Rosa Balistreri highlight the resilience of marginalized voices. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for rethinking Mediterranean linguistic policies in a way that values diversity without compromising national cohesion.

V - Maltese Colonial Language History: The "Tal-Pepe" Dialect and Its Reception by Traditional Maltese Speakers

The Maltese Archipelago was, for thousands of years, passed between civilizations. The islands' strategic location both militarily and economically meant that its nickname as "The Jewel of the Mediterranean" was well earned. Linguistically, the Maltese people always adopted their colonial rulers' native languages until approx. the 11th Century when the Kingdom of Sicily introduced Siculo-Arabic, the basis for modern Maltese. This would remain the spoken language of the people, all while integrating words from colonial languages introduced as Malta changed hands.

With the British Empire colonising Malta in 1800, an influx of British people moving to the Archipelago introduced English, a language which was further popularised as local industry integrated with international trade. In light of this, the Maltese people were, by necessity, required to learn English, to varying degrees. However, British socialites on the Island had begun to introduce the idea that Maltese was a language for the working class whilst English was the language to be spoken by upper society, high educated people. Naturally this created a rift between social classes, one that led working class people to associate English speakers with snobbery.

Ultimately, English speakers in Malta would eventually develop a vague understanding of Maltese, however it was common that they would often inject English words wherever the struggled to find the Maltese equivalents. This would become the basis for the "Tal-Pepe" dialect, also sometimes colloquially known as "Minglish". Today, this dialect has become the most prolific throughout Malta, particularly with younger generations as English has become the preferred language of younger generations. Furthermore, Maltese has developed into a language that is not only spoken by working class people but it has returned to be a default language when conducting business where possible.

Conclusion
These cases underscore the broader Mediterranean tension between unification and the acknowledgment of diversity. Linguistic policies are not merely administrative

choices; they are reflections of political priorities and cultural hierarchies. To move forward, Mediterranean states must reimagine language policies that go beyond symbolic recognition, embracing genuine inclusivity that respects and promotes multilingualism as a source of strength, not division.

The Mediterranean is a space where linguistic diversity is both a historical reality and a contemporary challenge. To honor this legacy and protect its future, policymakers must commit to nurturing this rich tapestry of languages, understanding that true unity is not achieved through homogenization, but through the celebration of diversity in all its forms.