



‘The burning’

Finitude and the politico-theological imagination of illegal migration

Stefania Pandolfo

University of California, Berkeley, USA

Abstract

Based on ethnographic research with Moroccan youth, the article traces debates and vocabularies related to the experience and imagination of clandestine migration to Europe (*l-harg*, ‘the burning’), and the risk to one’s life this entails, with a particular focus on the way Islamic eschatology and political theology provide the conceptual framework and ethical horizon within which subjectivity and despair, the de facto exclusion from citizenship, the existential stakes of life and death, are understood and creatively reconfigured. The article engages with the specific way Islamic ethical-political conceptual configurations such as *jihad an-nafs*, ‘the struggle of/against the self’ in a context of oppression, the risk of heresy (*al-kufri*, *as-shirk*) in the experience of despair and suicide, the ‘remembrance of death’ (*dhikr al-mawt*) and the representation of the Last Day are mobilized in debates among the youth and in the self-description of their predicament. While tracing the youth’s specific understanding of these concepts, the article also relates them to theological and philosophical literatures (from al-Ghazali to Shariati) to which they have access by way of cassette listening, reading, or satellite television. It is written in critical counterpoint with the reflection of Arab psychoanalysts and other secular Middle Eastern intellectuals around the questions of subjectivity and religion, and it was conceived at a time of anxious public debate concerning the problematization of religious violence and the rise of the Islamic revivalist movement.

Key Words

death • Islam • migration • world ending • youth

When you recall the Departed, count yourself as one of them.

(al-Ghazali, 1989)

PREAMBLE¹

This article is written in critical counterpoint with the reflection of Arab psychoanalysts around the questions of subjectivity and political theology. It was born in contrastive

dialogue with psychoanalysts and other scholars in Morocco and the Middle East who identify as secular intellectuals, during a time of heated and anxious public debate concerning the problematization of politico-religious violence and the rise of the Islamic revivalist movement, in the aftermath of the US invasion of Iraq and of the Casablanca bombings (May 2003), when Morocco was shaken by a wave of anti-war protest. From the standpoint of my ongoing research with Moroccan youth, as well as investment in psychoanalysis, Islam, and their respective ethical projects, I asked – what would it mean to pose the questions differently, engaging with contemporary forms of subjectivity in Islam, without completely abandoning the legacy of Freudian thought?

One of the challenges of the present moment is coming to terms with forms of life in which subjectivity is understood in terms of a theological law. The proceedings of a symposium on ‘Psychoanalysis and Islam’, held in Beirut in 2002, open on a six point statement concerning the difficulties of psychoanalysis in the Arab and Muslim world today (*La célibataire*, 2004: 7–18). The first point mentions the unshaken foundation, in the world of Islam, of human existence in divine will, and the related impossibility of the Cogito: ‘for the act of thinking sanctions the end of religion’. The second point mentions the absence of a scientific revolution in spite of the Aristotelian legacy, hence the impossibility of the subject of psychoanalysis. The third point stresses the absence of democracy and human rights, and the presence of a climate of ‘subjective intimidation’, which makes impossible the work of unconscious associations. The fourth point speaks to the hegemony of religious discourse: ‘religion is totalitarian, it rules over the realm of meaning, and it will treat as an intrusion any alternative secular interpretation of the meaning of life’. The fifth point has to do with the abrupt passage to the nuclear family in Arab society, and the dysfunctions it produced, and the sixth with the ‘heterogeneity of the concept of the Ego’, which remains entangled in the social ‘We’.

Subjectivity and religion, at least in the specific context of Islam, are described in that text as incompatible terms. According to Mustapha Safouan, a prominent Egyptian psychoanalyst who is also one of the founding members of the Association of Arab Psychoanalysis,² this incompatibility does not have to do with the religion of the Qur’an per se, but with the way political power – the monarch – has come to occupy in Islam the transcendent place of God. In such a system there can be no subjects: there are only the monarch and the mass. Subjectivity is only possible in a democratic system, he writes, ‘a system where the place of the Third is not occupied by a person, but by a signifier’ (Safouan, 2004: 13). Safouan models his argument on Freud’s text on *Massenpsychologie* (Freud, 1959[1921]) where the absolute power of the Narcissistic Chief is related to the depersonalized mass of the group. Contemporary Muslim societies in his call are that kind of authoritarian system, predicated on a ‘con-fusion’ between theology and political coercion.

The pervasive revival of religion in contemporary culture, particularly but not solely in the context of Islam, has been associated in public debates with the danger of religious communitarianism and the specter of religious wars. In recent psychoanalytic readings, departing from Safouan’s position and directly addressing what is treated as the destructive potential of religious passions as such, the resurgence of religious identities, particularly in the context of contemporary Islamism, is understood as a psycho-political malady, and the revivalist recourse to the religious referent (‘the torment of the origin’; Benslama, 2002) as a form of psychotic delusion, bearing witness to a collapse of the symbolic order and opening on the prospect of collective violence.

Confronted with the rise of a theological imagination that visibly shifts the focus from a modernist ethos of individual creativity and reflexivity central to the project of European psychoanalysis, to renewed forms of communitarian affiliation and religious modes of belonging where the subject is constituted by its surrender to a notion of divine law, Middle Eastern psychoanalysts seem to encounter an impassable limit, foreclosing their own ability to recognize the possibility of different life forms. In the words of the psychoanalysts with whom I discussed the emergent question of Islam, at issue is a generalized mutation in subjectivity, of a psychotic nature, related to parallel mutations in late-capitalist societies, hinting that human society may be moving 'off limits', in a trajectory of self-annihilation (Melman, 2002). From this perspective the Islamist phenomenon and its radical vanguards can only be understood as a form of collective self-destruction – a generalization of what Freud called the 'death drive' (Freud, 1961[1920]) – epitomized by the figure of the suicide bomber.³

Yet on the other side of this interpretative divide the 'return' of religion and spirituality (and the realization of their enduring presence) calls insistently for an understanding of subjectivity, alterity, politics and hermeneutics that is no longer grounded in the Enlightenment prejudice against religion, nor in the theories of secularization that predicted the disappearance of religion in the process of rationalization understood as the essence of liberal modernity (Asad, 1993; Habermas, 1985; Vattimo, 2000). Moving in that direction are some important attempts at restituting visibility and intelligibility to forms of life that are otherwise unrecognizable from the standpoint of the secular vocabularies naturalized in public debates (Asad, 1993, 2003; Mahmood, 2004).

Critically engaging with Euro-American philosophical notions of freedom, agency, intentionality, religion, and law, these works have stood as a corrective to the way the phenomenon of the Islamic revival has been treated in international scholarship and the media. They have documented religious practices that forcefully counter totalizing representations of 'fundamentalism' and have revalorized theological argumentation, questioning the way the Islamic revival is systematically reduced to a socio-political and psychological phenomenon, disregarding its specific theological and ethical dimensions. In this sense, these works have opened a space of debate within which the reflection of this article is located. Yet, in their attempt to reconstitute legibility, they postulate the inherent rationality and coherence of religious discipline and practice, and turn away from exploring the complexity and singularity of lifeworlds.⁴ Whether to restore intelligibility is necessary to postulate coherence remains for me a question, one I indirectly address in this article. It requires revisiting the classical anthropological problem of understanding different life-worlds. This is a problem that is discussed in the phenomenological and existential traditions, but one that I address here in terms of the Lacanian corpus, because of its specific emphasis on questions of alterity.

In his 1945 article '*Le temps logique*', Lacan discusses the question of understanding with reference to the experience of time. He addresses this through the positing of a logical riddle, which he demonstrates to be insoluble from the standpoint of classical logics. Outlining the unfolding of a different solution, he distinguishes 'a time for comprehending' (*le temps pour comprendre*) from the advent of resolution and utterance, which he calls 'the moment of concluding'. Understanding, for Lacan, is inclusive of

both registers. It is not just the fact of ‘comprehending’ the other – assimilating it into a pre-existing discourse and thus restituting coherence. It requires openness to alterity, a discontinuity of experience. The temporality of understanding is not linear, and cannot be reckoned within the categories of classical logic. It is a discontinuous space-time of structural positioning in relation to the Other, imaginary identifications, and hesitations, which lead to the ‘leap’ of performative affirmation: ‘the moment of concluding’. Apprehending the possibility of different life-worlds calls for the conceptualization of a discontinuity, an incommensurability, which affirms subjectivity at the radical risk of alterity (Lacan, 1966[1945]).

A temporality of understanding in the complex field of Islam today cannot spare the work of engaging the risk of alterity. It is opened by the anthropological realization of the contingency and limits of one’s conceptual tools in approaching what is perceived as the unfamiliarity of other forms of life: whether these be expressed in an encompassing discursive form, as with revivalist Islamic pedagogies making a claim for a collective new life, or instead in the form of the fragment – the fragmented, painful and sometimes original ways of inhabiting a world where none of the available vocabularies can be fully inhabited, even when they are invoked, and the attempt at reconstruction takes the form of a solitary self-creation in a space of destruction which is also, sometimes, self-destruction.

In conversation with a growing cohort of works in the anthropology of Islam (Abu-Lughod, 2005; Asad, 1993; Dakhlia, 2005; Hammoudi, 2005; Hirschkind, 2006; Johansen, 1998; Khan, 2006; Mahmood, 2004), this article engages with some contemporary forms of the theological imagination and the modalities of the subject it makes possible, as this contributes to shape the everyday existence of Moroccan youths. Following the trace of their accounts, I question a simple opposition of modernist fragmentation and religious belonging, exploring the complex and sometimes contradictory configurations of existence, the risks and the possibilities of critique that can be apprehended from within an understanding of the subject as surrendered to the law and the mercy of God.

In this process, I seek to displace two sets of related generalizations that shape the terms of current international debates on religion and politics. The first concerns the representations that have proliferated in Western media around the figure of death in the contemporary Muslim imagination, particularly with respect to martyrdom and suicide. The second has to do with the way recent debates on bio-politics and exceptionality, as well as psychoanalytic diagnoses of the present ‘civilizational malaise’ have come to inform our understanding of life and death, rendering invisible and unintelligible other ways of imagining these terms. The generalization of a conceptual framework centered on the reduction of life to biological existence at the planetary level, in the production of abjection as in the deployment of humanitarian logics, is a case at hand (Agaruben, 1995). But what becomes of ‘bare life’ when death is understood as ‘awakening’, the beginning rather than the end, as is the case in Islam and in other religious traditions, and is today openly discussed in innumerable chat-sites on the internet?

Rather than tracing these representations genealogically, this article’s mode of critique is ethnographic. In conversation with Moroccan youths from poor urban neighborhoods, candidates for clandestine migration, I attempt to conjure a style of

argument and a form of life that resists inclusion in the ready-made conceptual cases of liberal debates. I engage with the specific way ethico-political conceptual configurations such as *jihad an-nafs*, 'the struggle of/against the self' in a context of oppression, the risk of heresy (*al-kufi*, *as-shirk*) in the experience of despair, the 'remembrance of death' (*dhikr al-mawt*) and the representation of the Last Day are mobilized by the youth in the self-description of their predicament, providing the framework and ethical horizon within which subjectivity and despair, the de facto exclusion from citizenship, the experience of the end of social relations, are understood and originally reconfigured. In their recourse to the ethico-political vocabularies and affective dimensions of Islamic concepts and practice, the youths situate their questions at the outset in a international space, or more precisely, in what in Arabic would be called a 'general space' (*am*), beyond all sense of national or even cultural belonging, and in fact precisely stating the impossibility to belong in what is experienced and described as an unjust social order. It is in their recourse to the vocabularies of Islam that the youth can articulate the very concrete experience of the end of social relations in the neighborhoods in which they live – the space of physical and social death in which they dwell – as well as the utopian possibility of new forms of connectedness. Such an Islamic 'general' space of normative reference and debate is not just one opened by the pirated digital cards that in Morocco give access to the decoding of satellite television, or by the experience of virtual connectedness on the internet. Unquestionably these are important. In the months preceding the Iraq war young men would gather all night to watch Al-Jazeera, preparing for their possible journey to Iraq. Yet as argued by ethnographers of the 'new media' in the Muslim world, contemporary Islam presupposes and creates the existence of a global public space of an ethico-political nature, which in specific national contexts or in relation to the West function as a counter-public (Bowen, 2004; Hirschkind, 2001).

My research on the practice and the imaginary of migration among Moroccan youths in poor neighborhoods in Rabat engages a fragmentary form of life. Migration – which is increasingly understood as the compelling yet often unrealizable project of an illegal crossing to Europe – has profoundly changed its connotation since the closure of European borders in the last decade. One says *kanriski*, 'I'm taking the risk', in a mix of Arabic and French, to signify the clandestine departure, hidden in the bottom of a truck, or by hazardous sea passage – a departure which is also called *l-harg*, 'the burning' (from the verb *haraq*, 'to burn'). In the metaphor and the discourse of *l-harg* – clandestine migration, incineration, burning, transgression (in the sense that one also says *hargt l-feu rouge*, I 'burned', that is, went through, a red light) – and in the stories of the *harraga* with whom I spoke, there is reference made to a heterogeneous configuration relating to the figure of a 'burned' life – a life without name, and without legitimacy; a life of enclosure in physical, genealogical and cultural spaces perceived as uninhabitable; and the search for a horizon in the practices of self-creation and experimentation drawing on an imaginary of the elsewhere and of exile.

The use of language is itself affected: Kamal, Jawad, Said and the others speak Arabic with a Moroccan accent, but their preferred idiom is a form of standard Arabic that is increasingly the lingua franca of a large section of postcolonial Moroccan society: one that no longer seeks recognition from the European former colonists, or even from the Moroccan postcolonial rulers.

From our first encounters our conversations unfolded in a shifting realm between geography and theology, between a disenchanting socio-political description of exclusion, and a moral account of banishment and transgression; between the violations of the law of states (by the illicit trespassing of frontiers, and those of the law of God; between a mode of personal narrative, and one of moral admonition; between life and death, this world and the other. The shifting realm of our conversations is also a hesitation between orthodoxy and heresy, belief and unbelief, in the account of personal lives, as in the turn of theological discussions. By attempting to inhabit this rift, and by elaborating a way of 'remembering death' in their everyday life experience, the youths with whom I talked carve a possible critical space, by drawing on vocabularies and looking for answers in the Islamic tradition.

As I follow the way they account for their experience in their own terms – of becoming a non-person, of daily violence and death, of the breaking of familial ties, of life 'shrinking', of 'despair', of the struggle for life and the risk of death – I trace the way their accounts open to an eschatological elsewhere, which, I argue, is not a closed hermeneutic horizon, but an open imaginal space (Agamben, 2000; Lowith, 1957).⁵ I see there the work of a creative imagination, the fact of struggling, and creating oneself, with and against the limits of one's cultural universe (Crapanzano, 2002).⁶ Following the reflection of Kamal, Jawad, Said and the others, I note the parallelism between their experience of 'exiting' social ties, their 'separation' from a shared common world, and a theological reading of the Hour, the Last Day, rooted in Islamic tradition and actively present in the popular imagination, vernacular and learned, as well as in the discourse of contemporary transnational Islamism.

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The predicament of migration and 'burning' has taken on a new urgency in the wake of the 'suicide' bombings of 16 May 2003 in Casablanca,⁷ which brought to the forefront of the Moroccan public debate, for better or for worse, a situation of social and political exclusion, the existence of vast zones of 'non-rights' and social abandonment, the lack of horizon and the rage that characterize the predicament of the youth and are expressed in the attempt at migration, as well as, as it was increasingly argued in the press, in the turn to political Islam. In the days immediately following the events in Casablanca an association was made in public discourse between underserved urban areas, shantytowns, Islamic radicalism and international terrorism.⁸ Journalists interviewing relatives and neighbors of the 'kamikaze'⁹ at 'Kamikaze-city', as shantytowns started to be dubbed in the press, found themselves unwittingly contributing to the criminalization of the urban poor, which was accompanied by a call for urban reform, but most fundamentally translated into a period of massive police repression.¹⁰ An article in the French monthly *Le Monde Diplomatique* (Belaala, 2004) rehearsed this conflation for the international audience, arguing that the reality of dilapidated urban areas, zones of juridical exception (*hors-la-loi*), was related to the proliferation of radical Islamist groups, in fact small groups of desperados, issued of a situation of social disintegration in the new slums of the Moroccan cities:

Les takfiristes sont des aliénés issus de milieux sociaux désintégrées qui n'ont connu que l'univers brutal et sordide des ghettos et ont été traité par la société comme des

bêtes féroces. Au nom d'une certaine conception sectaire de l'Islam, ils retournent cette férocité impitoyable contre l'ordre établi. (Belaala, 2004)¹¹

Current political theories of sovereignty and exceptionality contribute paradoxically to this representation of a violent and meaningless existence, comparable to the unqualified 'bare life' of refugees in the camps (Agamben, 1995, 2000). It is difficult to write in this context of overlapping referents. It requires clearing theoretical space. On the one hand, there is a necessary work of theoretical retooling to be undertaken in conversation with psychoanalysis and political philosophy about the stakes of subjectivity at this time in history, and its relation with political theologies. On the other hand it is crucial to question the set of associations that are presented as immediately self-evident, and the tendency to represent the field of Islam without concern for its internal complexities, specific history and hermeneutic possibilities. This article was born as an intervention in that Moroccan debate. Attempting to convey the lifeworld of the youth with whom I had been engaged in conversation, I argued for its intelligibility, its capacity for critical reflection, and for the peculiar way in which the questions of subjectivity and existence were raised in relation to a theological referent. To the psychoanalytic reading of delusional self-destruction, I opposed Kamal's elaboration of the concept of self-struggles, *jihad al-nafs*, and his representation of the eschatological horizon, arguing for the possibility of a different reading from within the corpus of psychoanalysis itself.

MGHAMAR B L-HAYAT: A DEBATE ON MIGRATION, TRANSGRESSION, THE LIMIT OF HERESY AND THAT OF LIFE

We are discussing the question of risk – the risk to one's life, in the crossing – the sense of one's death, if one dies, and the moral conundrum this produces. The three of us, sitting in a public park under the old eucalyptus trees that date back to the colonial period. Coming out of the neighborhoods to places where 'nature', as they say, gives a sense of space, has become one of the rites of our encounters. Kamal and Jawad are forcefully disagreeing on the meaning and moral evaluation of the attempt at migration, a 'crossing' Kamal has single-mindedly if unsuccessfully pursued for a long time. A theological dispute unfolds about the status and nature of death in the 'attempt' at illegal migration, *l-harg*, the 'burning', and of what they call *al-qant* (classical Arabic *al-qanaʿ*), the condition of 'despair' – the temptation of doing away with life, the loss of all hope, in the religious sense, as well as, in the vernacular sense, a feeling of oppression, rage, absence of horizon.¹²

Jawad: Just look at how many people die each day in the boats [*lancia*, the boats that attempt to cross illegally to Spain from the Moroccan shore]. Each day the news tells you how many, shows you the images. We say that the person who is risking the crossing is putting his life in danger, *mkhatar b-hayatu*, that is *mgamar b-hayatu*, he embarks on a mortal journey, 'gambling with his life'. Each day, when you look at the news, you think that you could be one of those corpses floating on the water. They find themselves against a wall, have no perspective here, and when they get there, if they do arrive, have the problem of the papers and all that. For them there is no landing and no return.

Kamal: Those who decide to go for the most part have a *damen*, a ‘guarantor’, a protection, someone on the other side that tells them what they will find, will give them a ‘map’ of the situation. Yet it is true that one who decides to leave is *hayr*, he’s furious, in a state of bewilderment, and his feelings are flooded by exasperation with the present conditions of life. He’s in a rage: blood has gone up his head, and he doesn’t care whether he will live or die.

Jawad: He will either die or ruin his life. Of a hundred that go, 90 will die; 10 will survive and fall into the hands of the Spanish police.

Stefania: How does one understand death in the crossing according to the teachings of Islam?

Jawad: It is a suicide, *intihar*.

Kamal: Why suicide? I disagree with you brother, it is not a suicide . . .

Jawad: *Ghadi mghamar b rasek* – You go gambling with your life, in other words, you have chosen to die, in full awareness (*katdir f-belek ghadi tmut*). The one who died at sea, we say, *mghamar b-hayatu*, he’s taking a gamble with his life. Either he will live or he will die, and if he died, he had already chosen death, without waiting for the time appointed (*met bla khatar*). He throws himself into a dream, an illusion, he is in error.

Kamal: What else could he do?

Jawad: This is the problem, this is what happened to you and caused you [Kamal] to ‘burn’ (*badi hia l-mushkila lly ja’ala lek hetta hargti*).

Kamal: What else could I do, become a thief?

The theological turn of our discussion is not a surprise. Since the earliest conversations about migration and ‘burning’ I realized that as soon as the question of the decision to migrate is raised one finds oneself speaking in several registers at once, and the narrative conventions are blurred. There is first the project of migration as a concrete reality of ‘this’ world, an individual and political response to a situation of closure and alienation, and injustice, a departure from a non-life towards the horizon of a life that might enable a claim to symbolic recognition.

This worldly sense opens to the larger imagining of the migratory project as an adventure, a dangerous journey. It is the necessary risk to take if one is to cross over to the other side (of the Mediterranean), with all that this entails: the anticipation and fear, but also the skills, knowledge, sheer ability, and not last, the fascination and excitement. This is the sense reckoned by the concept of *al-rihla*, which could be translated as a journey, as moving in space, and which defines a whole genre in classical Arab geography and travel narratives that are also, often, tales of marvelous encounters with the unknown and the uncanny (*al-gharib*). Awareness of a mortal risk in this endeavor is conveyed by the generalized use, in the language of clandestine immigration, of the verb *ghamura* (in the fragment above, *ghadi mghamar b rasek*, you go gambling with your life), ‘embarking on a hazardous adventure’, risking one’s life, connoting the potentiality of a destructive outcome.

Both senses of worldly travel are intimately connected to a theological and moral dimension of departing: the fact of severing familial ties, exiting, choosing exile, or crossing to another world. It is the meaning mobilized by the concept of *hijra* as discussed in the Qur'an and in the Hadith, up to its modernist interpretations in contemporary theologico-political debates. *Hijra*, literally the fact of 'abandoning' or 'severing the ties' (Khalid Masud, 1990),¹³ is a foundational concept in Islamic tradition. It sets the conditions of a specific ethics, no longer based on genealogical attachment but instead upon an ethical community to come.¹⁴ Modeled on the Prophet's departure from Mecca to Medina (AD 622) in a situation in which the new faith was under attack, it is the injunction to migrate from a land of injustice and oppression, in order to 'strive in the effort' – the literal sense of *jihad* – on the path of God. Yet this ethical sense of 'parting' and 'departing' is also intimately related to another crossing, different in nature: the separation of death, which, in the words of Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (12th century) is the 'deprivation of a man's property consequent to his being pitched into another world which does not correspond to this' (al-Ghazali, 1989: 124). Departure in this sense is the crossing of the soul into a different state, through the experience of physical death. The remembrance (*dhikr*) of that departure yet to come is for al-Ghazali a crucial task of the believer. Remembering death, in his view, amounts to welcoming a temporality of the end in the time of the now, in the form of a sensory experience. At once vicarious and intimately personal, this experience of death is made possible by the imaginative faculty, which 'imprints' it in the soul of the living through meditation on the physical death of familiar others, the loss of their worldly possessions, and the decaying of their body in the grave. This does not mean, al-Ghazali says, that one should hope for a short life. To the contrary, 'the longer a man's life extends the more solid and complete will be his virtue' (al-Ghazali, 1995: 32–3). What is at issue in the remembrance of death is an apprenticeship of the other world in this world, which is a presupposition for what might be called, in the terms specific to that theological and ethical tradition, a practice of freedom. In this sense, explicitly echoed in the conversation with the youths I interviewed, the trope of Departure opens onto an eschatological vision.

Kamal and Jawad come from the same neighborhood, a former shantytown in the near periphery of Rabat, one of the neighborhoods that gathered population from the early rural exodus of the 1960s and 1970s and was later 'consolidated' with concrete constructions (the 'rehabilitation' was funded by a UN project in the late 1970s); narrow alleys numbered in red paint, crowded small houses perched on a hillside, where the most basic social and health services are lacking, and the state is tangibly felt in its sole prerogative of repressive force. People refer to it as *l-huma*, the neighborhood, a term that conveys a sense of physical belonging that can turn into ambivalent rejection but cannot be anodyne. In its urban typology it contrasts somewhat with the new quarters that have come to constitute the majority of urban space, what in French is called 'péri-urbain' and has become an essential quality of the city and the country as such (a quality not in any sense unique to Morocco, but marking the esthetics of urban landscape throughout the Middle East). A landscape made of informal housing settlements often without infrastructures, unfinished cement buildings that are inhabited as such, large avenues bordered by *terrains vagues* where children play and people gather in the afternoon.

Downhill from the neighborhood is a swampy area bordering the new freeway to Tangiers, the gateway to Europe, and an industrial zone with textile factories that get commissions from European companies – the *sharikat* – and employ an underpaid non-contractual mainly feminine labor force from the surrounding areas. Each day long distance trucks for international transport come to load and unload, and each day youths from the neighborhood hope to make an ‘attempt’ or *muhawala*, as they call it, by hiding in the trucks all the way across the Spanish border.

Neighborhoods such as these, which according to official estimates comprise about 30 percent of the housing stock in urban areas (Hamdouni Alami, 2006; SNAT, 2004), have come to the scrutiny of state security forces as well as to the attention of the national and international media after the bombings of 16 May 2003 in Casablanca. At the time of the Casablanca events I was doing fieldwork in Rabat. The political moment necessarily affected my research and the conversations I had. It also affected how I thought of writing: I hesitated between the responsibility I felt to convey the experiences and thoughts that were entrusted to me by my interlocutors, and the concern that those same experiences and thoughts might reinforce the common figures of public debate, feeding the phantasm of an official discourse on violence. Later as I was writing, reflecting through the transcripts of conversations, reading theological texts to understand references that eluded me, I realized that the conversations I had had with my interlocutors indexed a completely different set of realities and conceptual possibilities than those represented in public discourse. They demonstrated the presence of debate, in the strongest sense of ‘argumentation’. They suggested the forms of a complex reflection on despair, dispossession and depersonalization, as well as on the possibility and risk of those states, in an existential and a theological sense. And they were furrowed by questions insistently asked, in the lives of my interlocutors, about the meaning of it all; questions that in our conversations were formulated to a large extent in the ethical vocabularies of Islam.

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Kamal is 26. The first time we met he told me, as if to recapitulate his existential posture in a visual image, how he spent most nights on the hill overlooking the neighborhood and the textile factories, gazing at the freeway with his binoculars. He jokes about his posture as a night creature, one he shares with his close friends, each of whom had withdrawn from social life in the neighborhood and as much as possible from interaction with their family, at least at one level, each in his own particular way. After five years of waiting and attempting, he has perhaps lost faith in the possibility of actually getting across the border. Yet his position, as that of many others, remains one of self-imposed exile – a ‘refusal’ born of disillusionment, and of a lucid assessment of political realities. If only by a wish or aspiration, he refuses to participate in the ‘conviviality’ of power relations – the blurring of ‘eating’, and ‘being eaten’, at the same table, in a mode of psycho-political domination wherein symbolic recognition takes the form of voluntary servitude (Mbembe, 2005[2000]).

Kamal is unmarried, went to school until about the age of 15, and after several failed efforts (he once worked at one of the factories as an office clerk, and later unloading trucks) gave up on finding a job in Morocco and determined to leave at all cost. He introduced me to Jawad as his counterpoint, someone who had instead chosen to stay.

Jawad remained in school longer, almost reaching the baccalaureat, but lost his father to illness at the age of 16 and was led out of school by lack of support. No one in his family helped him. He shares with Kamal a critical awareness of exclusion and social inequality, of abusive power relations, and of the reality of social abandonment, but has a different approach to life that relies, to a certain extent, on his understanding of Islamic ethics in terms of the virtue of patience. He is married and has a young daughter, does not have a permanent job, but each day sets out to seek temporary employment as a car mechanic, while on weekends he plays the violin at weddings and other social events. He is aware that in reformist circles *sha'abi* (popular music) is considered impious but is not disturbed by this judgment that he considers too rigid. By contrast, he is inflexible on the question of risking one's life in the migratory attempt. In his view putting one's life at risk is a religious transgression (*ma'siya*), a sin, akin to suicide. Suicide, *al-intihar*, is prohibited in Islam, both the actual act of killing oneself, as well as just 'hoping for death' (*tamanni al-mawt*). In this sense, Jawad argues, the attempt at illegal migration is an ultimate rebellion against God, equivalent to an act of apostasy (*shirk*, denying the oneness of God). Because the person who gambles with life doesn't wait for the time chosen by God, and pursues his or her own cause of death, what Jawad glosses as an 'improper' death. In his view, there is value in the fact of living as such, however unbearable its present condition, not because human life is inviolable (as posited by humanitarian logics), but because no one has access to the knowledge of God and it is God who gives and takes life.

Kamal disagrees. He counters that, for someone like himself, the attempt at crossing to Europe, and the risk of death this entails, are not a challenge to God, but an ethical struggle for a better life. He argues this in terms of injustice, the notion of a life which has lost all value, has been humiliated and degraded, and in terms of the Islamic ethical concept of *jihad an-nafs*, the 'effort', of the self the 'struggle', against one's worldly desires and towards a possible future in a situation in which all paths are barred. I will come back to Kamal's interpretation of this concept, a peculiar synthesis of quietist and activist attitudes, 'work on the soul' and action against social injustice. Jawad argues for patience, the virtue of *aş-sabr*; Kamal expresses and seeks to justify impatience as a moral struggle on the part of the self, a religiously granted exception in a time of oppression.

Jawad is referring to the theological and ethical question of the limit of human freedom in despair. In different ways both Ibn Miskawayh (10th century) and al-Ghazali, in their works on ethics, discuss the importance of containing anger and learning to lead a balanced life, both through discipline, moderation and prayer, and through trust, or hope in the mercy of God (*raja*). In particular Ibn Miskawayh raises the issue of 'false virtues', maladies of the soul that model themselves on virtues while instead perverting their nature. False courage and false generosity, for instance: true courage, he writes, is the opposite of taking unnecessary risks with one's life, even in battle. More courage is required to face the agony of death in one's bed, when death comes at its appointed time, than to expose oneself to an enemy strike in misplaced acts of courage (Ibn Miskawayh, 1969). Jawad has not read Ibn Miskawayh; he might have been introduced to al-Ghazali's ideas in school, or in the pamphlets that circulate as a popular religious pedagogical literature, through cassette tapes of sermons, and television and radio programs, which host lectures on Islam and question-answer sessions with *mufiti* and scholars on a daily basis. Jawad's pronouncements, however, are also deeply

rooted in the popular religious imagination, which is the terrain upon and against which further elaborations have developed. The virtue of patience and endurance, the recognition of the unfathomable knowledge of God and a structural blindness of the faithful, the value of leading a balanced existence, without giving in to anger and to the influence of unrestrained passions are present in the vernacular as much as the literate understanding of what a good life might be.

But Kamal disagrees, appeals to the appropriateness of the emotional surge, a passionate unrest, in the present situation (the feeling of being *hayr*, fury, exasperation – a condition that shares a familiarity with anger and trance), and to the legitimacy of the ‘effort’, which is also a struggle for life in a situation in which life is unlivable and a change of conditions is called for. He opposes the attempt at migration to the alternative of losing moral integrity – becoming a thief – and in the Qur’an it is clearly stated that a person oppressed has an obligation to migrate rather than risk losing moral integrity. Finally, he introduces the pivotal concept of ‘despair’, both in the existential and in the theological sense.

As becomes clear in the exchange below, Kamal’s position is complex. In one sense, it is reminiscent of certain currents of the contemporary Islamic revival in Morocco and elsewhere, which establish a close relationship between a denunciation of social injustice, of alienation and marginalization, and the ethical-theological project of living in the ways of God (*fi sabil illahi*) – if necessary, by choosing exile or engaging in active rebellion. The writings of the Egyptian Siyyed Qutb, and the Iranian Ali Shariati in particular, set forth the notion of individual agency and responsibility in the struggle, which is *at once* a struggle for this world and the other, and which may result in death, a death that can be understood as martyrdom. Perhaps most prominently in Kamal’s position can be heard the intellectual influence of Sheikh Abdessalam Yassine, founder of the Moroccan revivalist movement *al-‘adl wa al-ihsan*, ‘Justice and ethical practice’, which has an important and growing grassroots constituency in urban Morocco, and increasingly in rural areas as well. In his writings as in his teaching, Sheikh Yassine offered an original synthesis, on the one hand, of Sufi affective and prophetic registers, visionary experiences and pedagogical practices (Darif, 1995; Tozy, 1999; Yassine, 1989, 1999, with the contemporary concerns and political critique of modernist and revolutionary Islamic revival, while explicitly drawing inspiration from the work and life of al-Ghazali).¹⁵ (It should be noted, however, that social critique and eschatological concerns as such are not unique to the contemporary Islamic revival. They are an important dimension in classical Islam, from the formative period, and persist in a continuous way in vernacular practice, unquestionably in the Moroccan case. They are associated with the Qur’anic imperative, so variously understood, of *al-amr bi-al-ma’ruf wa nahy ‘an al-munkar*, ‘advocating good and denouncing evil’, which, at least in the hagiographic recollection, has opposed the ‘fury’ of contestation in the name of God’s way to the unjust domination of rulers [Cook, 2001].)

In another sense, however, Kamal’s position is yet more complex. Unlike an active member in a revivalist movement, with whom he might share a language and a vision, Kamal has no ‘title’ – no stable place from which to speak or draw the grounds of his existential identity. He reflects, debates, and explores possibilities and the limits of his thought in the laboratory of his own bodily existence. And in that searching, which as such has an experimental character, he finds himself confronting the limits of

belonging, as well as the limits of faith. (One could think in this context of Hammoudi's [2005] recent book on the Hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca, as a religious, cultural and personal experience that exposes at once an attachment impossible to dissolve, and ambivalence impossible to reduce to an unproblematic belonging. The experience of this conundrum, which in the book is the author's own, dispossesses the subject of the capacity to invoke the authority of the reference from which it draws its identity, all the while being seized in its matrix and its passion. To sum up this conundrum, that of a faith necessarily unfaithful, of a participant who is both included and excluded, Hammoudi coins the terms '*sans titre*').¹⁶

Jawad reiterates his point: *Keyf'ate wahed l-ḥedd, imma ghadi ihya imma imut*. He sets a limit for himself (while it is God who sets the limits in his law), he may live or he may die, he may succeed and reach his goal, as he may die.

Stefania: Why is this wrong?

Jawad: Because he sets a 'limit' to his life on the base of this alternative, he gambles with his life: he'll succeed in getting where he may find work, or he will die. On the other hand if he had stayed home he might have eventually found work, and in any case he would be still alive (*katbqa 'aysh*): for life is a 'work' (in the moral sense of doing good works [*ma ḥeddek 'aysh, nta 'andek wahed l'amal*]).

Kamal: I disagree.

Jawad: I said it's a suicide!

Kamal: No! It is not a suicide. We speak of suicide when a person can't stand it anymore, blood goes up his head, he's furious, and he throws his life off; but here you have someone who is striving to find a way to live, to make a life for himself, feed his brothers and sisters, and send money to his parents, so that they may have a life and find some strength, a way out of this wretched existence: it is not suicide! I can't agree!

Jawad: I'll explain it to you with a different example. If he dies, if he drowned, his family won't find out, they think he made it to Spain. I know kids (*ddreri*) who want to flee to Spain and take their cell phone to call their family when they arrive. Then they get in the boat, and the boat capsizes and they all die [because, he explains, the dealer doesn't care, the boats are old and not maintained]. They all die. For the most part, those who die don't die at their own time (*makeymutush 'ala khaṭarhum*).

I ask at this point what they mean by *l-mawt bla khaṭar*. In the context of our conversation I understand it to be a death which is not one's own, the death of a person who doesn't take the time to die. Together, Kamal and Jawad reply with another example: the death of a taxi driver in Rabat, who after taking a passenger to a destination died at the wheel of his car. However suddenly, he died '*ala khaṭru*, that is, they explain, '*ala khaṭar allah*, at his proper time, that is, at the time chosen by God, *lahg l-'ajel dielu*, he met 'his' term, his deadline.

Jawad: But there are those who can't wait to die that way, the death 'assigned'. *Keyqtel rasu b rrasu*, he is his own cause of death; his death is a transgression, a sin, an ultimate rebellion against God (*ma'siya*). He disobeys, and doesn't wait for the time appointed; for example, he hangs himself. If he drowns at sea, or dies asphyxiated in a truck, he creates his own cause of death, and a person who died having created his own cause of death is like a person who doesn't recognize *tauhid*, the oneness of God (*bhal ila sherik b-allah*). That person is an apostate; he is equivalent to an unbeliever.

Jawad raises the question of transgression in terms of *shirk* and *kufri*, heresy (literally polytheism) and unbelief. I will come back to this important point, for what is implied in Jawad's indictment, as also in Kamal's reply, is that the 'risk' to one's life in migration and to one's soul in the fury of despair is also the one of losing faith.

Kamal does not join in condemnation, understanding from his own experience how the life of a person can withdraw, shrink away, all the way to seeking death. He has friends who committed suicide. A couple of days before this conversation he told me about a close friend who hanged himself in his room and when they found him his face was so white, he said, and translucent, as if all the blood had withdrawn from his body. Kamal sees this as surrender, a form of madness which slowly took over their lives, and from which he doesn't consider himself immune. He gives a definition of despair:

We say of that person, *qnat*. That person, we say, is a person that fell into despair, *qnat*. A human being, when he falls into despair, all doors close up for him, and he can no longer see or distinguish anything [*mabqa ybeyinlih walu* – connotation of having no horizon], and abandons himself to drugs. That's it. *Lahag wahed l-bedd*, he has reached a limit. His mind [*damagh dielu*, his mind-brain] is full [*amar*, 'full', beyond what can be tolerated], he sees only one thing on the horizon, hanging himself. *l-muhim, rruh dielu makatbqash, ruh dielu rah Seddrha b ll hashbish*, in the end, his *ruh*, his soul, doesn't stay in place, is no longer there, his *ruh*, he sent it off, out, with the drugs. . . . And as for what is on his mind, he only wishes for one thing: death.

Jawad: This is what we call suicide.

Kamal: This is despair, *l-qant*. [Kamal is using the term as a theological concept, and explains]: Allah said, '*La taqunatu minnu arrahumati allahi inna allah yaghufiru addunuba jami'an hwa alghafuru al-rahimiyimu*. (Despair not of the Mercy of God: for God forgives all sins, He is all forgiving, most merciful)' [Qur'an, 39: 53]. If you feel desperate, if you have lost all hope, trust your hope in God, perform your prayers, and see how your life will change. . . .

Stefania: But not all people have this kind of moral strength . . .

Kamal refers me to a tape of sermons, one he had already previously mentioned as specifically addressing the malaise of the youth.¹⁷ It is one of the several tapes he gave me as an introduction to the way contemporary piety and theological preoccupations come to inform his existential and intellectual world, at least at one level. Each sermon is composed of examples drawn from daily life and presented in the mode of a moral

allegory. The point is to show that in their involvement with worldly pleasures and gains, including western-style music, drugs, and the pursuit of wealth through abusive work relations and corruption, young people are 'dispossessed' (*al-muḥarramun* is the title of the tape, 'the dispossessed') from the way of God. (Examples of sudden impious deaths, intended to instill the fear of God in the faithful and, on the other hand, of sudden awakenings to the path of God are at the center of the argument). At one level Kamal identifies with this lesson, which corresponds to an aspect of his life experience, when in a moment of straying and desperation he was able to find rest in prayer. He did not tell me the story of that period in his life – which he sees as formative of the person he is today and of his coming to a certain kind of awareness, *l-wa'y* – until he showed me the place where he used to spend the night with his friends, an open green area at the edge of built-up space, where they drank and engaged in violent gang activities. He had lost all sense and taste for life, gave himself to drugs, what is colloquially called *l-qarqubi* – antipsychotic medications that one can buy in the street.¹⁸ Drugs made him feel like a corpse, he says, and this is why he took them. Despair is a critical figure in his discourse, and in the context of this account, itself structured as an 'example', it is a turning point.

During that period, one day a man approached him with an exhortation to join in prayer. Kamal did not listen. He did not want to fall into the proselytism of the *Islamiyin* in his neighborhood, even though he respected the work they did to help people with charity and provide social services neglected by public institutions. He was sunken in depression. But the man came back, and gave him an illustrated booklet showing the positions of prayer (*ṣala*). Kamal tried out of boredom, he says, as a sheer physical exercise, and started feeling better. He took on praying and attending a mosque, joined the community in their activities and in their outdoor retreats, where he was able to find again a sense of community, even just in performing tasks together – gathering firewood for cooking, practicing sports, performing communal prayer. He joined with them for a while, until they opposed his decision to 'burn' to Europe, and he couldn't renounce his project. He then separated from the group, and continued his search alone, in both a literal and a hermeneutical sense, or in the company of others with whom he shared the resolution to leave.

Jihad an-nafs: the struggle

I push Kamal to elaborate his position that death in the 'burning' attempt would not be a suicide. Is he suggesting that death in the *ḥarg* is comparable to death in war (*ḥarb*, *jihad*)? He nods and explains:

Yes, there is a resemblance; I mean war in the sense of *ḥarb nefsek*, 'be at war with yourself'. One struggles against one's *nafs*, the worldly desires of one's soul/self.

Kamal goes on to oppose the short-term desires of the *nafs*, in their whimsical immediacy, and the long-term hope which is represented by the migratory project. It is in this sense that death in the *ḥarg* may be compared with death in war:

l-ḥarg, you want to go to find a way to support your family: this is the main idea, you want to help, they don't have anything, a single room for ten people, it is like

being in prison, 10 people in a single room. One has to do something with one's life; I will do something with my life. This can't be called suicide.

* * * * *

Migration, in other words, is a work that pleases God. Its pursuit is a *jihad*, a struggle on the path of God. And if death were to occur, it would be like death in a religiously authorized war, for which the faithful find reward in the afterlife. Kamal's appeal to the notion of war is two fold, and combines two different understandings of *jihad* that in current debates are seldom considered side by side, even though in classical literature they are shown to be closely related.¹⁹

On the one hand, *jihad* is a constant 'war' with oneself, against an internal enemy, impossible to eliminate, and in fact *also* necessary for life – a *jihad* that only ends at death. On the other it is a war against an external enemy who represents a threat for the community of Muslims. While in the first sense of 'self-war' Kamal's use of the concept is close to the classical understanding of the cultivation of virtue, the second sense situates the 'enemy' as a form of oppression internal to the society – poverty, injustice, humiliation – stressing the struggle towards a change in historical condition, which can take the form of rebellion or exile, and which is based on a political assessment of the local and international political context. For Kamal the two meanings are closely related, and are both at play in the predicament of migration.

Jihad in the first sense is the effort to form and improve oneself, a work of poiesis in the Aristotelian tradition of ethics that was reformulated in the Islamic concept of *tahdib al-akhlaq*, the 'refinement of character'. *Jihad al-nafs* is the shaping of character by developing its fortitude and by learning to restrain the *nafs*, bodily soul or 'self', and its natural dispositions. In al-Ghazali's reading it is not so much a question of containing a demonic self as in a struggle of reason and passions (an understanding that would be more specifically Christian), but rather – for those who so choose, for it is a question of volition – to re-create their character and natural dispositions in the direction of a virtuous life. 'Were the traits of character not susceptible to change there would be no value in counsels, sermons and discipline, and the Prophet would not have said, Improve your character' (al-Ghazali, 1995: 25).

According to al-Ghazali, certain forms in existence are 'complete', and cannot be modified; others are 'incomplete', and can be modified by volition: natural dispositions, among them anger and desire, can be rendered obedient and docile by means of self-discipline and struggle. Re-educating dispositions does not mean to abolish them, but to re-orient them, restoring balance and moderation: for life needs desire, and the possibility of 'struggle' needs the emotion of anger – as long as they do not take over the self. Reforming character is a matter of extirpating and re-creating traits, through the slow work of habit formation which relies on 'exercise' – which is bodily as well as spiritual, for the two are in a constant exchange – and on the imitation of virtuous behavior in others. This work can be painful at first; al-Ghazali models it on weaning a baby, or restraining a wild animal. And in as much as it is performed by the self on the self, it requires technique – limiting food and sleep until a new habit is created, avoiding contact with others for a time. But, when a virtuous habit is acquired through daily exercise, it becomes second nature and a source of pleasure and delight. Al-Ghazali understands this work of re-shaping as an effort towards 'deliverance' (the Arabic term

is *najâ*, connoting being saved or rescued, delivered): deliverance from enslavement in the world in the pursuit of the desire for God; 'deliverance', which could be translated as a practice of freedom, if we are prepared to conceive of 'freedom' differently than the modern European term can convey for us. This is in two senses. On the one hand, it is the deliverance of the self from the tyranny of appetites (*shahwa*) and the pursuit of pleasures (*raghba*, *ladha*) by refining the character and inculcating higher desires. On the other, it is the deliverance from worldly attachments and relations and the possibility of a different vision, an 'awakening' to the reality of other pleasures and desires in the exposure to the alterity of God. Deliverance and awakening are made possible for al-Ghazali by the coming to awareness in the experience of finitude – what he calls the remembrance of death. The two aspects are intimately related, for the ethics of 'deliverance' he sets forth through self-discipline (*riyadat*) and the meditation on finitude (*dhikr*) could not be understood without the 'departure' from this world into the other, in the frequentation of death. Death, he writes, is the 'spoiler of pleasures', a disturbance, interruption, which produces a sudden realization away from the numbness of everyday routine.²⁰ The possibility of justice and political critique in this world depends on the cultivation of that *regard éloigné*, a gaze which is not of this world. Only a vision of the Hereafter, through the familiarization with death, and the patient work of remembering death everyday, in anticipation, in fear, and in the vicarious pain of separation, can free the believer from the preoccupations and greed of the soul (*nafs*). In this sense it can be said that eschatology and ethics are closely related, at least in the thought of al-Ghazali, and for some of these youths as well.²¹

Kamal explains:

Kaḥarḥ nefsek, you struggle, you are at war with your self (*nafs*). Your *nafs* wants this and that and can't wait, and you resist, you attempt to restrain it, 'tie it' (*katrbḥha*). The soul/self can be understood with the example of a horse; if you don't restrain the horse with a bit it wanders around, can't find its way. That wandering is *l-hawa*, the whimsies of our desire. God tells us that *l-hawa* follows the random whimsies of the self, wants to drink, smoke hashish, wants girls, wants to wander about in the streets. The *ḥarg* instead, the desire to migrate, to 'burn', is precisely the opposite: you want to go in order to support your family, feed them; they are poor, don't have anything, live packed in a single room, a prison. In one's life a person has to do something. I will do something with my life, and this is not a suicide.

The implicit assumption in what Kamal is saying is that dying in the effort of a *jihad* – a struggle for a better life, the ultimate scope of migration – is not a suicide, but a death in the way of God, for which there is reward in the afterlife. Even though he may die in the endeavor, the 'burner' of international frontiers will not, in his interpretation, burn in hell.

Jawad opposes that there are no grounds to consider illegal migration a war, because the illicit migrant only seeks to resolve a personal problem, to improve his life, obtain a material gain; while in a war one fights in the collective interest: 'In a war you fight for your country, in the *ḥarg* you fight for a dream, an illusion.' Kamal puts an end to the debate: 'We don't fight for an illusion, but for something that will find realization, God willing. You make the first step, God makes the next. It is not suicide.'

Jawad's point is that a war must be authorized, and the project of illegal migration is far from being authorized as a collective endeavor. There is a long tradition of debates, in Islamic jurisprudence as in politico-theological arguments, about who is authorized to call for *jihad*, or simply to 'condemn wrong' or declare someone to be apostate, and what kind of consensus is required. Kamal's approach suggests the possibility of authorizing oneself in a situation of exceptional hardship. Such self-authorization, from his friends' point of view, is a transgression and ultimately a sin. It is here that Kamal's position is closer to a modernist interpretation of the subject's responsibility (the believer understood as a subject of consciousness), a responsibility which is at once towards this world *and* the other. For Kamal, who is giving a theologico-political reading of the situation from which he seeks to migrate, the 'worldly benefit' to be gained in the endeavor is also, as he attempts to show, a spiritual struggle. In his writings, which have much influenced some sectors of the Moroccan youth, Sheikh Yassine locates that political-ethical struggle primarily in the 'heart', on the basis of what he calls the 'prophetic diagnosis' of a social and cultural crisis.

Yet within the logic of Sheikh Yassine's movement today, self-authorization would not be an option.²² One would have to rather look in the direction of the Iranian theologian Ali Shariati, theorist of the revolution, who in explicit dialogue with Fanon, Sartre, and Camus speaks of the emergence of a 'new self' who has come to the awareness of injustice through despair, and can authorize himself or herself to think and act on the path of God for a change of condition. Shariati describes the characteristics of such a new self, in terms of awareness, sensitivity, boldness of thought, loftiness of spirit, and fortitude of the heart. They are the characteristics of the Ideal Man – 'a man of *jihad* and *ijtihad*, of poetry and the sword, of solitude and commitment, of emotion and genius, of strength and love, of faith and knowledge. He is a man uniting all the dimensions of true humanity' – who is not one-dimensional and alienated from his own self, but through submission to God has been summoned to rebellion against all forms of compulsion (Khosrokhavar, 1995, 2003; Shariati, 1979).

Yet Kamal is not the 'ideal man' of Shariati. Despite his resorting to the vocabularies of selfhood and effort on the path of God, his approach, as well as that of his friends, is solitary and eclectic and fails, in an important sense, to live up to the 'absolute' – Shariati's condition for the realization of the new self. However conscious of pain and horror, Kamal's posture is ironic. Each of these youths is engaged on a search, a solitary quest which is external to institutions, and of which the migratory project, and the willful habitation/violation of boundaries, is but a metonymic image. That externality and that quest are values that some of them rediscover in their encounter with Islamic ethics, with their potential for self-transformation, political contestation, and the possibility of imagining a different world. It is not possible to apprehend the specific subjectivity these youths attempt to reconfigure outside of the debates, the possibilities, and the experiential and conceptual world of Islam. Yet, perhaps, it would be more appropriate to find a comparison with the imaginative and idiosyncratic millenarian political theology of some of the 16th century European figures, treated as heretics in some cases by the institution of the Church (Ginzburg, 1980).

As we closely follow the implications of Kamal's argument about the reciprocal relation of the 'war' against the self, the 'war against poverty and injustice' (*jihad al-fuqr*),

and the migratory project, we see the outline of a parallel between the 'hope' of the desire for God and its eschatological realizations, and the long term project of migrating to Europe. At this level, the personal and the collective registers, the private and the public, are intertwined. In both cases, the long-term horizon is made possible by the opening of a gap, a departure from one's 'self' and one's attachments, or, to borrow Shariati's (1979) expression, a 'migration from the self'.

The lifeworld of I-HARG

In my conversations with these youths I have tried to capture the state of mind of the *harg*, its figures and vocabularies, as a specific modality of being in relation to death, transgression, and the struggle for life. In attempting to follow their discourse from within, and in terms of the figures they themselves deploy, I would like to draw attention to its reflexivity, its capacity to produce new thought, in the modality of experiential narrative as well as of intellectual debate. In this perspective, I will now turn to a description of the conceptual and existential world that emerges from our conversations, focusing on a repertory of concepts or figures: 'despair' and the pursuit of 'limits', the degradation of life, the confrontation with death, the thought of migration, the paradoxical coming to 'awareness', and the development of an eschatological vision of the Last Day in the everyday. I conclude with a reflection on the eschatological imagination, which I discuss with the help of al-Ghazali, posing the question of the re-articulation of the subject in the remembrance of death: the fact of creating a 'link', or as Lacan says, *faire lien*, when all connections are broken (Lacan, 1997).

In the structure of address – I am their interlocutor – there is a request for listening, and for the validation of an experience that does not otherwise have a title to recognition.²³ They watch Moroccan and satellite TV (al-Jazeera and al-Arabiyya), which give much space to social and political reportage as well as roundtable debates on political and religious issues, and are familiar with the genre of documentary and the mode of individual witnessing that throughout the world, and increasingly in the Arab world, is promoting a new style of testimonial authority. At some level, they seek to occupy the position of institutional 'witness'.²⁴ At another, however, they speak from a place that cannot be appropriated, and in terms of a question that is singular, and is the mark of their own painful quest. In this sense, they bear witness to the vulnerability of a life form which is also personally felt as the risk of one's own destruction, and to the encounter with a drive to life, born in the confrontation with the limit of death.²⁵ In conversation with me they moved between different 'voices': the epic register of travel narrative, as a geographical exploration of limits; a mode of personal narrative with an implicit, and sometimes explicit, demand for a psychotherapeutic intervention (particularly in the context of traumatic experiences and in the relation with their families); and a mode of theological argumentation, from which they attempt to draw the elements of a possible reading. In as much as the different voices are inseparable, overlapping, and developed in an internal counterpoint, I will not try to separate out the different registers, and will discuss them instead as they come up in the narrative accounts.

Al-qanaʿ: despair

At issue is a sense of a withdrawal of life, of life shrinking. It is as if by the aftershock of an impact, human beings have been ejected from the space of life – the blood drawn out of their bodies, thrown into an Elsewhere which is also a different time, a tempo-

rality which is not of this world, and which, at the same time, is the bodily record of a zone of exclusion. This is expressed through the concept of *al-qanṭ*, or *qanṭ dduniya*, despairing of the world, extreme boredom, depression that becomes despair, loss of all hope; or with the image of the *ruh*, metaphysical soul, departing from the body, it is 'sent off, or 'migrating', into a space of death. It is what happens in dreams according to the Qur'anic and vernacular understanding of dreaming.²⁶ But in the uncanny doubling of despair it happens with drugs. Let's recall Kamal's definition:

We say of a person *qanṭ* – he or she fell into despair. A human being, when he falls into despair, all doors are shut for him, he can no longer see or distinguish anything, and abandons himself to drugs. *Lahg wabed l-hedd*, he has reached a Limit. His head is full; he sees only one thing, hanging himself; his *ruh*, his soul, doesn't stay in place, is no longer there, he sent it off with the drugs. . . . And as for what is on his mind, only one thing: death.

Al-qanṭ (classical Arabic *al-qanaṭ*) is not despair as universal human experience, as such immediately accessible and translatable – even though it claims universality on its own account within a different tradition of ethics. We might relate it to Kierkegaard's analytics of despair, or William James's experience of melancholy (James, 1994; Taylor, 2002: 35), but we must also take seriously the fact that in the use of these youth despair is a theological concept, whose semantic configuration refers to the notion of 'trial' of the believer.

In its vernacular use in Moroccan Arabic *l-qanṭ* is an image of imprisonment, lack of space, extreme boredom, and a cause of madness or suicide. In this sense when mentioned by a patient in the psychiatric emergency room, it is understood by psychiatrists as a sign of 'depression' or 'melancholy' (*ikti'ab* in psychiatric language), which can take hold of a person and reduce her to a psychic and bodily quasi-death.

Despair's relation to madness and migration is a recurrent theme in our conversations, in an intertwining of medical, theological, and existential registers. Despair can lead to madness, losing a person's mind in the sense of *l-humq*, madness without return, but may also lead the believer astray, erring away from the path of God. The two senses are both distinct and related, in as much as madness has a theological connotation contiguous with a medical one, in the vernacular understanding of demonic invasion, as well as in the normative approach of Sunni Islam.

The thought of migration is an antidote of despair. Kamal explains this to me with reference to his own malaise. He sees himself as 'knotted' or traumatized, *ma 'aqqad*, by an intimate wound, an essential vulnerability that exposes him to the risk of madness. This wound, which he traces to his early life within the family, is both the source of his vulnerability and of a certain vision, and it is at the origin of his desire to expatriate. The thought of the *harg*/burning, he says, in spite of the risk of death, is for him an effort to seek health. He explains the relationship of clandestine migration to madness, *l-harg u l-humq*, by the vernacular etiology of the 'black dot', the recognition of a destructive potential in each one of us, which is kept at bay by leading a life of ethical 'works':

In the head of each human being there is a black dot (*nuqta l-khela*). If you are active and involved in the things of life, if you practice *l-amal*, the works that please God,

you succeed in forgetting its presence inside your head, and its potential of destruction remains unrealized, the black dot remains contained, like a cyst, and does not harm you. But if you are not doing anything, if you are not working, just waiting in boredom, you start feeling its presence, become obsessive, and it is as if a wind blew through that black dot inside your head, and shattered its content in a million fragments. The black dot turns then into dust, and you go mad, you are lost.

The risk of madness in despair is paralleled by a risk of doubting the foundation of faith, or even challenging God, therefore entering heresy. Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya elaborates on this in his 'Treatment of Calamity' (1998: 142–7), stressing that 'losing the reward of patience and submission is truly greater than the disaster'. *L-qont*, in this sense, is close to the classical theological notion of 'losing hope' and 'losing guidance', 'errance' (*dalal*), understood as the experience of feeling abandoned by God. The person in despair has thoughts of being abandoned by God. It is in this sense that despair shares in the semantic structure of the concept of *kuf*r, usually translated as 'unbelief', and the person in despair comes to inhabit a border, a region of normative instability: *lahag wahed l-hedd* – 'he has reached a Limit'. On that border, certainty is suspended and the truth of revelation can be lost, or it can be discovered anew. The advent of questioning, from the Prophet Mohammed's moment of confusion as to the nature of his revelation (Benslama, 1988),²⁷ to al-Ghazali's (1953) self-narrative of a spiritual crisis,²⁸ is both foundational of the possibility of belief, and represents an essential risk. 'Who would despair of the mercy of his Lord save those who are astray in Error (*dalluna*)?' (Qur'an, 15: 56). In the debate with which I opened this article, Jawad sensed such potential transgression in the words of Kamal, and in the spirit of what he understood as the law, appealed to the language of 'sin', *ma'siya*, and charged with heresy the position of the illegal expatriate, a burner of political and theological borders. Kamal himself, just as he was describing the experience of losing hope (an experience which is also his own), cited a Qur'anic exhortation not to fall prey to despair, not to forget the compassion of God – also, perhaps, for its performative force.

In his study of ethical concepts in the Qur'an, Izutsu (2002) argues that the semantic configuration of the concept of *kuf*r comprises an array of related yet different meanings, none of which can be reduced to a simple notion of disbelief in the modern English sense of the term (Johansen, 2002, 2003).²⁹ All suggest that the possibility of *kuf*r is rooted in basic human dispositions, and hence the position of belief can never be a given, but is an open ethical work – a work, one may add, which in its unfolding can repeatedly encounter the risk and possibility of *kuf*r.

Despair is a trial, one of the trials of *fitna* to discern the quality, and truthfulness, of a person's faith. *Al-fitna* is a pivotal concept in the Qur'an, as also in the vernacular understanding. Reinterpreting a pre-Islamic notion of the immanence of harm and desire in the terms of a new ethics, *al-fitna* in the Qur'an is the 'limit' or 'trial' to ascertain the faith of the believer: 'Everyone shall have a taste of death: and We test you through disaster and well being, by way of *fitna*, and to Us you must return' (Qur'an, 21: 35).

Falling into despair and dwelling in that state amounts to losing trust in God, losing 'hope', *raja'*, in his compassion. Despair then is one of the 'limits' that can transgress into apostasy, or establish the truth of God's law. One aspect of this trial is 'the ordeal

of affliction and torture' (*fitna al-mihna*), which subjects the faithful to suffering at the limit of the intolerable. It is comparable to 'al-waswas', a whispering of the devil in the ear, and one of the widespread causes of madness: 'Wa fitnat al-šadr al-waswas', the fitna of the heart is the *waswas*, obsession and internal delusion (al-Manzur, 1988).

Despair marks the failure of the virtue of endurance, *aş-şabr*. And yet in certain Sufi readings it is seen as a state, a station (*maqama*), which is reached by the adept by way of a passage through a radical loss of self, which necessarily entails a risk of non-return. According to the revolutionary eschatology of Ali Shariati, on the other hand, who reads the Qur'an and the Traditions in light of Kierkegaard and Sartre, despair is the consciousness of injustice and suffering. Shariati sees a kernel of responsibility in despair, the responsibility of the oppressed (*mazlum*), who becomes a martyr in full awareness of his defeat in this world. In the debate with Jawad, Kamal's position pushes belief and personal-political engagement to a limit which is that of *fitna* – at the risk of impatience and arrogance, of overstepping the bounds (*tağha*), by assuming the experience of despair as a coming to consciousness. Al-Ghazali himself points out that sadness (*al-huzn*) is a state in which the soul/self is 'softer', already distanced from the pleasures and ambitions of worldly attachments, hence more receptive to the work of remembrance of death, and therefore to the possibility of vision, awareness (al-Ghazali, 1995: 63–4).

The slow death

The meditation on despair as an existential and theological risk gives way to a reflection on depersonalization, and on the end of connectedness in what is described as an aftermath of social life, and of life *tout court*. The words that keep coming to describe the event of becoming a non-person, are *al-mahgur*, the 'wretched', humiliated, reduced to the status of 'scum', *al-mqbur*, the one who is overpowered and vanquished, subjugated, *al-mqmu*, the one who is despised, valueless, subjected. These words lend image to the experience of what the youths call a 'slow death' (*al-mawt al-baṭī*), death by lack of place, a certain way of becoming an *arwah*, a 'spirit' while still alive, a living dead, through the 'shutting of all doors', the flattening of the horizon, metonymically embodied in the use of drugs which 'send off the soul', render the body insensitive, rigid like the limbs of a corpse. And in this context there would be so much to say about the frequentation of death, suicide, illness, violence, that engender a phantasmagoria of images, a world populated with spirits and regulated by the operations of magic, where the risk of the one who 'gambles with his life' to cross over to Europe is also the risk of being 'touched' by the jinns.

We leave here the domain of the ethical struggle, at least in the prescriptive sense, to enter *al-gharīb*, 'the uncanny', strange, that which exceeds mundane reality. It is the encounter with the demonic (another dimension of *al-fitna*) as a pervasive dimension of everyday life, as well as an encounter with 'harm' in the form of abandonment and oppression. In his writings Sheikh Yassine makes reference to the condition of *fitna*, humiliation and corruption in which the society dwells. At some level these youths situate themselves in that perspective. Yet their position is not one of affirmative moral denunciation: they are also existentially dwelling in a space of *fitna*. They are 'standing on the cusp', in a precarious and uncomfortable position, fraught with ambivalence (James, 1994, cited in Taylor, 2002: 59). 'Home', for them, has become *unheimlich* (Freud, 1919).³⁰ 'So many of us have been struck in the attempt at migration' (*tqasw*,

touched, implicit by the jinns): in their interpretation it is this 'having been touched', exposed to the realm and the operations of Death by the hand of the jinns, that causes the unleashing of the death drive, and results for so many in suicide.

Their reflection on the *huma* – the neighborhood, but also the social community in which they were born, a sharing of assumptions and habits, rites, ways of being together, and which in its ideal representation would be based on a sense of closeness that persists – is aimed at showing that the space of familiarity is both unlivable and uncanny, 'against nature'. There is no transmission of a desire to live. Not, in any case, in the unreconstructed places of genealogical belonging – the relation with fathers and mothers, with sisters and brothers. Fathers are represented as participating in the 'crushing' of the self, by the performance of their own weakness, as well as by the exercise of an empty authority that does not correspond to a symbolic 'support' (*damen*): 'You could have a university degree', says Jawad elaborating on his sense of having been abandoned by his family at his father's death, 'and in these neighborhoods several youths do have degrees, but if you don't have support when you need it, a person you can lean against, a guarantor, you will eventually surrender to drugs'. This condition is characterized in their eyes by the fact of not having a *damen*, a guarantor – a father, very often in their stories, but also a principle of legality, at the local as well as the international level. 'These kids who kill each other with knives and swords in our neighborhood at night, you may find that they are educated and even have university degrees: *ṭḡgru*, 'they have been crushed'.

They tell me how the project of 'burning' began in school when they were about 15. People had started crossing to Europe and would come back in the summer and tell stories, or there were just stories told about them, on the other side. They had left illegally, in the long distance trucks that would come and go, load and unload at the textile manufacturers down the hill from their neighborhood (*sharikat dyel export*). The idea started entering their minds like a whispering, an obsessive whispering in their ear (*wuswas*), and they could no longer concentrate in school: 'Our minds flew away with those distance tracks, our bodies were here, our being over there, we were *ḥayr*, beside ourselves, until we dropped out of school'. They describe their first little jobs at the textile factories, only the girls had good jobs and brought a decent pay home; they explain that girls are 'submissive', they accept exploitation, and the bosses prefer them, they don't make trouble. (The same 'submissive girls', however, who often don the headscarf, are also beginning to reverse established gender dynamics, asking the men in marriage, and financially supporting them. This is hard for the men to accept, or even acknowledge.) For them, there were only exhausting jobs, lifting heavy boxes and loading trucks, until the day they were able to climb into a truck unseen, and depart.

Afternoons spent remembering those first 'attempts' (*muḥawla*) with me, the excitement and the fear, long descriptions of *r'muk* (French, *remorque*), the long distance cargo trucks, in their technical and mechanical details: how the doors lock, how you elude control, what happens at the border with the custom police, how does it feel to be in there, squeezed in the midst of piles of jeans in plastic bags, in the dark, with no oxygen, flattened against the walls and hardly breathing. And then, in most cases, the disappointment of being discovered, on the Spanish or the Moroccan side, being questioned and sent back, and often beaten up by the police (beatings on the legs, to break the bones, 'so that we can't try again'). Kamal and Said made at least 10 attempts. Said never made

it to the other side, Kamal made it once, all the way to Algeiras, but when the police caught him in the street and addressed him in Spanish, he couldn't reply and was taken to the station and sent back. Only once they tried at sea. They speak about *l-harg* openly, the attempts, the fact of taking risks to go across. In the stories of crossing there is an adventurous dimension that makes them feel alive, and creates a bond among those who live in this space of abandonment and self-exile. Other things are much harder to discuss: the sense of being crushed, the suicide of friends, the fear of becoming mad, the situation at home, with parents and siblings, the impossibility of relating to their fathers, and also, for different reasons (it has now become dangerous), their frequentation of Islamist mosques.

They describe the state of mind of the *harg* in a language of addiction: '*l-harg keyjri f-l-aruaq bhal ddim, ana mbli* (burning flows in my veins like blood, I am addicted)', *mbli*, a term that is used for drugs, but also for being in love – I have lost all desire – *regbba* (desire, longing, for anything other than the burning itself). And in terms of rage, oppression: '*Ana hayr* (I am beside myself)', (*hayra* is confusion, helplessness, extreme anguish) and by the image of an elsewhere that becomes an obsession, and produces a cleavage, a rift, somewhat comparable to what happens in the phenomenology of dreams: '*Ddati hna, khatry lehe, bhal l-wsuas fiya* (my body is here, my Being is over there)' (with a gesture of the hand, far away, over there, in Europe), 'as if with a constant whispering in my ear'.

l-gharib

Ana qasit 'ala udd l-hariq, 'I got myself exposed/touched by the jinns because of burning'. Stories of demonic encounters are recurrent in our conversations, in counterpoint to the ethical register of *jihad al-nafs*, because 'burning' requires nightly waiting in forsaken places, or by the water, sites characteristically haunted by the jinns. But the exposure to 'touching' and demonic possession has also to do with the emotional state of a person who is *hayr*, in a rage, or in the heat of despair. These stories are accounts of events of being seized into a space of death for those who are vulnerable and will end up losing their minds or committing suicide; they are told as cautionary tales, but also offered as factual reports on a state of things, indexes of the withdrawal of life. But there are other narratives in which the person stands up to the jinns and tests the fortitude of his or her will. The 'burner' is represented as cultivating the volition and skills of a healer who develops the interior strength to encounter the demonic without being seized. As Said tells of his encounter with a feminine presence one night that he was 'risking', he is narrating such a story:

One night at Aswak Assalam [a supermarket] we were 'risking' (*kanriskiw*), just by the freeway, there is a thicket, it is a haunted place (*ghaba mskuna*). And a girl went by, she was beautiful, wore a long white dress, and was all covered with gold, and we were sitting there, waiting [waiting to see whether they could climb inside a cargo truck]. I got up, wanted to check out her beauty from close up, verify her true being [jinn or human], and my friends held me down. I am not afraid of Them, even if they materialize right here in front of me. If you are afraid of them, they strike you. I am checking her out carefully, she is walking very slowly, I check her feet, she has camel feet – they don't have feet like us humans. The other kids were hiding or calling

for help, I kept looking at her, and our gaze met, my eye met her eye, she made a sign and I replied with a sign, she turned her face around, started walking very slowly, and I followed her, she put some distance between us, and I followed her at that distance, and kept looking at her. I had wandered a long way from people. Then she disappeared, and I returned to my friends.

Said looks at the jinn, wants to stand up to her gaze, but humans cannot stand that gaze without losing their mind. At stake is the 'testing' of his fear, fear of madness and death, by confronting the *fitna* of a she-demon, who is also a personification of Europe. Said is testing his capacity to resist, not being lost – in the theological sense of *dalla* as perdition, and in the vernacular sense of becoming her prey, but he's also exploring his own fascination and desire. It is an art of danger (Le Poulichet, 1996).

World Ending

Prompted by a violent happening the previous night, Kamal and Said start reflecting on death – death as a physical killing. Kamal recalls an event, a dispute between two youths, one stabbing the other with a knife. The victim grabbed Kamal's leg to make a shield with his body, and as Kamal freed himself the other was struck to death. It was the first time he witnessed a violent death, he says, a disfigured death (*mwta meshuba*), obscene, public, a death which, in itself, is a punishment from God. Kamal recalls his own astonishment: 'The last rattle of a dying person is like the rattle of a sacrificed lamb' (*debiḥa*). In conversation, each recalls the event of a death. They visualize the corpse, the physicality of the body, bleeding until it becomes white and translucent, or rotting in a hole, where it will be found days later (Said says he showered for days without being able to get rid of the smell of death on his skin); or frozen in the refrigerators at the morgue (Said recalls having brought the freezing corpse of a little girl in his arms from the morgue all the way home for the funeral), to practice 'good works', he says.

The visualization of death in their recollection explodes the existential frames of daily life. It inscribes the object-like quality of the corpse in the present as a 'remembrance of death', which is not a cultivated attitude, in the sense in which Gnostics practice *dhikr*, or at least not explicitly, but something that befalls them, as death does. The experience of death, of the corpse, radically alters the coordinates of the real, tangibly producing a temporality of the afterlife in the here and now of presence.

In 'The Remembrance of Death and the Afterlife' (1989) al-Ghazali provides a phenomenological description of the experience of death as the event of a cleavage, a radical dispossession which is a 'lapse' into another, incommensurable state. He describes in a profusion of visual details the decomposition of the body in the grave, the fear of the soul, the darkness and smell of the grave, the worms, and the questioning by the angel of death, and invites the faithful to meditate on those images, producing them in the imagination and imprinting them in the soul as both an ethical and an existential bodily experience. Through *dhikr* the living learns to look at the world, and oneself, from the outer-temporal standpoint of the grave: 'the dead man sits up and hears the footsteps of those who are present at his funeral, but none addresses him save his tomb, which says, Woe betide you, son of Adam! Did you not fear me and my narrowness, my corruption, terror and worms? What have you prepared for me?' (p. 135). Seeing the

world from the standpoint of the grave is a step towards 'unveiling'. Yet understanding death is impossible for human beings, 'since death cannot be understood by those who do not understand life, and life can only be understood through knowing the true nature of the spirit itself'.

The themes of al-Ghazali's 'remembrance' have an echo in conversation with Kamal and Said. In the midst of their recollections of death I asked them the question of the sense of life, the worth of life, if it still had a meaning, in their neighborhood, in relation to the stories of violence and abjection, and to their representation of life as 'crushed' and 'violated'. Kamal replied:

You see the world, it is like a glass of tea, you drink it and it is empty. You ask me what life is, what the meaning of life is in this (lower) world, *dunya*. Life, you enter from one door, and come out from another, *dkhal f bab u kharj f bbab*. *L-Akhera*, the Afterlife, life on the side of death, is something else. It is an unveiling, you become aware. And the point is becoming aware of the Afterlife in this life.

But in the banality of everyday life, he continued, in the neighborhood, the first time he witnessed a death, a murder in the street, he couldn't sleep for days. But then one becomes accustomed, and now he was no longer affected. Of course he's afraid of dying, despite everything. But he does accept that he may die in the attempt at migration, in a truck. . . .

He continues, and the visualization of death in this world lapses to a vision of the Last Day: 'On the Last Day, the day of resurrection, we will all come out in the open, and one person will not recognize another. The kings will come out, Hassan II and Mohammed V, they will come out naked, and no one will know them.'

The imagery is reminiscent of Qur'anic reckonings of the Last Day, 'the Hour'. For in the landscape of the Hour, a landscape flat and without horizon, people will be scattered like moths, barefoot and naked, and no one will recognize the other. It is the end of human connectedness, family, community or nation, and the radical aloneness of each person: in al-Ghazali's words, it is 'the day in which the secret things are rendered public, the day in which no soul shall aid another', 'the day in which they are summoned towards the infernal fire', 'no father may assist his son', and 'a man shall flee from his brother, his mother and his father', even mothers will abandon their babies (al-Ghazali, 1989: 186–7). The condition of life at the 'limit', as these youths describe it, in the aftermath of society, necessarily evokes for a person within this tradition the Qur'anic vision of the end of time. And how could the 'passage' itself, the 'crossing' of the geographical chasm between the continental fault lines of Africa and Europe, not evoke the *sirat*, the traverse or narrow bridge over the chasm of Hell – the bridge thinner than a blade or a thread, which will widen like a highway to let across the saved, or instead shrink like a blade to make the damned fall, pushed down into eternal fire (Al-Ghazal, 1973; Smith and Haddad, 2002[1981])?

Notes

- 1 My grateful acknowledgement goes to the youths in Rabat and Casablanca who have been my interlocutors in these conversations. I have changed all names of persons and places in the article. I also would like to thank Mohammed Hamdouni Alami,

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- 2 Safouan has been closely associated with Lacan. He translated Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams* into Arabic.
- 3 The Seminaire du Symbolique in Rabat has been a site for debate on these questions. Some of the ideas in this article were elaborated in constructive dialogue with Rabat psychoanalysts Fouad Bencheikroun, Farid Merini, and Abdallah Ouardini who, unlike the psychoanalytic position I discuss in the article, do engage with the emergent question of Islam (see, for instance, Bencheikroun, 2005).
- 4 It should be noted, however, that Asad discusses the way in which in a number of historical contexts 'coherence' is the result of a struggle, and the mark of a political claim for discursive dominance.
- 5 The question of whether eschatological reasoning and imagining presuppose the closure of hermeneutics in the certainty of the end of time, which is also the fulfillment of prophecy, is once again at the center of debate. Most secular interpretations argue in this direction, postulating a fundamental incompatibility between the 'closed future' of eschatology and the 'open future' of modernity. Lowith, however, whose reflection on eschatology and history shaped the early configuration of this debate (1957), points out that eschatological time is hermeneutically open, and more so than if the time of modern science, if science is understood in terms of calculability and predictability, in as much as human beings have no access to the designs of God. In *Il tempo che resta* (2000) Agamben revisits this question through a close reading of St Paul's letter to the Romans with Walter Benjamin's Theses on the Philosophy of History – Benjamin's visionary reflection on the experience of *jetzzeit*, the messianic 'now', in which time is interrupted, as a coming of the temporality of the End. In a chapter on the figure of the 'apostle' (whose features Agamben recognizes in both St Paul and Benjamin), and which he contrasts with the figure of the 'prophet', Agamben distinguishes 'eschatological time' from 'messianic time'. The first is static and incommensurably 'distant' in the future, he argues, as the End of Time, while the second is dynamic and 'near', immanent, and can be understood as 'the time of the end', as experienced in the present moment. Messianic time, in his view, is an intermediate temporality – a 'limit' and an 'excess' – between sacred eschatological/apocalyptic time, and profane chronological time. In this article I implicitly engage with Agamben's discussion of messianic time (which is akin to Lacan's '*moment de conclure*'), but attempt, at least in the context of my ethnography, to overcome the dichotomy through a reading of the eschatological writings of al-Ghazali side by side with the eschatological visions of the youths with whom I talked – which are spoken at once in the future and the present.

- 6 As an engagement with the work of De Martino in *La fine del mondo* (1977), Crapanzano contrasts 'open' and 'closed' millenarianisms and eschatological horizons in the last section of the book.
- 7 Forty-five people were killed in the bombings at five different sites in the business center of downtown Casablanca. Most of the dead were Moroccan nationals. This includes 13 suicide bombers and self-described martyrs. They were all from the same shantytown in Casablanca, Sidi Moumen (population 130,000).
- 8 The Moroccan press from this period is dedicated entirely to attempting to understand, document, and diagnose the situation that might have produced the bombings in Casablanca. See in particular *Maroc Hebdo*, *la Gazette du Maroc*, *Aujourd'hui le Maroc*, and *As-Sabifa*. Other weeklies such as *Le Journal* and *Tel Quel* tried to resist what they called 'l'amalgame'.
- 9 As done worldwide in the Euro-American press, the French and English terms used to describe the bombings emphasized 'suicide' as the distinctive feature of the attack. The Moroccan press in French was no exception, using *attentat suicide*, while the perpetrators were called kamikaze following the international press. The Moroccan press in Arabic, by contrast, and in this following the orientation of the Arab press in other parts of the Middle East, variously characterized the attacks as '*ameliyya irhabiyya* (terrorist operation) or '*ameliyya jihadiyya* (jihad operation). From the point of view of those who committed the acts, the action was referred to as '*ameliyya istishahdiyya* (martyr operation). There is little reference to the notion of suicide in the Arabic characterization. And in fact several articles published in the Moroccan press at the time, both in Arabic and French, were written with the didactic intent of explaining the condemnation of suicide in Islamic theology and the error of those youths who could think that their act could amount to an act of *istishahad*, or martyrdom. Thanks to Mohammed Zernine for clarification on this point. A discussion of the question of violence and its representation in the aftermath of the 2003 Casablanca attacks is found in a special issue of the review *al-fikr wa naqd* (Zernine, 2004).
- 10 As documented in the Amnesty International report of May 2004, and later also in the Moroccan press.
- 11 Translation: The *takfiri* (literally, those who declare a portion of a Muslim society heretical – promoters of excommunication, *takfir*) are estranged and alienated youth (*aliénés* also means 'mentally deranged'), issued of disintegrated social milieus, who, in their lives have encountered nothing other than the sordid and brutal universe of the ghettos, and have been treated by society as ferocious beasts. In the name of a certain sectarian interpretation of Islam they turn back this heartless ferocity against the established order.
- 12 What follows is the transcript of a tape-recorded conversation in June 2003, in Rabat.
- 13 'Lo: as for those whom the angels take [in death] while they wrong themselves, the angels will ask: In what were you engaged? They will say "We were oppressed [weak and humiliated]". The angels will say, "Was not Allah's earth spacious that you could migrate therein?"' (Qur'an IV, 97–100).
- 14 Hodgson clairvoyantly makes this point in *The Venture of Islam: Conscience and History in a World Civilization* (1977).
- 15 While the reference to al-Ghazali remains foundational, the Sheikh and the movement as a whole reject today any kinship with Sufism, choosing to be

associated with modernist currents in the international Islamic revival. Abdessalam Yassine had, however, earlier in his life, been a disciple at an important Sufi *zawya* in Northern Morocco. For a biography of Shaykh Yassine see www.aljamaa.com and www.yassine.net

- 16 In a different context, but with reference to a comparable conundrum of belonging, see Pandolfo (2006).
- 17 In his book on the practice and the implications of Qur'an cassette listening Hirschkind (2006) argues that the kind of listening associated with this modern and reproducible medium is not passive, but instead constitutive of an ethical self. Listening-performing, or chanting, is an irresolvable couple, and it is in fact understood as such in the Arabic concept of *sama'*, listening, which presupposes an active role and creative function. Hirschkind's text engages with the representation of physical death and the relation to eschatological time conjured by Qur'anic recitation, whether live or mechanically reproduced in cassette recordings.
- 18 Literally, *l-qarqubi* indicates the agent by which one is turned over (*qarqab*, vernacular onomatopoeic), inside out, or upside down.
- 19 Their contiguity is reckoned by a much-cited Hadith, one al-Ghazali brings to his discussion of the 'exercises' of the self (*riyadat al-nafs*):

Our Prophet said to some people who had just returned from a *jihad* (war): Welcome, you have come from the lesser to the greater *jihad*. Oh emissary of God, he was asked, and what is the greater *jihad*? The *jihad* against your soul, he replied. And he said, 'The real *mujahid* is he that wars with himself for the sake of God.' (al-Ghazali, 1989: 56)

Al-Hakim al-Tirmidhi, commentary on the Hadith above, cited in T.W. Winter's introduction to al-Ghazali.

- 20 *yakaddar 'ala al-insân al-ladhât wa ash-shahwât* ([death] spoils for human beings pleasures and longings; al-Ghazali, 1989: 8–9).
- 21 In *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood (2004) provides a description of contemporary religious pedagogies and a world of practice which share a remarkable resemblance with al-Ghazali's reflections on spiritual exercises, *ryadat al-nafs*, disciplines of the soul. The book does not engage in a discussion of al-Ghazali's theological-ethical universe per se, but shows how that tradition is revived in contemporary pedagogical practices in the Egyptian feminine *da'wa movement*. In the wake of recent problematizations of the questions of tradition and religion, which she furthers in terms of a critique of liberal vocabularies of freedom and agency, Mahmood's book follows the pathways of a discursive tradition that is at once old and new, continuous and discontinuous, and lives in the practices, affects, desire (for God), styles of argument and bodily investments of the women who actively participate in it. Her book attempts to demonstrate the inherent coherence (and specific rationality) of these practices, arguments, and theological orientations. This methodological and textual strategy accounts for why *Politics of Piety* does not set as its primary task to explore the phenomenological complexities of particular lives in their necessary open-endedness. For the work's chosen task is that of apprehending the embodiment and reflexivity of an Islamic discourse, which is not 'the women's discourse', but the

discourse from which they draw orientation and reference, which is immanent in their practices, and in relation to which they articulate their subjectivity. At a moment in which the very possibility of recognizing the existence – and the right to continue to exist – of life forms that draw their ethical and political reason from the theological universe of Islam, Mahmood's contribution is crucial. While clearly in dialogue with that work, my approach in this article also somewhat differs from it, for two reasons:

1. Because of the specificity of the youths' experience I discuss in my article (solitary, fragmentary, outside of established affiliations to a collectivity or a religious movement), I don't focus on the coherence of a discourse, of which I assume both the theoretical coherence and the necessary incoherence, but on the way this ethical and theological tradition is articulated with and in the lives of particular people, who also, in the situation I describe, push that discourse to its 'limit', entering a realm of indeterminacy which is beyond reason, and cannot be accounted for even in terms of a practical reason understood with Aristotle. I do emphasize, however, that the experiences of Kamal and his friends acquire a certain coherence precisely by reference to the eschatological tradition articulated by al-Ghazali, and that their reflections and existential explorations are made possible by that tradition's own formulation of the limits of reason, of indeterminacy, and heresy. Hence, I argue, the youth's experience cannot be understood without seriously engaging with that theological tradition, and exploring its conceptual and existential possibilities and conceptualization of limits from within. (Thanks to Charles Hirschkind for our exchange on this point.)
2. On the basis of a reading of al-Ghazali (1989, 1995), I suggest that it is possible to demonstrate that the apprenticeship of *ryadat an-nafs*, spiritual exercises, or disciplines of the soul, is predicated on the experience of alterity and finitude al-Ghazali describes in his work on death and eschatology. This requires a reflection on the limits of reason, and an exploration of what, in William James' (1994) terms, might be called the existential edge of experience. Ethical practices, in the tradition of al-Ghazali, are also, necessarily, a guided encounter with alterity. In this sense it seems to me that a discussion of practices and of the crafting of virtues could be complemented by a reflection on the existential questioning of the lives that are invested in, and shaped by, that ethical project. A renewed reflection on the limit nature of 'religious experience' in James' terms, seems to me a possibility to explore – in the aftermath of Asad's (1993) poignant critique of the European category of 'religion'. This is what I attempt to do as a beginning in my discussion of the concept of *al-qanaʿ*, 'despair', in the experiential accounts of the Moroccan youths. It is my position that the two sides of this discussion – on the apprehending and representing of ethical-theological practice, as well as on methodology – are related. The Lacanian 'time of understanding/concluding' I referred to at the beginning of this article is predicated on an encounter with alterity, the possibility of inhabiting a limit, which may be also the event of risking reason.
- 22 This, more precisely, outside of the person of the sheikh and a few high ranking members of the group. In 1974 Abdessalam Yassine wrote a letter to Hassan II in

which he denounced the situation of the country and advocated reforms and a change of conditions in the name of Islam (*al-Islam aw twfan*). He subsequently was assigned to two years of psychiatric confinement in Marrakech for 'prophetic delusions', and when he came out of confinement created a journal which later engendered the organization of *al-'adl wa al-ihsan*. Today this organization has still, technically, an illegal status, but is increasingly considered as a most important political opposition, treated as such by the press, and de facto included in the public debate. The possibility of inclusion in the Moroccan political scene is experienced by many of its members as a danger – losing vision and the possibility of critique. As witnessed by a corpus of visionary dreams of grassroots militants endorsed by the organization as truthful visions (*ruya ṣaliḥa wa aṣṣahīha*) and recently published on the organization's website, there is a concern for not being enlisted in the political game (Mohammed Tozy, personal communication, and his unpublished presentation on *Les rêves visionnaires de al-'adl wa al-ihsan*, Colloque de Fes sur 'Les Trois Monotheismes', Association Lacanienne Internationale, Fes, Morocco, 7–9 May). As for the issue of hierarchy and authorization on the path to gnosis and in the relation with a sheikh, see Lings (1993).

- 23 I speak Arabic and to an extent Morocco is home for me. I am originally European – Italian – and this inscribes a doubling between our respective positions and the themes and questions of our conversations, a fact that is openly acknowledged and at times reflected upon in our exchanges. I am conversant with questions of mental health because of my interest in psychiatry, mental illness and the 'cures of the jinn', and am therefore an interlocutor who can relate to that side of their experience. The book I plan to write is important to them, because it represents a public echo for our conversations. In this sense it could be said that the book I am projecting to write functions as a Third.
- 24 At the time I was conducting these interviews a truth commission was officially instituted in Morocco to investigate, document and record human rights violations committed since the early years of independence, and during the kingdom of the late king Hassan II (1956–99). L'Instance Équité et Réconciliation (IER, in Arabic, *Al-Insaf wa al-musalaha*), created in April 2004 by royal decree, collected hundreds of testimonies of 'victims' or relatives of victims, and received over 20,000 victims' requests for reparation by the state. In spring 2005 a number of public hearings were organized by the IER in several cities, widely covered by the media and, at least the first time, broadcast on Moroccan television. This process stirred much debate, and produced complex and sometimes unintended reactions. For several months it captured public attention, contributing to the feeling (already fostered by the growing importance of reportage and first person accounts in the programming of Arabic satellite television) that the posture of 'witness' is a pivotal step in the claim for rights. In the Moroccan situation, however, the equation of witnessing, injury, and citizenship (based on human rights) is less obvious than in other international contexts. Among large unprivileged sectors of the Moroccan population, skepticism colored people's perception of the work of the IER, and the notion of accessing citizenship through witnessing.
- 25 See Hammoudi (2005: 286): 'Chacun était donc parti à la découverte de la vie, dans le parcours qui nous séparait de la mort'.
- 26 See my discussion of dreaming in Pandolfo (1997).

- 27 Benslama comments on a passage from Al-Tabari's commentary on the Qur'an (8th century) where it is said that the Prophet had a moment of doubt concerning the true nature of the revelation, for the voices he heard frightened him and made him fear he might be possessed.
- 28 One can also think comparatively of Kierkegaard's *Of Sickness unto Death*. See also Cheddadi's (2004) chapter on the Qur'an and the fundamental paradox of truth in the Qur'an.
- 29 Discussing the historical configuration and transformation of notions of truth, belief, and unbelief in a number of different contexts, including recent Egyptian 'apostasy trials', Johansen suggests that it might be precisely the process of positivization of the law in Middle Eastern countries in the late colonial and postcolonial period that rendered apostasy a crime objectively describable and punishable by the law of the state (see Johansen, 2002, 2003).
- 30 For an elaboration on this un-homely dimension of the 'home', in a different context, see my articles, 'Le noeud de l'ame' (1999) and 'Je veux chanter ici. Parole et témoignage en marge d'une rencontre psychiatrique' (2006).

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STEFANIA PANDOLFO is Associate Professor of Anthropology, University of California at Berkeley. Her work has centered on the study of forms of life, subjectivity, and memory, with a focus on Islam, the Arab world, and the question of post-coloniality. In recent years her research and writings have addressed new forms of the subject and ethics at the interface of psychical/psychiatric, political, and religious processes and discourses, and in the context of the Islamic revival. Current projects include research on transnational migration and youths, and on emergent Islamist discourses and practices relative to the healing of mental illness. She is the author of *Impasse of the Angels. Scenes from a Moroccan Space of Memory* (University of Chicago Press, 1997) and is currently completing a book (*The Knot of the Soul: Madness, Psychiatry, Islam*), based on research at a Moroccan psychiatric hospital, as well as sites of vernacular and Qur'anic healing. *Address*: Department of Anthropology, 232 Kroeber Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720, USA. [email: pandolfo@berkeley.edu]
