

State Bureaucrats or Social Leaders? Conflicts in the Implementation of Morocco's Islamic Education Curriculum

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Public education is perhaps the most obvious and, at the same time, the most understudied mechanism linking state and society. In my dissertation, I examine a conflict in Morocco over the content of an Islamic education curriculum between state bureaucrats, religious leaders, Islamic education teachers and education inspectors. This topic is interesting for several reasons. First, it problematizes the assumption that the state is a coherent, integrated body by illustrating intra-state dissent and conflict. Second, by identifying the main actors and their positions in this conflict, it illustrates important cleavages in Moroccan society. Third, it provides ethnographic data on the content of an Islamic education curriculum in one of the most liberal Arab states. Finally, because the curriculum reform was part of a larger restructuring of religious agencies in response to the Casablanca bombings

in 2003, it provides a case study on the day-to-day impact and unintended consequences of state responses to violent attacks.

I will be doing the fieldwork for this research from November 2010 to October 2011 in Fez. Through interviews and archival data, I will identify the main actors, their positions and important events that allowed the curriculum reform to occur. Through discourse analysis of the final curriculum, I will evaluate which actors' preferences were incorporated and whose were ignored.

Past fieldwork in Fez was extremely important in guiding me to select this dissertation topic. While studying Arabic in Fez on a FLAS fellowship during the summer of 2008, I lived with a Moroccan woman and her family. The woman was an Islamic education teacher at a local elementary school, and she spoke frequently of the reform to the curriculum, all the training that she was required to do, and ways that she felt

the curriculum could be improved. Our informal conversations later guided me to pursue my current dissertation topic.

During the summer of 2009, I spent three months doing pre-dissertation fieldwork with funding through collaboration with Herbert Kitschelt of Duke University and from the UF Political Science Department. During this time, I experimented with survey research, gained experience interviewing in French, and developed a number of contacts with Islamic education teachers, local political party leaders and journalists.

After completing the dissertation, I hope to expand the project to a comparative study of Islamic education reforms in North Africa and the Middle East.

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