

From the Diversity of Endogenous Spaces to the Specificity of Exogenous Space.

The case of Bab Lamrissa Square in Sale Morocco

Abdellah Moussalih

Ecole Nationale d'Architecture de Tétouan (ENAT), Morocco

moussalihmail@yahoo.fr

Abstract

This article presents the social uses and practices of users through their manifestations, in order to evaluate the evolution of the relationship between the transformation of spatial structures and the production of landscapes representative of the image of the urban area.

In order to support the hypothesis, the field of investigation is focused on the public space of Bab Lamrissa, which now represents a natural extension, a kind of immediate "periphery" of Sale, which abolishes the physical boundaries. Deciphering the forms and methods of social allocation of the Bab Lamrissa square reveals a differentiation of uses and divisions, establishing the courtyard as an open-air urban laboratory.

Keywords: Salé, Medina, Bab Lamrissa, public space, appropriation, uses

To cite this article:

Moussalih, A. (2022) "From the Diversity of Endogenous Spaces to the Specificity of Exogenous Space: The case of Bab Lamrissa Square in Sale Morocco", *The Journal of Public Space*, 7(1), pp. 409-420. doi: 10.32891/jps.v7i1.1613.

This article has been peer reviewed and accepted for publication in *The Journal of Public Space*.



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution - Non Commercial 4.0 International License <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

Introduction

Questioning the notion of public spaces in the means of Moroccan cities using western vocabulary is akin to a risky adventure. The literature that has addressed this topic is fundamentally divided into two types, those that deny and those that confirm the existence of endogenous spaces that fulfil functions similar to public spaces in the western sense.

Moral: public spaces in ancient cities cannot be conceptually approached by them, regardless of its socio-spatial and perceptions of society.

In this context, we can retain that the organization of the Medina, the relations of neighbourhood, social control govern and circumscribe the limits of public spaces that remain viscous and elusive. This particular socio-spatial configuration forms the exit spaces of women who find themselves in the process of negotiating about the exit spaces and thus their freedom. A daily battle becomes thematic in the new public spaces of the contemporary city.

Knowing the theoretical hypotheses relating to the structure and formation of public spaces in a Moroccan city requires understanding this notion in the context of Medina.

As an evolving traditional tapestry, its cultural foundations and its social transformations, this knowledge is essential to understand the genesis of the public space in the case of the Moroccan city and particularly the case of Sale.

To support this concept, we based our field investigations on the public space of Bab Lamrissa, which now constitutes a natural extension, a kind of immediate “periphery” of Sale that abolishes the physical boundaries.

The Medina, an apparatus of endogenous public spaces and hierarchy:

In the context of the Moroccan city, understanding the notion of the public space is intimately linked to the various changes of the Moroccan urban phenomenon, inseparable from the profound transformations experienced by the traditional Moroccan urban space, namely the Medina. Approaching and appropriating public space in the classical city (the Medina) requires a reading that takes into account the original fabric and its evolution, called “the cultural foundations and the social transformations” (Navez-Bouchanine, 1992) but also religious principles. “Certainly, the organization of the Medina has been on contextual and ideological grounds, but these alone cannot explain the practices of the public space. Local customs and cultures contribute to shape the relationships between people and their environment” (Karibi, 2015, p. 259). Despite the absence of geometric regularity, dear to western rationality (Fejjal, 2015, p.265): “although an uninitiated visitor might suffer from vertigo and experience some disorientation, the slawis found the streets of their city modest and neat” (Brown, 2001, p.71). The urban fabric of the city reveals its own rationality which characterized by a separation between the residential area and the business zone, by arranging its traffic pattern in hierarchical networks¹.

From the morphological point of view, the great mosque (Al-Masjid Al-Jami) forms a prominent central element of the Medina in which everything converges and flows from

¹ It presents itself as filtered spaces from the doors to the living quarters. The raw material is made step by step, to arrive and sold as a complete product at the centre. This gates logic is also valid for the taxation of goods that enter and leave the city, the passages, whether at Bab Sabta or Bab Fez, were strictly controlled to levy taxes on the goods entering and leaving the city.

it, as if it is a heart. As a community space, but also a public one, the agglomeration organized around this structuring equipment:" the most prestigious markets and workshops [are] located in the centre of the city near the main holy element, the mosque². On the other hand, we [find] the undesirable elements near the periphery". Thus, from the centre to the sides, the various elements of the city are organized according to its nobility and its symbolic value.

The central position of the Great Mosque³ symbolizes the dominance of the urban, cultural and religious aspect of the Medina. It represents an essential spatial component that organizes and determines the movements of the believers who have the opportunity to meet at the prayer time (five times a day). These places were conducive to exchange, consult, pray, study or simply meet to talk (Brown, 2001, p. 81), leading to maximization of social interaction and fulfilment of community life.

All production and service activities were organized by a spatial hierarchy; as a nerve centre in the city. It is precisely around this community but also in the public space where we have easily seen the expression of the preferential evaluation of certain noble professions, which is somewhat closely related to worship: "Walking down this street⁴, one first passed by the tailors' shops and the craftsmen's workshops." (Brown, 2001, p.71). The services adjoining the mosque support its position as "structuring equipment", these supplements are compatible with a whole range of services essential to daily life; have societal and public⁵ dimension. Thus, we consider the space inside the Medina to be public and communal when groups of people come together around a common reference at a specific time. Of course, it can be a national group ("the Moroccans"), a religious community ("the Muslims") and a neighbourhood community ("the population"). Thus, practices create daily life habits, which give certain legitimacy on the conquest of particular places; but these practices overlap with others, hence the frequent resort negotiation to occupy such space at such time. These were practical spaces whose boundaries were flexible.

² The Masjid Djami is often translated as Great Mosque (Friday Mosque), by its functions and its aspect, becomes the most important public building of the city. From a functional point of view, the Great Mosque is associated with building of different functions (prayer place or school) and from this functional diversification results in great diversity and formal richness. Inside the Great Mosque, the courtyard usually contains basin and often a sundial. The prayer hall may have a maqsura (a separate place) for the prince and possibly another for women. Its main elements are the mihrab (a decorative niche in the qibla wall), the minbar, the dikka (a platform for the second call to Friday prayer), and the kursi (desk for the Quran); the prayer hall is also decorated with precious boxes containing other things such as Qurans, carpets, lamps, and incense burners. The obligation to perform the ritual ablutions has often led to the installation of bathrooms outside the mosque.

³ Moroccan mosques do not build in the same architectural order, it presents over centuries and according to regional trends and various plans; these also differ according to the land area, its urban location and the topographical planning. However, the constituent elements of the plan remain almost the same in most large mosques, and its typical scheme consists of the following architectural blocks: a prayer room with naves and wings, a room for the minbar, a room for the imam, an open-air courtyard with or without corridors and a room for ablutions; these buildings may contain other annexes: a burial chamber and Bayt Al- Gnaz.

⁴ This is the ramp of the *cadi*, *Aqbat Al Qadi* refer to the house of Abdellah Ben Khadra, a judge and president of the fez court at the end of the 19th century.

⁵ Public bathrooms, ovens for public use, markets, Quran schools, shops, notary offices, hairdressers, pharmacies, bookstores, etc. In general, these services are for hygiene, mind, education, health, food, etc; which intensify social relations.

The large⁶ dynamic and attractive arteries came to complete the device of the public space inside the Medina. They daily welcome abundant flows of users, visitors and especially commercial activities; the use of this space is regulated by secular rules that all the population knows and respects.

Even if it is described as massive, the smallness of these spaces does not seem to harm their attractiveness. The rush in these commercial arteries is tolerated, and individual personal space is reduced without any problem, as this place is invaded by the flow of pedestrian traffic from various populations of all socio-economic groups of different ages and genders. These spaces are noisy in the morning and afternoon, but it regains its original shape and calm in the evening while waiting for the next day.



Figure 1: Land use plan of the Bab Lamrissa public space. Source: INAU, 2017
Bab Lamrissa, a tacit and consent coexistence of users.

The urban design of the Medina reflexes the reality of the population of the idyllic Islamic city and its distinctive places. Moreover, the appearance of new spaces cannot be understood without putting it in an urban context, characterized by the configuration of the city's centralization, its representation and its exploitation by public

⁶ The term "large" is relative to the scale of the Medina and its urban components (except the Great Mosque) because when you change the scale-spaces of the Medina, even the largest ones enter into a small relatively sphere.

actors as well as the applicable urban governance system. The current goal of the public authorities is to create new public spaces that characterized by its continuity between commodity and urbanity. Consequently, the old centre is no longer necessarily the organizing element of the urban space; the new peripheral places are gaining important rules from a functional, social or symbolic point of view. Thus, we are witnessing a reconfiguration of territorial identities (Depending on work, housing, leisure, etc) and multiplication of socialites is sometimes ephemeral and fragile.

The Bab Lamrissa space located on the immediate peripheral of the medina of Sale corresponds to the formation of secondary centres and centralities, with a recreational specialization and homogenous attendance with powerful common appropriation (figure 1). Bab Lamrissa Square is defined by the buildings' elements and prestigious heritage, dominated by the great Bab Lamrissa from which it takes its name and the ancient walls of the city of Sale.

In January 2012, a significant enterprise was taken to improve the Bab Lamrissa courtyard as part of the development project of Bouregreg valley, aims to rethink this space, which previously crowded with vehicular traffic as a real living place, attractive and enjoyable for the locals (the population of the city).

The design of this square tends to seek a balance between green and mineral spaces, by combining lawns with more mineral spaces. The Bab Lamrissa square will allow daily relaxation at leisure (Walking, relaxation, games, etc.) while allowing the services of temporary event functions. (Exhibitions, festivals, concerts, etc) As for street furniture, the square is punctuated by 82 gray granite seats, apart from the benches and lamp posts; street furniture is rare.

a. Bab Lamrissa cohabitation and coexistence according to a bipolar sharing scheme.

In general, Bab Lamrissa is a set of concrete practices of proximity, hard to understand and sometimes change according to time and event. It also falls within the register of the centralization of places associated primarily with entertainment and the neighbourhood parallel to the fact that space is used freely (or at least without social restrictions). These practices concern phenomena ranging from production to simple occupation space, including transformation as an intermediate state.

Mixed and shared space between teenagers, young people, seniors, and especially women who accompanied by their children or grandchildren, mostly from the neighbourhoods of Sale. Bab Lamrissa square transformed from its base function into a kind of symbiosis of uses that everyone respects: "the rules of use underlie interactions between individuals and groups define the visible or latent limits of public space. You tacitly know how far you can go and what you must avoid" (Dris, 2005, p. 203). The walker hesitates to mingle with the crowd. Bab Lamrissa maintains a distanced, detached relationship with the square without becoming one with it. And the frequentation of this place by families is one of the main reasons given to justify good moral and ethical behaviour. Thus, the tacit physical participation that defines the boundaries of appropriate places (figure 2).

In the square, we find families accompanied by their children who have taken the northern part of the place, it is decorated with public benches in grey granite that permit its users to observe, discuss, and freely socialize while watching over their children playing. This location lets street vendors reside in this area, taking the available opportunities.



Figure 2: Diagram of sharing the Bab Lamrissa space between users.
Source: photos and realization, A. Moussalih 2015.

Women always choose the same places to sit while their children meander in front of them in all directions. Strollers act as a bulwark against potential intrusions. Therefore, it allocates a portion of the public space, but leaves no chance for potential pushchairs or other competing users who would like to share it: “Not all people [go] to green places to engage with others. Sometimes they need a private space for themselves. This kind of people [like] only to observe others from afar” (Rasidi et al, 2012, p. 465). Thus, women constructed a place of “privacy” in a space open to all (Provansal, 2002).

The behaviour of sitting in public constitutes a form of expression, a language, and a territorial making of the appropriate space. Sitting in the city is a scene played out by at least three actors: “the one or those who sit in a group, the artistic or spontaneous device which is itself a geographical and institutional location [...] and finally the others, the passers-by, the dwellers most of the time unknown [...]. In fact, sitting on a bench means a sharing of the occupied space of co-existence rules, which supposes and favours a form of socialization” (Jole, 2003, p. 108).

On the other hand, we also find teenagers and young adults who exercise a counterweight between the users of Bab Lamrissa Square and who preferred to keep the occupied spaces in the South of it by turning them into actual land “mini-football”. Thus, the space directly participates in its structure, making it possible to share and limit or even exceed the extension of game activity (Gibout and Lebreton 2014? P. 73).

Searching for interactions through playing is an opportunity to learn the basics of the game, and then it becomes the prime motivator for the audience. Because, in the absence of pre-organized and specialized spaces, the crowd adapts to places not intended for them. Since then, it has become the game that organizes and polarizes the space.

The social learning integration and negotiation through the development of rules of the game within each game, made up of children and teenagers. The public space is also the place where a dominant sexist social practice is reproduced in our societies, built on sex separation (Benghabrit Remaoun 1997). Thus, girls and boys play in the same space, differentiated by the relative proximity of their mothers. This allows a permanent control of the mother who exercises her authority from a distance, through gaze and gesture (Figure 3).

This scheme fits perfectly with the sharing of Bab Lamrissa space. Thus, the ball game is played by children and teenagers in the southern part, while the girls play their favourite games alongside their mothers in the northern side. On the other hand, mixed games occupy the intermediate or transitional sides. Each type of public have drawn the limits of their own space has succeeded in preserving and protecting it from possible intrusions.

Boys games	Mixed games	Girls games
Soccer	Bicycles - scooters Rollerblades	Hopscotch - Jump rope
In the North	Intermediate parts	In the South

Figure 3: Diagram of the games practiced in the public space of Bab Lamrissa according to gender. Source: 2015.

b. Bab Lamrissa, when the sacred invents new forms and new temporalities of use and appropriation.

Although temporary and punctual, the installation in public space is a reflection of the ordinary, mundane, ritual, or leisure appropriations of a space traversed, consumed and shared by very different social patterns. In Bab Lamrissa courtyard, the highlights of the public events take place during the week, the weekend and the summer (spring and summer) or in the late afternoon and evening during the month of Ramadan, which imposes its rhythm and atmosphere; the day is framed by the call to prayer. In fact, everyday life is no longer punctuated by the muezzin except during the month of Ramadan. This data particularly influenced our schedule of observation and interviews with users. During Ramadan, the square knows a peak of animation only in two major periods of the day: either between the prayer of Al-Asr (in the afternoon) and the prayer of Al-Maghrib (from the sunset corresponding to the time of breaking the fast), or from the prayer of Al-Ichaa (from the night) until a late time at night.

In fact, these two peaks of animation lead to intensity in the place, with great differentiation in terms of types of uses, profiles, and forms of appropriation. The first period of attendance at the square begins with the prayer of Al-Asr and continues until sunset, the time of breaking the fast. The few green spaces are invested and transformed into a stopover offering freshness and rest during the summer and the

periods of heat waves, especially the benches are hardly shaded and do not encourage users to stay there (Figure 4). During this period, users tirelessly take turns in the square and each finds a suitable job for his age and physical abilities: “Everyone tries to pass the time in his way,” says one of our interviewees. Children, accompanied by their parents, run this time in all directions (bicycles, scooters, roller-skates, etc.). Adults and seniors try to make a minimal effort by taking shelter in the shaded areas of the yard to enjoy the coolness. During this time of the day, young people find in team games, particularly football, and a distinct pastime that occupies the entire place. Those who cannot find a vacant space to make their stadium or play space turn to under the new Hassan II Bridge. On the other hand, the absence of women during this period raises more than one question.



Figure 4: The occupation of green spaces in Bab Lamrissa Square during Ramadan.
Source: A. Moussalih, 2014

During the second period, between the Al-Ichaa prayer (the night prayer) and until a late hour in the night, the square finds another atmosphere; it is completely transformed. Bab Lamrissa space acquires a new configuration and a new spirit. In short, the exceptional atmosphere of Ramadan sets in. This sacred month shifts all the urban activity from day to night. Night family outings are increasing; the municipality and cultural associations are organizing to decorate the public space with lively evenings (artistic and cultural events) in the open air. It attracts the crowd from all over the city and women end up reclaiming their rights to the scene, whether they are accompanied by a child, brother, and parent or alone. The Bab Lamrissa square becomes a place of traditional and local outings for them (Figure 5).



Figure 5: female attendance at the Lamrissa Ramadan festival 2017. Source: A. Moussalih, 2017

By evoking the question of the temporality and frequency of women in the public space, we are actually wondering about the constraints of access to public space. Thus, for more traditional populations, such as those living in the medina, the presence of women is not tolerated at night (Van de Bovenkamp and Vloeberghs 2015). Public space is socially forbidden to them as they can only access it with the company of a man, out of respect for customs and security reasons. Only the month of Ramadan makes it possible to derogate from this. During this month, the night outings of families and women multiply. The square takes on a ceremonial character, with free events attracting large crowds, especially men. Women also go there accompanied by their husbands or children: “The public space witnessed a frequent attendance by women during this period in a sort of truce [...]. But this triumph of celebration over the taboos and the habit mode of everyday life become ephemeral since the end of Ramadan once again re-established the monotony of daily life and the “curfew” on women” (Dris 2004, p. 261).

Despite the social, temporal, and cultural restrictions related to the use and the massive presence of women in public spaces, during this month, families are more tolerant of young girls going out after sunset, which shows the important role played by the month of Ramadan as a liberal time-space.

Regardless of the spirituality and the cruelty of this month of penance, the evening becomes the place where psychological and religious burdens seem to be lightened: “If the day is overloaded with taboos, the night observes its temporary lifting” (Bennani-Chraïbi, 2000).

If men and women wear modest clothes and most women abstain from makeup at least during the day, in the evening, after a long day of fasting, the instincts regain their hold. Many girls allow themselves to wear “daring outfits”. This behaviour becomes an actual social phenomenon during the nights of Ramadan. Thus, the public space becomes the stage where several forms of furtive flirting are discreetly deployed, with a polite appearance, but sometimes aggressive.

c. Bab Lamrissa, a space of comfort and closeness.

The public space of Bab Lamrissa is then more than just a place to go out. It becomes a space of comfort and proximity: “Urban spaces [...] could be inclusive spaces. They can be considered as potentially spaces to stimulate social interaction. However, modern

society nowadays does not have many intense social interactions with strangers. Most of them feel comfortable communicating only within their own social group and do not feel the need to interact with others. [...]. As long as the presence of others is enjoyed by one, the comfortable distance between them can be ignored” (Rasidi et al. 2012, p.465). This corresponds, according to the urban sociologist Chombart de Lauwe “gatherings of men who do not necessarily constitute a group, yet are linked with common representations, communication facilities and certain similar behaviors” (de Lauwe, 1979). In other words, the regulars develop a mutual knowledge within the local space they occupy.

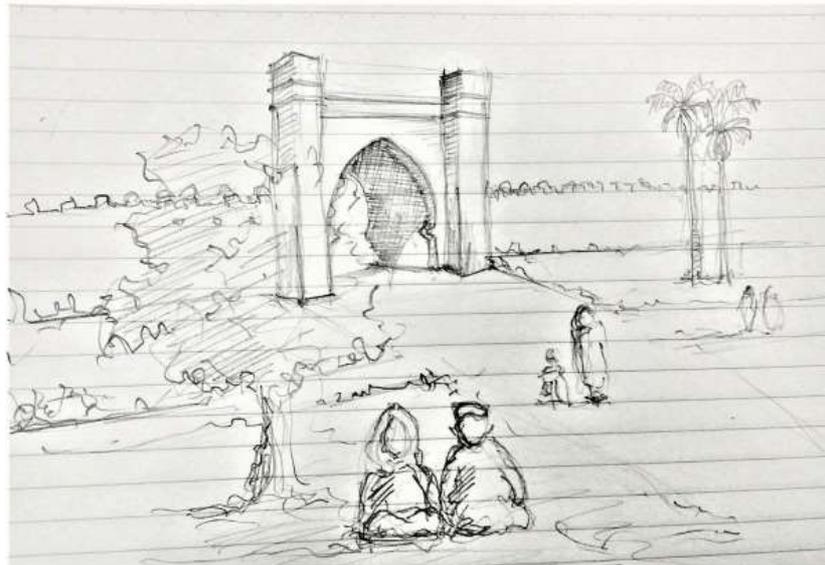


Figure 6: Bab Lamrissa a space of comfort and closeness.
Source: Sketch drawn by Imane Brahimi, 2017

An inclusive and sociable space, Bab Lamrissa becomes the only refuge to get rid of boredom, discuss family problems and restrictions; it is materialized by the expression “نسى الهم” “forget the worries of everyday life”. This idea emerges directly from interviews conducted with the population who are accustomed to this place, and in particular with women. This sociability can be called “primary”, according to the definition of Caille (1949) it is the act of individuals and groups that are mostly composed of retired elderly people from underprivileged classes and often plagued by loneliness and boredom (figure 6).

In fact, the interviews that were the most difficult to translate in order to retain their semantic content were those who was given by the women of Bab lamrissa. Their expressions were short, colourful and full of meaning, such as: "forget about life worries", "breathe fresh air", "and stretch your legs". They draw their words and lines directly from the Moroccan cultural reference, which makes it difficult to transpose into another language.

These women's testimonies indicate another dimension that cannot directly be inferred from their comments, which is attachment to the neighbourhood: buying and consuming nearby, and enjoying leisure activities in the neighbourhood. This dimension is

traditionally associated with the emotional ties that bind the populations to their place of residence. Bab Lamrissa square as a public space embodies this function through its proximity and accessibility from the city of Sale. This form of appropriation of the square updates a reflection expressed by Kenneth L. Brown on Sale according to which the city has largely overflowed the walls of the city (Brown, 2001, p. 53).

Conclusion

Deciphering the forms and methods of social allocation of the Bab Lamrissa Square reveals a differentiation of uses and division, establishing the courtyard as an open-air urban laboratory.

Bab Lamrissa Square, thanks to its location linked to the old city old Sale, has succeeded in providing the city with an opening to its external space and offering its populations a space for social warming. The users, through forms of use and appropriation of this square, have established a balance in the logic of implicit and consenting coexistence of uses. Moreover, the month of Ramadan transforms the scene and imposes its rhythm and atmosphere. Ramadan succeeds in transferring daytime activities to nighttime. Observing the way in which these frequent actions are implemented, these uses and forms of appropriation make it possible to make the observation that this public space must figure as a new emerging centrality confirming its position as an organizer and polarizer on the scale of the Medina and Sale.

The female presence in this public space reveals the evolution of the spaces in women's daily life within the Arab cities and turns it into a symbol of freedom and emancipation. The studied space represents "multi-use" places that have been invested by local populations, not only to imply leisure activities (programmed activities), but also for "informal" and "infringement" activities.

The uses and forms of appropriation invite us to question how the making of urban space tends to assign a particular identity to a place by mobilizing discourses and arrangements that aims to anchor it in reality. However, the remarkable contradictions concerning designers, producers' orientations, most often, hide a lack of knowledge of the place by the last, an impossibility of assimilating to its core and dispossessed it, little by little, of its substance.

References

- Benghabrit Remaoun, N. (1997) 'L'enfant et la rue-espace jeux', *Insaniyat*, 2, pp. 43-57. [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.4000/insaniyat.11505>
- Bennani-Chraïbi, M. (2000). 'Le ramadan au Maroc: sacralisation et inversion' in Adelhah, F., & Georgeon, F. (eds.), *Ramadan et politique*. Paris: CNRS Éditions, pp. 113-123.
- de Lauwe, P. H. C. (1979) 'Appropriation de l'espace et changement social', *Cahiers internationaux de sociologie*, 66 (january - june), pp. 141-150.
- Dris, N. (2004) 'Espaces publics et limites. Les implications du genre dans les usages de la ville à Alger' in Denèfle, S. (ed.) *Femmes et Villes*, Tours: Presses Universitaires François-Rabelais, pp. 249-264.
- Dris, N. (2005) 'Les espaces publics à Alger: mise en scène des formes opposées des usages' in Boumaza, N. (ed.) *Villes réelles, villes projetées : villes maghrébines en fabrication*. Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, pp. 197-210.

- Fejjal, A. (2015). *Fès : héritages et dynamiques urbaines actuelles*. Rabat: Editions Dar Attaouhidi.
- Gibout, C., and Lebreton, F. (2014) 'Cultures juvéniles et loisirs sportifs de rue : une approche par l'espace public'. *Agora débats-jeunesses*, 3 (68), pp. 71-84. [online]. Available at: [10.3917/agora.068.0071](https://doi.org/10.3917/agora.068.0071).
- Jolé, M. (2003) 'Quand la ville invite à s'asseoir: Le banc public parisien et la tentation', *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine*, 94 (1), pp. 107-115. [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3406/aru.2003.2515>
- Karibi, K. (2015) *Mixité urbaine et l'espace public à Rabat*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Kenneth, B. (2001). *Les gens de Salé, les Slawis : traditions et changements de 1830 à 1930*. Casablanca: Eddif.
- Monqid, S. (2006) *Les femmes marocaines et la modernité urbaine : stratégies d'appropriation des espaces privé-public*, Tours: Université de Tours.
- Navez-Bouchanine, F. (1992) 'Les espaces publics des villes marocaines', *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine*, 57(1), pp. 185-190. [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.3406/aru.1992.1713>
- Provansal, D. (2002) 'Espaces publics et usages multiples' in Carrière, J.P. (ed) *Villes et projets urbain en Méditerranée*, Tours: Presses universitaires François Rabelais, pp. 63-71.
- Rasidi, M. H., Jamirsah, N., and Said, I. (2012) 'Urban green space design affects urban residents social interaction', *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 68, pp. 464-480. [online]. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sbspro.2012.12.242>
- Vloeberghs, W., & Van de Bovenkamp, E. (2016) 'Sacré ramadan: centralité d'une expérience religieuse collective' in Dupret, Z. R. B. (ed) *Le Maroc au présent: d'une époque à l'autre, une société en mutation*, Rabat: Centre Jacques-Berque, pp. 773-781.