Jalil Bennani
To Be and Not to Be: Identity Today

As I work in Morocco, I would like to talk to you about this question of identity as it is raised today in my own country. Morocco is a country placed at different crossroads, between Subsaharan Africa and Europe, a multicultural and multilingual country. From the countryside to the city, from a mere village to a huge metropolis, from Morocco to Europe, individuals often switch from one culture to the other, from one tradition to the other, from one identity to another. A migrating, plural identity.

A tense and even sometimes stormy debate enlivens, on the one hand, the advocates of returning to – even being rooted in – a rigid tradition, and on the other hand, the champions of a renewed tradition, one open to new additions coming from other continents and other cultures. This quest for identity can waver between extremes: withdrawing into a specific identity with a nostalgic return to the caricature of a tradition; or losing oneself in a fake modernity, a borrowed identity that refuses any link with the original culture. This fierce debate refers to cultural values and to the religious and political fields.

In this multicultural and multilingual society – the spoken languages being Arabic, Berber, French, Spanish, English – people experience a multiplicity of identities. As a matter of fact, cultural heritage is mentioned in the Moroccan constitution, in which the Arab-Islamic, Amazigh, Saharan-Hassanian, African, Andalusian, Hebraic, and Mediterranean influences that traverse the country are acknowledged. A great many young people, who want to enjoy our globalized era to the full, renew such a plurality by adopting several styles of dress, by speaking several languages, and by celebrating all the different festivals (Eid, Christmas, Halloween).

The young want to "leave." This word does not merely mean that they want to leave their parents' house but should be understood in its metaphorical sense as leaving the parents' model behind. It is a necessary step, as is commonly known, in order to find one's own structure as an adult and thus relinquish the ideal ego. They go searching for new identifications the group, the gang, the social fabric, offer them. This very mode of identification Freud called identification "by contagion." They identify with themselves among themselves, the libidinal link being created by contiguity and being held through the idealization of a leader. This modality conjures up the notion of the Ego ideal, which is embodied by the leader. It paves the way for individual and collective psychology.

As for the return to tradition, some young people turn out to be more rigid than their parents, who find this baffling. In displaying their strong attachment to values, prohibitions, taboos, they are manifesting the return of the parental superego. But, as we see among migrants' children in Europe, they may also

reject all that comes from their ascendants. This rejection must be interpreted as a default in the transmission of a transgenerational memory. But in order to create and reinvent one's destiny, one has to know how to welcome one's ascendants' heritage. Stories are constituted with as many real facts as imaginary ones. Transmitting is reappropriating the heritage so as to reinvent one's own story. When a break occurs in the transmission, identification relies on an imaginary tradition by creating artificial identities.

Some young people, in their longing for identity-building references, may be under the influence of a real or virtual guru. Indeed, indoctrination, which often leads to radicalization, quite often takes place via the Internet's social networks. The weaker the subject, the more vulnerable they are, the more they are under some influence and thus liable to this mode of identification. This phenomenon, while it is related to the absence of any parental identification, is favored by the impossibility of integration into the surrounding social model. The identities adopted via social networks are short-lived. One may wonder for what reasons these socially excluded youths take refuge in religion to borrow an identity from it and provide a legitimacy for themselves. One of the answers may lie in the fact that current civilization is short on myths and legends. Religion enables one to withdraw into oneself, to take refuge, to find a pretext.

By its very nature, indoctrination is perverse: just as young people are leaving adolescence, they attempt to shift away from their parents, which leads them to idealize the outside world that is meant to help them structure their personality. Within the family the first acquisitions occur. Within the outside world, other discoveries await them. Their maturation is thus progressive. As they are submitted to authority, gurus intervene precisely by stopping this idealization process and giving them a ready-to-adopt identity, an immediate satisfaction which will hinder the maturation process. Such a satisfaction momentarily brings a feeling of security and artificially provides a feeling of strength. The ego's defenses strengthen and can even generate paranoid behaviors, with feelings of persecution that may go as far as to rouse violence within, and designate imaginary enemies. The other, the different one, is always perceived as exterior.

The title of this panel led me to consider the questions of origin, of belonging, being here and now, here and elsewhere: "Who am I?," "Who are you?," "Where are you from?," "Who is the other?"... The question "Who am I?" is often related to someone addressing another "Where are you from?" If this is meant to address a foreigner, it is posed to know the country where one comes from, one's nationality, culture, language. If it is meant for an indigenous person, it is asked in order to know their family origins (*Ould flan*: "the son of so-and-so") and refers to a belonging, a tribe, a family, a lineage. Beyond this identity, the subconscious identifications refer to heritage, ancestors, community ties, and the loyalty to some masters. Whereas

identities are flexible, identifications are rebellious and stubborn. The latter thus are performed through a transgenerational transmission. This transmission does not include the mere reproduction of the models but the difference in behaviors and ideas, evidence of what has been reappropriated from what has been learned, within the family and via outside influences.

"Who is the other?" Otherness intrigues, worries, raises suspicion, as if it meant a questioning, even a threat, for a fixed and fantastical identity. Why is the other rejected? How can one explain the fears, projections, and exclusions that emerge to target the one who is called a "foreigner"? It is much easier to see evil in the other than in oneself, to project one's fears and anxieties into the foreigner. The encounter one has with the other whose culture is different confronts each one with one's own intimacy. And it refers to our own otherness at the same time. This link between the familiar and the foreign is described in Freud's text which deals with a "worrying strangeness." There is a feeling of déjà vu here. Freud told the story of his being on a train and as he looked into the window, he thought he was someone else, only eventually realizing that this other was himself. Who has never felt this strange feeling when wondering who they are, where they are from, why they are here? We sometimes experience this worrying strangeness, something that should have remained hidden but has escaped repression. Thus the other is subconsciously inside us. This encounter with a foreigner leads one to see oneself as a stranger to the other. And each one is confronted with this other inside them. The anxiety when facing the other can then trigger rejection, racism, xenophobia. But there is also the anxiety related to the unknown, which leads to security-induced behaviors, to psychological as much as geographical and political enclosure. Anxiety triggers fear and the search for solutions. The foreigner becomes the one that must be pushed aside.

Otherness lies in languages themselves. Moroccans are generally bilingual and sometimes multilingual. Each language conveys a history and a heritage. French, which is my second spoken language, the one with which I theorize and write, used to be that of the colonizer. The identification occurs inside a linguistic and cultural environment which immediately includes the question of the difference. The ego is the result of multiple identifications. Identity is changing, heterogeneous, and multiple. It reflects the mutations that take place within the social link. The individual psychology is straightaway a collective psychology, as Freud underscored.

As can be seen in the clinical and as writers have shown, some Maghrebins grew up with the desire to reappropriate the French language. The identifications that came from this thus have straightaway introduced a difference in the symbolical belongings themselves. One can better understand what leads many Maghrebins to the desire for an exile with all the emotive

power a departure implies. Who the individuals become, whether they succeed or fail, turns out to be determining when it comes to the emotive commitments – of hate or love – they have in the host country: nostalgia, pleasure, shame, or rejection. This plurality of symbolical belongings is a crucial question today. It leads philosophers, anthropologists, sociologists, and psychoanalysts to reinvent the notion of the universal.

We are all exiled. We come into a world that exists prior to us. From cradle to grave we go through successive separations, but also discoveries, reconstructions, new identifications related to an ever-renewed exile. What welcome can we provide for one we call a foreigner? Whether a traveler, a tradesman, in exile or wandering, the foreigner points for us to the closest link we have between the present and the past, the intimate and the collective, the subjective and the collective memory.