

## ANTHROPOPOIESIS, EMBODIMENT AND RELIGIOUS RITUAL IN MOROCCO: TOWARD A NEW THEORETICAL APPROACH

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In this article I offer a reading, inspired by the embodiment paradigm, the theory of practice and the 'anthropopoietical' perspective, of some Islamic rites observed during my fieldwork in Morocco. My main thesis is that these religious and secular rituals should be seen first and foremost as 'anthropopoietical' rites, ritual practices through which the society tries to impose its own model of humanity on its members to mould their *habitus*. To this end, I survey different analyses of ritual in Morocco and compare them with more general theories of embodiment, of *habitus*, and of 'anthropopoiesis'.

It was very early in the morning, when Abdelghani, my host, came and woke me. That was a special sacred day: the Feast of the Sacrifice, or the Great Feast ('*Aid el kebir*'), as it is also called, when Ibrahim, the patriarch, is commemorated. After breakfast we went, along with Abdelkarim, one of his best friends, through the neighbourhood in the periphery of Casablanca, where I conducted fieldwork, to the college campus, where the *musalla*, the open place for the great collective prayers, lies. When we arrived a lot of people were already there, waiting for the prayer, everyone with his own mat, most of the men wearing *djellabas*. My friends found a place among the people, while I sat not so far from the crowd, to have the opportunity to observe everything. When the sacred place of the *musalla* was full, the *imam*, donned in a beautiful white *djellaba*, started to pray, followed in an orderly manner by the crowd. The prayer was composed of only two *rak'ah*, being shorter than the common daily prayers: people bowed and kneeled down twice, all together, whispering the *fatiha*<sup>1</sup> and other verses from the Koran, and performing the *takbir*.<sup>2</sup> For me, a non-believer, the effect was impressive and made me think of the Durkheimian thesis about the crucial role of collective rites in the making of the sense of the sacred. After the prayer, the *imam* gave a sermon commemorating the Patriarch, and then the

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imam and a local official sacrificed a ram on behalf of the community. At the same time, in front of his palace in Rabat, the king was performing the same ritual act on behalf of the entire Moroccan people, as required by his role of father of the nation. After the sacrifice the ceremony drew to an end and everybody left. My friends came back to me and we went home, following a different path from the one by which we had arrived, as tradition demands. At home Abdelghani's family was waiting for us, in order to kill a ram to celebrate the Great Feast.<sup>3</sup>

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During my fieldwork in Morocco and in Italy among Moroccan immigrants, I have often witnessed ritual performances like the one just described. Among many possible examples, particularly interesting is the celebration of 'Aid el Fitr (the feast at the end of the month of Ramadan) by the Muslim community (made up above all of Moroccan people) in Turin. In 2005 a sports building had been chosen as *musalla*: among the properties of the prayer is the creation of sacred 'space-time' that can transform any place into a mosque. 'The *salat* introduces a break between the flow of everyday life and a time-space characterized by a pure Islamic practice' (Henkel 2005: 497). In a context of immigration, the collective prayer acquires a further social value as a means of identity expression and community construction. The identity dimension of the Islamic prayer seems to reinforce the Durkheimian perspective. Yet, it is necessary to stress that at the centre of the ritual scene lies the prayer, a personal and individual prayer, although performed in chorus, because it is the personal character of the act that undermines the usefulness of a classical Durkheimian analysis of the ceremony, a kind of analysis to which I am inclined. Also because of my non-religious standpoint, indeed, in the face of a collective ceremony like the one described above, I always tend to give a social interpretation, namely that in collective rites society manifests itself to itself, and that from this appearance their sacred force emerges. An interpretation of this kind is based on two grounds: on the one side, the rite symbolically represents the society or, as in our case, at least the community of believers. The meaning of the rite therefore lies in the social group to which it directly refers. This reduction of the symbolic meaning of the rite to social reality has often been criticised by the interpretative school. But the Durkheimian reading has another strength in its underlining the pragmatic dimension of the ritual, and in avoiding reducing the collective ceremony to an abstract text without social effects. By 'pragmatic dimension' I simply mean the role played by the collective rite in the foundation of the community, by creating and reinforcing the

social bonds between the members. However, the risk is that an exclusive focus on the collective dimension of the rite may lead us to neglect the personal one.

An interpretation of the ritual practice from a neo-Durkheimian perspective —such as the one proposed by David Sutton (2004) for Greek funerary rites—has therefore a certain appeal and analytical usefulness. But, at least in the case of the collective Islamic prayer it implies the risk of overlooking a crucial dimension, the prayer itself, which in this religious tradition is always a personal act, even when performed collectively. How can we take into account at the same time the social and the individual dimension of the ritual practice? From my point of view the only possibility is a rigorous ‘anthropopoietical’ perspective, focused on the social process of construction of subjectivity. What I want to maintain in this paper is that the prayer, and more generally the ritual act, is not to be seen simply as a symbol, but as a practice, indeed as a technique of the body (Henkel 2005, Starrett 2001), part of a complex system which includes other Islamic rites like circumcision, fasting, and the first marriage. In other words, I believe that to understand these ritual actions it is necessary to support the Durkheimian approach with the perspectives developed by the theory of practice (Bourdieu 1972), by the paradigm of embodiment (Csordas 1995) and by the anthropopoietical paradigm (Remotti 2000, 2003).<sup>4</sup> This paper is also an attempt to interweave these theories that, I believe, offer us different but complementary insights on the ritual experience.

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My standpoint, that the ritual act is at the same time practice and symbol, is similar to the one proposed by Combs-Schilling (1989) in her book on Moroccan rituals, entitled *Sacred Performances*. In the Introduction, Combs-Schilling, writing of the different approaches to the interpretation of social actions, and following Sherry Ortner’s influential 1984 article, emphasises the theoretical shift from the predominance of symbolic anthropology to the theory of practice. Both scholars contend that symbolic anthropology with its emphasis on meaning and communication has ended up overlooking the ‘individual and collective bodies’. For this reason, the influence of Bourdieu, with his recovery of ‘the everyday’ and of the material dimension of social life, can be seen as a salutary response to the ‘idealistic’ tendencies of the previous trends. Bourdieu’s theory is indeed a prominent source of inspiration for my proposal, which is based on the basic ideas of *habitus* and of the processes of interiorisation by which that system of dispositions



is born. As is well-known, for the French sociologist the source of our actions, of practices, is a semiconscious system of trends and representations that is created by the continuous experience of the social structures and tends to reproduce them. Bourdieu's great theme is the permanent interaction between structure and practice, in the form of continuous processes of interiorisation of norms, schemas and values, on the one hand, and processes of exteriorisation on the other (Bourdieu 1972). But the French scholar rarely focused his analysis on ritual practices (Combs-Schilling, 1989), thus leaving a blank space in his theory. Yet, as shown by Sherry Ortner (1984), the interpretation of rituals in the light of the theory of practice can be seen as one of the most fruitful fields of research; and this can be said also with regard to Islamic rituals (Abu-Lughod 1989, Henkel 2005), although I agree with Starrett (1995) and Mahmood (2001) that, in this case, the theory needs some, even substantial, re-elaboration.

In any case, the theory of practice is still useful to remedy some of the flaws of the symbolic approach to ritual. The latter has been the target of critiques by Talal Asad (1993) too, who maintains that the vision of ritual as a symbolic text to be interpreted in order to extract its actual meaning is deeply influenced by the Christian tradition of biblical hermeneutics, thus implying a bias in our stance on ritual activities. Referring to his investigation of medieval monastic life, he shows that the key to understand ritual is the concept of 'discipline'. The ritual act is, indeed, first and foremost the performance of prescribed actions, depending on abilities acquired by mental and bodily discipline. Ritual practices are not simply metaphors of a religious cosmology, but are, as well, means that both create and manifest religious dispositions. Asad's proposal is perfectly in line with Islamic rituals, which overtly emphasise discipline and practice. Indeed, it seems to me that Asad tries to overthrow the hegemonic common sense of most religious studies, which looks at the non-Christian rituals in the light of Christian tradition, by reading the Christian monastic tradition in the light of Islamic orthopraxis. His critiques are directed also towards Geertz's theory of religion (1973), which Asad judges abstract and idealistic, because of its focus on systems of thought rather than on actions and power. Nonetheless, I believe there can be a dialogue between Asad and Geertz, since they share the idea that ritual produces 'enduring dispositions'. This dialogue can help to analyse ritual action in its nature of both symbol and practice, of text and discipline. The paradigm of embodiment, developed in the United States and the theory of anthropopoiesis, born in Italy, proceed in this same direction. The embodiment paradigm was proposed by Thomas Csordas (1990) in his interpretation of the ritual practices of charismatic Christians. Following the authoritative

example of Merleau-Ponty and Bourdieu, Csordas's effort to found a new theoretical paradigm centred on the human body is firstly a reaction against the idealistic relics within culture theory. Anthropology, he says, has often neglected the body and corporeality, studying the human body and culture as two distinct realities, whereas it would be better to look at the body as the 'existential ground of culture'. The core of Csordas's proposal is the nexus between embodiment as corporeality and embodiment as interiorisation of cultural forms and norms: this means that the ways the body is socially informed and culturally moulded should be at the centre of the analysis. The bodies of the charismatic Christians, haunted by demons and prone to glossolalia, testify how the human body can be moulded to adapt to religious beliefs, and how in this process a shared *habitus* is generated.

A substantial affinity links the paradigm of embodiment with the anthropopoietical one, developed by Remotti (1999, 2000, 2003) and other European scholars. This theory aims to be a coherent theoretical synthesis of earlier approaches and theories and, above all, a 'research perspective', based on two assumptions: First, the idea that 'humanity is not given . . . but has to be constructed and moulded' (Remotti 2000: 111), a 'constructivist' perspective which takes up the notion of the 'incompleteness of human being' (Geertz 1973); and second, the ethnographic evidence showing that many societies share, to different degrees of awareness, this same idea, and describe their ritual practice as a 'making of humanity'. The starting point of this theoretical perspective are those rituals, like initiation rites, whose purpose, often explicitly stated, is to shape or construct persons or adults, that is, to make complete human beings. These rites which aim at transforming and making the humanity of a person, according to Remotti (2000, 2003), can be called 'anthropopoietical'. In other terms, if every human group, every society and culture needs to form its own members, we can subdivide the process of cultural moulding into an anonymous, everyday anthropopoiesis (corresponding more or less to the socialisation process) and an explicit, conscious one, which often takes the form of ritual. This represents one of the main differences from Bourdieu's theory. While the latter's focus is on an anonymous, implicit and continuous process of cultural incorporation, anthropopoietical theory has instead a particular interest in practices and processes explicitly aimed to 'make humanity', to construct and transform subjects.

Rites can be seen as cultural means through which society tries to impress its own model of the person upon its members, symbolic devices which operate more often than not through bodily practices and manipulation. Rites of initiation, for example, have not simply the function of marking the passage to a new status, but instead often have a transformative quality

on the subjectivity and identity of initiates, as shown by S. Heald (1982) and M. Godelier (1982). 'Rituals are not limited at all to move an individual from a position to another', Remotti (2000: 93) writes, 'instead, they transform him radically . . . what is at stake is his own identity'. These ritual practices can be defined as 'anthropopoietical rites' because they explicitly mean to impress on the subjects the 'forms of humanity', the social qualities prescribed for them (Godelier 1982), moulding both their unconscious dispositions and their self-consciousness. My hypothesis is that Islamic religious rituals, like the *salat*, the prayer, being consciously directed towards the modelling of the believers (Mahmood 2001), should also be seen as anthropopoietical ritual practices. The point of view of the anthropopoietical theory, according to which rites are the means used by society to model its members, can, when coupled with Bourdieu's insights, prove very useful in understanding Moroccan and Islamic ritual practices like the *salat*.

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Abdelghani, my host and best informant, and Abdelkarim, one of his best friends, were young, unemployed inhabitants of the periphery of Casablanca. Abdelghani, although an ardent believer, was not particularly rigorous from the point of view of ritual practice. As he himself told me, periods of laxity about daily prayers and going to the mosque, associated with a constant use of hashish and alcoholic drinks, alternated with times of religious rigour, responding to a deep need of ritual cleansing and moral improvement. Abdelkarim was, at first sight, quite the opposite. Ideologically not far from the PJD (a moderate Islamist party), with a more solid religious knowledge, he was deeply rigorous in his observance of the ritual practice: he used to pray five times a day and to go to the mosque, devoting himself to the *da'wa*.<sup>5</sup> For Abdelkarim, religious practice was both a means and an end in itself. Yet, notwithstanding the difference, the two young men shared the same faith, an analogous cosmology and similar ideas on morality and virtue. The differences were obviously serious, but their religious dispositions, values and assumptions were quite the same, produced by similar processes of discipline and cultivation. If prayer has in their eyes an absolute value as the only effective means of personal and spiritual growth, it is because of a shared religious *habitus*, which in turn is the product of religious education, ensured, first and foremost, by ritual practice.

In her eloquent essay on the *salat*, Saba Mahmood (2001) addresses her critique to the dichotomy opposing individual emotions and spontaneity against the conventionality of ritual action. She underlines that the Islamic prayer is a disciplinary technique willingly and consciously chosen by the believers to mould their own subjectivity following the model offered by their discursive

tradition. *Salat* is seen as the main instrument of cultivation of a 'pious self' in a religious discourse, which emphasises moral discipline and self-control as the way towards moral perfection and virtue. Mahmood describes concepts of self and religion that represent ritual practice and religious discipline and pedagogy as ends and a means at the same time. 'The desired goal (pious worship) is also one of the means by which that desire is cultivated . . . ritual worship is both part of a larger program of discipline through which piety is realized and a critical condition for the performance of piety itself' (2001: 834). Rituals, discipline and self-construction are the main arguments of discourses, concretised in conscious processes of 'bodily inculcation' of religious values through ritual practice, which remind us of Bourdieu's notions. Nevertheless, in Mahmood's opinion, the perspective of Bourdieu is problematic, because of his lack of consideration for the explicit discourses and practices of self-construction, for the 'pedagogy of body'. Developing this critique, Mahmood links herself to the analogous reflections by Gregory Starrett (1995). Starrett accepts the concept of *hexis* - the socially acquired bodily dispositions, the corporeal dimensions of *habitus* (Bourdieu 1972) - using it to illuminate the Islamic prayer, but he sustains that: 'anthropological analyses of *hexis* that stress unconscious and ineffable meanings are of limited utility when dealing with Islamic rituals . . . For Muslims . . . ritual *hexis* is always explicit to some degree' (1995: 953). Indeed, it is because of this conscious dimension that Islamic rituals - overt attempts to mould bodies and selves following a prescribed model of humanity - can be defined as 'anthropopoietical ritual practices'. However, an exclusive focus on individual choice and disciplinary practice - upon which Mahmood concentrates her analysis - implies the risk of overlooking the wider collective processes of subjectivity construction: the anthropopoietical process is first and foremost a cultural and social phenomenon. My Moroccan friends also saw in the prayer the best means to reach virtue, that is, as a means and an end in itself, because virtue means first and foremost following religious duties. But (and here Bourdieu is still useful) their conception of the prayer derives from the *habitus*, the dispositions they have already acquired during their entire life. The spontaneous project of construction of a 'pious self', emphasised by Mahmood (2001), acquires meaning only within collective anthropopoietical processes, aiming at the modelling and construction of *habitus* and subjectivity.

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As Remotti (1999: 11) writes: 'Any anthropopoietical process implies a definition of humanity that functions at the same time as a model of action', a concept of the person that is at the same time 'model of' and 'model for',



to borrow Geertz's terms (1973). In the accurate picture Lawrence Rosen (1984) offered us of the traditional concept of the person in Moroccan culture, we see that this discursive tradition—strongly influenced by Islamic philosophy and theology—draws a model of humanity in which religious practice has a crucial role in the formation of the person.

Rosen (1984) maintains that Moroccan conceptions of human nature are based on three main concepts: the ideas of *ruh* (the immortal soul), *nafs* (the vital essence) and '*aql* (reason). The local concept of the person is straightforward and directly linked with ritual practices; every living being is gifted with *nafs*, the vital principle, the vital force and instinct, necessary for survival and reproduction, even if dangerous. *Nafs* is associated in Morocco with vital passions, dangerous because they are the source of our bad actions and because they always tend to take control of the person. Instead, it is a duty of the person to channel them in the right direction and toward the right ends, thanks to the '*aql*, whose main role is to control and discipline the *nafs*. '*Aql* is firstly the faculty of control, primarily self-control (and indeed it shares the verbal root with the verb *a'qal*, *tanna'qal*: to bind, [Pandolfo 1997]). The aim of '*aql*, practical reason, is not to suppress vital passions but to lead them towards the socially useful goals prescribed by religion, by the Sunna.<sup>6</sup> All human beings have the capacity for practical reason, but to different degrees: in children, *nafs* prevails and '*aql* is limited, because of their lack of experience; and in women, following local reasoning, '*aql* develops less than in men, and this is why they have to be controlled by males. What is interesting is that, although '*aql* is believed to be a natural quality, people think it can be developed, first and foremost, by religious practice and learning. '*Aql* is reinforced by following religious duties, which means that it is through ritual practices that people learn self-discipline. As Rosen (1984: 33) says: 'adults retain the pre-eminence of reason over passion by repetitive ritual acts because repetition creates habit'. Repetition creates habit, ritual practice creates *habitus*. Through the constant repetition of ritual acts the subjects develop their '*aql*, their practical reason, and their religious dispositions. Repetition is at the core of the *salat*, the practice of formal prayer, which for this reason has a crucial role in the anthropopoietical project. Prayer has indeed a pre-eminent position inside the 'matrix of disciplines and institutions in which Muslim forms of subjectivity and social relations are forged and reproduced' (Henkel 2005: 489).

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The *salat*, the daily prayer, lies at the core of the matrix of anthropopoietical process. If Bowen in 1989 could lament an insufficient attention in



anthropology to this crucial dimension of Islamic experience, since then a number of scholars have produced valuable studies on the *salat* (Henkel 2005, Mahmood 2001, Starrett 1995). While Bowen and Starrett focus on the various meanings daily prayer acquires in different social contexts, Henkel (2005) pays attention to the role played by this 'body technique' in transmitting and reinforcing the basic concepts of the religious experience: the meaning of the ritual act is structured on a semantic core which carries the main principles of the religious ethos—like the unity and sovereignty of God. 'It is this fundamental concept at the centre of the Islamic tradition that practitioners are prompted dramatically to reaffirm in the five-times-daily practice of the *salat*' (Henkel 2005: 499). The Islamic prayer is at the same time symbol and practice, and here lies its efficacy. It is a disciplinary body technique 'which, through continuing practice, shapes certain dispositions of religious Muslims' (Henkel 2005: 500).

The five prayers have a common structure and *hexis*, based on corporeal schemas called *rak'ah*, whose number can change according to the time of day at which the prayer must be performed. Dawn prayer, for example, is composed of only two *rak'ah*. A *rak'ah* includes the formulation of 'basmalah' ('In the name of God, the Gracious, the Merciful') and the *niya* ('the will', the expression of intention); the performance of *takbir*<sup>7</sup> and the recitation of the first *sura* of the Koran (the *Fatiha*) and at least three other verses; then bowing and genuflection, after which the practitioner returns to the sitting position and then stands up to start the second *rak'ah*. At the end, the practitioner pronounces the prayer of Ibrahim and the *taslim*, the salute of peace.

*Salat* must be performed five times a day, and by this everyday practice religious dispositions are born. Dispositions that correspond to the 'deep, diffused, and durable states of mind and motivations', found by Geertz (1973) at the core of religious experience. The aim of the rite, with its symbolic dimensions, such as the bowing and the kneeling down, is to form a religious *habitus*, the source of actions and representations, the interiorised matrix of practice, of ethos and of a particular worldview, in this case the religious one, which stresses the incommensurability of God and the submission of the believer. It is necessary to dwell on this point, because everyday prayers are the core of religious experience and the first technique for the moulding of the dispositions and ethos of the believer. The repetitive character of the prayer, as well as its physicality, are decisive aspects that both show its disciplinary quality. By the constant daily repetition of this practice, since the first years of life, the believer acquires in a practical and emotional way the deep and basic dispositions and the worldview that will form the religious core of his *habitus*. In turn, the dispositions and



*ethos*, interiorised through ritual practice, find a vehicle of expression and a means of confirmation every time the believer devotes himself again to prayer. In ritual practice, the dialectic of interiorisation and exteriorisation forming the very texture of social life finds its most clear epiphany.

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Besides daily prayers, other ritual practices can be analysed through the lens of the anthropopoietical perspective. If the *salat* shows us the importance of repetition, the fasting (*sawm*) of Ramadan is an illustration of the importance of self-discipline (Buitelaar 1993). If we focus only on the most important traits of this tradition, we can see in the *sawm* a demonstration of self-control, *'aql*, and patience, *sabr*, and at the same time the ritual means through which these religious qualities are learned. Fasting is a test of the will of the believer and an example of self-discipline, a sign of reason and of faith, as every Muslim believer knows. Circumcision (*khitana* or *tahara*) has not been much studied by the ethnographers of Moroccan culture, notwithstanding its significance. One of the reasons probably lies in the fact—noted by Marjo Buitelaar (1993) and John Bowen (1989)—that anthropologists tend to give more attention to local and popular forms of religion than to official Islamic practices like circumcision and fasting. Circumcision is indeed prescribed by the *Sunna*, and its first meaning is to physically mark on the person his belonging to the *Umma*,<sup>8</sup> to engrave upon his body the unforgettable sign of belonging to the most sacred community. It is then a practice acting on the body, a ritual act at the same time symbolic and physical, which moulds the subject according to a model of the ideal person, in this case the ideal model of the perfect man, the Prophet.

The *khitana* (or *tahara*, both terms mean purification and cleaning) can be practiced any time after the first week from the birth. The first week is the first symbolic threshold crossed by babies of both sexes, the name is officially given and the occasion is celebrated with a ritual feast, called *el sbuh* (the week), to which kin, friends and neighbours are invited. From this moment on the baby can be circumcised, but usually people wait at least a year and normally much more. Normally, the rite of *tahara* is celebrated with a feast where a great meal of mutton and chicken is offered to the guests. In Casablanca, where I conducted my fieldwork, people can decide to take the child to the surgeon at the clinic, and after to celebrate the feast at home, or to call the doctor to the house. In the latter case the father and other close relatives witness the operation in a closed room. After the actual circumcision the mother paints the hands and the feet of the child with *henna*, a ritual act charged with prophylactic meaning that

accompanies every rite of passage (the adornment of the bride with *henna* is a crucial stage of the marriage ceremony, too), and that, it must be noted, has in itself a clear anthropopoietical component, being a temporary marking of the body (Diouri 1997; Giacalone 2006); then the little boy, sporting new white and green clothes (the two colours of Islam), is taken, sometimes on horseback and accompanied by musicians, to the mosque, where a thanksgiving prayer is performed. Back home the child is greeted by the guests and given presents and money.

This circumcision rite has many stratified meanings: first comes, as the name itself reveals, the ritual act of cleansing, in both a spiritual and physical sense, permitting the young boy to enter in a cleansed state into the community of believers. But *khitana* has also a gender dimension, which is not secondary. As Fiorella Giacalone (2006: 119) notes: 'circumcision marks the separation between mother and son, because the child will increase his virility and enter into the community of men'. But the ritual is not exactly a rite of passage, as Vincent Crapanzano noted (1980a, 1980b), simply because the young boy will go on living inside the feminine sphere of social life for some years still. Yet, although there is not a 'social passage', the rite is a symbolic separation from the world of women, and a transformative practice whose aim is to make the subject into a man, an androgenetic rite. Circumcision is not a rite of transition, it aims instead at transforming a man-to-be into a real, although still not grown, male, by means of an indelible sign on the body, and by means of pain. Crapanzano (1980a, 1980b) offered an interesting psychoanalytical interpretation of the ritual, according to which the wound is a sort of symbolic re-elaboration of the phantasm of castration and other original traumas, and represents a tentative way to work out the feminine dimension of maleness. But to understand the ritual we have to consider also the theme of pain and patience: to become a man it is necessary to face the pain of our wounded maleness. The acquisition of patience, *sabr*, one of the most precious qualities for a believer, is a critical meaning of the ritual manipulation of the body. Circumcision is then a clear instance of anthropopoietical rite: the body is transformed, incised, to stamp on him the sign of the membership in the community of believers, with a reference to a specific concept of the person, to a religiously oriented, and prescribed, model of humanity. 'To make humanity means also to operate on the body, inscribing on it signs of humanity . . . If you have to construct humanity, it is inevitable that it is "embodied", "in-scribed" on the body, or that the body talks of it, its visible, tangible epiphany' (Remotti 2000: 8). And the circumcised body talks of gender, belonging and religious identity.

If the circumcision rite is not a rite of passage, other ritual moments do have this meaning, for instance the experience of the first fasting, which marks the moment when the young man or the young woman has acquired enough reason to control himself or herself (Buitelaar 1993). But above all, the actual rite of passage to adulthood is the ceremony for the first marriage. Combs-Schilling (1989) has produced a complete and convincing analysis of the Moroccan nuptial rite, an analysis centred on the crucial moment, extremely physical and full of meaning, of the defloration of the bride: the spouses become adult persons by the spilling of blood, a practice showing an overt analogy with the circumcised body. To become adult men and women, a painful experience, a bodily transformation is required. Although the bride's virginity is still a value in contemporary Morocco, and consequently the test of the bridal trousers is still deemed necessary by many people, the marriage ceremonies at which I have participated are very different from those described by Combs-Schilling (1989). The dimensions of festivity and conviviality, along with that of ostentation, are nowadays stressed. However, the basic symbolic structures are the same: during the ceremony, models of adulthood are proposed to the groom and bride, who have to appropriate them in order to have access to this condition. 'The Moroccan rite presents adult structures to the initiates in intense and clarified form, directly embedding it within their bodies' (Combs-Schilling 1989: 190). In the course of the night feast, the groom and the bride are at the centre of the stage, embodying in an intensified way the same roles of adulthood, with their specific gender difference, which stresses agency for the males and passivity for the women. The rite is the moment of maximum socialisation into the adult role, the symbolically charged time when the spouses can experience their future life. The rite of the first marriage is, therefore, the actual rite of passage to adulthood, reserved in Moroccan culture to married people (Kapchan 1996).

Both circumcision and marriage ceremonies, although very different from each other, are anthropopoietical rituals, that is to say symbolically charged practices by means of which society imposes its models of person and gender on subjects. They are not simply a representation of passage, because the rites act on the body of persons, transforming them. We can see in these rites practices that constitute, mould and reinforce the subjective *habitus* and its *hexis*. Ritual practices, religious and secular, help to form those interiorised dispositions that lie behind subjective actions. Moreover, these rites work with a constant reference to models of humanity and valued personhood that characterise the local system of meanings. What distinguishes secular from religious ritual practices is that the latter imply a more explicit

canon and that the disciplinary dimension is more evident. In other words, while most rituals are in fact disciplinary practices acting on the subject and his or her body to impose on him or her a socially valued form, religious rites have a sort of disciplinary surplus, along with an explicit aim to form a religious ethos in the believer.

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From my point of view, circumcision, fasting and the *salat* testify to the usefulness of the paradigm of embodiment, because it is through the discipline of the body, bowing in prayer or experiencing hunger during the Ramadan, that religion is empirically lived. And it is through the traces that the ritual practices leave on bodies that religion is interiorised, embodied and appropriated by the subject following the ideal of humanity endorsed by religious canon. More than texts, rituals are processes of writing on subjects and anthropopoietical means of subject production.

Ritual practices are not simply the *mise en act* of bodiless symbols, or communication media, but complex mechanisms that act on bodies and through bodies, aiming at the modelling of the person and at the formation of the *habitus*, by way of incorporation and disciplinary processes which give flesh and bones to meaning and values. After this long excursus we can, then, come back to our initial vignette, to the collective prayer for 'Aid el Kebir and my Durkheimian interpretation. As I said at the beginning of the article, the value of the Durkheimian view lies in the apprehension of the pragmatic role of the rite in the formation of the social group. However, the study of Islamic ritual practices shows that the formation of the community passes necessarily through the formation of the individual members, thanks to anthropopoietical rites and practices that impress on them a shared model of humanity.

## Notes

1. The first chapter of the Koran.
2. The formula: 'Allahu akbar': God is the greatest.
3. Regarding the Feast of the Sacrifice see Combs-Schilling (1989) on Moroccan traditions, and comparison between Moroccan and Indonesian practices developed by Bowen (1992).
4. Endnote by the editors: The term anthropopoeisis introduced by Remotti (2000, 2003) etymologically has Greek roots. In Greek the word anthropopoeisis refers to humanization as a developmental process by which specific characteristics of human beings are ascribed or acquired (definition given in the

Dictionary of Modern Greek Language, edited by the Aristotle University of Thessalonica, 1999). Remotti (2000) choose this term (and the corresponding adjective anthropopoietical) to characterize his research perspective.

5. Preaching by means of good example, see Hirshkind 2001.
6. The holy Tradition.
7. Cf. Endnote n°. 2.
8. The community of believers.

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