

Edgar Morin's Theory of Complex Identity and Multiculturalism: Navigating the Interconnectedness of Moroccan Identity

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ABSTRACT

Edgar Morin's theory of complex identity and multiculturalism brings into the surface an important perceptual framework for understanding the interaction of cultural, social, and historical elements in the construction of national identity. This study adopts a qualitative conceptual analysis based on an interpretive review of Edgar Morin's major works and relevant scholarship on multiculturalism and Moroccan identity. The analysis is organized around Morin's dialogical, hologrammatic, and recursive principles to examine their relevance for understanding Moroccan identity and multicultural education. More specifically, this paper examines Morin's concept of complexity and its implications for the understanding of Moroccan identity as a dynamic and evolving construct. In this regard, Morin's principles of dialogical thinking, hologrammatic relationships, and recursion offer an alternative to reductionist approaches to identity by emphasizing interconnectedness, plurality, and interaction. Within the Moroccan context, therefore, identity emerges as the result of the interaction of multiple cultural influences, including Arab, Amazigh, African, Andalusian, Mediterranean, and Jewish components. Furthermore, Morin's concept of "unity in diversity" provides an important perspective for understanding multiculturalism without erasing cultural differences. Ultimately, the article argues that identity is neither fixed nor homogeneous but rather a dynamic process shaped by historical, social, and institutional influences.

Keywords: Edgar Morin; complex identity; multiculturalism; Moroccan identity; diversity; cultural representation; inclusivity.

INTRODUCTION

Identity issues have become pressing matters that can no longer be overlooked, ignored, or dismissed, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall, when culture replaced the economy and identity replaced class. Before this event, the dominant analysis focused on economic factors and class structures. Concepts to the same degree identity and culture were not examined as relevant. All the same, this equation changed globally and became notably evident in Eastern and Central European countries, ever and again taking on a tragic dimension. This was not because identities inherently tend toward conflict, but because the failure to recognize them leads to confrontation.

As Moroccan identity continues to evolve in an increasingly globalized world, the representation of different cultural components requires careful examination. A certain challenge to inclusivity and tolerance within Moroccan identity arises from the selective integration of cultural components, which is often influenced by historical narratives and societal norms. At the same time, new approaches to balancing cultural recognition with the wider Moroccan cultural framework are emerging.

The Moroccan Constitution of 2011 officially recognized the multiplicity of the sources of Moroccan identity, including the Hebraic tributary as one of its fundamental components. This constitutional recognition reinforces the relevance of studying Moroccan identity through theoretical frameworks capable of accommodating plurality and diversity without fragmentation.

Methodologically, this article is a qualitative conceptual study. Rather than collecting empirical data, it undertakes an interpretive analysis of Edgar Morin's theoretical writings together with scholarship on

multiculturalism, identity, and Moroccan educational policy. The discussion is structured around Morin's dialogical, hologrammatic, and recursive principles to explore their contribution to understanding Moroccan identity within educational contexts.

Complexity and Complex Identity

Edgar Morin's (2001) theoretical framework on complex identity and multiculturalism marks a valuable perspective for examining identity formation in multicultural societies. Morin's concept of "complex identity" (Morin, 2008) posits that individual and collective identities are multifaceted, dynamic constructs shaped by various cultural, social, and historical factors.

For analytical purposes, this article examines Moroccan identity through three interconnected dimensions of Morin's complexity theory: the dialogical principle, the hologrammatic principle, and the recursive principle. These dimensions provide the analytical framework through which multiculturalism and identity formation are interpreted throughout the article.

In *La méthode*, Edgar Morin identifies three principles that form the foundation of complex thought:

- The dialogical principle unites two antagonistic principles or notions that appear contradictory but remain inseparable and essential for understanding the same reality.
- The hologrammatic principle demonstrates that the part is in the whole and the whole is within the part.
- The recursive principle explains the generative loop in which products and effects become producers and causes of what produces them.

These principles provide an alternative understanding of identity that moves beyond reductionist explanations.

A complex object or system is defined by this characteristic: it cannot be described by an analysis consisting of cutting it up and decomposing it into elementary functions. The scholarly term used is that of emergence. "Complexity first imposes itself as an impossibility of simplification; it emerges where complex unity produces its emergences..." and further on, "Complexity is not complication." What is complicated can be reduced to a simple principle, like a tangled skein or a sailor's knot. Certainly, the world is very complicated, but if it were only complicated, that is to say tangled, multi-dependent, etc., it would suffice to carry out the well-known reductions. And it is true that many administrative procedures, perceived as complex, are in fact only hyper-complicated and could be simplified (Morin, 1990, pp. 122–123).

Faced with such complications, Cartesian logic will remain operative for a long time. "The complex," to which Edgar Morin devoted almost the entirety of his work, is that which is woven together. Separate the threads of a fabric and you will immediately lose the entire cloth that the interweaving of the threads formed. The photograph that illustrates this article, taken somewhere in Guadeloupe, is telling: if you try to separate the tree trunk from the vines and other plants that are attached to it, you run the risk of causing the whole to perish.

Let us quote Edgar Morin: "The complex is truly that which is woven together and, on the other hand, the irreducible contradictions that deep problems give rise to. There exist fundamental contradictions for the mind, and the fact of thinking two contrary ideas at the same time represents, in my view, an effort of complexity. The physicist Niels Bohr said that the opposite of a profound truth is another profound truth. Before him, Pascal had said the same thing. Truth is found in uniting antagonistic but complementary notions – which, for my part, I call dialogics in order to distinguish it from dialectics."

The non-decomposable character is not sufficient, in fact, to characterize the complex. One must add to it the unpredictability of behavior: a croissant is not easily decomposable into a pile of flour, water, and butter, yet it is not therefore complex, its behavior being fairly predictable until you have swallowed it. And while our information systems are decomposable into material and software elements that are supposedly describable, their behavior very often proves to be unpredictable.

The multiple combinations of these software and hardware elements, together with the no less numerous combinations of input data, generally could not have been tested. Companies are in perpetual transformation: mergers and acquisitions follow one another, rendering futile attempts to formalize processes that are impossible to freeze. Within each company, the necessity of a global vision, of a systemic nature, is taken into account through approaches such as urban planning and enterprise architecture, which develop the good practices necessary for maintaining the coherence and transformation capacity of the information system.

But standardizing inter-application flows and developing data repositories is not enough. The information system of each company is no longer isolated, as it could have been in the early days of computing; it interacts with what we might call the global information system, through the Internet and multiple interfaces linking customers, suppliers, users, and connected objects. “Cloud” hosting and the exponential growth in the volume of stored information add further to this complexity. The requirements of security, accessibility, and performance are confronted in a process that, following Edgar Morin, we might call dialogics. Analytical and systemic approaches are naturally complementary, just as the whole and the parts are, and are not opposed to one another.

The analytical framework is suitable for many functions of the company, which are less exposed to interactions and changes. But how should one act in the face of information systems that are no longer necessarily deterministic? The “mastery of information systems,” the vocation of our association, should not be understood in the sense of domination and absolute control, but rather in the sense of “better management” within an uncertain environment where any absolute prediction of a system’s behavior would be illusory. Modeling and simulation then become privileged tools. The risk-based approach and decision-support computing provide avenues for reflection.

Complexity versus Complication

There are two preliminary difficulties in speaking about complexity. The first difficulty is the absence of an epistemological status for the term. Philosophers of science and epistemologists have neglected it, with the exception of Bachelard. The second difficulty is semantic: if one could define complexity clearly, it is evident that this term would no longer be complex.

In any case, complexity emerges as difficulty, as uncertainty, and not as clarity or as an answer. The problem is to know whether there is a possibility of responding to the challenge of uncertainty and difficulty.

For a long time, many believed, and perhaps still believe, that the shortcoming of the human and social sciences was their inability to rid themselves of the apparent complexity of human phenomena in order to rise to the dignity of the natural sciences, which established simple laws, simple principles, and made the order of determinism prevail in their conception.

Yet today, we see that there is a crisis of simple explanation in the biological and physical sciences; from that point onward, what seemed to be the non-scientific residues of the human sciences—uncertainty, disorder, contradiction, plurality, complication, and so forth—has today become part of a general problematic of scientific knowledge (Morin, 1990, pp. 9–10).

That being said, I would like from the outset, given that there is difficulty and confusion surrounding the word complexity, to point out that one cannot arrive at complexity through a prior definition; we must follow diverse paths, and paths so diverse that one may wonder whether there are complexities rather than a single complexity.

I shall therefore very quickly and in a non-complex manner, since this will take the form of a kind of enumeration or catalogue, indicate to you the different avenues that lead to the “challenge of complexity.”

The first avenue, the first path, is that of the irreducibility of chance or disorder. Chance and disorder first emerged in the universe of the physical sciences with the irruption of heat, which is the agitation/collision/dispersion of atoms or molecules; then with the emergence of microphysical indeterminacies; and finally with the original explosion and the current dispersion of the cosmos (Morin, 1990, pp. 10–11).

The Dialogical Principle and Multicultural Education

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As a sociologist, like Bourdieu, to whom he has often been both compared and contrasted, he approaches with a question, mobilizes his tools to see to what extent they are performative with regard to the question, and puts it to work, while leaving room for surprise by allowing the question to interrogate his tools. Through the recursive principle, the question comes to nourish the tools, to give them a little more scope and relevance, while reality itself renders the concept more complex. This amounts to saying that the concept of complexity is complex in itself because it is nourished by experience and by reality. It is not merely a concept born from the imagination of the inquiring researcher, but rather from the encounter between reality and the researcher’s imagination, through a play of creativity that allows the complex approach to be nourished by the complexity of reality. This point is important for understanding Morin’s educational aim, in that it shows that complex thought, when mobilized for education, is anchored in the reality of education and leads one to think about education within the society in which it is situated.

COMPARING MORIN WITH OTHER PERSPECTIVES ON IDENTITY

Identity has been examined through various theoretical perspectives, each emphasizing a particular dimension of its formation and evolution. Among the most influential, Stuart Hall conceptualizes identity as an ongoing process of cultural representation shaped by discourse, history, and social experience rather than as a fixed or essential characteristic. Similarly, Pierre Bourdieu explains identity through the concepts of cultural capital, habitus, and symbolic power, demonstrating how educational institutions reproduce dominant cultural norms and social inequalities. In contrast, James A. Banks approaches identity from an educational perspective, arguing that multicultural curricula promote inclusion, democratic citizenship, and equal educational opportunities. Although these theories provide valuable insights into identity formation, each tends to privilege a specific analytical dimension, whether representation, power relations, or educational reform.

By comparison, Edgar Morin's theory of complexity offers a more comprehensive understanding of identity by integrating these dimensions within a single epistemological framework. Rather than viewing cultural influences as separate or competing forces, Morin argues that identities emerge through continuous interaction, dialogue, and mutual transformation. His dialogical principle explains how apparently contradictory cultural traditions coexist without cancelling one another, while the hologrammatic principle demonstrates that each cultural component simultaneously reflects and contributes to the broader national identity. Furthermore, the recursive principle emphasizes that identity is constantly reconstructed through the reciprocal relationship between individuals, institutions, culture, and society. Consequently, Morin moves beyond reductionist explanations by presenting identity as an evolving and interconnected process.

Within the Moroccan context, this complexity perspective is particularly significant because Moroccan identity has historically developed through the interaction of Arab, Amazigh, African, Andalusian, Mediterranean, and Jewish cultural traditions. Therefore, unlike approaches that primarily focus on representation, educational structures, or curriculum reform, Morin provides a theoretical framework capable of explaining how these diverse cultural influences collectively shape national identity without erasing their individual distinctiveness. Ultimately, his theory not only complements the contributions of Hall, Bourdieu, and Banks but also extends them by demonstrating that cultural diversity should be understood as a source of cohesion rather than

fragmentation. This integrated perspective therefore provides a stronger conceptual foundation for analysing cultural representation and multicultural education within contemporary Moroccan society.

Complex Identity and Moroccan Identity

Morin's concept of complexity provides an important framework for understanding Moroccan identity. Moroccan identity cannot be understood through a single cultural component but rather through the interaction of multiple cultural influences that together form a complex and evolving whole. The inclusion of Jewish cultural elements contributes to students' understanding of national identity and illustrates that identity is neither fixed nor simple. Instead, identity emerges from the interaction of different cultural elements working together within society and educational systems.

Morin's concept of "unity in diversity" supports the idea that multiculturalism can strengthen social cohesion without erasing cultural differences. Moroccan identity is therefore shaped by various cultural influences and evolves through their continuous interaction.

DISCUSSION

Morin's theory enriches our understanding of multiculturalism by emphasizing interaction rather than separation, complexity rather than reduction, and plurality rather than homogeneity. His approach foregrounds the importance of recognizing the multiple dimensions that constitute individual and collective identities.

The theory provides an important perspective for understanding national identity formation in multicultural societies and offers a framework for analysing how educational systems contribute to the construction of inclusive identities.

Edgar Morin's (2001) theory of complex identity noted that identity is not fixed, to be more specific it is a process shaped by a set of different influences. Including Jewish culture in textbooks highlights the diverse cultural forces that make up Moroccan identity. Morin's perspective supported the idea that Morocco's identity should reflect all of its rich cultural history, not just a select part.

Edgar Morin describes as "reductionist thinking," wherein complex realities are conventionalized to be congruous with pre-existing frameworks. First and foremost, Jewish contributions to Morocco's intellectual and cultural development are not merely peripheral but rather central to its evolution, and their absence from educational materials keeps going with a delusive narrative of nonconformity. This reductionism on the grounds of this challenges the transformative potential of education by depriving students of the chance to critically engage with their diverse heritage. That being the case, incorporating Jewish role models into the curriculum may challenge these reductive frameworks and contribute to the development of an all-inclusive understanding of Moroccan identity. Unlike representation theories that primarily emphasize discourse (Hall) or multicultural education frameworks that focus on curriculum reform (Banks), Morin's complexity theory highlights the dynamic interactions among multiple cultural systems. Consequently, Moroccan identity is understood as an evolving process shaped through continuous interaction among its diverse cultural components.

Edgar Morin (2001), in this regard, explains this further in what he thinks are challenges posed by fragmented education. He states, "The predominance of fragmented learning divided up into disciplines makes us unable to connect parts and wholes; it should be replaced by learning that can grasp subjects within their context, their complex, their totality" (p. 1). This is why it is important to represent the Jewish cultural elements in a way that can help students understand their place within the broader Moroccan identity.

Edgar Morin's theory of complex identity and multiculturalism offers a valuable framework for understanding Moroccan identity as a dynamic and evolving construct shaped by multiple cultural influences. His principles of dialogical thinking, hologrammatic relationships, and recursion emphasize that identity cannot be reduced to isolated components but emerges through interaction and interconnectedness.

Morin's concept of "unity in diversity" highlights the possibility of strengthening social cohesion while preserving cultural plurality. Identity is therefore not a fixed construct but an ongoing process shaped by historical, social, and institutional influences.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Edgar Morin's theory of complexity provides a valuable framework for understanding Moroccan identity as a dynamic and evolving process rather than a fixed cultural reality. By bringing together the principles of dialogical thinking, recursion, and the hologrammatic relationship, Morin shows that identity develops through the continuous interaction of different cultural, historical, and social influences. Therefore, Moroccan identity should be understood as the result of the coexistence and interaction of its diverse cultural traditions, including Arab, Amazigh, African, Andalusian, Mediterranean, and Jewish heritage.

Moreover, comparing Morin's perspective with those of Hall, Bourdieu, and Banks demonstrates that each theory contributes important insights into identity formation. However, Morin offers a broader and more integrated perspective by explaining how these different dimensions work together rather than separately. As a result, his theory provides a stronger conceptual foundation for analysing cultural representation, multicultural education, and the role of educational institutions in shaping inclusive national identities.

Finally, this study highlights the importance of moving beyond simplified understandings of identity and recognising its complex and interconnected nature. In this respect, education has an important role in promoting cultural understanding, inclusion, and mutual respect. Future research may build on this theoretical framework by exploring how Moroccan Jewish cultural elements are represented in educational materials and how these representations influence students' perceptions of Moroccan identity, diversity, and social cohesion.

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