

# UNIVERSALITY AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY IN MORAL SYSTEMS AMONG WEIRD AND NON-WEIRD SOCIETIES: A CASE STUDY OF FRANCE AND MOROCCO

Lina Bentahila, Roger Fontaine, & Valérie Pennequin

Laboratory PAVeA, EA 2114, Department of Psychology, University of Tours (France)

## Abstract

**Background:** Morality plays a fundamental role in the functioning of any human society by regulating social interactions and behaviors. Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) (Haidt & Joseph, 2004) led to a major change by proposing pluralist “moralities” with a common ground in all cultures composed of five main moral principles (Care, Fairness, Loyalty, Authority, Purity). These principles thought to be universal and rooted in the evolutionary past establish the moral system. Nevertheless, the prioritization of moral values stemming from these principles is different across cultures. We thus tested the moral endorsement of these principles in a cross-cultural dataset among a WEIRD society (France), and a non-WEIRD society (Morocco). **Method:** 150 French (mean age; 28.81±12.70 years) and 152 Moroccans (mean age; 29.94±13.90 years) were recruited online. They first completed the 14 ethnic identity questions of the Quebec version of the Ethnic Identity Measure (MIE). They also completed the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ). **Results:** The effect of culture on subjects' level of endorsement to moral principles is significant. Moroccans score higher on the moral principles of Loyalty, Authority, and Purity, while French score higher on the moral principles of Care and Fairness. The importance accorded to these principles influences the structure of the moral system of both societies. **Discussion:** The principles of Care and Fairness correspond to the individualizing foundation because these are all linked to individual rights and that the individual is at the center of moral values. France's moral system draws on more liberal social rules, founded upon individual rights, justice, and the principle of avoiding harm. The principles of Loyalty, Authority, and Purity correspond to the binding foundation. It restricts the liberty of individuals in favor of promoting the interests of the group. Morocco's moral system supports the regulation of individuals' egoism by encouraging them to adopt behaviors that facilitate cooperation.

**Keywords:** *Universal moral, moral foundations, moral principles, cross-cultural research, WEIRD and non-WEIRD societies.*

---

## 1. Theoretical background

Morality plays a fundamental role in the functioning of any human society by regulating social interactions and behaviors. The individual's environment establishes shared cultural knowledge, which brings about affective, cognitive, and behavioral consequences on morality.

Moral Foundations Theory (MFT) (Haidt & Joseph, 2004) set a milestone in the field by proposing pluralist “moralities” with a common ground in all cultures composed of 5 main moral principles. The characteristics of Care are benevolence, kindness, sympathy. Fairness represents reciprocity, respect for individual rights. Loyalty represents commitment, patriotism. Authority represents obedience, discipline, submission. Purity represents chastity, devotion, piety. These principles thought to be universal and rooted in the evolutionary past establish the moral system (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). It is, therefore, the prioritization of moral values stemming from these principles, which differentiates cultures and individuals.

Graham, Haidt and, Nosek (2009) describe the principles of Care and Fairness as the individualizing foundation, because they are all linked to individual rights and that the individual is at the center of moral values. They emphasize the importance of personal rights, justice, and caring about the well-being of individuals (Vauclair, Wilson, & Fischer, 2014). Nowadays, they mostly appear in individualistic societies associated with Western, Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD; Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Nevertheless, cultures do not limit their values to that of protecting the individual. For this reason, Graham et al. (2009) defined the binding foundation, corresponding to three other principles (Authority, Loyalty, and Purity). This foundation restricts the liberty of individuals in favor of promoting the interests of the group (Vauclair et al., 2014). One mainly finds this foundation within non-WEIRD societies (known as oriental, less educated, less industrialized, quite poor, and non-democratic), associating it to collectivist cultures.

## 2. Research questions

Empirical results support the theory of division of the individualizing and binding foundations between individualistic and collectivist cultures (Graham et al., 2009). Thereby, does France and Morocco societies exhibit cultural patterns of moral system?

## 3. Methods

150 French (22.51% men, 27.16% women, mean age; 28.81±12.70 years) and 152 Moroccans (23.18% men, 27.15% women, mean age; 29.94±13.90 years) filled out the questionnaire, which was put online from December 2020 to May 2021 on the Sphinx Online software. The questionnaire provided information about socio-demographic characteristics, age, gender, level of education, country of birth etc.

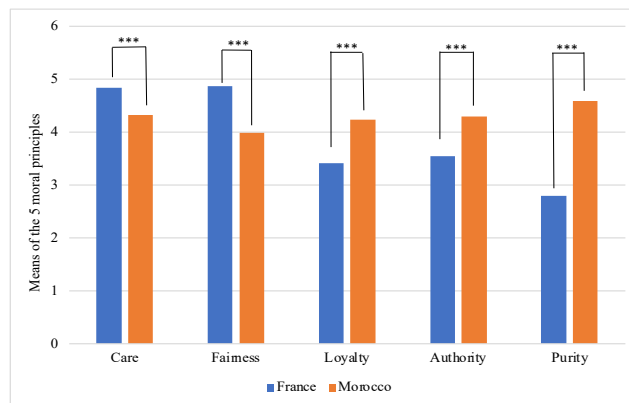
They first completed the 14 ethnic identity questions of the Quebec version of the Ethnic Identity Measure (MIE) (Tremblay, Corbière, Perron, & Coallier, 2000). The goal was to select participants with a sense of belonging to their own culture. Retained participants had scores of 3 or higher.

They also completed the French version of the Moral Foundations Questionnaire (MFQ) (Métayer & Pahlavan, 2014), which has been designed to assess individual moral system on the 5 moral principles. It consists of 2 parts of 15 items, each one containing 3 items per principle.

## 4. Results

In a Multivariate Analysis of Variance conducted the effect of culture on subjects' level of endorsement to moral principles is significant,  $F(5,29) = 81.65, p < .001$ . Moroccans score higher on the moral principles of Loyalty ( $4.24 \pm 0.84$  vs  $3.41 \pm 0.83$ ), Authority ( $4.30 \pm 0.83$  vs  $3.54 \pm 0.92$ ), and Purity ( $4.59 \pm 0.87$  vs  $2.80 \pm 1.04$ ) than French (*Figure 1*). While French score higher on the moral principles of Care ( $4.84 \pm 0.67$  vs  $4.32 \pm 1.02$ ) and Fairness ( $4.86 \pm 0.57$  vs  $3.98 \pm 1.08$ ) than Moroccans (*Figure 1*).

Figure 1. Means of the 5 moral principles according to culture. \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .



To observe the structure of the moral system of both societies, we conducted a Principal Component Analysis (PCA) (*Table 1*). For French, 2 factors explained 75.86% of the total variance with eigenvalues greater than 1. Factor 1 is represented by Care and Fairness and factor 2 is represented by Loyalty, Authority, and Purity. For Moroccans, 2 factors explained 73.68% of the total variance with eigenvalues greater than 1. Factor 1 is represented by Loyalty and Purity and factor 2 is represented by Care and Fairness. Authority is not represented by the 2 factors.

Table 1. PCA of French and Moroccans. \*Factor weight > .70.

PCA Variables	France (n=150)		Morocco (n=152)	
	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 1	Factor 2
Care	-0.890*	-0.065	0.507	-0.779*
Fairness	-0.867*	-0.045	0.489	-0.790*
Loyalty	-0.029	-0.878*	-0.775*	-0.581
Authority	-0.103	-0.878*	-0.652	-0.620
Purity	0.103	-0.880*	-0.848*	-0.623
Eigenvalues	2.281	1.502	2.617	1.067
Total %	45.761	30.103	52.340	21.349

## 5. Discussion

In this study, participants from Morocco obtained higher scores when considering principles of Loyalty, Authority and Purity compared to French participants. The differences center around these 3 principles, which are justifiable when one considers the cultural differences in terms of collectivism and the link between Purity and religious practice, in Morocco. Collectivist cultures extol interdependence among individuals, conformity, and emphasize the needs of the group above the pursuit of individual goals. Moroccan culture has modes of social organization close to those observed in the distant past in traditional societies, associated with non-WEIRD societies. For them, concerns regarding Purity, spiritual degradation, and moral expectations of loyalty toward one's social group, are the concerns that arise the most. French participants, on the other hand, advocate more the principles of Care and Fairness. Their morality draws on more liberal social rules, based on individual rights, justice, and the principle of avoiding harm. This corresponds well to the traits of an individualistic culture which are autonomy, liberty, and the pursuit of uniqueness.

Generally, the structure of the moral system of both societies supports the theory of division of the individualizing (principles of Care and Fairness) and binding (principles of Loyalty, Authority, and Purity) foundations. These foundations, independent of one another, establish the moral system based on the idea that all intuitions and feelings induce judgments and moral arguments.

## 6. Limit

Morality does not get reduced to one cultural moral or social status; in effect, there are universal moral concerns. The inter-individual heterogeneity must be considered as individuals do not passively bend with dominant representations of their culture.

## 7. Conclusion

We saw intercultural differences of moral foundations among a WEIRD society (France) and a non-WEIRD society (Morocco). Individuals, throughout their cultural experiences, rely more on one or another of these foundations and moral principles. It is consequently important to consider these when evaluating the moral identity of societies.

### References

- Graham, J., Haidt, J., & Nosek, B. A. (2009). Liberals and conservatives rely on different sets of moral foundations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *96*, 1029–1046. doi: 10.1037/a0015141
- Haidt, J., & Joseph, C. (2004). Intuitive ethics: how innately prepared intuitions generate culturally variable virtues. *Daedalus*, *133*, 55–66. doi: 10.1162/0011526042365555
- Haidt, J., & Kesebir, S. (2010). Morality. In John Wiley & Sons, Inc (Ed.), *Handbook of Social Psychology* (pp. 797–832). Hoboken, NJ, US
- Henrich, J., Heine, S. J., & Norenzayan, A. (2010). The weirdest people in the world? *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, *33*, 61–83. doi: 10.1017/S0140525X0999152X
- Métayer, S., & Pahlavan, F. (2014). Validation de l'adaptation française du questionnaire des principes moraux fondateurs. *Revue internationale de psychologie sociale*, *27/2*, 79-107. Retrieved from <https://www.cairn.info/revue-internationale-de-psychologie-sociale-2014-2-page-é79.htm>
- Tremblay, C., Corbière, M., Perron, J., & Coallier, J.-C. (2000). Équivalence interculturelle de la mesure d'identité ethnique (MIE). *L'Orientation scolaire et professionnelle*, *29/4*. Retrieved from <http://journals.openedition.org/osp/5800>
- Vauclair, M., Wilson, M., & Fischer, R. (2014). Cultural conceptions of morality: examining laypeople's associations of moral character. *Journal of Moral Education*, *43*, 54–74. doi: 10.1080/03057240.2013.873365