

# **ORGANIZATIONAL IDENTIFICATION PROCESSES BEYOND AND ACROSS SOCIETAL CONTEXTS: THE CASE OF A NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION FOR SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE ENTREPRENEURS**

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**Abstract:**

Drawing on organizational studies and intercultural management the paper raises the question of how to comprehend identification processes across societal contexts. The paper conceives of identification as narratives and explores internationalization on the basis of a qualitative analysis of the French NGO, the *Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants*, in Morocco. The analysis contributes with comprehension of how identity narratives travel across societal contexts. The study illustrates, first, that identification results both from face-to-face social interactions and from imagining a belonging with organizational members that one rarely, if ever, meets. Second, the paper shows that identity narratives with abstract template structures are particularly apt for internationalization.

**Key words:** identification processes; organization; narratives; internationalization; France and Morocco.

## **Introduction**

Identity constitutes an asset for organizations whether they are private, public or non-governmental organizations (NGO). However, with internationalization organizational identities are challenged in several ways. One challenge relates to how an organization preserves a unique and cohesive identity when it expands national borders traveling into heterogeneous institutional contexts. Another challenge relates to organizational identification processes, that is, how individuals come to identify with an organization that spans across several societal contexts. The present paper explores this latter challenge.

The paper conceives of organizational identification processes as the course through which belonging or attachment to a given organization is produced (Scott, Corman, and Cheney, 1998).). In this process, identity and identification are closely interrelated. Organizational identity creates and is created by organizational identification. While organizational identity defines ‘who we are’, identification consists of practices in and through which individuals activate particular identities in relevant settings. Literature illustrates that contextual embeddedness is vital for organizational identity since identification processes are situational, relational, multi-dimensional

and constituted by dynamic processes. It is through communication and social interaction that individuals define themselves in relation to those they aspire to resemble ('we') and distinguish themselves from the 'others' (Scott et al.1998). An organization's identity depends on its uniqueness and legitimacy that provide from the institutional contexts within which it emerges and operates (Gioia et al. 2013).

Yet, while the importance of contextuality is acknowledged, literature hardly explores the questions of how organizational identification takes place across societal contexts. When addressing contextuality, literature tends to investigate either continuity in organizational identity over time - endurance -, or it explores how institutional pressures shape organizational identity formation and change in one institutional context. This leaves unexplored the question of how organizational identities travel across institutional contexts and the implication for identification processes. In addition, while organizational literature is abundant in terms of empirical studies from stable and developed institutional contexts (i.e. US and Europe), examples from emerging contexts are scarce (Gioia et al. 2013). This implies that our empirical insight remains limited with regard to whether and how organizational identity travels from the West/North into emerging countries in the East/South.

Hence, this paper proposes to explore contextuality on the basis of an empirical study of how the organizational identity of an organization travels beyond Europe. The *Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants* (CJD) (translated into 'young business leaders', authors' translation) is an NGO that, since its foundation in France in 1938, gathers (in average 3,000-4,000) young business leaders (under 45 years) around the vision of contributing to the betterment of society in and through leading their small and medium sized companies. The CJD offers a puzzling example for studying organizational identification processes. The average length of membership is short and the turn-over is high. This implies a relative short socialization that appears to contrast with the dedication and devotion towards the organization that the members express. This is likewise the case in Morocco that in 2001 became the second country outside France in which the CJD was founded. To allow for a contextualized study of organizational identification processes across societal contexts, this study will focus on the CJD and its members in Morocco.

The paper adopts a narrative approach to identification. Narratives are at the heart of identification processes since they provide sense to events by ordering these in a sequential story with a plot (Czarniawska, 2011). That is, with the words of MacIntyre 'I can only answer the question 'What I am to do? If I can answer the question 'of what story or stories do I find myself a part' (quoted in Wertsch (2012, p. 129). Narratives also provide resources for how to make sense of the existential question of 'who-I-am' and 'what-is-my-role' (Boje, 1991; Czarniawska, 1997). Regarding a collective identity, such as an organization, the question is whether and how a narrative is shared. Telling a narrative is a practice through which the teller positions him or herself in relation to the story, and potentially becomes part of it, and shares it. In this way, narratives constitute symbolic devices for establishing and maintaining organizational identification. In the present study, organizational identification processes will be conceived of as narratives in and through which individuals make sense of their lives and inscribe themselves within a collectivity. A narrative analysis of identification processes implies identifying stories with a plot on 'who we are' and exploring how the narrators share, negotiate and perhaps contest such stories. In relation to our focus on organizational identification processes across societal contexts, the question is whether and how individuals inscribe themselves into identity narratives

that travels from different historical, institutional and cultural contexts. Our questions in relation to the CJD in Morocco are therefore:

- 1) How do the Moroccan business leaders/entrepreneurs position themselves within the CJDs identity narrative that emerged from within the French historical, institutional and cultural context?
- 2) How can these insights contribute to our understanding of organizational identification processes across societal contexts?

The paper is organized as follows: first, a brief review of extant literature on organizational identity and identification processes with a view to set up a theoretical framework for comprehending organizational identification across societal contexts; second, the case of the CJD is introduced; third, the research design and methods are presented; fourth, a clarification of the CJD's identity narratives with an analysis of the ways in which the CJD narrative acquires sense for Moroccan members and functions as anchor for their live and work; fifth, a discussion of how these findings contribute to our understanding of identification processes across societal contexts.

## **Organizational identity and identification processes**

The extant body of literature is large, reflecting the importance that identity and identification have acquired for the understanding of organizational cohesiveness and performance (i.e. Gioia et al. 2013, Ashforth, Harrison, and Corley, 2008; , 2008, Pratt, 2003; Schultz et al., 2012). Organizational identification processes are conceived of as a course through which belonging or attachment to a given organization is produced (Scott et al. 1998). Identification occurs through socialization and is nurtured by an organization's capacity to provide sense to its members (Gioia et al., 2013). That is, does the organization fill the meaning voids that its members may resent and does it provide the recognition to which they are aspiring (Ashforth et al., 2008). In the process of attachment to an organization, Scott et al. (1998) conceives of identity and identification as closely interrelated and mutually constitutive. Organizational identity creates and is created by organizational identification. Organizational identity provides resources for constructing an identity while identification constitutes practices in and through which individuals activate identity resources in a particular setting (Scott et al. 1998). When so doing, individuals may draw on several coexisting and competing identities; and they may either endorse or resist dominating organizational identities (Alvesson and Willmott, 2002). The implication of this perspective is that individuals are social actors that draw on extant resources for constructing identities while, by the same token, reconstructing these resources. Hereby, identities and identifications are always in the becoming, as it is within the social interaction in a particular place and time that individuals define themselves.

### *Organizational identification processes across societal contexts*

Studying continuity and change in organizational identity over time, Gioia et al. (2013) contend that distinguishing identity 'labels' from 'content' is useful for comprehending identity change and stability over time. Hence, identity labels may remain stable while content is

malleable. In a similar line of argument, literature on intercultural studies demonstrates that when values, ideas or practices travel across societal contexts, their form may remain stable while the content changes. Drawing on the distinction between the ‘signifier’ and ‘signified’ in semiotics, Brannen (2004) coined the term ‘recontextualization’ to define the process in which a signifier, originated within one meaning system, acquires new sense (signified) within another system of signification. Several studies illustrate such recontextualization processes within organizations that span several institutional contexts (i.e. Barmeyer and Davoine, 2011; d’Iribarne, 2012). Literature on intercultural studies further illustrates that individuals actively contribute in making new sense of travelling signifiers within the receiving societal context in relation to extant signification systems and ongoing conflicts of power within the situational and contextual setting in which they act (i.e. Romani et al., 2011; Gertsen and Zølner, 2012; Yousfi, 2011). Hence, meaning is being negotiated by social actors, hereby, giving rise to the emergence of ‘new’ or ‘hybrid’ meanings.

Identities and identifications are likewise being negotiated. Brannen and Salk (2000) conceives of intercultural encounters as a situation in which social actors selectively draw on several cultural schemata depending on the stance they adopt in a particular situation and in relation to a perceived ‘other’. Identifications are likely to be situationally defined, multiple (Sackmann & Philips, 2004) and hybrid, in the sense of combining elements from various cultural schemata on micro-, meso, or macro-levels (i.e. team, organization, profession, ethnicity, nation, language, region, religion). In a study on a shared service centre belonging to the subsidiary of an MNC of Danish origin in Bangalore, Gertsen & Zølner (2014) illustrate such an hybrid identification among the team-leaders. The team-leaders defined themselves as ‘modern indians’ as a way to endorse a stance in-between traditional Indian management and the impersonal value-based management that the Danish MNC put forward. Articles with a post-colonial perspective likewise show how employees and managers outside Western contexts simultaneously endorse and contest Western management values and discourses (i.e. Yousfi, 2014, Boussebaa et al., 2014).

### *Imagined communities*

We have seen above that extant literature on organizations conceives of identities and identification as on-going dynamic processes that are situationally defined and contextually embedded. Literature also defines these processes as being relational in the sense of always constituting a process in which individuals relate themselves to people they would like to resemble while distinguishing themselves from people they would not like to be associated with. In this perspective, identification processes constitute always a conversation with an interlocutor and operates only in relation to ‘someone’ (i.e. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Czarniawska-Joerges, 1997; Schultz et al., 2012; Weick, 2001). However, increasingly today, this conversation may be with a virtual or symbolic interlocutor, as identifications emerge within large collectivities with little face-to-face contact and in relation to an abstract idea on how this interlocutor is.

In his seminal work on nation-building, Anderson (1983) defined national communities as ‘imagined’ since even members of the smallest nation would never know all of their fellow-

members (Anderson, 1983, p.6) unlike the premodern village communities in which identification was built upon face-to-face social interaction. A community is imagined when its members do not know most of their fellow members individually or have even heard about them, and yet, in the mind of each member lives the image of their communion. Hence, an 'imagined community' conceptualizes feelings of belonging to a group of people that one imagines to be like 'us' without having ever met them. Anderson states further that the strength of an imagined community does not depend on the degree to which it is invented or genuine but rather on whether the idea of belonging and likeness may serve to unite and create emotional ties between its members and beyond their differences and differing interests (Anderson, 1983). In other words, the strength of an identity narrative depends on its capacity to create an emotional tie that can carry the imagined communion beyond member's internal divisions.

### *Narratives and organizational identification processes*

Organizational literature consents that narratives hold a key for understanding identification processes. A narrative orders events in sequences of time, in place and involves a causal plot with characters and action of change (Czarniawska & Gagliardi, 2003; Gabriel, 2000). Hereby, narratives provide sense to events by ordering these in a sequential story with a plot – storying (Czarniawska, 2011). In relation to the existential question of 'who-I-am' narratives contribute in shaping our thinking of 'who I am' as they provide cognitive resources for the stories into which we inscribe ourselves (Boje, 1991; Czarniawska, 1997). In this perspective, a collective identity is about sharing a narrative of 'who we are' and the act of narrating constitutes a symbolic device for identification. When telling this narrative, a subject positions him or herself in relation to the story.

Identity narratives might be based on a selective memory of the past (forgetting what differs and memorising what makes a like) and/or on the aspiration of reaching a common goal in the future (Anderson, 2005; Said, 1994). However, when telling narratives, individuals customize extant narratives relating it to own experiences and are hereby slightly altering it to make it fit with a given time and place. Hence, narrative carries ambiguity that opens for the negotiation of its meaning. Several versions of one narrative might coexist while still functioning to create feelings of identity and belonging with those who share it - or with those one imagines sharing it. Wertsch (2012) distinguishes between template narratives and specific narratives. Specific narratives include concrete information about particular settings, actors and actions and are hence embedded within a given time and space. Inversely, template narratives are conceptually abstract and provide a schematic structure with an emplotment that can be shared beyond a specific time and place. Template narratives can be seen as 'cookie cutter plots' as they provide an abstract plot that can be contextualized in various ways (Wertsch, 2012).

### *Theoretical framework for comprehending organizational identification processes across societal contexts*

The following analysis of organizational identification processes across societal contexts will draw on the above insights from the literature on Organizational and Intercultural Studies. Identification processes will be conceived as the course through which individuals construct attachment to an organization in and through practices in which a particular identity is activated, negotiated and modified. Identification processes are conceived as situational, relational and processual and emerging out of on-going social interactions in a defined context in which organizational actors may adopt multiple identities depending on their stance in a particular situation. The implication is that identities might change form and content when travelling into new societal contexts in which social actors are likely to re-interpret and make sense of these in relation to extant signification systems, their own position within society and their interests. The concept of imagined communities will be drawn upon to further our understanding of identification processes within large and geographically distributed organizations in which members relate to one another on the basis of how they imagine one another to be.

Identification processes will be analysed as narratives that the organizational members tell and share to differing degrees and in various ways. Wertsch's distinction (2012) between template and specific narratives will be mobilized to further our comprehension of the internationalization of the CJD narratives and bonding between CJD's in various contexts. The proposition is that a template narrative is particularly apt for contextualization due to its abstract and schematic plot structure. Accordingly, a template narrative is also likely to be more easily shared across contexts and to contribute in forming imagined communities. Particular attention will be paid to how template and specific narratives are used to construct bonding with respectively 'imagined' and 'face-to-face' communities.

### ***The Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants: its origin and internationalization***

#### *The French origin of the Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants (CJD)*

Originally, the CJD is a French non-governmental organization that gathers business leaders from all sectors around a set of values for how to lead and for the role that business is to play in society. Through the management of their companies, members are to contribute to the betterment of society by integrating considerations for all aspects of business responsibilities; that is, economic, social, societal and environmental responsibilities. Working methods consist of experimenting new ideas for how to lead their companies in a responsible way and of learning from one another's individual experiences. On this basis, the CJD seeks eventually to influence political decisions at local and national level. The ngo's aim and its working methods have remained fairly stable throughout CJD's more than 75 years long history in France (Bernoux, 1974; Zølner, 2009).

The non-governmental organization was founded in 1938 by a group of young Social Catholic leaders working in small and medium-sized family companies. The economic crisis in the 1930s and a widespread liberalism and conservatism among French employers in small and medium-sized enterprises exasperated the founders that aspired to create a 'different' image of business leaders, that is, to illustrate their social concern and their ambition to contribute to the betterment of society. These values are still at the core of the CJD and adhering to these conditions membership. However, being member of the CJD also provides tools for becoming better leaders and raises awareness on the need for socially responsible business and, both through training sessions and exchange with other members (Bonneveux et al. 2011).

In post-war France, the CJD acquired the image of representing modern, progressive and enlightened leaders that presented innovative proposals for how to organize work in new ways and with an emphasize on a a-political dialogue with employees (Bernoux, 1974). In this way, the CJD appeared as an organization apart on a French labour market marked by a conflictual dialogue between employees and employers (Zølner, 2009). The CJD also developed a well-established network of regional and local organizational structures throughout post-war France. The local level is primordial for the functioning of the CJD. Within the about 100 local sections, members gather face-to-face on a regular basis in order to share, discuss and reflect upon their experiences from their companies, and also in relation to work themes defined at national or regional levels. One crucial function of the local sections is to break the isolation of its members through offering a space where they can exchange ideas, challenges, and worries with like-minded peers in an atmosphere of open-mindedness, confidentiality and benevolence.

### *CJD's internationalization process*

In the 1990s, the CJD failed its ambition of expanding into European neighbouring countries (i.e. UK, Germany) despite political and economic cooperation within the EU and shared democratic visions and cultures marked by Christian cultural traditions. Yet, from the early 2000s onwards, a bottom-up internationalization process turned out to be more successful, primarily in francophone countries outside Europe. Progressively, the CJD emerged as a Francophone network for business leaders with the creation of 17 national/local organizations (i.e. Tunisia (1998), Morocco (2001), Quebec and Tchec Republic (2007), Monaco, Benine (2010), Senegal, Belgium, Mauretanie (2011), Ivory Coast (2013), London, Pekin, Madagascar (2014) (<http://www.cjdinternational.org/histoire/>, consulted December 2017).

At the international level, the CJD is headed by a president that is elected among former national presidents and for a period of two years, as it is the case for all other leading positions in the organization at local, regional and national levels. The CJD International formalizes the relation between the national organizations and stipulates two yearly meetings. These formalized contacts involve primarily, the national presidents and vice-presidents. Below the national level, there are no formal and regular international contacts. Communications between local sections are sporadic and limited, such as educational seminars, more or less formalized visits and the twinning of local sections from different countries. The international contacts tend to go from France and out. For example, the CJD Morocco invites experienced instructors from France for their educational seminars, French local sections visit Moroccan local sections and individual

French members contact CJD Morocco when expanding into the Moroccan market. Yet, CJD's international expansion in Africa has been facilitated by the Moroccan CJD (i.e. Senegal).

## **Research design and methods**

### *A contextualized case-study*

The study is designed as a qualitative in-depth case study with an empirical focus on identification processes among CJD members in one societal context. This allows for contextualizing the study. Morocco was selected in its capacity as having one of the 'oldest' CJD organizations outside France. CJD Morocco was founded in 2001, and has worked on building up the organization for more than 15 years. In 2017, CJD Morocco gathered 150 members, divided in seven local sections (Casablanca, Rabat, Tanger, Fez, Agadir, Dakhla, El Jadida). However, the CJD remains primarily anchored in the French speaking coastal area around the political and economic capitals, respectively, Rabat and Casablanca. The analysis will be based on these two local sections. The Casablanca section is the oldest and biggest section (estimated around 30). It is also closely related to the national level of the organization; for example, it shares office with the national level; 6 out of 11 national presidents came from the Casablanca section and some of these are still active in the section. The Rabat section is smaller (estimated around 20), more local, only two of the 11 national presidents came from the Rabat section.

The Moroccan CJD case offers insight into identification processes that transgress two societal contexts, France and Morocco, that share a memory that, indeed, both assembles and divides in the post-colonial setting of today (i.e. colonial past, French language, religion, North-South).

### *Empirical material and the collection process*

The empirical material consists of documents, individual and focus group interviews and an observation. This varied empirical material provides insights into how the organization presents itself within the Moroccan contexts as well as how its members narrate the organization. A first access to the organization was achieved through the French part of the organization and then elaborated through a snowball technique in respectively Rabat and Casablanca.

The bulk of the extant empirical material is comprised of 22 semi-structured interviews with members in the Rabat and the Casablanca section (conducted between 2014-2016). Participants included both fairly new members (6 months) and long term members (8 years and onwards), some of the latter had acted as respectively local, national and international presidents for the CJD. The interviews aimed at providing insight into how members situated themselves within the CJD narrative and made sense of it in relation to the life they lived as entrepreneurs in respectively Casablanca and Rabat. All interviews were open-ended to allow participants to narrate their experiences in their own words. The interviews were organized by an interview guide loosely structured around three main headings: 1) The interviewee's professional background and career (i.e., age, family situation, educational background, previous professional



experiences); 2) the interviewee's encounter with and his/hers experiences in the CJD 3) and their experimentation with implementing the CJD guidelines for a responsible business. Interviewees were probed to give as many concrete examples as possible to nurture rich description. The interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted face-to-face in the interviewees' office or in nearby cafés. The interviews were conducted in French to ensure that language deficiency did not constrain their narrations. French is the primary language employed by the members within the CJD framework as well as in Moroccan business in general, and all interviewees had completed either all or a part of their university educations in French. Indeed, they enjoyed a high proficiency and felt at ease in French. After each interview all first-hand impressions were carefully written down and all individual interviews were transcribed. The analysis is based on transcripts and notes in French (Marschan-Piekkari and Reis, 2004).

Moreover, two focus group interviews were conducted in the Rabat section: one in the initial phase with the aim of acquiring access to interviewees, and a second, to give the Rabat section a brief feedback on the findings and to hear their reaction to the first analysis. The latter focus group interview illustrated that, though the interviewees had scarce if any contacts beyond Morocco and they perceived the CJD to be a 'Moroccan organization', they were emotionally attached to the international part of the CJD. This led to conceiving of the CJD as a partly 'imagined community'. To achieve insights into the internationalization of the CJD, three interviews were conducted with former and present presidents of *CJD International* (respectively June 2015 and June 2017) and with a staff-member in the Paris office (October 2015) that assisted the CJD International administratively.

In addition to interviews, CJD Morocco's biannual congress in June 2017 was observed with the aim of acquiring insights into social interaction between members from Morocco and beyond. However, as the international participation was restricted to the President of the CJD International and a representative from the CJD France, the observation confirmed that for the CJD Morocco the international relations were more symbolic than real.

Finally, the analysis also draws on CJD websites and working documents, that is, both from the Moroccan parts of the organization (its national level and the two local sections) and from the CJD International. This includes *Internationale Charter, Statutes and regulations*, face-book pages, uploaded videos on youtube.com. Also press articles on the CJD in Moroccan media were consulted. These sources gave insight into how the organization presents itself within the Moroccan institutional contexts and in relation to other business organizations. Finally, the paper draws on previous research on CJD France, its history and local sections in France (i.e. Bernoux, 1974; Bonneveux et al., 2011; Ballet and de Bry, 2001; Zølner, 2009; Blaco and Zølner, 2008; Zølner, 2007;) and includes insights from secondary research on the Moroccan societal context and field of entrepreneurs.

### *Limitations*

While this paper defines identification as on-going processes of becoming, an important part of the empirical material consists of interviews. That is, an empirical material that provides insight into their expressed identification at a certain point in time and space, rather than as a process over time. Further, the interviews were conducted by a European researcher implying that the interviewees told their stories to one that was perceived as an 'outsider', both in the sense of

not being member of the organization and as a non-Moroccan. This interview setting is likely to have led some interviewees to emphasize the localness of the organization and the need for development, however, the international background of the interview was also clearly appreciated during the participant observation where the leaders of the organization put it forward as a sign of the CJD's international dimension. Therefore, documents, videos, intranet and home-pages were also included, as these were produced without being influenced by the researcher and in addition, provided a longer time perspective. Finally, throughout the collection of empirical material and the analytical process, the study was discussed with a sociologist of Moroccan origin, in order to include a perspective from inside the societal context (political, economic, social, cognitive and normative structures) as well as to induce reflections upon the researcher's perspective on the research context and upon how she was perceived as a 'European' in the Moroccan context (Jack and Westwood, 2006).

## **The CJD and its identity narratives**

### *The CJD International*

If we read the CJD's vision of social responsible business as a narrative, its plot can be defined as creating an 'economy that serves mankind' (*mettre l'économie au service de l'homme*) and the main characters are business leaders that are to change society in and through their company strategies and management. Hence, the narrative carries a 'progressive' ideal for business in society in the sense of contributing to a betterment of society in and through undertaking differently. Yet, the narrative also holds a pragmatic ideal, as its members are said to compose with the harsh economic reality of the everyday business while retaining their dream of a better society. This distinguishes between 'us', the CJD members that are working for their ideals; and then the 'other' leaders, those for whom the economic profit is the sole goal and who undertakes without caring for employees and the society. This narrative has travelled between the local sections within France throughout the organizations history and can be seen to carry that which is central, enduring and distinctive about the organization in its own presentation. The strength of this narrative can be seen to lay in its schematic structure with hardly any contextualized information on the time, space and actors. This has offered members, throughout the organization's history, resources for constructing a positive self-enhancing identity as business leaders within the French institutional context. In this particular context, business and small-and medium sized enterprises (SMEs) suffered from a negative image and in reaction to this the CJD narrative constructed a positive image (Zølner, 2009).

One finds also this identity narrative within the Charter of the CJD International from 2008. Herein, the aim of the CJD International is stated as putting 'the economy at the service of mankind'. In fairly similar terms, one reads in the preamble to the updated version of the *Statutes* for the CJD International (2014) that 'The CJD aims at innovating business in the service of mankind and based on the values of responsibility, solidarity, loyalty and in the respect of individual rights' (all quotes are translated by the author). Hence, in the formal communication at the French and International organizational levels, we can distinguish an identity narrative around a vision of a business that contributes to the betterment of society and in which business leaders play a main part. This narrative can be defined as a 'template narrative' in the sense that it is

reduced to the schematic narrative structures (i.e. actors as being young leaders that serve society) with hardly any contextualized information on the time, space and actors.

### *CJD narrative in Morocco*

The elements of the template narrative are clearly distinguishable in the collected empirical material from CJD Morocco, whether it is in documents, interviews or when members talk among themselves. The CJD Morocco states that its goal is: ‘Promoting an economy at the service of mankind that is more respectful of all of its business stakeholders and its societal and environmental responsibility, and deploying our guidelines for global performance within our network companies’ (<http://www.cjd-maroc.net/>; consulted July 2016,).

In this way, historical and geographical differences appear blurred and ‘one’ community appears to materialize. For example, on the web-page, ‘1938’ is presented as the founding year without specifying that this was in France, and that CJD Morocco was only established in 2001. Moreover, the founders’ concerns are said to be like ‘ours’. Also interviewees describe values and practices that they experience at the local level and then they attribute these to the whole of the organization, often underlined by statement such as ‘This is what the CJD is about’ (*C’est du CJD*) or ‘It’s the CJD magic’ (*C’est la magie du CJD*). Hereby, they project own local experiences onto the wider community while simultaneously constructing themselves as being part of the CJD. Finally, one can observe multiple wordings and expressions in the documents and interview statements that are similar to those applied in the CJD France and CJD International, including ‘to put the economy at the service of mankind’ (*mettre l’économie au service de l’homme*) – ‘man is at the heart of business’ (*l’homme au coeur de l’entreprise*) – ‘to be dedicated without taking yourself seriously’ (*faire du sérieux sans se prendre au sérieux*) – ‘kindness’ (*bienveillance*) – ‘conviviality’ (*conviviality*). Through these ways of talking and writing a wider CJD community is constructed in the image of the Moroccan members’ own local experiences of the CJD.

Their contact with the wider CJD community is sporadic and for many almost non-existent. Some, in particular the former presidents, have taken part in formalized contact within the CJD international, participated in events in other countries, primarily France, and some have also developed personal relations with members beyond Morocco. Yet, when asked, the majority of the interviewees explicitly stated that they only had sporadic contact with CJD’s outside their local section and Morocco. That is, they had met a French member teaching a seminar, discussed with international participants at the Moroccan National Congress, or received visiting groups of French members. Nonetheless, they talked about the broader CJD community as if they knew it well. This is eloquently expressed by this Rabat member that first carefully describes resemblances with CJD France and then states that he has never participated in any French meetings: “I have never attended any CJD events in France]. I know that the spirit is more or less what we have here, so I think we have a little bit the same ideas, the same values...” (Interviewee R7, Table 1a).

However, when the members in Casablanca and Rabat talk, they also contextualize the CJD narrative. By adding specificities on acts, actors, time and place they make the template narrative come to live from their standpoint within their local settings. The interviewees are explicit about the need for contextualization as clearly expressed in the following quote: “[...] fundamentally the

CJD values remains universal [...], with regard to the values of sharing, on the exchange, on the gift of oneself, but I think that we have a little touch to give, which is the Moroccan touch, which is the Moroccan identity [...], we can not be a movement that is disconnected from its environment. [...] It would not work. [...]” (Interviewee R1, Table 1a)

In this process of contextualizing the template narrative, several specific narratives emerge that appear as contrasting and mutually re-inforcing. These specific narratives illustrate the multifacetedness of the Moroccan CJD identity and they are more or less present in different parts of the Moroccan organization. In the following, we will illustrate four of the specific narratives that illustrate the ambiguity and the hybridity of their identity narrative

#### ‘Us’ as entrepreneurs that contribute to the development of the Moroccan society

In this specific narrative the plot of contributing to the betterment of society is specified to be to ‘contribute to the development of our country – Morocco’. The CJD members do so primarily through organizing educational seminars on entrepreneurship at university, mentoring entrepreneurs, organizing societal debates that are innovative in the Moroccan context (i.e. how to create not just jobs but good jobs (*‘bien-emploi’*) which was the theme of the National congress 2017). They present themselves as having the knowledge and skills for contributing to this development, thanks to their educational background (from universities in Morocco, France and Canada) and their economic situation in general. Hence, they also feel obliged to be ‘useful’ (*utile*), as they see themselves as privileged and they can contribute to the development of their society in which everything is needed.

#### ‘Us’ as a Moroccan organization

Many interviewees also advocate explicitly a ‘Moroccanization’ of the universal values that the CJD carries. This comes, for example, clearly to the fore when the former president of the Rabat section states that the CJD can reach good results once well ‘incarnated in the Moroccan context’ (Interviewee 1, Table 1a). Hereby he implies an adaptation of the general and universal values to the themes and topics that are relevant to the development of the Moroccan context (poverty, youth unemployment, lacking educational competences and skills) and also to increase their capacity to reach out to the society. That is, when ‘we address ourselves to the youth we need to speak their language, we cannot theorize in French’ (R1, Table 1a). However, Moroccanization is also about addressing the CJD narrative from within a Moroccan cultural perspective, in the sense of giving the narrative a ‘touch’ of their cultural identity rather than merely copying it. Other interviewees go further criticizing a ‘colonial spirit’ in Morocco that consists in uncritically adopting everything that comes from the outside (i.e. R11, Table 1a). This post-colonial criticism is also played out in relation to the French origin of the CJD. When asked explicitly, a few interviewees commented, indeed, on characteristics that they associate with the Frenchness of the CJD (i.e. use of a meta-language and an aspiration to theorize, R3, Table 1a). One of the former national presidents also commented on what he defined as ‘a post-colonial complex’ within CJD Morocco that had led to refuse certain procedures/ways of working from the mother organization and to insist on inventing own procedures. This ‘post-colonial complex’ had led to judge experiences and insights on their French origin rather than on their potential usefulness in a Moroccan context (Interviewee C2, Table 1b). Yet, most interviewees actually described their French peers as being ‘non-French’, in the sense of always adopting a positive and pragmatic

attitude, not being arrogant, seeking compromises and always being ready to question themselves. In this way, they constructed the CJD as different from their image of France. In a post-colonial perspective, one may say that the CJD offers a narrative to the former colonized that allows asserting their identity as modern entrepreneurs and Moroccan.

#### ‘Us’ as a different Moroccan organization

As an introduction to a round table discussion at the National Congress (June 2017), three members played a theater sketch that illustrated the conflict between an employer, who wanted to improve the economic performance, and his employee, who wanted more ‘well-being’ (*bien-être*). An angel materialized in the shape of a former CJD president (C3, Tables 1b) that had been dressed up in an angel costume and it was called upon to reconcile the employer and his employee. The audience was amused and simultaneously, one of the secretaries at the national level posted a photo on Face-book with the following message: "The CJD, an organization that is different from the others... a round table that starts differently!\_ (Facebook, July 2017)). This comment illustrates a narrative on the CJD Morocco as being different from other Moroccan organizations for business leaders. Interviewees say that the CJD distinguishes itself by offering a forum for sharing and exchanging knowledge between members, by its organizational structures and its non-authoritative leading style (i.e. democratic election of presidents for a non-renewable mandate of two years), and by its informal and joking tone. At the local CJD meetings there is room for laughter and emotions, and hereby, the CJD offers support and the comfort needed when confronting the ‘harsh’ economic reality they are confronted with as business leaders. In this respect, the interviewees mirror CJD France presentations of itself as a unique organization for business leaders since it provides its members’ with moral support and that they ‘deal with serious topics, without taken themsselves seriously’.

#### ‘Us’ as an international group

While the moroccanization of CJD was stressed in interviewees and international contacts were scarce, interviews with members in the Rabat and Casablanca sections revealed a strong attachment to the international dimension of the CJD. An illustrative example is the focus group interview with the Rabat section (Table 1d). To a question from the author on how to define the Moroccan ‘touch’ of the CJD – that the members had stressed in individual interviews - the participants reacted vehemently by emphasizing the ‘universality’ of the CJD values. They also stressed that ‘universality’ was felt when communicating with CJDs beyond the Moroccan context. That is, when meeting CJD members from outside, they instinctively felt that they understood one another. Moreover, one participant added vehemently that for the members of the Rabat section, the ‘CJD constituted a window to the outside’. This window gave opportunities for constructing international networks and let in experiences, knowledge, techniques, values from the outside and being an ‘international’ organization also carried prestige and facilitated recruitment. Moreover, this ‘window to the outside’ was also described as providing comfort and courage to engagement in a betterment of society locally, that is, communicating with people that shared the belief that undertaking differently was possible. This commonality created a stonger feeling of belonging than the one felt for local entrepreneurs that did not share the CJD ideal, or as one participant stated (R4, Table 1a). In other words, the participants expressed a belonging to the community of CJD members that transgress societal contexts. In this respect, the CJD sets them apart from prevailing attitudes and social practices that they criticized in the Moroccan

society. CJD implies being progressive and open to new ideas, new knowledge and new ways of doing things, also questioning oneself and daring to do things differently in order to improve results. Some interviewees explicitly contrasted this attitude with the Moroccan societal context, in which they criticized their co-nationals for not questioning the way things are done and for mindlessly following what is said to be the tradition.

## *Discussion*

The analysis showed how the Moroccan CJD members positioned themselves within the organizational identity narrative of the CJD. That is, following the general structure of the template narrative, they reproduce its plot of an economy at the service of mankind, and present themselves as entrepreneurs that work for the betterment of society and against the 'other entrepreneurs' that are only motivated by self-interest. However, the members also contextualized the template narrative, hereby, specifying what contributing to the betterment of society implies in the Moroccan societal context in which they live and act as entrepreneurs; namely, economic development with concerns for social, societal and environmental responsibility, and; a modernization with respect for Moroccan identity.

The multiple dimensions of 'selves' that emerge in the contextualization of the CJD narrative illustrate the complexity of the identification processes for this group of entrepreneurs. They adhere to a modernization of society through processes of economic liberalization and internalization, however, they also aspire to preserve and strengthen the 'human' and 'spiritual' side of economic life. They express strong belonging to their country of origin and denounce a persisting colonial spirit; however, they also aspire to be part of the international community around the CJD with an heritage from its long French history. This analysis is in line with recent articles showing how 'hybride' identities emerge in post-colonial contexts (i.e. Yousfi, 2014; Gertsen & Zølner, 2014) and calls for a more in-depth analysis of how the Moroccan CJD members simultaneously adopt and resist the French CJD identity and practices.

This takes us to the question of which insight these findings provide to comprehending identification processes in and around organizations that transgress societal contexts. Studying identities as narratives and distinguishing between template and specific narratives (Wertsch, 2012) allows furthering our comprehension of identification processes across societal contexts. One insight is that the abstract and schematic structure of the template narrative facilitates such processes. This allows for business leaders/entrepreneurs to contextualize the general plot in relation to their engagement in a particular context. That is, the plot of business leaders that serve society by contributing to societal progress is sufficiently abstract to be used to make positive sense of a business leaders existence and professional role in France of the 1930's and the 2000's just as well as in Morocco from the 2000's and onwards. While the overall plot/vision is similar across societal contexts, the Moroccan case illustrated that the CJDs the identity narrative is also being contextualized within the particular societal contexts. The plot became contributing to the development and modernization of the Moroccan society and the focus changed towards societal issues: i.e. education for the youth, employment, training of potential entrepreneurs and encourage a move from informal to formal part of the economy and change of mentality (towards making initiative and not just waiting).

A second insight is that the template narrative facilitates identification with geographically distributed members, that is, beyond the face-to-face community at local level. It is easier to associate oneself with abstract ideals for good and bad, than with specific accounts of how one acts for the betterment of society. Hereby, the template narrative functions to nurture a mental bonding with members beyond their face-to-face locality. This mental bonding is experienced as a comfort and encouragement to continue to work for their aspirations in their local context in which the CJD members are confronted with their local peers that think differently. As face-to-face meetings with the CJD members from beyond Morocco were sporadic and rare, the international CJD can be defined as an imagined community.

A third insight is that the template narrative, and the imagined community that it carries, reinforces the identity and identification with CJD within the local Moroccan contexts. The CJD narrative serves to distinguish members from other entrepreneurs and other networks of entrepreneurs and contributes hereby to set them apart, as being atypical in a Moroccan context. Their uniqueness/identity is being cultivated in and through their social practices and interactions.

However, the CJD members also feel the necessity to specify this template narrative. The implication is, not surprisingly, that the focus of the organization changes slightly. Likewise, being 'progressive' social actors that are 'frontrunners' in their societal context, acquires a different meaning within the developing/emerging economy of a society that debates its future 'in between modernity and tradition'. That is, to reconcile their aspiration to modernize society with their feelings of belonging to their country and its cultural identity. Their identity as 'progressive social actors' also resonates with a societal discourse as 'entrepreneurs as modern heroes' that emerged in the 1990s in the wake of liberalization and deregulation of the Moroccan economy (Catusse, 2008).

The template and the specific narratives carry two, mutually reinforcing, identification processes; one is the outcome of constructed similarities in and through social interaction in the local context; the other one results from imagining a community of likeminded peers beyond the locality. The first emerges out of social interaction among like-minded peers and exchange in face-to-face regular meetings at the local level in the sections in Casablanca and Rabat, and occasionally at national level. This confirms literature stating that identification emerges out of social interaction within a particular space and time in which the carriers make sense of the life they live (i.e. Alvesson and Willmott, 2002; Czarniawska, 1997; Schultz et al. 2012; Weick, 2001). Their mutual identification is facilitated by similar economic interests, challenges and similarities in their dispositions, capital and position within the economic field; that is, francophone, with university diplomas and international experiences and many are entrepreneurs.

The second identification process is closely related to the CJD as 'a window to the outside', a window to business leaders/entrepreneurs in other societal contexts. This window to the outside is of value as it carries symbolic capital in the Moroccan societal context and the promise of acquiring new knowledge and skills. Professional and societal ideals are, thus, sources of identity construction rather than religion, nationality, and distinctions between former colonizer and colonized, or North and South. This was particularly clear in the Rabat section in which the international part of the organization remained largely 'imagined' by the members as contacts to CJD beyond the local level was almost absent. In this imagination, they found comfort and

support to the ideas that they believe in and in opposition to the surrounding management tradition to which their local peers adhered.

Hereby, our case study illustrated that the identification around the CJD functions as an imagined community that, in the absence of face-to-face interaction and communication, makes it possible to preserve the imagination that ‘we’ are alike and that ‘we’ share similar ideas. Accordingly, the emergence of this identification process is not explained by social interaction and communication, but rather by the absence of such, that is, as an imagined community that provides its carriers with emotional ties that helps them making sense of the lives they live in a spatially and temporally defined space (Anderson, 1983, 2005). This leads to speculating whether more intensive face-to-face contact between CJD members beyond Morocco and in particular, with the CJD International located in France, would make differences come to the fore and perhaps, thwart the imagined cohesion.

These insights from the two simultaneous identification processes raise the question of how they relate to one another. Can the imaginary community exist without the social interaction in the local network? How and to which extent do the identification processes among local members depend on the imaginary aspect of a community of likeminded entrepreneurs that cut across societal contexts? While the present study on the local CJD section in Rabat does not provide insight into this, literature on collective identities and nationalism suggest, however, that these two processes are mutually dependent.

**Table 1a: Interviewees Rabat section**

<b>Inter- viewee</b>	<b>Gender/ age</b>	<b>Educational degree</b>	<b>International experience (studies or/and work)</b>	<b>Career/ Entreprise</b>	<b>Highest responsibili ty in the CJD</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>R1</b>	M 1976	MSc Finance and accounting	Toulouse Paris	Entrepreneur SME	President Rabat	October 2014
<b>R2</b>	F 1964	MSc economics	Montpellier	Manager in family SME Entrepreneur	Working group leader	October 2014
<b>R3</b>	M 1970	Architecture	Clermont-Ferrand	Entrepreneur SME	President Rabat	October 2014
<b>R4</b>	M 1964	Engineering	none	Entrepreneur SME	President Rabat	October 2014
<b>R5</b>	M 1977	MSc Finance	Montpellier Paris	Employed manager	President Rabat	October 2014
<b>R6</b>	F 1967	MSc Business and administration	Études à Montpellier, Perpignan Grenoble	Employed manager	Working group leader	October 2014



<b>R7</b>	M 1975	Ph.D. Engineer	Etudes en Belgique MNC	Employee/independent	Working group leader	May 2015
<b>R8</b>	M 1979	MSc Business and administration	Montreal	Employed manager	Working group leader	May 2015
<b>R9</b>	M 1979	MSc hospitality	Lausanne	Entrepreneur SME	Working group leader	May 2015
<b>R10</b>	F 1989	MSc Management	Lyon Paris	Consultant Family SME	Working group leader	May 2015
<b>R11</b>	M 1982	Bsc computer science	Toronto	Entrepreneur SME	President Morocco	May 2015 January 2016
<b>R12</b>	M 1983	School of fine arts (Ecole supérieure des Beaux arts de Casablanca)	None	Entrepreneur SME	Working group leader	May 2015
<b>R13</b>	M 1966	Engineer	Toulouse	Entrepreneur SME	President Morocco	January 2016

**Table 1b: Interviewees Casablanca section**

	<b>Gender/age</b>	<b>Educational degree</b>	<b>International experience</b>	<b>Career/enterprise</b>	<b>Highest responsibilities in the CJD</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>C1</b>	M 1973	Engineer MSc Business and Administration	Metz	Employed manager	President Morocco	January 2016
<b>C2</b>	M 1977	Msc Accounting	Montpellier	Employed manager	President Morocco	January 2016
<b>C3</b>	M 1966	Engineer	Montreal	Employed manager	President Morocco	January 2016
<b>C4</b>	M 1964	Engineer	Paris	Employed manager	President Morocco	January 2016
<b>C5</b>	M 1965	Accounting	Poitiers	Employed manager	President Morocco & President CJD International	January 2016
<b>C6</b>	F 1977	Engineer	None	Employed manager - entrepreneur	Working group leader	January 2016
<b>C7</b>	M 1969	Engineer and MBA	MNC au Maroc	Entrepreneur SME	Vice-President Morocco	January 2016

<b>C8</b>	F 1976	MSc Business and Administration	Grenoble	Entrepreneur SME	Working group leader	January 2016
<b>C9</b>	M 1982	Engineer	Paris	Entrepreneur SME	Working group leader	January 2016

	<b>Table 1c: CJD International</b>	
<b>I1</b>	Former President France and former President CJD International	June 2015
<b>I2</b>	Former President Senegal and present President CJD International	July 2017
<b>I3</b>	CJD International Secretariat	October 2014

	<b>Table 1d: Focus group interviews</b>	
<b>FGI 1</b>	Rabat section (6 participants)	October 2014
<b>FGI 2</b>	Rabat section (20 participants)	May 2015

<b>Table 1e: Participant observation</b>	
National congress Morocco	July 2017

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