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# Claude Montmarquette: incarnation of creative curiosity and sharing

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*Claude has left us, but everything he has disseminated as academic knowledge and knowhow remains!*

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How to talk about Claude without betraying the modesty that would prevent us from showing him openly our recognition and feelings about him?

Much has been said and, given enough time, could be expanded upon regarding his contributions to economic analysis and methodologies that were new at the time. I would like to emphasize that these contributions are not limited to the frontiers in North America, and for my part I insist on our recollections on this side of the Atlantic, with some anecdotes regarding academic and human interactions.

Toward the end of the 1980s we benefited from several academic stays of Claude, and it is thanks to him that we conducted research in applied microeconomics and explored econometrics with qualitative variables. During the 1990s, just as he was introducing experimental economics in

Quebec, students of “applied econometrics” at Hassan II University in Casablanca benefited from externalities thanks to his generosity and dynamism, as well as to a superb conference organized on his initiative, devoted to initiating this new approach in economics through a series of presentations and applications.

If I return to our first joint article, “The determinants of school outcomes” ([note 1](#)), it would be to say how he explained to us the gymnastics to which you resort in order to exploit data bases that are often insufficient to allow you to deepen the analysis. Actually, we worked on results of the baccalaureate (final stage of secondary school in Morocco), lacking data on students’ ‘intellectual performance’ in order to control for the effects of variables characterizing their socio-economic level, their teachers’ attributes and those of the schools in question.

However, we had the pupils’ grades in CM2 (end of primary school). Thus, it occurred to Claude to suggest, with some qualifications, resort to two-stage modeling/equations that involved explaining the results of primary school, then using the residuals as a proxy for intellectual performance in the equation analyzing baccalaureate outcomes. The results were convincing.

Regarding character, I want to emphasize Claude’s patience and extraordinary capacity to listen: this translated into almost juvenile-appearing expressions of wonder in the face of explanations

that you might propose to him in light of estimated results that were counter-intuitive or contrary to the literature. In the event, the mother's education turned out to be insignificant in the analysis of school outcomes.<sup>1</sup>

The same turned out to be the case in explaining the negative impact of 'town origin' in analyzing insertion in the labor market of graduates of professional training centers in Morocco ([note 2](#)).

You would have thought that coming from a town increased one's chances of belonging to a social network that would ease one's entry to the labor market, however a 'stronger' factor offsets that consideration: young people from rural areas who study in towns are more enterprising in seeking a job, accepting a minimum wage lower than that acceptable to their urban comrades (who benefit from housing with, and even pocket money from, their parents.) Thus, these rural young people, anxious not to return to the countryside, shortened their period<sup>2</sup> of unemployment compared with their urban counterparts.

Via jointly conducted research (another example: "Casablanca high school graduates' choice of university courses" ([note 3](#)), or by supervising theses (demand for children, demand for health care, female participation in the Moroccan labor market...), Claude enabled Lasaare (the Laboratory of Statistics Applied to Economic Analysis and Research) to grow following its establishment in 1994. Subsequently, generations of students and researchers, especially at Hassan II University in Casablanca and Auvergne University in Clermont but also other universities (Geneva, Paris I, Palacky/Olomouc in the Czech Republic, FTU/Vietnam...), who come every year for training in applied economics. Claude always knew how to draw the best out of his students, thanks to his attention and humility and the pertinence of his questions.

Several areas in which we were subsequently inspired in one way or another by interaction with Claude: besides the economics of education ([note 4](#)), especially the economics of health ([notes 4](#) and [5](#)), also the informal sector and microfinance.

Recently, Claude's loyal friendship came once more to the fore when I asked him to join the inaugural JMA conference in Casablanca in June 2019.

In spite of his many constraints, Claude did not delay a second in responding positively and coming for a stay that, to be sure, was very brief, but also intense, thanks to his enthusiasm. What he has said about education, upon returning to it after he suspended his studies at age 16, confirms his special interest in the discipline ([note 6](#)) and his natural wish to share his knowledge and

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<sup>1</sup> Actually, knowing the ages of the children's mothers, we established the connection with conditions in the then wide open Moroccan labor market, and were thus able to explain why graduates could not supervise their children. The majority assigned their kids to illiterate rural girls who came as domestic servants and "child tenders." Thus, many of the children did not profit from their mother's education, leading to an insignificant coefficient.

<sup>2</sup> It was thanks to Claude that we were introduced to time series models which we subsequently applied to study access to housing in Morocco (enabling us to inform decision makers who organized support programs such as the guarantee fund to finance housing for low-income groups: FOGARIM), or also to study the duration of bachelorhood.

develop that of others. His impressive assiduousness in the different sessions during the two days, challenged the young researchers to want to learn.

On the human level I want to relate, once more, Claude's sense of wonder, like a child's, in face of the diversity of colors of vegetables in a couscous, or after tasting an orange on the terrace of a café/restaurant: he was silent for a puzzlingly long time, then said, "Fouzi, today I have eaten a real orange<sup>3</sup>". Or his pleasure on strolling in a rural market, or admiring a quasi-desert plateau on the road to Marrakech. I recall his passionate discussions with Amal on Marxism and the limits of market mechanisms.

I insist on Claude's empathy and generosity towards others. Last fact, dated early July 2021: in spite of physical weakness, he spent part of a morning providing us with feedback on a study we had underway regarding strategies for promoting cultural and creative activities In Morocco. He explained methodologies and qualified our hypotheses.

It is said that children are small people and people are big children; I would add that Claude knew how to retain the part of a child in him, from which his curiosity and profound love of research.

I could not close this friendly homage without mentioning (i) Andre Martens, who introduced me to Claude one day in November 1988. He had organized a dinner following a lecture I had given in the University of Montreal economics department regarding macroeconomic and financial reforms in Morocco. Since this dinner I have enjoyed the respect and kind attention of professor Claude Montmarquette, while Andre, as coordinator of CIDA's PARADI program, subsequently arranged several missions by Claude; (ii) Clive Gray, with whom Claude was friends and who as director of USAID/Rabat's privatization project also financed a mission in which Claude explained, to colleagues at Mohamed V University, how to develop a research laboratory on the basis of his experience with Marcel Dagenais and other colleagues in the University of Montreal economics department; (iii) Mohamed Bennani, then dean of our faculty, who shared a high regard for Claude and who facilitated my activity as a beginning instructor in establishing this cooperation.

Finally, I mention the conclusion of Youssef Bouazizi, one of our doctoral students, who wrote me his condolences: "*Providence owns what it has taken back, Claude owns what he has given.*"

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<sup>3</sup> He wanted to stress his appreciation of the freshness and aroma of that orange. He seemed to "discover," revealing it in such a forceful and spontaneous manner.

Claude on a street in Rabat - June 2019



Claude visiting a pre-medieval monument (Hassan Tower in Rabat) - June 2019  
(during the JMA)



Claude together with his friend Louis Levy-Garbois and Louis' wife, in the Rabat house where I had the honor and pleasure of inviting him





## Revue *Réflexions Économiques*

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