



Moulay Ismail-ISA Journal

First Edition of Moulay ISA Journal, A Moroccan-American Adventure Begins

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Special points of interest:

- Build a cultural bridge between Moroccan society and American society
- Tolerance, understanding and accepting the differences are key words to solidify the bridge.
- Generosity, openness of mind and correcting stereotypes are our goals

The Dean's Note on Cross-Cultural Understanding, The Moulay Ismail University and ISA in Meknes



By Prof. Abdallah Malki
Dean of the School of Arts and Humanities, University of Moulay Ismail, Meknes, Morocco

To participate in the world practice of cross-cultural understanding is an enterprise that is most honourable and honouring. The partnership agreement that ties the School of Arts and Humanities of the University of Moulay Ismail in Meknes with "International Studies Abroad" falls within this spirit. Working towards ensuring the most helpful atmosphere with colleagues and representatives of ISA has been one of my pleasurable and instructive moments. Seeing that these efforts have materialized in the experience four contingents of American students have taken with them back to the United States has been my satisfaction ever.

Students, faculty and staff members have all come to the truth that judging people should emanate from a direct touch and an immersing contact with these people. ISA students who took part in the Meknes Programme have all confirmed that their view of Morocco and its people has burgeoned out of true and genuine contact with various groups and factions of the Moroccan society: with university professors, with university students, with people in the streets, with people in their homes, with real Moroccan people in their daily life and concerns. American students have all come to the empirical conviction that Morocco, and Meknes more specifically, is a confirmed hospitable and cross-cultural haven. ♦



Editor's Note - A Cultural Bridge is Our Goal

By Prof. Ouafae Bouzekri

Recently, we've seen an increasing interest in Islam, in the Arab World, and in the status and condition of women in the Muslim world in general. From this interest has emerged a unique program launched by ISA at the School of Arts and Humanities of Meknes, expressing ISA's deep interest in many aspects of Moroccan culture: history, art, architecture, languages, politics, and business. The primary aim of the program is to give to American students a wide-ranging academic view of the cultural life of Morocco that will enrich their experience and make their stay fruitful, thus helping the students achieve learning, understanding and tolerance, three fundamental keys for building a bridge between their culture and ours.

The program is growing as a vibrant community of Moroccan researchers strive to build cultural awareness and enhance the learning about and understanding of their culture. Its uniqueness also lies in helping American students become immersed in Moroccan culture and in making them feel that this immersion is both possible and worthwhile.

Bearing in mind that these students have their own view of the world and will be interacting with people whose worldview differs significantly from theirs, we try not only to promote a deeper understanding of a different culture [through homestay, cultural seminars, language learning (Classical Arabic and Darija, as well as French), and being involved actively in the local culture], but also to help them enjoy and appreciate a way of life different from their own.



A variety of local cultural activities reinforces what our students learn in class. As one of them said, "This has been an eye opening few months". Such a positive reaction has encouraged me to initiate this virtual magazine where our students will have the chance to talk about their intercultural experience. It will also occasionally include articles written by teachers involved in the program.

Myself, I value my affiliation and relationship with ISA a great deal. Being able to connect with students from different parts of the United States enriches my perspective and helps me appreciate the cultural heritage and diversity that these young students bring to my class, to my university and to my hometown. ♦



'Cooking without language: What a pleasure!'

By Marci Manley (ISA Summer 1 2008 student)

The dough was beginning to cement to my fingers in a gooey plaster that made the Moroccan girl's eyes dance. My face must have looked distraught, because she laughed and shook her head, which I read to mean, "No worries, it's all right." She proceeded to take over molding the dough -- it had gone from eggs, sugar, and oil to a mass in a few seconds --- leaving Professor Bouzekri to begin scraping the concoction from between my fingertips. All of this came after she had trusted me to pour in the ingredients. Not only that, but she didn't flinch when I cracked the eggs on the side of the chipped bowl, proceeding to dump the contents into the mixture. Nor did she try to pry the whisk from my hands when lumps remained in the batter. She couldn't speak English, and I couldn't speak Moroccan Arabic, but we were making Moroccan cookies together. Without speaking, but with a nod here and a gesture there, we had dough to be rolled.

It was just one more moment in the two hours my fellow students and I spent at the Jossour NGO in Meknes.

Samantha and I were students in Professor Bouzekri's Gender Studies course, and we were excited to see an NGO in action after hearing about them in numerous lectures and articles. The NGO works to teach young women who are out of school and without a major source of income how to cook pastries.



ISA student Marci Manley tries her hand at mixing dough with NGO female pastry students

They can either take their training and sell pastries as small, self-owned businesses or work in bakeries as cooks. But this Tuesday morning was the day when the students of the NGO became teachers to American students.

To be sure, none of us

besides Professor Bouzekri spoke French or Arabic fluently, so the problem of communication seemed imminent. Sarah and Jamila were two of the girls taking cooking classes at the NGO, and they directed us in the kitchen along with their mentor "The Chef." The two hours we had available seemed to dissipate with alarming rapidity between whisking, pouring, and cutting to create the favorite Moroccan pastries we had all grown to love. We also discovered a few new favorites that we would croon and cry over at our departure. Moroccans know how to bake sweet goodies.

The interaction with Sarah and Jamila resulted in priceless moments of learning to communicate through sheer will and excitement. Hand gestures, nods, grunts, and shrugs...combined with an occasional *smehly* (pardon me) and *la mushkilla* (no problem) resulted in glazed apple tarts and powdered almond pies. Trays of snake-like spiral cookies were stacked on baking trays, and rolls of dough with little nips of chocolate hidden inside awaited the ovens.

Sadly, we could

One thing was apparent to me and my fellow Americans: good intentions and a healthy dose of laughter are a common language in every country.

Compartmentalization of Urban Space in the Medina.

By Prof. Mohssine Nachit.

One of the ways to understand a given society or culture is through its architecture, for architecture is the most authentic mirror reflecting that society. The Islamic city, or what is commonly called the Medina, has been misunderstood and misrepresented by western observers. When you see a western film taking place in a medina, the general atmosphere that would be created is that of chaos and confusion. Orientalist scholars

...architecture is the most authentic mirror reflecting that society

have also described the medina in similar terms; that is as a confusing labyrinth. Even tourists today still regard some medinas, like that of Fes, as a perplexing and unclear space.

Such a superficial view of urban space testifies to a lack of understanding and probably a deliberate attempt to devalue the specific quality of the medina that sharply contrasts with the structure of the western city.

Urban space in the medina is like a good piece of writing, well articulated from its morphology to its syntax. And from the start I may state that the key element in this structure is the mosque which plays a pivotal role in shaping and organizing urban space in the medina. The structure of the medina could be divided into three constituents, which are interconnected in an organic way. These three units are:

- 1) The spiritual centres.
- 2) The social and economic centres.
- 3) The residential areas.

The corner stone of Islamic society in general and the Islamic city in particular is the mosque. It is the place where believers meet five times a day to pray and every Friday to undertake the collective prayer. This central position of the mosque has also shaped the whole structure of the medina. Near the big mosque you would find the Medersa where students used to study Islamic theology as well as to live in the upper floor. And since religious education is so important in the bringing up of children, Koranic schools (Mssids) are built in every district to allow all the medina families to educate their children.

The dominance of the religious constituent of the Islamic city is quite visible in the omnipresence of minarets all over the medina. For every district there should be a minaret from which the Moazin's call for prayer could be heard by all the inhabitants. And, whenever his voice is no longer audible a new mosque and minaret are built.

Together with the spiritual centres, the Islamic city has total autonomy in social services and economic activities. However, the organization of economic activity is determined by a subtle logic in which the big mosque is the main determining factor. Noble and clean economic activities are situ-



ated in the nearby surroundings of the mosque. In the Islamic religion, cleanliness is near to godliness. Such activities are also associated with an upper social class that needs silk and wool for clothing and gold and silver for jewelry. Indeed the gold and silk markets are always in the vicinity of the mosque. On the contrary, the unpleasant economic activities are situated on the extreme edge of the medina and are associated with the lower social classes, and artisans such as those who clean animal skins in the tanneries, hammer metal in the blacksmiths market, etc.

In between the noble and unpleasant activities, you would find a series of cooperatives and crafts, which are organized according to their nature and the various needs of medina dwellers. Such activities are, for example, spice sellers (attarins), weavers (darazins), bucket makers (kababins), carpenters (najarins), etc. This organizational scheme of space and economic life is manifest very well in the medieval medina of Fes, where each alley takes the name of a given corporation.

From this we may conclude that there is a great ecological awareness. That is, by keeping clean activities in and dirty ones out, medina dwellers would not be affected by any maladies caused by pollution. We may also conclude that there is harmony between the spiritual body and the social and economic one. Religious faith lies in the heart and the heart should be pure, and this image is reproduced in the spatial position of the mosque whose environment should



One of the many market streets in the medina of Meknes



A common site in the medina as donkeys are the most useful beast of burden here. Photo: Richard Lip-pard (ISA Summer 1 2008 student from CSU)

in the funduk nearby, which also contains some rooms in the upper floor reserved for merchants. This system allows both the possibility to safely store the goods and to rent a room for the night. Souks and funduks are always connected to the countryside, which provides the medina with raw materials. That is why souks and funduks and some medina gates are arranged in a contiguous manner to allow easy transportation and exchange of goods.

is known today as Fes Jdid. Saharans have created Tizimi in Meknes.

The final type of street in the medina is the cul-de-sac or the "derb" in Moroccan Arabic. It is a space where only the inhabitants are allowed in. It is a public space, yet its being closed at the end makes it reserved for its inhabitants. Every "derb" contains a prestigious family. Most of the time, this family lives at the bottom of the street for more privacy. Being a member of a "derb" implies belonging to a community and sharing the same interests and values. It is there where individuals learn how to become members of the community. In the "derb" everything is shared by the inhabitants; children and women could meet out in safety. Houses remain open so that every member could enter just by knocking on the door and mentioning the word "karib", a friend.

...the organizational dimension of the medina is to be seen from within not without

From this brief survey of urban space, we may conclude that the organizational dimension of the medina is to be seen from within not without. Also that space is organized in an organic manner that fits in with the daily needs of medina dwellers. And finally, that the architecture of the medina is never to be disassociated from the religious nature of Islamic society. ♦

be clean too.

Souks play a major role in the medina. It is a place of economic exchange between inner residents as well as country people. Souks vary from one craft to another. Their placement is, therefore, by the nature of goods sold there. Textile is in the heart of the medina, while leather is near the walls.

Souks are also related to Funduks (a kind of hotel). Every economic activity has its own souk and funduk. Wool, for example, is sold in a particular souk (El Haik) and the bulky stock is stored

The third constituent of the medina is the residential area which is characterized by a neat and codified organization. The residential areas are actually a series of medinas in miniature. In every district you would find all the necessary services needed by the inhabitants, such as hammams (public baths), public ovens, cemetery, etc.

In the residential area you would also find three types of streets:

- 1) the main streets.
- 2) the secondary ones.
- 3) the cul- de -sac.

The main streets cross the medina from one edge to another, and by so doing they link the spiritual centres, the economic ones and the different gates of the city. All along these streets you find shops, artisans and the hectic life of the medina.

As for secondary streets, they have different connections with the main ones, but are less busy. In them you would find the hammam, the fountain, the koranic school, etc. The secondary streets are grouped in what is called a Houwma (neighbourhood), where some ethnic and tribal groups have settled down for years. For example the Andalusians after 1492 created in Fes what



Any corner of Hedim Square is a good place to meet for conversation.



Rue Berrima: one can find just about anything here, especially good spices, herbs, dates and cookies.

Women and Witchcraft in Morocco

By Hannah Kelley-Bell (ISA Winter 2008 student)

Every time we see something that we do not know how to explain, we blame it on the bad spirits, known in the Muslim world as the jinn. For example, the woman that cooks for us always has a few pieces of bread in a plastic bag under the sink- we quickly attribute this unusual behavior as a way to repel the jinn. Dur-

During the last two and a half months here we have learned different practices used to repel the bad spirits

ing the last two and a half months here we have learned different practices used to repel the bad spirits like placing cous-cous on the roof, not pour-

ing boiling water down the drains, creating smoke by burning incense, sprinkling salt on the ground while weaving, and placing a knife under a pillow while one sleeps.

The practice of witchcraft is associated with the use of magic and deals with spirits, afterlife, magic and rituals. Witchcraft in Morocco is common and believed in due to the fact that it and the jinn are mentioned in the Koran. In Morocco, there are three different types of people who are believed to be associated with witchcraft, witches, sorcerers and Lfkih. Traditionally, witches are considered to be women whom are tragic fig-

ures with mystical powers that are inherent in their personality. Sorcerers have the connotation of being men who are evil and driven by malice and perform magic responsible for the succession of events. The final type of person, lfkhi, is a religious figure. This is a person believed to have supernatural powers and their abilities are believed to be gifts from God, however typically this role is reserved for men.

In Morocco, witchcraft has become a means of escape for women who are powerless and have a low self esteem. Apart from the religious side of witchcraft, it is also used by women to place curses and spells on others. Among the ways to cast spells are reciting incantations, using herbs

as amulets or potions, creating voodoo dolls, inscribing runes on objects, performing physical rituals and gazing at objects for divination purposes.

Those who seek the help of witches in Morocco are typically women wishing to empower themselves by casting spells on people like their mother-in-law, co-wife, lover and others who threaten them and their status. One of the most common curses among witchcraft in Morocco is making one's husband impotent. This curse is called the 'tkaaf', also known as the paralyzing spell. In Morocco, magic is a currency of power and a means of exploiting women



Display of traditional products: herbs, oils, animal parts and powders, etc. They are used for witchcraft and healing. Hedim Square
Photo: Richard Lippard (ISA Summer 1 student from CSU)

financially while simultaneously contributing to their psychological sickness.

The role of women in witchcraft in Morocco is discouraging. The business of witchcraft is one of deceit and taking advantage of others. Not only do you see men taking advantage of women, but also women taking advantage of other women. Typically it is a woman who seeks help in the realm of witchcraft and does so with the purpose of increasing self image and gaining power.

The religious connection between witchcraft and daily life causes many citizens to act accordingly. In everyday life people use charms to ward off the evil eye and perform minute rituals as aforementioned in an attempt to discourage the jinn from entering their life. The use of magic in the religious realm is black magic, warding off the evil eye, producing amulets, conjuring and casting lots. Thus is the association of witchcraft and Islam which demonstrates the need of the Lfikh, which provides a place for people to go to in order to seek blessings by somebody who is spiritually accomplished or a majdoub. Even though not every Moroccan seeks out means of casting curses or participates in non-religious

aspect of witchcraft, the practices to repel the jinn are daily rituals and ways of life that are reinforced by the Koran and Hadiths. Luckily, af-



Eggs, amulets, potions and elements to ward off the evil eye, enhance love and empower those who seek such help. Hedim Square.
Photo: Richard Lippard (ISA Summer 1 2008 student from CSU)

ter a few months of wondering, we have finally figured out that the bread under the sink is actually for the cows and has nothing to do with repelling the jinn. ♦

NGO Opens Doors for Female Pastry Chefs

Continued from page 3

only help in preparing the famous Moroccan cookies, and we couldn't see all of our labors enter the ovens to be baked. The experience of working hand in hand with other women, despite the barrier of being unable to fully communicate was one of the best I have had in my six weeks in the Maghreb. One thing was apparent to me and my fellow Americans: good intentions and a healthy dose of laughter are a common language in every country. We, as students of Moroccan feminism, were eager to observe these young women's empowerment in the kitchen. They, as young Moroccans, were excited to share their culture with us. The trading of customs, and the trust and hospitality displayed by these two girls, and the directors of Jossour, was overwhelming.

Two hours wasn't nearly long enough to get my fill, but I walked away with tarts and pies and a new outlook on the plight of Moroccan women. We now knew of at least two women, Sarah and Jamila, that were making a better way for themselves and were able to teach us something about the culture we had come to be a part of.

themselves and were able to teach us something about the culture we had come to be a part of. ♦

This Momentous Moment

By Daniel Ostad, Director ISA Meknes

Life is made up of moments. One moment turns into the next to create what we commonly refer to as time. In March of 2007 I was offered the chance to collaborate with the University of Moulay Ismail's School of Arts and Humanities in the opening of a new study abroad office for ISA in Meknes. At that moment, I knew that by accepting this challenge the course of my life would take a radical new direction, and that I would be allowed to become an integral part of the new awakenings and the unforgettable times that ISA students would experience studying and living in Morocco!

Never before has ISA had a program on the African continent and never before has the University Moulay Ismail had a steady collaborator from the United States.



Ancient horse stables of Sultan Moulay Ismail in Meknes, 17th century.

This is the first issue of a journal which aims to document this truly unique moment through the eyes of students, professors, and colleagues. All those involved in this venture feel compelled to understand and explore the importance of this moment. It is a moment when East meets West in Morocco, a magical land which by destiny has been geographically and spiritually placed between Oriental and Occidental.

In this day and age when our planet seems smaller than ever yet the divides between some cultures bigger than ever, we choose now, this moment, to accept the challenge of com-

munication with hopes to awaken a universal willingness to explore and understand. ♦



The joy of these goats climbing in an argane tree show that in Morocco we can be happy with little things. There is a quality