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### Virtual Magazine of Morocco on the Web

Morocco Week in Review

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#### A Legacy of Peace Corps Service

By Lillian Thompson February 2016 [lillianthompson2005@yahoo.com](mailto:lillianthompson2005@yahoo.com)

I'd like to share with you a story about the origins of the High Atlas Foundation, and my experience with it as a Peace Corps Response Volunteer. The High Atlas Foundation resulted from its founder, Yossef Ben-Meir's Peace Corps experience as a volunteer from New York City assigned to a remote mountain village struggling with poverty and drought in the High Atlas Mountains in the 1990's.

The Foundation's work is grounded in the principles of community participation, which engages beneficiaries in the process of receiving and using aid effectively. This is a perfect match for the Peace Corps, which engages Americans through living and working in these communities. The world we live in today needs to know about and support initiatives like this.

Since the first group of Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs) arrived in Morocco in 1963, over 5,000 Americans have served as part of the organization's partnership with the country to develop resilient communities through education and similar voluntary initiatives. For so many PCVs, this represents a physical, intellectual and emotional journey into the unknown that can be compounded by a sense of a lack of accomplishment, owing to an inability to perceive their contribution to the continuing process of emerging country development and the Peace Corps' long-term commitment to that mission. 'Why am I here?' and 'why was I there?' could be said to be something of a PCV refrain.

In 2010, having previously served in Eastern Europe, I was posted to the Kingdom as a Peace Corps Response Volunteer to work with Yossef Ben-Meir, an environmental PCV from 1993-95 and president of the High Atlas Foundation (HAF), which turned fifteen years old last year.

RCPV service differs from that of PCVs in that it is project-focused and there is a more intensive, exact matching of volunteers to assignments. Mine focused on NGO development and I worked alongside HAF staff, in particular Nabila Jaber, coordinator of the Center for Community Consensus and Sustainable Development at the Faculty of Law, Economics, and Social Sciences of Hassan II University in Mohammedia.

Yossef was teaching at Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane when I arrived in the country and it was there, in his kitchen (a Moroccan version of Whole Foods!) that I had the privilege of talking with him about participatory development. Over many a chicken tagine dinner I came to learn his story and that of the HAF, founded by Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs), including himself, who served in Morocco. It's a tale of love and commitment on the part of PCVs towards each other, towards Morocco and with respect to the Peace Corps' 'three goals' and a testimonial to the lasting impact Peace Corps service has the capacity to impart.

#### *The Peace Corps' Mission*

*To help the people of interested countries in meeting their need for trained men and women*

*To help promote a better understanding of Americans on the part of the peoples served*

*To help promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans*

[www.peacecorps.gov](http://www.peacecorps.gov)

In 1993, Yossef was assigned to as different a spot possible from New York City, from where he had just arrived a remote mountain village in Morocco's High Atlas region. There he worked for the national park system and learned how to succeed in agriculture in an environment where water contributes more to soil erosion than to the well-being of the crops.

Having ended his service and now a highly motivated social entrepreneur, Yossef realized his vocation lay in Morocco, to where he knew he had to return in order to continue focusing on arid mountain agriculture. Arriving in 1998, he was met at Casablanca's Mohammed V airport by RPCV Thom Anderson who, on finishing grad school, had returned to run the Seamens' Club in Casablanca. At Thom's suggestion, Yossef applied for and gained the post of Environmental Program Manager with Peace Corps Morocco, serving in that capacity for eighteen months.

The friends' subsequent decision, in 2000, to form a nonprofit, instead of a business, set the course for HAF, which has gone on to become an organization that succeeds in bringing together Moroccans, PCVs and RPCVs.

A strong American-Moroccan board was created, no doubt attracted in part by fundraising events in New York that brought Moroccan culture to the States; heflas (parties) providing the opportunity to enjoy the cuisine (including generous helpings of mint tea!), music and art of the Kingdom and film festivals organized by HAF in 2010 and 2011.

In 2003, Yossef and Mouhssine Tadmouy-Cherki, a Moroccan who had later taken over as Environmental Program Manager at the Peace Corps, requested a meeting with Margaret Tutwiler, then U.S. Ambassador to Morocco, to ask for project funds. HAF was at the beginning of its mission to plant organic fruit trees in order to produce cash crops, thus aiding disadvantaged local communities and helping combat soil erosion in the High Atlas mountain region.

Ambassador Tutwiler, who possessed a reputation for toughness, agreed to the meeting, arranging for the participation of several agriculture experts, including the head of USAID. While Yossef knew that planting trees is a grassroots business in every sense of the term and not in the same league as the large-scale projects in which USAID typically engages he had a refined, viable technical and business model and was prepared to give it his best shot.

In closing, he described the reaction of one particular mountain community when the first truck of saplings arrived in their village "they cried," said Yossef "because they saw planting a tree as an act of faith." "Well then," replied the ambassador, "let's spread some faith around." The project was funded within a week! In the long term, this episode set a new precedent as the Ambassador was granted a discretionary fund from which HAF was to benefit further (alongside other organizations) in later years.

These days, rather than merely purchasing saplings, HAF concentrates on establishing organic nurseries. By 2014 the organization had achieved its goal of establishing a million organic trees and medicinal plants in Morocco and is now engaged in its One Billion Tree Campaign, which includes its junior educational initiative, Sami's Project, and House of Life, an intercultural organic agriculture scheme utilizing land adjoining Jewish sacred sites for the benefit of local Muslim farming families.

Alongside planting trees, HAF's focus areas now include water in terms of efficient irrigation and potable supplies clean energy, women and youth empowerment, business cooperative formation, intercultural initiatives and education. All projects are identified by beneficiary communities at meetings facilitated by HAF-trained staff utilizing participatory development methodology.

Moreover, while HAF raises half of its funds in the U.S. and half in Morocco, with the assistance of successive Moroccan and American ambassadors and countless others who believe in the cross-cultural partnership, it has shifted its focus towards events designed to attract and reinforce partnerships. These have included receptions held at the U.S. Ambassador's residence in Rabat and at Akrich, south of Marrakesh, the House of Life pilot site.

Since 2009 (the year before I arrived in Morocco) when HAF created the Mohammedia Center for Community Consensus-Building and Sustainable Development, the foundation has gone on to engage in four further university partnerships.

During my service, I helped design a program at the Center to educate and promote participatory development and also prepared the first draft of a participatory development guide for Moroccan village leaders and university students.

In retrospect, I believe that "apart from these worthwhile outcomes, for which I am very grateful" the 'real' purpose of my time in Morocco, in another, perhaps even higher sense, was to meet Yossef and others, Moroccans and Americans, who continue the legacy of Peace Corps service and translate it into something tangible and understandable. In this way they build models of hope and inspiration, for PCVs and all those involved in the often uncertain vocation of human development, that are applicable on an infinitely wider scale.

By so doing, those nagging existential questions "why am I here?" and "why was I there?" - receive a definitive response, namely that as volunteers each of us makes a contribution which we may not even recognize at the time, including the forging of individual and collective relationships, of goodwill between our countries and "with reference to the Peace Corps' Third Goal - the creation of change within ourselves, as Americans who come to understand and appreciate diverse cultures.

Ms Thompson retired in 2015 from the United States Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), where she used participatory planning methods to help communities plan their recovery following disasters. She has lived in five countries, and relishes the challenges and rewards of cross-cultural living. Ms Thompson currently lives in St Louis, Missouri, USA.

[http://www.highatlasfoundation.org/blogs/683-a-legacy-of-peace-corps-service?mc\\_cid=214280db8a&mc\\_eid=LWt2yvsFeg](http://www.highatlasfoundation.org/blogs/683-a-legacy-of-peace-corps-service?mc_cid=214280db8a&mc_eid=LWt2yvsFeg)

### Could Arab Peace Corps Counter Extremist Message?

Cecily Hilleary February 19, 2016 WASHINGTON

The year was 1960, and the world seemed to be on fire: The Cold War was raging, and coups, conflicts and revolutions were taking place across the globe. That October, during the final weeks of his U.S. presidential campaign, then-Senator John F. Kennedy proposed dispatching a volunteer army of youths to non-industrial nations to help foster development and boost cultural understanding. Ten months later, the first Peace Corps volunteers headed for Africa, and since then, more than 210,000 have served in 139 countries.

"I think that they did more good for America than all the bombs we dropped around the world," said Sami Jamil Jadallah, founder and executive director of the Washington, DC-based [New Arab Foundation](#).

Today, similar conflicts are playing out across the Arab world, and religious extremists, aided by social media, are manipulating and mobilizing vulnerable youth from across the globe.

"Most of the fighters flocking to Syria and Iraq, whether from Chechnya or North Africa or Saudi Arabia, are youth who are politically marginalized, jobless, living in poverty with little self-worth and little hope for the future," he said.

The solution? An Arab Peace Corps that would recruit volunteers from across the Arab World "Muslims, Christians, North Africa's indigenous Amazighs, Kurds and others" youth with college degrees in education, health care, engineering and agriculture, and send them to communities in the region most in need of their skills.

Jadallah would also send volunteers to "at-risk" communities in Europe and North America to serve as role models and mentors for troubled youth who are "easy prey" to terror recruiters.

During two years of service, volunteers would receive room and board and a small stipend. After completing their term, they would be given partial and/or full scholarships to graduate school.

"It's an idea a long time coming," said Saudi Arabian socio-political commentator [Tariq Al-Maeena](#). "The Arab street that today loiters about aimlessly feeling powerless and detached will probably adopt the idea of a 'peace corps' very willingly. They would want to be part of a productive rather than destructive endeavor."

Maeena thinks the plan is very feasible. "How Arab governments would respond to the concept is tied to their own agendas," he said. "There are many differences between Arab countries today, as witnessed by the wars currently being stoked." But he also believes Arab government "especially those in the oil-rich Gulf Cooperation Council" would be "well-served" by funding the program, which, in the end, could function as a "salvation for Arab pride."

#### Challenges ahead

Yossef Ben-Meir, a former associate Peace Corps director, is today president of the [High Atlas Foundation](#), a nonprofit working to develop rural communities in Morocco. He outlines some of the challenges that Jadallah might encounter along the way. "Within Arab nations, there is regionalism," Ben-Meir said. "There are ethnicities, different languages, and there isn't always a sense of unity. Assimilation or integration can present challenges."

Gender could also be an issue, he said. "There may be more flexibility among women, say, in the U.S., to go off and travel and be a part of another community," he said. "But in some traditional environments or social settings, that opportunity for women to do that may be limited."

But, he added, none of these obstacles is insurmountable, and they could ultimately benefit everyone. "When we bring volunteers from within one ethnic background into a country to serve another, that's an incredible opportunity," he said. "And encouraging women to volunteer would break down barriers that may need to be broken."

Ben-Meir says volunteerism is beginning to take hold in the Middle East, and he has first-hand evidence that it pays off "not just in terms of building communities, but in giving marginalized youth a sense of purpose. "Right now, I have partnerships with four universities in Morocco. At [University Hassan II Casablanca](#), for example, there's no movement of radicalism there. You don't find unrest there because students are engaged," he said.

Jadallah is currently working to seek funding for the project. "Hundreds of billions of dollars have been wasted on war," he said, adding that with any luck, governments and private donors will be just as willing to help fund peace.

<http://www.voanews.com/content/could-an-arab-peace-corps-counter-the-extremist-message/3198118.html>

### High Atlas Foundation Partners with Clinton Global Initiative in Tree Planting Project near Marrakesh

Sunday 7 February 2016 - [morocco world news](#) By Colette Apelian Marrakech

Unfortunately, we are living in a time in which interfaith relations are usually reduced to negative caricatures defined by the Israeli Palestinian conflict, the so-called Islamic State madness, or the Charlie-Hebdo massacre.

What is often forgotten in the media coverage is the long history of co-existence and the commonalities between persons of different faiths or, what the President of the High Atlas Foundation and former Peace Corps volunteer, Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir calls, our humanity, a quality he interprets to be closely intertwined with mutual respect for the environment. As an art and architectural historian, I see students learn this truism through the much maligned liberal arts and humanities courses, particularly art history and media and cultural studies. Dr. Ben-Meir practices it through the events and programs he and his team organize for the High Atlas Foundation (HAF) in Marrakech, Morocco.

HAF's mission is to create sustainable development projects requested and controlled by the local communities and in partnership with the public, private and civil organizations. They take what the writer of the press release for the January 25, 2016 event describes as a participatory, democratic approach, asking members within the community to tell them their ideas, then organizing and pushing forward their projects with local representatives that bear HAF business cards. HAF

projects are focused around five foci: youth, women, cultural diversity, clean drinking water, and clean energy, and include programs for encouraging organic farming to irrigation and solar energy. Other initiatives located throughout Morocco, especially the south and Sahara, are listed at their [website](#). HAF is both a United States 501(c)(3) organization and a Moroccan non-profit association. Since 2011 it has held special Consultative Status at the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

HAF's activities occur at a moment in which the Moroccan government with World Bank, United Nations, and United States government and nongovernmental support are sponsoring programs to encourage rural tourism, improvement of rural living conditions, and rural economic development. Country wide Programs are enumerated in the Vision 2020 plan for tourism and Maroc Green plan for agricultural opportunities. Projects include the creation of a tourist infrastructure in the countryside and possible exportation to European markets Morocco's medicinal, aromatic, and beauty based agro-products researched by joint Moroccan, European, and American professors.

HAF is but one of the nongovernmental organizations working in conjunction with the Moroccan development agencies enacting local initiatives. The agencies include *l'Agence pour la promotion et le Developpment du Nord, l'Agence du Sud, and l'Agence de l'Oriental*. For each, and their donors, such as the World Bank, the United Nations, and the United States, improvement of the society is directly linked to creating jobs and economic opportunities, which, in turn, are enabled by education and training all of which have a larger goal of promoting Moroccan economic and political stability, preventing clandestine trade, and displacements of persons across urban/rural and national borders. HAF is distinguished from its counterparts by the focus on organic and energy efficient farming and development, and, thus, the introduction of Moroccan products into the lucrative export market for responsibly grown and created food, beauty, health, and fashion goods. The tree planting ceremony is part of the ambitious One Billion Tree Campaign to plant and distribute fruit trees, such as lemon and pomegranate, at Jewish sacred sites in and around the High Atlas. The larger goals are bringing communities out of poverty encouraged by subsistence farming and to help prevent soil erosion and deforestation. The organic fruit trees were grown on a nursery established on land lent to HAF by the Jewish community of Marrakesh-Essaouira in 2012.

The late January tree planting and distribution ceremony in the Tomsloht Commune, Akrich Village in the Al Haouz Province just south of Marrakesh was held on the fifteenth day of Shevat or Tu B'Shevat on the Jewish calendar. It is a day reserved for celebrating the new planting season, especially for fruiting trees. The ceremony was held in a fruit nursery next to the seven hundred year old resting place of a Jewish saint or marabout, Rabbi Raphael HaCohen, one of hundreds of Jewish sites of veneration throughout Morocco. Both Jews and Muslims venerate at his tomb, according to its Muslim caretaker. Legend has it that the shrine, housing for pilgrims, a synagogue, dining hall, and water well are on land donated by a local Basha whose life was saved by the Rabbi.

In attendance were the Wali of Marrakesh-Safi, Mr. Mohamed Moufakkir; the Governor of the Al Haouz province Mr. Younã's Al-Bathaoui; the President of the Jewish community of Marrakesh-Essaouira, Mr. Jacky Kadoch; Dr. Ben-Meir; the United States Ambassador, the Honorable Dwight L. Bush, Dr., and members of the Akrich community. Invited guests included professors of agronomy and biodiversity, such as Ahmed Hakam and Ahmed Ouhammou, who is also concerned with preservation of the Marrakesh Toubkal National Park, and members of a nearby ladies' couscous making cooperative, the *Coop rative Aboghlo pour des femmes d'Ourika*.

Also in attendance were HAF's local project managers, including Hana Ezaoui and Amina El Hajjami. Hana organizes fruit tree planting and education in the south at Boujdour, along with Jana Ceremniha, HAF's Programing Assistant. Amina is the representative of the *Coop rative Aboghlo pour des femmes d'Ourika*. Local beneficiaries included school children, who also helped in planting the fig tree. David Bult, leader of Green Sahara furniture brought his next group of Moroccan youths from Asni who will be trained in in Casablanca to create designer pieces from fallen wood.

The January 25, 2016 ceremony in Akrich heralds a partnership with the Clinton Global Initiative (CGI) Commitment to Action tree planting project. The ceremony ended with Mr. Bush and Mr. Al Bathaoui signing a Clinton Global Initiative Commitment to Action plan to plant a million trees in nurseries adjoining historic rural Jewish burial sites in the southern Moroccan provinces of Azilal, Essaouira and Ouarzazate. The goal is to benefit local, disadvantaged Muslim farmers.

The HAF-CGI event was marked by a ceremonial fig tree planting ceremony and dispersal of trees to local farming families, especially their young men and girls. When I asked the young men later what they planned to do with the saplings, they said they would plant them in the middle of their homes, which usually have open courtyards, then, in a few years, enjoy and sell the fruit in the town market.

What struck me most about the occasion is what it said about not just Morocco at this juncture in history and economy, but as Dr. Ben-Meir said, our humanity and what brings us together. Trees have been cross-culturally venerated since prehistoric times. They have spiritual significance in Greco-Roman mythology, Zoroastrianism, the Vedas, Hinduism, Buddhism, Wiccan beliefs, Confucianism, Daoism, Shintoism, Sikhism, and Zen beliefs. They are venerated today by the three Abrahamic religions. In Gnostic Jewish beliefs or the Kabbalah, the Tree of Life is a way of describing all forms of existence. We learn from Edward Westermarck *Ritual and Belief in Morocco* (1926) the significance of trees and their reverence in Morocco, particularly of fig and fruiting trees.

Indeed, veneration of the natural world is part of Moroccan intangible cultural heritage, whether one has access to a garden in the center of a home or a field one cultivates. Symbolic representations of the natural world animates the arts and crafts of Morocco, particularly Berber or Amazigh woodworking and textiles, some of which are on display in Marrakesh museums like the Jardin Majorelle and the Tiskiwin. It can even be found in the contemporary arts of the Mus e de la Palmeraie, particularly in the work of Farid Belkhaia. Cannot their presence and our mutual awe and reverence of the environment bring us together in peace much like the arts, sports, and food, if not also the cross faith veneration of saints and ancestors? And, if I may switch hats to one of a cultural programing officer, might not Vision 2020 to create rural tourist destinations also include gardens and greenery around the marabout structures like one might find in the New Orleans cemeteries and at P re Lachaise in Paris? Morocco has similar tourist appeal potential in its saint filled cemeteries, not to mention a way to show how Islam, Judaism, and Christianity are similar, and how Islam is religiously diverse, particularly in Morocco.

How the HAF CGF plans develop is a future investigation. There are a few challenges to working the rural areas of Morocco and Akrich is like many small agricultural towns. Though only a half hour from Marrakesh, a city characterized by large shopping malls and amenities, Akrich has a relatively basic infrastructure. There is at least some electricity, perhaps solar, near the marabout, however telephone service and Internet access is nearly nonexistent with Maroc-Telecom, at least, making communication with program organizers and distributors more difficult in this region. It is an agricultural community of small scale farmers with products, but little infrastructure for vending them for a profit that befits their labor, at least not yet and not outside their immediate locale. The saplings are a significant start. However HAF and their beneficiaries will need assistance in the future to bring their value and promise to fruition.

*Colette Apelian is a researcher, visual culture specialist, and elearning expert based in Morocco. Her publication topics include the histories of automobile and electricity, street and fine art, taxi and truck decoration, urban wildlife, the social use of commercial centers and advertising, food, and the environment. Excerpts of this article are part of her forthcoming environmental and vegetarian food guides to be published during 2016. Her publications are for sale at Amazon.com.*

<https://www.morocoworldnews.com/2016/02/179251/high-atlas-foundation-partners-with-clinton-global-initiative-in-tree-planting-project-near-marrakesh/>

#### **Column: Not all Muslim nations restrict women's rights.**

[Rekha Basu, rbasu@dmreg.com](#) January 19, 2016

Here's an interesting fact about Morocco that could challenge your views about the rights of women in a Muslim country with an Islamist political party in power. A woman there can do something women in America cannot: Walk into a pharmacy and buy birth control pills over the counter.

That's not something you're likely to hear from state legislators around the United States, who've been whipping up bogus fears about Islamic Sharia law and stonings of women taking place over here. Moroccan politicians, just like ours, differ on the role religion should play in the nation's laws and public policies. "This idea that there is one unified Islamic world is wrong," says the man who heads Morocco's independent human rights commission. There is the Saudi version, in which women are not allowed to drive. There are North African, Indonesian, Malaysian, Turkish and sub-Saharan versions.

I had the opportunity Monday to talk by phone with Driss El-Yazami, president of the Moroccan National Human Rights Council (CNDH), created in 2011 and enshrined in the country's constitution. It came about in response to massive demonstrations demanding greater recognition of human rights. El-Yazami had been a human-rights activist living in exile in France since the 1970s during the tenure of a former king. A few years ago, he was invited by current King Mohammed VI to head the council. When we spoke, El-Yazami was visiting Washington, D.C.

Under Morocco's constitution, the king is the commander of all people of faith, including Jews, Christians and Muslims. The council's approach to increasing democratic rights and freedoms in Morocco is to study an issue, make a report and initiate dialogue between various factions. Then the recommendations go to Parliament to vote on. Last year the council went through that process with a view to relaxing the country's 10-year-old law that permits abortion only when a mother's life or health is endangered.

Though there is no scientific data, the Moroccan Association for the Struggle Against Clandestine Abortion claims the law has resulted in some 800 back-alley abortions a day, resulting in about 13 percent of all maternal deaths. At the king's request, a panel including religious clerics, doctors and legislators was convened to look into relaxing it. The council wants to do that at least for rape or incest cases, and where there are birth defects or genetic diseases. El-Yazami's side also wants a woman to have the option if her pregnancy resulted from a lengthy unwed affair that ended. It might be hard for a politician here to gain allies using that example.

The council received 75 filings from Moroccans, the majority in favor of loosening restrictions. A new draft law is expected from Parliament.

"Some Arab and Muslim countries such as Lebanon, Tunisia and Morocco are observing a silent revolution when it comes to women," El-Yazami said. He said women in those countries used to have on average 7.2 children apiece, but that number has been reduced to 2.10. "In all Western societies, equality begins when women have less children," he said. Freed from "the power of men," they are better able to get an education and go into the work force. All girls now attend primary school in Tunisia and Morocco, which they didn't do 20 years ago. More women are in the work force and there are five female government ministers. There is also a draft law before the Parliament to create a new institution for gender equality. These changes, including the one resulting in contraception without prescriptions, came about as a result of feminist activism dating back to 2003-04, according to El-Yazami. Some of it happened over the Internet and with support from non-governmental organizations. He said there were huge demonstrations both for and against liberalization. Muslim scholars have written feminist interpretations of Islam. Although same-sex sexual relationships are forbidden by law, they are "an old tradition in our literature," El-Yazami said.

There are ongoing tensions between his side, which bases its positions on the constitution, and religious factions, which base theirs on religious interpretations. El-Yazami said the prime minister attacked him as anti-Islamic over the council's advocacy for more inheritance rights for women. But El-Yazami argues equality between men and women is at the heart of the Moroccan constitution.

The prime minister is from Morocco's majority Islamist party, but there are three secular parties in Morocco's Parliament. El-Yazami says there's not a specifically Muslim argument on abortion; the clerics use the same reasoning as pro-life people in the U.S. At least they can have peaceful debate on it, El-Yazami said. "In Libya, Syria, Iraq and Yemen, they're killing each other over this issue." And at least we can also have a peaceful debate. Although we do have more liberal abortion rights in the U.S., the push for change is going in the opposite direction. Maybe we're not so different from a Muslim country after all <http://www.desmoinesregister.com/story/opinion/columnists/rekha-basu/2016/01/19/column-not-all-muslim-nations-restrict-womens-rights/79010766/?from=global&sessionKey=&autologin=>

**Fruit tree distribution with the girls and boys of Bouchane schools (Rhamna province)**

By Lisa Maria Wiese, Social Media Intern February 9, 2016

On February 8th, I had the great joy of accompanying the HAF team and HAF's president Yossef Ben-Meir to the rural province of Rhamna. There, I attended my first tree distribution which took place at Bouchane schools in the area. The first school I visited was an all-girls school with 102 students between the ages of 13-17 and the second school I visited was a boy's school with about 105 students of the same age.

The trees were being distributed for Sami's Project which was established in 2012. The goal of Sami's Project is: "to enhance and enrich primary school education and facilities, particularly for rural students in Morocco". Based on this goal, HAF is improving the infrastructure of 113 schools this year, thereby increasing the student's opportunity of furthering their education.

When we arrived at the all-girls school, the teacher showed us around. A portion of the girls live on school property, which gives the students from far away villages the life-changing opportunity to attend school, therefore increasing their chances to create their livelihoods. Although there is an ability to provide students with housing, there is still a lack of technical equipment such as laptops, that help students learn the skills necessary to succeed in the modern day workplace.

Each of the students were given three saplings to plant: a grape, a pomegranate and a fig. The saplings given to the children will be brought home and planted to help support each family.

Planted in the school's garden, we could already see the little saplings growing steadily from last year's distribution. In the dry areas of Morocco planting trees makes a large positive impact on the environment and it also improves the school's appearance and atmosphere for the students

After spending the day alongside the students at their school, I got the impression that they learn about sustainability in a creative way. When talking with the girls, they told me how grateful they were to be bringing home the trees and how much it will help their families. It was an important experience to see the faces and facets behind HAF's work.

I was reassured in my work as a social media intern for HAF. This was especially important for me as I see that the rural areas in Morocco have a drastically different development level compared to my daily experiences in Marrakech.

<http://highatlasfoundation.us1.list-manage.com/track/click?u=5bbd0e9d6ea090312e7b595b4&id=d9e3f7913f&e=LWt2yysFeg>

**On the Cusp of Change - Walnut Distribution in Tadmamt, Al Haouz.**

By Elle Houby 16 February 2016

A mere forty-five minute drive from the rhythmic commotion that is Marrakesh, Morocco's southern metropolis, sits the lush nursery of Tadmamt. As spring edges closer, the intricately terraced fields make for a refreshing change of scenery after the vibrant urban scene. Yet, enveloped in the lofty peaks of the High Atlas region and tucked away at the end of a winding dirt road, the nursery itself is a place few stumble upon by chance.

The nursery, rich in a history of walnut production, welcomed an exceptional number of visitors for a tree distribution ceremony in early February. The air was thick with excitement as 28 men from surrounding communes admired around 14,860 walnut saplings, representing great potential for the enthusiastic recipients and the associations and municipalities they represent.

"We have a wonderful saying in Morocco: 'they plant and we eat, we plant and they eat'", Abdeljalil Ait Ali, a member of an Oukaimeden association, explained when asked about the significance of each sapling. "The distribution of these walnut trees is of great benefit, not only for our association but also for our families, including our children and grandchildren. The reward they bring will be shared in a generous and inclusive manner."

Global prices and demand for walnuts is continuing to grow and [consumers in the US and Europe seek ever greater amounts of organic product](#). The fact that walnuts are a hot commodity is one that nursery caretaker Omar Outazgui knows well. As he bundles, counts and distributes the saplings, his energetic hands testify to the expertise of many years. "I began working with plants when I was twelve years old; since then I have tended many different types of trees, such as almond, olive, pomegranate, and, of course, walnut," Omar explains.

High altitude regions such as Tadmamt provide an ideal environment for walnut trees to thrive. Just as saplings are starting to be distributed to local farmers and associations, fresh land is being turned and new seeds planted, almond being among them. These and other changes are being introduced as the nursery at Tadmamt, owned and managed by Morocco's High Commission for Water and Forests which, since 2008, has joined in partnership with the High Atlas Foundation (HAF), a Moroccan-U.S. non-governmental organization, enabling HAF to establish organic fruit tree nurseries on such land. When the saplings mature they are distributed to surrounding communities, free of charge as part of the HAF's [One Billion Tree Campaign](#).

"In Al Haouz province there are currently 300,000 walnut trees, amounting to 34% of Morocco's walnut production. In the past week alone, we distributed around 28,400 trees at Tadmamt and Imegdale - that's approaching 10% of the entire amount of walnut trees in the whole province!" HAF President Dr. Yossef Ben-Meir enthuses. "Numerous and diverse civil, public, communal and cooperative entities become partners in the campaign, each playing an essential role. The essential catalyst is the Department of Waters and Forests and the fight against desertification, who have given the land for the nursery."



In the particular case of Tadmamt, the partnership was a four-way one together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and Yves Saint Laurent Beaut , whose support goes toward training members of the Aboghlo Women's Cooperative in nursery maintenance. HAF partnerships, in sum, form a mosaic of national and international cooperation, working together to benefit those affected by rural poverty throughout Morocco.

Concludes Ben-Meir "were each of the 700 hundred parcels of land managed by the High Commission for Water and Forests in Morocco put to maximum use for organic fruit tree agriculture, this would [generate between 80 and 100 million plants each year](#). Our pilot project together constitutes a real breakthrough." In the words of Mohammed Issoual, the Marrakesh Regional Director of Water and Forests of the High Atlas region, this partnership and the resulting project represents the essence of Morocco's forestry strategy. "The distribution of fruit trees in Tadmamt is a vital action for the empowerment of communities and their capacity to protect the environment."

The strategic vision of the High Commission for Waters and Forests and Desertification Control in this area has a perspective of integrated governance, natural resources, and takes into account the characteristics of each region. What follows is a participatory approach mobilizing and institutionalizing partnerships between different stakeholders including the local population and NGOs. This makes the local population a development actor that raises its own projects, boosts local socioeconomic wheel, creates wealth, and values all products without compromising the sustainability of the forest.

Systemic poverty in Morocco remains an impediment to the prosperity of rural people. According to a recent [Carnegie Endowment study](#), half the Kingdom's population - and three-quarters of those below the national poverty line - live in rural areas. The key to sustainable prosperity then, lies in the practiced hands of those who, like Omar, live and work, hope and dream in Morocco's sparkling mountain air.

[http://www.hightatlasfoundation.org/blogs/682-on-the-cusp-of-change-walnut-distribution-in-tadmamt,-al-haouz?mc\\_cid=214280db8a&mc\\_eid=LWt2yvsFeg](http://www.hightatlasfoundation.org/blogs/682-on-the-cusp-of-change-walnut-distribution-in-tadmamt,-al-haouz?mc_cid=214280db8a&mc_eid=LWt2yvsFeg)

#### **The mixed record of Morocco's February 20 protest movement.**

The inside track on Washington politics. By Adria Lawrence February 20

On Feb. 20, 2011, tens of thousands of Moroccans took to the streets in over 50 towns to demand freedom and democracy. In the euphoria that followed the initial protests, 40 civil rights groups and political organizations came together to support the youth of the newly named [February 20th movement](#), which continued to organize nationwide protests in Morocco's major cities and towns. King Mohammed VI responded to the movement's demands on March 9, promising far-reaching constitutional reforms, including an independent judiciary, better rule of law, and an elected government that reflects the will of the people. He appointed a committee to draft constitutional reforms, and on July 1, 2011, they were approved in a nationwide referendum; [98.5 percent of voters](#) favored the changes, according to the Ministry of the Interior. In November of 2011, parliamentary elections brought a new government to power, headed by the Party of Justice and Development (PJD), a moderate Islamist-oriented party that had not previously played a leadership role in parliament.

Were the Moroccan protests successful?

Five years later, how should we think about the consequences of the Arab Spring for Morocco? Were the Moroccan protests successful? Along a number of dimensions, the answer appears to be yes. First, the February 20th movement managed to organize sustained, mass mobilization. The protests that began in February reached their peak in April, a remarkable achievement when we consider that the protests in nearby Tunisia crested with the Jan. 14, 2011, overthrow of President Ben Ali, less than a month after the self-immolation of Mohammad Bouazizi triggered the initial Arab Spring protests. Protests in Morocco persisted despite the absence of a dramatic achievement such as regime overthrow. They took place in a country where mass protest had historically been tolerated only when it criticized other states and international actors, not the Moroccan regime itself.

Second, the protests did not lead to violence. The monarchy, unlike its counterparts in Bahrain and Syria, chose not to brutally repress the demonstrators, and the protests did not give way to the civil violence that has threatened or undermined stability in other parts of the region since 2011.

Third, the February 20th movement forced the king to respond: he promised reform, changed the constitution, and allowed a new party to form the government; the PJD continues to lead a coalition government, with new [elections scheduled](#) for October 2016.

For these reasons, Morocco looks like a pretty successful outcome, particularly in comparison with other states in the region. Indeed, there has been much [discussion](#) of a "[Moroccan Exception](#)," referring either to the kingdom's overall [stability](#), or to the king's [savvy move](#) to defuse protest by offering constitutional reforms. The monarchy advertised its reforms as evidence of Morocco's gradual movement toward democratization, an alternative to the authoritarian stasis or instability that prevailed elsewhere.

Foreign leaders praised the king's moderate approach. A year after the Arab Spring, Secretary of State [Hillary Clinton](#) called Morocco "a leader and a model," commending the regime for "holding free and fair elections, empowering the elected parliament, taking other steps to ensure that the government reflects the will of the people."

Was Morocco really a model of peaceful progress toward democracy?

If the reforms had actually empowered parliament and led to a democratic transition, there would be little reason to doubt that the Arab Spring in Morocco was remarkably successful. But our assessment of Morocco's fate five years later should be informed not only by government claims, or by comparing Morocco to other states in the region, but also by asking whether or not the February 20th movement made progress toward its goals. Erica Chenoweth and Maria Stephan, who have written extensively on nonviolent resistance, [argue](#) that an important metric of movement success is the achievement of campaign objectives. By this measure, the Arab Spring in Morocco has been an abject failure. Moroccan writer [Laila Lalami](#) and independent journalists such as [Ahmed Benchemsi](#), have torn apart the notion of a "Moroccan Exception," arguing that this claim better reflects successful public relations by the monarchy and its foreign supporters than it does the real political situation in Morocco.

The key demand of the February 20th movement was a "king who reigns but does not rule." In interviews with activists during the fall of 2011 and winter 2012, I learned that they envisioned a genuine constitutional monarchy, like England or Spain. If the king could be persuaded to democratize from above, Moroccans would be able to increase their rights while avoiding the violence and instability that has so often accompanied regime overthrow in the Arab world "not just since the Arab Spring, but after the U.S. invasion of Iraq, and after the coups that overthrew monarchs in Egypt, Libya, and Iraq during the immediate postcolonial period.

Only Tunisia has fared well after regime change, and it is smaller, wealthier, and has higher rates of literacy than its North African neighbors. "Who is to say we will be like Tunisia?" one activist told me, "We could end up in a civil war, like Syria. It is better to let the king take the lead." The [promise of constitutional monarchy](#), "not just since the regime change without instability " shaped the February 20th movement's objectives.

The hope that the king would limit his power helps to explain why his promises of reform proved effective in reducing the size of the protests. Many Moroccans thought that he ought to be given the chance to make meaningful reform, although core activists worried that the king would not voluntarily give up power without continued pressure from the street. Their fears proved well founded. Even as leaders in France, the United States, and elsewhere praised the king for his tolerance and willingness to democratize gradually, Morocco was arguably becoming *less* democratic.

What changed after the Arab Spring protests?

The first sign that the monarchy was not serious about increasing the voice of the people came from the process of constitutional reform itself; activists criticized the regime for [appointing a commission](#), rather than seeking to represent opposition voices, in constructing the constitutional amendments.

Second, the [reforms](#) themselves did little to alter the balance of power between the elected parliament and the king and his court (known in Morocco as the *makhzen*). The king retained his prerogatives and parliament remained a neutered institution with a severely fragmented party system that includes [over 30 parties](#). The most important change was a requirement that the king select the prime minister from the party with the most votes, a change that did little to address the parliament's overall weakness.

Third, once the reform process had played out, and media attention was no longer focused on Morocco, the state began a campaign of [outright repression](#) of protesters and regime critics. Over the past four years, February 20th activists and independent journalists have been detained and arrested for criticizing the reforms and the regime.

Two years ago, Ali Anouzla, editor-in-chief of the independent online newspaper *Lakome*, which the monarchy has blocked, [was arrested](#) for publishing an article that linked to an article in the Spanish newspaper *El Pa s* that discussed a video posted by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb. Anouzla was charged with providing material

assistance to a terrorist group, defending terrorism, and inciting terrorist attacks. Anouzla, now out of jail on conditional leave, still faces these charges. His case demonstrates how the regime has masked its use of repression by claiming to be fighting terrorism.

The regime's crackdown has been savvy, with few outright attacks on protesters. Instead, activists and journalists have been harassed, brought up on minor charges, and jailed for brief periods. These acts appear to be intended to silence criticism and discourage further contentious action in the kingdom.

Morocco five years later

Morocco in 2016 is stable. It is a reliable ally of the United States. It has taken steps to develop its economy and improve the well-being of Moroccans. It is not even close to resembling the most brutal of regimes the Arab world has seen. There are thus many reasons to appreciate the state of affairs in Morocco today. But it is important not to mistake stasis for progress.

The biggest winner of the Moroccan Arab Spring was the monarchy itself, as [I thought it might be](#) on the first anniversary of the Arab spring. The February 20th movement's objective "a monarch constrained by democratic procedures" has not been achieved. Instead, the king paid lip service to democratic aspirations while quietly shutting down critical voices.

Today, the king's power appears more assured than ever. Some February 20th activists say that Moroccan politics has returned to the pre-2011 era, but in fact, circumstances are far less promising for democratic reform now than they were before the Arab Spring. First, the very fact that the regime survived unchanged makes it appear less vulnerable than it was before. Second, the regime has made opposition harder by targeting dissidents and limiting the independent media. Finally, pressure for democratization is unlikely to come from outside Morocco.

The relative importance of Morocco to the United States and France has risen as other allies have fallen or proven less reliable. The United States needs a stable ally in North Africa and does not want to put pressure on the monarchy.

Although stability in Morocco appears assured in the near term, a [new article](#) of mine, forthcoming in the *British Journal of Political Science*, suggests that targeted repression may lay the groundwork for future protests. In surveying Moroccan youth, I found that many protest leaders came from families that had experienced repression in the past. They were the sons and daughters of dissidents imprisoned during the era of the current king's father, Hassan II. Their family's experiences of repression left a lasting legacy. When the opportunity arose, these youth were already organized and ready to take to the streets. The repression of the past five years may similarly come back to haunt the regime in future years.

In the long term, the smart way to prevent renewed "and potentially more serious" protests, given that the king's promises of reform were hollow, is for the regime to begin taking meaningful steps toward a constitutional monarchy in which power is more evenly shared with an elected parliament.

By sharing power, the king and the government would also share responsibility for economic growth and development. Dismal employment and growth prospects were a key motivator in 2011, and while the government has taken serious steps to improve [the economic situation](#), growth has slowed and youth unemployment remains high. Democratization alone won't solve these problems, but giving the country as a whole a greater stake in decision making may make it less likely that, the next time around, the king himself is held accountable for the country's challenges.

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<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2016/02/20/the-mixed-record-of-moroccos-february-20-protest-movement/>

#### **Review of Laila Lalami's Novel The Moor's Account.**

Saturday 20 February 2016 - [morocco world news](#) By Mbarka Bohamra Rabat

In 1527, a fleet of five Spanish ships led by Pãinfilo de Narvãiez set sailed to explore present-day Florida, only to get lost and perish in The New World. The crew originally consisted of three hundred men including officers, soldiers, friars and settlers but four men survived: the expedition's treasurer, Ælvar Nãez Cabeza de Vaca; a nobleman named Alonso del Castillo Maldonado; an explorer named Andrãs Dorantes de Carranza; and his enslaved moor Estebanico.

Upon his arrival to Spain, Cabeza de Vaca began writing his own account of what he had witnessed in his journey, which was published in 1542 and it's considered to be the first written account of North America. There was only one line in which he mentioned Estebanico: "the fourth [survivor] is Estibanico, an Arab negro from Azemmour".

In her novel, *The Moor's Account*, Laila Lalami sets out to resurrect Estebanico, giving him a voice to tell the story from his perspective and narrate the details of the ill-fated expedition without the embellishments or the changes that the other survivors would add to their stories to make them fit the Spanish crown at the time. He "intend to correct details of the history that was compiled by my companions, the three Castilian"

Estebanico, or Mustafa Al-Zamori as Leila labels him, was a merchant living in Azemmour. When the town fell to Portuguese rule and famine spread all over the place, he had to sell himself into slavery to save his family from starvation. Baptized and converted to Catholicism against his will, Estebanico strives to juggle his identity in a strange land and surrounded by strangers and hazards from every corner in The New World.

The novel touches on different themes and emotions including despair, loss, racial conflicts, and most importantly; greed, which the root of all evil in the story. It was greed that led Pãinfilo de Narvãiez to cross the ocean in search of gold he convinced himself it existed in Florida. It was greed that made Estebanico forsake the profession of a notary that his father wanted for him and instead he ventured into trading, selling several human beings and eventually, selling himself into bondage.

The storytelling moves rather in a slow motion giving the novel a perceptive undertone. Estebanico narrates a myriad of tales about the American Indians, their tribes, their traditions and their customs and the survival tactics that allowed him to remain alive. The story also points out how racial differences crumble in times of peril and hardship, but they're back as soon as the circumstances return to comfort.

Overall, *The Moor's Account* is a well-researched page-turner filled with thrilling and sometimes shocking events. It explores the reactions of humans in the face of the adversary and danger, and the brutality on both sides of equation (Indians and Spanish colonists) from the perspective of a relatively neutral bystander.

Throughout the story, Estebanico remains unbiased and his only concern is staying alive and regaining his freedom. He writes about The Spanish: "Just by saying something was so, they believed that it was. I know that these conquerors, like many before them, and no doubt like others after, gave speeches not to voice the truth, but to create it." If you're into historical fiction and want to read about darker periods of history, this novel is a must-read for you.

<http://www.morocoworldnews.com/2016/02/180246/review-of-laila-lalamis-novel-the-moors-account/>

#### **Morocco and the Rights of People with Disabilities**

Tuesday 16 February 2016 - [morocco world news](#) By Kawtar Zahidi and Souhail Wardi

*"During my daily commute, I suffer enormously with transportation problems. For me it is the greatest obstacle in my daily life. It is impossible to take buses, because they are not wheelchair accessible nor are there reserved seats for people with disabilities. Taxis do not stop for me, because they either do not have a large trunk to carry my wheelchair (90% of taxis are small vehicles like Fiat Unos) or they do not want to take the time to do it.*

*The worst days are the days of winter, when I have a class at 8 a.m., and I remain in the rain waiting for the bus. The first one comes packed with people, the second and the third, too. I usually take the fourth one. I climb into the bus with great difficulty, with the help of some kind souls. After all this mess, I make it to class one hour late and exhausted. Fifteen minutes of rest is essential, so in the end I have only 45 minutes left to follow the class, that is, of course, if I can understand (laughter)." Adil Nidaï " 29 years old " translated from French.*

A big part of one's quality of life depends on the ability to move around the city comfortably and without difficulty. Going to work, continuing one's education, going shopping, finding access to healthcare, participating in cultural events as well as recreational activities should be possible for all people. Improving the living conditions and quality of life of people with disabilities is everyone's responsibility. There is a clear need for systems and institutions that protect the rights of the differently abled. Governments surely need to step up, but it is also the responsibility of various associations and organizations to make both private and public

spaces accessible. Some countries are doing very well in this regard, while many around the world are still lagging behind.

Morocco is one of these countries that are still lagging behind. Even though Morocco is committed to regional and international treaties to respect and uphold the right to adequate care and the rights of people with disabilities, unfortunately very little is seen on the ground.

The situation of disabled people is not at all reassuring. Morocco is far from doing enough, as the rights of disabled people are still overlooked. Public transportation is not accessible, nor are sidewalks, building, etc. People with disabilities also face frequent discrimination because of their condition. This deprives them of the simplest rights such as education, employment, and healthcare. They are as Moroccan as any one of us, yet are ignored in public policy; instead of helping them, the language adopted by society contributes to their stigmatization.

People with disabilities struggle every day with the nightmare of public transportation in Morocco. Some, like Adil Nidaï, decide to go out and persevere despite the many hurdles in their way. However, the majority of people with disabilities give up and decide to just live at home. This is at times a personal decision, but it is quite often imposed by family and loved ones. They stay home to not "disturb" anyone and to avoid the hurtful looks of society.

Disabled people who experience loss of mobility in Morocco remain in the shadows and are looked down upon. They are excluded from society and lack services to improve their quality of life. It is our duty to facilitate social inclusion of people with disabilities in order to positively impact their quality of life and improve their psychological and physical health.

What are we doing about this?

**Dinavie** is a Moroccan social enterprise that is here to solve the transportation problem faced by people with disabilities. We want to provide services to improve the mobility of people with disabilities. Every day, people in wheelchairs, the elderly with mobility problems, blind people and others struggle to get around. By providing them with the opportunity to move freely, just like everyone else, and to benefit from quality care and transportation suited to their needs, we enable them to regain an active social life. We want to promote their autonomy and social integration and enable them to access primary care, work, get educated, partake in cultural events and above all have fun and be happy.

How can you help?

We are raising money to acquire a wheelchair-accessible car to provide the above-mentioned services. We will use special tools to make it a breeze to transfer the disabled from their bed to a comfortable wheelchair, then onto one of our wheelchair-accessible cars. We then take them wherever their heart desires or schedule the day for them. We have raised \$4,917 so far out of our \$21,000 goal. Let us stand together to improve the situation of people with disabilities in Morocco.

To learn more about the campaign, visit this link: [launchgood.com/project/dinavie](http://launchgood.com/project/dinavie)  
<http://www.morocoworldnews.com/2016/02/179970/morocco-and-the-rights-of-people-with-disabilities/>

### **Autism in Morocco: The Hidden Facts**

Tuesday 16 February 2016 - [morocco world news](#) By Badreddine Aitlekhoui Rabat

In Morocco, autism is still considered a topic best discussed away from the public arena. Some people say that is a handicap, while others claim that is an illness. The fact is that it is neither an illness nor a handicap, but a spectrum. Autistic persons suffer from many obstacles that inhibit their acceptance as citizens. The first obstacle is the absence of a state health care policy that can alleviate the expenses of medical treatments and therapies that the parents of autistic persons must pay every month; the cost of medical care can be over MAD 5000 per month.

The second obstacle is the integration of autistic children in the educational system. These children remain limited to a small number of classrooms opened in public schools, and are led by local associations. Consequently, the third obstacle is the shortage of qualified personnel working in this field, an outcome of the absence of the state's willingness to invest in the training and certification of qualified persons to fill this shortage.

Culturally speaking, autism is rarely mentioned in the press and different mass media networks, except for some annual articles published on the 2nd of April to celebrate the international day of autism. As a father of an autistic boy, as well as a writer and vigorous advocate for the rights of autistic persons in Morocco, I published a testimonial book called: *Momo je m'appelle. Autiste je suis (My name is Momo. I am autistic).*

My first book is based on our real story as parents of an autistic boy, narrated by Momo. This story tells of how the whole family was engaged in an adventurous trip towards acceptance, finding solutions to the difficult emotional and financial situations they faced.

It is a trip through the universe of autism in Morocco, and how parents and society view it. My book is a simple and a modest contribution to spread awareness and inform the reader to the realities of autism in Morocco.

<http://www.morocoworldnews.com/2016/02/180008/autism-morocco-hidden-facts/>

### **The Secret Behind Motorbikes in Marrakech**

Sunday 14 February 2016 - [morocco world news](#) Omar El Qayed Marrakech

In talking about Marrakech and its people, the topic of transportation often comes up at some point. Since I was an undergraduate student, I have noticed that the vehicle of choice most people use to make their way around the city is the motorbike. I used to not think about the overwhelming presence of bikes in Marrakech.

Yet, one day, while coming out of class and going through the parking lot I thought, "Why are there so many motorbikes in Marrakech?" Thus began my quest to find the answer to this question. As part of my investigation, I curiously asked some Marrakechi, including my classmates, why they and the rest of the city overuse motorcycles in the city. In turn, they provided me with some interesting, convincing arguments about the issue.

To begin, the streets of the old medina, wherein most Marrakechi live, are narrow and overcrowded. Thus, people have no way to move around the medina using any vehicle other than the motorbike. People tend to rely on motorbikes to get around easily through all the small places in the medina. More important, most of the houses in the medina are small and have no garages nor places where to put any vehicle when not used. Motorcycles do not require much space like that cars, for instance, do, and, therefore, are more preferable.

Because Marrakech is characterized by its flat geographical areas, people have no difficulty to move around in the city using motorbikes. Marrakech fortunately has no steep roads to slow down the activity of motorcycles there. Thus, the level surface of the city greatly helps people to move about smoothly without any need to increase the speed of their motorbikes. This undoubtedly encourages the people of the city to rely on motorcycles.

As all people seek to be more-thrifty with their money, the Marrakechi people very wisely prefer to use motorbikes to get to their destinations, and spend less on gas and maintenance doing so. Motorbikes are cheaper to purchase, fuel, and repair in comparison with cars. This makes them the best choice for anyone: students who need to get to school; street vendors who rely on them to sell their wares; and bread distributors who ride them to make their shop-to-shop deliveries.

In addition to saving money, motorbikes save you time as well. With a motorbike, you can make your way between stopped cars and zip through the streets in record time. Moreover, some motorcyclists can even use the street pavement in case the road is overcrowded and blocked. Others just prefer motorbikes to free themselves from the road rage incidents that may sometimes occur during a traffic jam. In short, nothing can hinder or delay a motorcyclist in reaching his destination.

Another reason is that the Marrakechi tend to go far with less. Historically speaking, the people of this city are characterized by their creativity and craftiness. As such, they enjoy what they have in a humorous way. For most Marrakechi, a motorbike is just enough to satisfy their needs.

Even some rich people and university teachers, who can afford cars, prefer motorbikes. Some youngsters like to make body and sound modifications to their motorbikes. The use of motorcycles can be a matter of imitation of others, too. As people tend to imitate their friends, neighbors and parents, most of the people in Marrakech, especially youngsters, use motorbikes just because they see other people of the city use them.

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university. Most of his writings are essays and poems about his life.

<http://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2016/02/179868/the-secret-behind-motorbikes-in-marrakech/>

### Thoughts on Happiness in Morocco

Sunday 14 February 2016 - [morocco world news](#) By Ikram Baouchouch Rabat

The following is a reader reaction to the original article "[Morocco, Among World's Five Most Hopeful Nations: Survey](#)" by Iliana Hagenah.

Critical Analysis: In her article, Iliana Hagenah addresses the notion of hope among Moroccans. A survey conducted by the WIN/Gallup International Association classified Morocco as one of the top five most optimistic nations in the world.

When I first read the title of the article, I had mixed feelings of pride and surprise at the same time. How can one believe that a country that is ranked for several years among the lowest countries in education, social welfare, employment, and gender equality, always make it to be in the top most hopeful and happiest nations all over the globe? Because I'm Moroccan and I know what is happening in my country, I can understand that many Moroccans would share the same feelings as I do and may not believe what this survey says.

The article provides a series of questions depending on which a respondent's level of happiness is determined, which is something I disagree with. I think people's feelings of happiness and hope cannot be measured in numbers. However, I have to agree with the author in that economic wealth does not necessarily correlate to economic optimism. I find it reasonable that emerging countries are more optimistic and hopeful about their future than developed ones.

My Perspective:

As a university student and young Moroccan, I believe that hope is part and partial of every Moroccan's worldview. Moroccans' concept of hope is religious, spiritual, and social at first place. Their perception of hope and happiness lies in their simple life and peace of mind, not in money.

Reasonably speaking, Moroccans have many reasons to be pessimistic about the future: the alarming statistics of social service, education, unemployment, health, corruption, the increased salaries of political leaders, discrimination, and the less freedom of political life, to name a few. Also, the lack of rain this year made things even worse, and rings more warning bells on the growth of the Moroccan economy. Yet, Moroccans chose optimism of will rather than pessimism of reason.

Every Moroccan wants and dreams of a country where he/she has total freedom to say what they believe in, speak their minds without fear, benefit from their land's resources, and have equal rights regardless of their class or political views, so they do not need to immigrate and come back rich to be treated in better ways. They want to enjoy the beauty of their country as any foreigner visiting Morocco does. Most Moroccans may not be very happy and optimistic about their current situations, but they are very positive looking forward. Although there is a serious decrease in confidence in the Moroccan government, especially among the youth.

The reason why Moroccans are always featured in the top most optimistic and happiest nations is that happiness in the Moroccan perspective differs from a French or an American's perspective. Moroccans have a tendency to stay happy and optimistic in hardships throughout history. Moroccans believe that wealth is not necessarily the key to be happy and satisfied with one's life. Another reason why a Moroccan embraces life hardships more than anyone else is because they think it is a test from God. Moroccan people hold great faith in God, their land and their king. Thus even in worst cases you will always hear a Moroccan saying it is God's wish and we have to accept it. We Moroccans take our strength from the challenges of everyday life. From a Moroccan's point of view, if you live healthy life, have your family and beloved ones around you, that means happiness.

One cannot deny that Morocco has made recognized progress on political, economic, social, and human rights. However, we still have so many marginalized and oppressed people who have no right to express their opinions, citizens who lack the simplest basics of a decent life. Sometimes Moroccans, especially those living in rural areas, are unaware of this; they only pray for good health, safety of their beloved ones, and for God's mercy. This is their secret to always remain positive and hopeful in the hardest situations possible, which money cannot solve.

*English in Media is a Master's level course in Linguistics at Cadi Ayyad University. The course aims to increase students' media literacy and awareness of media bias. It also trains students to simplify their English for better communication with non-native English speakers. Morocco World News is partnering with the students of this course to provide them with a real-life opportunity to use and show what they study.*

*Ikram Baouchouch is a master student majoring in English Linguistics at Cadi Ayyad University of Marrakesh. This reaction is part of a class on English in Media.*

<http://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2016/02/179759/thoughts-on-happiness-in-morocco/>

### Prostitution in Morocco? Shocked! Shocked!

By [Kayla Dwyer](#) On 2/15/16

The corner of Souad's small bedroom in Tangier, Morocco, is crowded with piles of clothes, half-eaten bread and a dresser full of makeup and hair supplies. Souad, 39, hastily enters her second-floor apartment in Tangier's old walled neighborhood of souks, mosques and ancient houses. She rips off her long, traditional robe and headscarf and squeezes a green sweatshirt into her jeans, touching red lipstick to her lips, swollen and bruised by a recent beating from a client. Souad has been a prostitute for more than 20 years. In the next room a baby boyâ€"her roommate'sâ€"crawls through the doorway.

"This is the real prostitution in Morocco," says Souad, walking a pan of yesterday's couscous over to where the boy's mother, also a sex worker, is dressing her older child. "Prostitution that feeds these kids, that pays for a place for them to sleep, that buys the next meal."

Souad, who didn't want her last name to be used, has been selling sex in Tangier since she left her family because of the shame of her divorce at the age of 15. She still sends them money each month, but they are not aware of how she gets it. In Morocco, a North African and mostly Muslim kingdom, extramarital sex is illegal, and women are supposed to be virgins before they marry. But prostitution is common in Morocco and is transacted openly in caf s, hotels and certain clubs. A Moroccan government study, released last May, counts over 19,000 prostitutes in the cities of Rabat, Agadir, Tangier and Fez. A majority are separated or divorced, and about half have dependent children. One in 4 does not use condoms.

Prostitution has become a major topic throughout Morocco since [Nabil Ayouch's Much Loved](#), a film highlighting prostitution in Marrakech, was banned by the Ministry of Communications. The movie, which is fiction, focuses on the lives and camaraderie of four Moroccan female prostitutesâ€"featuring vivid party and sex scenes and frisky language. Its May premiere at the Cannes Film Festival prompted a fiery reaction from some Moroccans, who protested outside the parliament headquarters in Rabat, held heated online discussions and even made death threats to the actors. Loubna Abidar, an actress who played one of the prostitutes in the film, fled to France after being [attacked](#) in Casablanca last November by what she said was a knife-wielding gang.

The threat of physical violence is a reality for many Moroccan sex workers, including Hanan, 33, a friend of Souad's in Tangier. Her mouth is swollen from a beating given her by a client after she tried to get him to pay for their sexual intercourse. Prostitutes say their daily strugglesâ€"abuse, financial problems, run-ins with police and the fear of AIDSâ€"are not the main focus of the film, *Much Loved*, with its focus on luxury prostitutes.

Hanan describes her life as a gamble. Orphaned as a child, she says, she escaped abusive brothers and married an abusive husband, who threatened her with a knife and threw her onto the street, pregnant. "You can imagine the situationâ€"if you talk with someone to get help and he wants your body," she trails off, tears beginning to spill over her eyeliner onto her black fur-lined sweater. Her curly jet-black hair is pulled back into a bun, showing a round face and full features. During our interview, Souad holds Hanan's hand and holds back her own tears.

According to a Moroccan government study, there are more than 4,200 prostitutes in Tangier, Morocco's port city and a hub for expatriates like Paul Bowles and William Burroughs. Souad lives on one of many alleys in the old medina, where children kick around deflated toy balls in the narrow streets and everyone knows one another by name. But most Moroccan men don't have money here; many are jobless, with unemployment at [10 percent nationally](#). Souad says she finds her clients at the few remaining discotheques in town. Before leaving her apartment for the night, she checks the contents of the box on her cluttered dresserâ€"keys to clients' houses.

"You have to be careful of being raped or abused by some clients," she says. "The streets are so dangerous nowadays...and they abuse us." Many Moroccans hold



harsh views of women who prostitute themselves. Rachid, 30, a security guard in Rabat, Morocco's capital, is perhaps typical. Rachid, who refused to give his last name because of the subject of our interview, says he believes blaming poverty is a feeble excuse for women who break holy rules and bring dishonor to their families. "A girl must never forsake her dignity, no matter what the reason is," he says. "Her honor is her capital, and selling it is an unforgiven crime that is totally against our education and religion."

Yet men and women meet in caf  s, in hotels, in nightclubs to negotiate *la passe*, or the price for a sexual transaction. In many caf  s in the late afternoon, female prostitutes sit by themselves drinking tea or coffee, wearing leather or tight clothing and makeup, waiting for potential clients to approach them. Abdessamad Dialmy, a researcher on sexuality and identity at the University Mohammed V in Rabat, says Moroccans are aware that prostitution exists in their country. "We know that we do that, but we don't say that we do that, and we don't want others to say that we do that," he says.

Prostitution is prohibited by law in Morocco, punishable by imprisonment, Dialmy says. Still, the Ministry of Health financially supports public medical centers and nongovernmental organizations where anyone, including sex workers, can get anonymous HIV screenings and other services without being turned in to the authorities. Dialmy says the government allows prostitution because it is an answer to unemployment. "The state prefers prostitution over poverty," he says. "The law is there, but it is not always totally applied."

A majority of the women in the health ministry study said they are financially supporting at least one other person, often at least three others. Women who frequent caf  s and public places, acting independently and without any sort of "pimp," make an average of 200 dirhams, or about \$20, per sexual transaction, according to Azzouz Ettoussi, president of the Rabat section of [Organisation Panafricaine de Lutte Contre le Sida](#) (Pan-African Organization Against AIDS), which is part of the Ministry of Health.

Some find clients only occasionally, perhaps to pay an electric bill or support a child's educational needs. Ettoussi says there are also some prostitutes who attract a well-heeled clientele at expensive bars and nightclubs, men who can pay from 300 to 2,000 dirhams (between \$30 and \$200).

Though poverty and domestic abuse are primary factors driving women to prostitution, some Moroccan sex workers say they enjoy lives that are liberated and independent. Selma, 22, left an abusive father just six months ago in Sal  . She supports herself through sex work with a wealthy clientele and says she enjoys her life, which consists of daily trips to a popular nightclub in the Hassan district of Rabat. "Leaving my family and leaving home, I got a new punch, a new power," Selma says, cigarette in hand as she sits in a caf   in an upscale neighborhood of Rabat. "No one controls me now."

Selma is a devout Muslim, praying every day and going to the mosque. This is common among Moroccan sex workers, says Dialmy, the sex researcher. He says many have strong religious beliefs and feel a sense of guilt about their work, praying to God for forgiveness and hoping to go back to a "normal" life, one involving marriage and other work. Some use drugs or alcohol, like Souad who sometimes shares a joint with her peers in the dark corner of a caf   in Tangier's old medina.

Abdel Issaoui, 24, a student in Tetouan in northern Morocco, says many young men turn to prostitutes because they need to learn how sex works and they have easier access to sex workers than to Moroccan girls who are encouraged to be virgins. These same men often judge prostitutes as sinful and undesirable. Selma, for one, scoffs at this paradox, refusing to care what those around her think or say about her work. "I feel strong to face the hypocrisy of society," she says.

Alongside the dark seaboard of Tangier, where construction on a new port has torn down all but two discotheques on the shore  "which means fewer clients for her  "Souad stops in her tracks to give a few dirham to an injured woman begging on the sidewalk. Shrugging, she says, "That could be me one day." *Kayla Dwyer spent several months in Morocco on an SIT Study Abroad program and produced this story in association with Round Earth Media* ([www.RoundEarthMedia.org](http://www.RoundEarthMedia.org)). Youssef Janati Idrissi   contributed to the reporting.

<http://europe.newsweek.com/prostitution-morocco-sex-workers-426189?rm=eu>

**Earning a living on border of Morocco's Spanish enclave:** For Moroccan porters, smuggling goods through the border of Melilla exacts heavy toll and brings a meagre income.

[Jose Colon](#) | 16 Feb 2016 Melilla, Spain

At 6:30am, the sun has not made its appearance yet and the border of Melilla's Chinatown quarter is illuminated by the orange glow of street lamps. The border crossing is a maze of wires and winches that convey a sense of unease and fear.

The six metre-high border fence across the road, contributes to the feeling of a hostile environment that surrounds Melilla, the tiny Spanish enclave in the northeast of Morocco. Ahead, on the Moroccan side, the murmur of distant shouts and blows can be heard.

At 6:45am the sound increases and moving silhouettes of nervous police officers can be seen on the metal structures. A large crowd gathers at the gates waiting to pass to the Spanish side. Moroccan guards shout and beat the people back from the entrance with wooden sticks. With every passing minute the blows and screams combine in a crescendo, like a symphony of noises and yowls.

On the Spanish side, a 100 metres from the border, dozens of lorries jostle for a good parking spot. They spit out mountains of bundles, some weighing up to 80 kilos.

At 7am, the border gates open. Once past the border, dozens of Moroccan women and men run to the piles of packages. Their goal is to take one and pass it to Morocco as soon as possible to return and catch another and, if possible, yet another. Organisations on either side of the fence run what has become to be known as *"atypical trad"* <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/inpictures/2016/01/earning-living-border-morocco-spanish-enclave-160128090148249.html>

## FROM MOROCCO, WITH LOVE Passionate culture produces passionate food

Feb 17, 2016 by [Martha Esposito](#)

Cook This! with Shereen - Moroccan Couscous  
Harissa is a very common Moroccan spice blend.

Moroccan Couscous

Note: Traditionally, couscous is served topped with meats and/or vegetables but first steamed with the meats' juices several times to bloom the granules. I wanted to make mine less labor-intensive, yet still bold with Moroccan flavor. However, if you visit Morocco, don't tell them I let you take a shortcut.  
Pair with your favorite grilled or roasted meats.

2 tablespoons unsalted butter, divided  
2 tablespoons olive oil  
1 medium Spanish onion, sliced  
Kosher salt  
Fresh finely ground black pepper  
2 carrots, peeled, quartered lengthwise, sliced 1-inch-long pieces (1 cup)  
1 zucchini, quartered lengthwise, sliced 1-inch-long pieces (heaping 1 cup)  
1 1/2 teaspoons dried harissa spice blend (found at Whole Foods or online)  
1 cup couscous  
1 1/2 cups chicken or vegetable stock  
8 large pitted green olives, quartered lengthwise (about 1/3 cup)  
1/3 cup golden raisins  
Zest and juice (2 tablespoons) of 1 small lemon  
2 tablespoons good-quality extra virgin olive oil  
1/4 cup thinly sliced mint

Melt 1 tablespoon butter with oil into a 10-inch frying pan over medium heat. Add onions, season with  $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt and 2 turns on the pepper mill. Saut $\ddot{a}$  until tender crisp, about 2 minutes.

Add carrots and zucchini. Sprinkle harissa over the vegetables, toss to coat. Season with  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt and 2 turns on the pepper mill. Saut $\ddot{a}$  vegetables until tender, about 5-6 minutes. Decrease the heat to low. Remove the vegetables to a medium bowl. Cover to keep warm.

Melt remaining butter in the frying pan. Add couscous and toss to toast the granules, 1-2 minutes.

Stir in the stock and season with  $\frac{3}{4}$  teaspoon salt and 3 turns on the pepper mill. Bring stock to a gentle boil over medium-high heat.

Remove from the heat. Stir in green olives and raisins. Cover and let stand until all the liquid is absorbed, about 5 minutes.

Remove the lid. Using a fork, stir in the lemon juice and extra virgin olive oil. Toss and fluff the couscous with the fork. Remove couscous to a medium serving bowl. Top with the vegetables. Garnish with the lemon zest and mint. Serve immediately.

Serves: 4

Tepid Response On Domestic Violence, Says HRW

By [Eurasia Review](#) February 16, 2016

Moroccan police, prosecutors, judges, and other authorities often fail to prevent domestic abuse, punish the abusers, or assist survivors, Human Rights Watch said today in a letter to the Moroccan government. In part, that is because Moroccan laws don't provide officials with guidance on responding effectively. Human Rights Watch in September 2015, interviewed 20 women and girls who had suffered domestic abuse. They said that their husbands, partners, and other family members punched, kicked, burned, stabbed, and raped them, or subjected them to other abuse. Human Rights Watch also interviewed lawyers, women's rights activists, and representatives of organizations providing shelter and services to survivors of domestic violence. Morocco should strengthen and adopt draft laws that would improve protection for victims of domestic violence.

"Many women and girls enduring domestic violence don't get the help they need from Moroccan authorities," said Rothna Begum, Middle East and North Africa women's rights researcher at Human Rights Watch. "Adopting and enforcing a strong domestic violence law would not only help victims, but also help the authorities do their jobs."

A national survey of women aged 18 to 65 by the Moroccan High Commission for Planning in 2009 found that nearly two-thirds  $\hat{c}$  62.8 percent  $\hat{c}$  had experienced physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence. Of the sample interviewed, 55 percent reported "conjugal" violence and 13.5 percent reported "familial" violence. Only 3 percent of those who had experienced conjugal violence had reported it to the authorities.

Most of the domestic violence survivors Human Rights Watch interviewed said they had sought help from police, prosecutors, or courts. But many said police officers refused to record their statements, failed to investigate, and refused to arrest domestic abuse suspects even after prosecutors ordered them to. In some cases, police did nothing more than tell victims to return to their abusers.

In several cases, when women went to public prosecutors, the prosecutors did not file charges, nor directly communicate with the police but directed the victims to deliver documents to police, directing them to investigate or arrest the abusers. In some cases, police did not follow through, leaving women to go back and forth between the police and prosecutor.

Lawyers who handle domestic violence cases said they have seen judges require unrealistic evidence, such as witnesses, in domestic violence cases, often an impossibility since most abuse takes place behind closed doors.

"Women described turning up at police stations in their nightwear with bloody noses, broken bones, and bruised bodies but not getting the assistance they needed," Begum said. "Police need to help these women, not dodge responsibility."

Women and girls said they had few places to go to escape domestic violence. The small number of shelters that take in domestic violence survivors are run by nongovernmental organizations with little bed capacity and meager resources. Only a few get any government funding, and staff from one shelter said that the funding was not enough to cover even food costs.

Morocco has taken steps toward legal reform on domestic violence, and three bills are pending. A bill on violence against women, which includes provisions on domestic violence, was developed by the Ministry of Solidarity, Women, Family and Social Development and the Ministry of Justice and Liberties and sent to the council of government for review in 2013. An update of the bill is underway, but is not publicly available. The other bills would make adjustments related to violence against women in the penal and criminal procedure codes.

The revisions would clarify domestic violence crimes and rules of evidence pertaining to them. In its letter to the two ministries, Human Rights Watch noted both positive aspects of the bills as well as provisions that, if adopted, would set rights back.

Positive provisions in the main violence against women bill include protective measures, such as removing abusers from the home or barring contact with the victim. It also includes provisions to expand coordination of specialized units to serve the needs of women and children in government agencies, and committees to address women's and children's issues.

Human Rights Watch urged the Moroccan government to improve these pending bills, by including, for example, emergency and longer-term orders for protection  $\hat{c}$  also known as restraining orders. The bills should include a specific definition of domestic violence, spell out the duties of police, prosecutors, judges, and other authorities in cases of domestic violence, and criminalize rape by a spouse. The government should provide or fund essential services  $\hat{c}$  including shelters  $\hat{c}$  for domestic violence victims.

Some proposed amendments to the penal code would make matters worse for women, including a change to the penal code which would extend the possibility for reduced sentences for murder and assault to any family member who catches a family member engaged in illicit sexual intercourse (such as adultery). The government should repeal such provisions.

The Moroccan government should also ensure meaningful participation by nongovernmental groups and domestic violence survivors in the reform process. United Nations agencies and human rights expert bodies have repeatedly urged Morocco to enact domestic violence legislation. In 2013, the European Union agreed to provide financial support for such reforms, including through a  $\hat{a}$ ,-45 million grant for Morocco to implement the government's Gender Equality Plan of 2012-16. However, the Moroccan authorities have yet to come through on all their objectives, including enacting legislation on violence against women. Around the world, about 125 countries have laws on domestic violence. In the Middle East and North Africa, seven countries or autonomous regions have legislation or regulations on domestic violence: Algeria, Bahrain, Iraqi Kurdistan, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia.

"Morocco should take a stronger stand for women's safety and rights," Begum said. "There is no better way to start than with a strong domestic violence law." Please see below for statements from domestic violence survivors and for further information on needed law reforms.

<http://www.eurasiareview.com/16022016-morocco-tepid-response-on-domestic-violence-says-hrw/>

### Human Rights Watch Urges Morocco to Toughen Laws Against Domestic Violence

Tuesday 16 February 2016 - [morocco world news](#) By Zainab Calcuttawala Rabat

*Human Rights Watch urges Morocco to pass, strengthen law against domestic violence.* Human Rights Watch (HRW) wrote a letter on Monday urging Morocco to pass reforms to criminalize domestic violence and ensure that law enforcement officers investigate domestic violence cases.

A national [survey](#) conducted by the Moroccan High Commission for Planning in 2009 found that 62.8% of women aged 18 to 65 had experienced physical, psychological, sexual, and economic violence. Of the sample, only 3 percent of women who had experienced conjugal violence reported it to the authorities. "Morocco is in an excellent position to pass and implement legislation on domestic violence," wrote Liesl Gertholtz, director of the women's rights division of the watchdog organization, in the letter. "It has a track record of promoting women's rights under law, such as through its family law reforms, and has experienced service providers and civil society leaders who can advise on the reforms."

In September 2015, HRW completed interviews with 20 Moroccan women and girls who had faced domestic violence, as well as women's rights activists, lawyers and shelters. Rothna Begum, one of the researchers who worked on the project, commented on HRW's findings: "Many women and girls enduring domestic violence don't get the help they need from Moroccan authorities," [Begum](#) said. "Adopting and enforcing a strong domestic violence law would not only help victims, but also help the authorities do their jobs."

The letter went on to describe points of progress and dysfunctionality in Morocco's program to protect women and children from domestic violence. For example, although, the ministries for justice and health, along with the Royal Gendarmerie and the General Directorate for National Security promised in 2006 and 2007 to set up cells and units to assist women and children victims in hospitals and police stations, many human rights lawyers and activists told HRW that the facilities were never established or are ineffective.

Gerntholtz recommended three major changes to the 2013 bill 103-13 for the protection of women against domestic violence in the letter. Firstly, the bill should define the government's role in providing shelter, health and legal services to domestic violence survivors. Secondly, the bill should establish a trust fund or other financial assistance for domestic violence survivors. Finally, it should add provisions on training police staff and monitoring investigation effectiveness.

According to The Advocates for Human Rights, the fate of bill 103-13 remains uncertain since it was tabled in July 2014.  
<http://www.morocoworldnews.com/2016/02/180029/human-rights-watch-urges-morocco-to-toughen-laws-against-domestic-violence/>

### **A taste of Morocco in the Queen City**

By Mario D. King February 17, 2016

In this week's cultural cuisine expedition, me and mi familia decided to experience a taste of North Africa. We found a cozy Moroccan restaurant nestled in Charlotte's eclectic Plaza Midwood neighborhood.

Ajbani Moroccan Cuisine is considered one of the finest Moroccan restaurants in Charlotte. Upon our entrance, we were greeted by a sweet aroma, complimented by a vibrant and inviting color scheme.

On the menu, a lot of items piqued our interest. We decided to go with a variety of dishes to capture the full Moroccan experience. To kick things off we ordered a little appetizer â€” Brochettes. This gluten-free dish is made with Kebabs, marinated and grilled with Moroccan BBQ style. It's served with a Harissa yogurt sauce.

Next on our list: Berber Chicken

Berber cuisines are staples within North Africa. Couscous is a dish enjoyed worldwide and is a perfect companion to a Berber cuisine. Our initial reaction to this dish was that of someone looking at a piece of art. The bright colors alone made it appealing, but it was the taste that ultimately won us over. Who can turn down roasted chicken and vegetables in a creamy sauce of saffron with cinnamon and garlic? The olive and orange salad that topped this delectable dish added that extra "it" factor. Oh, and how can I forget about the couscous?

Then we tried a little tajine dish: Spicy Lamb

Tajine also is a Berber dish common to North Africa. This tender lamb was rubbed with a blend of spices then braised with onion, carrot, okra, and apricot. It was topped with a house-made preserved lemon.

Our last main dish is considered to be a Moroccan favorite: Chicken with Preserved Lemon.

This is another dish within the tajine family tree. The chicken breast was marinated and braised with a lighter blend of root vegetables and olives. It, too, was gluten free.

We finished up with some Moroccan dessert: Baklava.

This tasty treat was a layered dessert of pistachio, honey and phyllo dough, with notes of clove and cinnamon. It kind of reminded me of a remixed version of pecan pie. Good taste â€” I'll recommend it.

Overall, the experience was worth the price of admission. If you're health conscious, this is a great place to make part of your regular dining circuit. If you're not too concerned about healthy food intake, this is a great place to simply enjoy a great Moroccan meal. Is there a better way to close out a meal such as this than by washing it down with some mint tea?

[Ajbani Moroccan Cuisine](#)

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<http://qcitymetro.com/2016/02/17/a-taste-of-morocco-in-the-queen-city/>

### **Moroccan Entrepreneurs - Changing the Business Space**

BlogBy Jean R. Abinader

*A Series Featuring New Faces with Fresh Business Ideas for Morocco*

This year, the Global Entrepreneurship Summit will be held in Silicon Valley, June 22-24. Following on the heels of last year's successful summit in Morocco and another in Kenya, this next version promises to bring even more attention to entrepreneurs from the Middle East and North Africa.

It seems like a good idea to introduce Moroccan entrepreneurs already implementing projects that reflect the innovative energy they bring to the table. So in the run up to Silicon Valley, we will tell the stories of some intriguing entrepreneurs.

Maroc4Invest is a young company launched by Hayat Essakkati and Hamza Eddahbi. Hayat was born in the Netherlands to a Moroccan family that emigrated from Nador and Chefchouan in the north of Morocco. She studied Public Administration at the Leiden University and completed postgraduate studies at Johns Hopkins University with a Master's degree in International Relations and Economics. Afterwards, she started working on youth development and employability programs in the MENA region for the World Bank in France and Washington, DC. Hayat has always believed in Morocco's potential. "The year 2016 will show a boost in the entrepreneurship ecosystem including better business regulations, accelerators, co-working spaces, increase in investors and business angels. The opportunities are growing daily," she told us.

Hamza Eddahbi studied at ESSEC, a prominent French business school, after which he worked for an investment bank in London before moving back to Casablanca. Hamza is a former associate of McKinsey & Co.

Maroc4Invest enables foreign investors to penetrate the Moroccan market using a multitude of services taking their clients through the process from company registration to ultimately running their operations in Morocco. <http://www.maroc4invest.com/>

The idea behind the company is straightforward: to navigate the business world in Morocco, you need insider's information and access. Maroc4Invest (M4I) is a one-stop shop with the objective of making foreign investors feel at home by minimizing their risks.

As Hamza told us, "Morocco is a thriving economy. However, many services that we can't imagine to live without in Europe, the US, or Asia, do not yet exist across all sectors. Morocco is an open space for entrepreneurs that have already launched their businesses elsewhere and are looking to penetrate another market. A business in Morocco is an entry card to the very large African market."

Hamza believes that Morocco is heading in the right direction "as a result of better business regulations and export-stimulating policies... however, it is still difficult for incoming entrepreneurs to pinpoint the business potential or to develop an insight on how starting a business/relocating their office to Morocco exactly would look like."

Maroc4Invest offers prospective companies the following advice:

1. Registering: you can try to do it on your own. Generally expect to spend 2-3 weeks and around \$1000-1200 to register, that is, if you have the minimum \$1000 start-up capital. This low entry requirement has earned Morocco high marks in ease of doing business guides. Moreover, as their website points out: "Registering as an independent entrepreneur means you're entirely exonerated from VAT when your income doesn't surpass yearly revenues of \$50,000." Not a bad way to start, especially since you can use a home office for up to six months or sublet space from one of the up-and-coming shared-space facilities in major cities. Retaining a good accountant is a way to ensure that you avoid pitfalls of doing the registration on your own.
2. Office space: Depending on your city of choice and the quality of the building, a 600 square foot office, without furnishings can run about \$1200 per month in Casablanca (\$20 per sqm), and \$800 elsewhere. It is also worth checking out the start-up incubators and accelerators that are growing more common, as well as space in the technology parks.
3. Staffing: M4I has already identified local recruiting companies to help find the right people. "There are approximately six professional recruiting companies active on all levels in the private sector of Morocco. They will be able to find you skilled employees, from a factory worker to a mid-level manager." In addition, several professional training companies have the capacity to both recruit and identify mid- and senior-level employees.
4. Taxes: It is important to understand the tax system in Morocco, since, as in most countries, it has several forms: income tax, a progressive VAT, Social Security (CNSS), and other considerations, some of which may apply or not to expat workers. Morocco has a VAT of 20% with a maximum total corporate tax rate of 30% with an income tax ranging from 0-38%.

There are special advantages when you're a Moroccan residing abroad. Also foreign investors, unlike Moroccan citizens, will be able to repatriate their capital to a foreign account. M4I also provides information on specially designated industrial and duty free zones from the north (Tanger, Nador) to the industrial clusters around Casablanca and Kenitra, to the tax exempt southern region of Laayoune-Boujdour-Sakia El Hamra.

Maroc4Invest of course has much more information for companies that need a thorough playbook for building a business presence in Morocco. M4I is committed to making the path as smooth as possible for companies, investors, and start-ups to find their way in an evolving and rich business environment. Good business intelligence and well-prepared strategies will enable businesses interested in Morocco to find their way, build their brands, and make money. Now, wasn't that easy?

<http://allafrica.com/stories/201602190729.html>

### **King Mohammed VI: Social Justice, One of Morocco's Most Important Projects & Goals**

**February 19, 2016**

King Mohammed VI stressed Friday the great importance of social justice in Morocco, saying that it is "one of our most important national projects, a reign-long project through which we hope (â€) to fulfil our people's aspirations and expectations while living up to our cultural values".

Achieving social justice is a strategic goal in Morocco, said the King in a message to the Parliamentary Forum on Social Justice, held in Rabat, Friday. "Since my accession to the throne of my glorious ancestors, I have provided policy guidance in the political, economic and social sphere to promote social justice", added the Monarch, in the message that was read out by royal advisor Abdellatif Menouni.

"Our policy in this respect reflects a constant concern for the daily economic and social conditions of all segments of the population, particularly those suffering from poverty and various forms of deprivation", stressed King Mohammed VI.

"It is also in keeping with a firm belief that dignity, justice, equal opportunity and the enjoyment of a decent life by all components of the Moroccan society are fundamental human rights", he said, noting that "those ideals are at the heart not only of many of the initiatives I have launched, but also of the strategic public policy instructions I have given, particularly to the government, parliament and local councils."

King Mohammed VI said his vision in this respect is based on realistic as well as humanitarian considerations. It constitutes the essence of the first and second programs of the National Initiative for Human Development, seeking to improve living conditions of rural populations, especially the poorest and most fragile people.

"In my speeches as well as in the messages I send to various national and international forums, I invariably insist on the close correlation between economic growth, social justice and social cohesion", said the Sovereign.

Indeed, "I firmly believe that achieving high levels of economic growth makes sense only if it is accompanied by concerted efforts and effective, targeted public policies based on the fair and equitable distribution of the fruit of economic growth among all segments of the Moroccan population."

The King argued that "Morocco's investment effort for the implementation of flagship projects will achieve its intended objective only if those projects lead to the proper harnessing of human resources." Morocco's Constitution states that the country seeks "to build an inclusive society, in which all citizens enjoy security, freedom, equal opportunity, respect for their dignity, in addition to social justice, within the framework of the intrinsic relationship between the rights and duties of citizenship", said the royal message.

This statement actually sets "a comprehensive institutional benchmark for the goals and objectives to be achieved by sectoral, territorial and cross-cutting public policies in the economic, social, cultural and environmental spheres", added the Moroccan Sovereign.

He also explained that "the depth and consistency of the Moroccan perception of social justice is clearly evidenced by the fact that the supreme law of the land has explicitly listed basic economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, particularly for priority groups targeted by public policies designed to achieve social justice", making reference to children, young people, disabled people and other vulnerable segments of society mentioned in the Constitution.

To give concrete substance to this policy, the Constitution has not only provided for the aforementioned rights, but also mentioned mechanisms, principles and constitutional commitments to guarantee their actual implementation.

King Mohammed VI recalled in this regard Morocco's attachment to the principle of gender equality with regard to human rights, the elimination of all forms of discrimination, the constructive commitment of government authorities to use all necessary means to ensure that all citizens, men and women alike, enjoy basic economic and social rights on an equal footing.

<http://northafricapost.com/11014-11014.html>

### **Mesmerizing Morocco: From camels to beaches to spas**

2016-02-20T06

This I have learned â€" the more beautiful a country, the more dangerous its cabs. And Morocco is, by every measure, a very beautiful nation. My husband and I traveled to Morocco for one week late last summer. Because we did not want to spend our short time there on buses, trains or the aforementioned taxis, we selected three destinations located within a few hours of one another â€" the seaside town Asilah, the mountain village Chefchaouen and the cultural capital Fez.

Up first; Asilah, just 30 miles southeast of the Tangiers airport. We got there via one of Morocco's so-called grand taxis, a gigantic Mercedes with no air conditioning or seatbelts. Lively and walkable, Asilah features a seaside boardwalk and colorful cafes where men sip mint tea, the national drink of green tea, sugar and mint leaves. Asilah, like many North African cities, also boasts a historic medina, a walled car-free district of narrow, twisting streets where many Moroccans still live, shop and worship. We wandered aimlessly through the medina to the sea wall where couples stopped to watch the sun set over the Mediterranean and children scampered on the rocks â€" a perfect introduction to Morocco's natural beauty.

Moroccans speak Arabic and study French in school. But given that Asilah is only a 40-minute ferry ride from Spain, most people here also speak Spanish. I don't speak any of those languages so I found myself mashing up phrases like "Agua si vous plait" and "Excusez moi, donde esta el bano?" Because I never quite knew what I was ordering, I ended up eating a lot of tagine, the classic Moroccan stew slow-cooked in domed ceramic pots and loaded with potatoes, tomatoes and spices



such as cumin and turmeric. Delicious.

The highlight of our time in Asilah was a trip to Paradise Beach, which was a short but harrowing cab ride through a makeshift garbage dump and down a rocky cliff. This being the start of the off-season, no one else was there but us and the workers who run the cafes' small kitchens with hot stoves, brightly colored deck chairs and thatched umbrellas. One vendor had tuna salad so that's what we ate. Having fed us, he had nothing to do but join a pickup soccer match on the beach. Later, camels carrying tourists meandered past. I've been lucky enough to visit some beautiful beaches, and this may have been my most sublime experience yet.

Up next: Chefchaouen, a favorite of photographers and potheads alike. Why the former? Because the entire medina' every hotel, shop, staircase and restaurant' is washed in varying shades of blue. The story is the town was first painted blue in the 15th century by Jewish refugees, fleeing the Spanish Inquisition. And why the latter? Because the region is a major hash producer. We stayed for one day, long enough to take in the city's singular beauty, but not the second-hand smoke.

We had been told it would be easy to get bus tickets from Chefchaouen to Fez, our final destination. But alas, all four direct buses were booked. The helpful ticket agent recommended we take a shared taxi from Chefchaouen to the city of Ouazzane and, from there, catch the bus to Fez. No problem, except our cab driver's penchant for playing chicken with oncoming traffic.

But the harrowing journey just made our arrival at our hotel, Fez' Riad Laroussa, all the more rewarding. A marvel in service and design, the Riad Laroussa boasts eight enormous suites, an open-air courtyard and rooftop deck with stunning views of the medina. I literally started to weep when our server greeted us with a breakfast of fresh figs, rich coffee and a basket of date bread and Moroccan bread, which is round like pita but thicker and coarser. To think I was urinating in a hole at the Ouazzane bus station just a few hours before.

The hotel hired us a guide to tour the 1,200-year old medina, a UNESCO world heritage site and home to the world's oldest university. My husband and I are typically go-it-alone travelers, but a guide is a must in Fez for a two reasons. One, you'll never find anything without one. The 14th-century Koranic school with its intricately carved cedar screens and ornate tilework was only a few steps away from the cluster of shops where hand-stitched slippers are auctioned to merchants from across Morocco, but we would have found neither without our guide.

Our guide also helped us bargain, a national pastime for which I have no talent. Morocco's finest artisans live and work in Fez' the tanneries are the oldest in world and local weavers are known for their rugs' but con artists also ply their craft here. Our guide negotiated prices that seemed fair to everyone, and indeed, I am very pleased with treasures I brought home.

We returned to the hotel exhausted and ready for our trip to the hotel's private hammam, a traditional Moroccan spa. We lay down on slabs of marble (marble is everywhere' 17th-century Italians traded it pound for pound for sugar) and let the steam penetrate our skin. After a good loofah scrubbing, we enjoyed massages with essential oils. One day I may stay at another hotel this luxurious, but certainly not for \$150 a night.

We departed the next day for Barcelona where we stayed in a hotel room one-fourth the size of our suite. As we took off, we marveled at all that we learned about this unique country. To be honest, we did not know what to expect when we arrived. I knew Morocco was stable and relatively prosperous, but I was surprised how welcomed and safe I felt both as a woman and a westerner ... if not a cab passenger.

[http://www.stiltoday.com/travel/mesmerizing-morocco-from-camels-to-beaches-to-spas/article\\_e8be4c6d-0da1-5f29-bf40-0ddde57eee1.html](http://www.stiltoday.com/travel/mesmerizing-morocco-from-camels-to-beaches-to-spas/article_e8be4c6d-0da1-5f29-bf40-0ddde57eee1.html)

#### **Loubna Abidar: Fame versus Fury**

Tuesday 16 February 2016 - [morocco world news](#) By Asmaa Bahadi Rabat

*In an exclusive interview with the journalist Simo Benbachir, controversial Moroccan actress, Loubna Abidar, answered many questions and underlined the difficulties that she went through.*

Loubna Abidar, 30, saw her troubles begin in May 2015, when "Much Loved," directed by Nabil Ayouch, premiered at the Cannes Film Festival. Until then, Ms. Abidar had appeared only in small theater roles, television programs, and a couple of unremarkable feature films. By the time she boarded her flight home to Morocco, the film's trailer had gained traction on the Internet.

The Communication Ministry of Morocco was swift to react to the movie's premiere. It banned the film, saying that it undermined "the moral values and dignity of Moroccan women as well as the image of Morocco."

Loubna Abidar is also poised to earn France's top honor in film' a C sar' this month. While she was on her way to Paris, her friend called to tell her that she was nominated for a C sar award. She said, "I was in denial at first, I was scared and started crying, it took me three days to grasp the news." However, she wasn't delighted, since her ultimate and main goal isn't related to the C sar award and to prizes in general, but fighting for a cause. She added, "My fight is freedom and dignity for Moroccan women." She also emphasized the stereotypes that Moroccan women have to go through on daily basis.

She also expressed her pleasure and gratitude at being the first Moroccan woman ever to receive a nomination for the C sar award. Ms. Abidar describes herself as a feminist. Being a star in a controversial sex-themed film is not easy in a conservative Muslim society like Morocco's. She says she has always been engaged in defending women's rights, and traces some of her motivation to her early experiences with the prostitutes she so expertly portrays in the movie. Ms. Abidar dominated the headlines in French and the Belgian news, and described this mass hysteria as an opportunity for her to begin on a path toward achieving her main goal and win her fight.

Her appearance on "Le Petit Journal" a French television show' made her feel like a real star, she said. She hopes that one day the Moroccan press would support her work.

Concerning all the fuss about her in Morocco, she said, "There are some people, whose names I'm not going to mention, who use my name to distract the others." She also talked about a guest on a Moroccan radio station who "criticized [her] French accent instead of introducing his new single, so he could gain more attention." "My accent is unique because I'm Amazigh from Marrakech, which makes it automatically different."

People say that Loubna Abidar insulted Morocco and Moroccans, calling them "schizophrenic" so she could have easy access to France. To clarify, she said, "I have a Brazilian nationality, thus I already had a visa to visit France whenever I wanted to. I used to go to France once every three or four months. I did not insult Moroccan people, I insulted those who didn't want to leave me alone, who didn't see and understood the concept of the movie and believe in whatever the yellow journalism says about me [ ]. In fact don't consider 'schizophrenic' an insult as much as I consider it a fact."

"If I ever had the chance to act again in 'Much Loved' I would do it all over again, with the same passion, enthusiasm and energy [ ]. I'm so proud of my role in this movie," she added.

The interviewer asked, "Are you going to stay in the same kind of roles or show your acting capacities through new ones?" "I will stay in the same fight on the same level, yet different roles," Ms. Abidar replied.

Lastly, regarding the message that Loubna Abidar wants to convey, she said, "I love my people and my country, however I would like to finish this journey and the fight that I'm fighting in my own way. I'm doing this for Moroccan women, for their freedom and dignity."

<http://www.morocroworldnews.com/2016/02/179967/loubna-abidar-fame-versus-fury/>

#### **Brendan O'Connor: The secret to a stress-free break in Morocco**

[Brendan O'Connor](#) 15/02/2016

You get to a certain stage with the kids where you feel you might like to try something a little exotic holiday-wise. Since having kids, we have become great devotees of being cocooned in a family resort where there is a pool and kids' club so everyone gets to relax. But you come to the point where you would like to feel you are actually travelling too.

And so we found ourselves on a stress-free break in Africa for the weekend, the secret to it being that we were having our city break in the comfort of Club Med in Marrakech.

In our pre-children life, my wife and I had been to Marrakech twice, and I got it into my head that I wanted the kids to experience the city's famous city square, Djemaa el Fna. I am not sure my wife felt as certain that they could cope with the sounds and the smells, the monkeys and the snakes, but the regular Club Med shuttle service meant we could scuttle back to the club whenever we wanted.

As we wandered the souk with our guide, Abdel (a tenner plus tip is well worth it to make sure you are not bothered too much), it was the blacksmiths' market that proved too much for the kids. Certainly for the older one. And I did not blame her. Everything was alien, but the smiths were the strangest thing yet, expressionless as they banged away on metal. There was a smell of hash that would knock out a horse: not the mellow smell of grass, but the deep, sticky, heady, dark aroma of resin.

We skipped out of there quickly and on to the dyers' souk. Being a Friday afternoon, it was quiet in the markets. Almost despite themselves, the kids enjoyed the stalls, the walls of colourful shoes, the strange smells and sounds. The older one went quiet at times, and I could see her mind was being quietly blown. Twenty-four hours earlier we had picked her up at school, and now she was here in another world.

As we emerged out of the dark close quarters of the souk into the relative normality of Djemaa el Fna, we breathed a sigh of relief, got some orange juice from one of the endless trucks and looked at some snake charmers from a safe distance.

The older one begged to get a horse and carriage ride, so we paid 20 quid to be driven through the streets, taking in the sights and smells, the kids' eyes out on stalks as they shyly waved at the locals, who were staring at their blonde hair.

And then we were back in Club Med, back at the pool, still very much in Morocco, but in a less alien, more child-friendly version. We were staying in Le Riad, which is a hotel within a hotel on the Club Med complex. And actually it had the feel of a real riad (a traditional Moroccan house with a courtyard), only a posh one, where everyone is very nice to you all the time.

Indeed, being Irish, we were a bit suspicious of the friendliness at first. This is part of the reason we had perhaps avoided Club Med until this point in our lives. My wife and I are not really joiner-inners. And we had this notion that at Club Med you would have people jollyng you along to do activities all the time. I am allergic to activities and most forms of organised fun.

As it happened, we were wrong. You could be running around doing tennis and archery and there seemed to be a lot of French snowbirds playing golf, but really, all the Club Med people care about is that everyone is enjoying themselves. They are very deeply committed to this, and part of it is a friendly chattiness. Once we had got over our initial suspicion, we realised that there was a genuine warmth behind it all. They really just want everyone to be happy and to feel included, if indeed they want to be. And my kids did want to be included. They seem to have got a rogue joining-in gene from somewhere. So they were gagging for the kids' club, delighted to be coaxed on to the dance floor at the disco, and excited to see their favourites performing in the circus show on Friday night. Many of the staff have been to circus school for two years, and kids can learn circus skills along with their tennis lessons and art.

And Mum and Dad? Well, we could relax by the pool in Le Riad, ordering coffees, fruit juices and wine to our hearts' content, with no judgment at all. These people were actually encouraging us to sit on our backsides and be waited on hand and foot while they minded our children.

The upside of the place being very French and having mostly French guests is that the wine is good. We drank the Moroccan wine they handed out, though you could opt to pay for finer, but it was perfectly good. Another legacy of the French was that the food was fabulous and there was incredible bread at all times and proper butter - proper salted butter in big blocks that you cut chunks off to plaster on your proper French bread. We wanted exotic, but sometimes home comforts are good too.

The buffet in the evenings was quite French in tone too, with everything from duck liver on brioche to steak frites. There was a different international cuisine every night, and we scratched the Moroccan itch with delicious tagines and couscous that tasted way better than anything you would get at home. In general, the place was a heady mixture of Frenchness and Moroccan. It is probably handy if you have a bit of basic French with some of the staff, though the kids fared fine at the club with the international language of craic.

But the feel of Morocco is everywhere: in the decor, the rose petals strewn around and the general ambience. The Moroccan culture that can seem quite alien in the city centre manifests in Club Med as a gentleness and a playfulness, always a smile and a joke and a bit of messing with the kids.

After only three days we arrived back into a storm-blasted Dublin last Sunday night, feeling as if it might all have been a dream. It is only three hours away but another world, a perfect marriage of western resort comforts with the exoticism of Africa and the Arab world.

The kids tell me they want to go back. The real travelling has begun.

<http://www.independent.ie/life/travel/family/brendan-oconnor-the-secret-to-a-stressfree-break-in-morocco-34448621.html>

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