



CULTURAL ORIENTATION

MOROCCAN



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A hillside village in Morocco
Flickr / Jane drumsara

Chapter 1 | Moroccan Cultural Orientation

Profile

Introduction

Morocco's coastal location and proximity to the European continent have shaped its history. The region has experienced many successive waves of diverse cultures, from migrating tribes and refugees to occupying forces and foreign merchants. After centuries of often tumultuous dynastic rule and colonial occupation, Morocco is now an increasingly prosperous country governed by a constitutional monarchy.^{1, 2} Economic initiatives and governmental reforms continue to modernize the nation and raise its standard of living, although the country still suffers from poverty and unemployment.^{3, 4} Despite increasing socioeconomic change, Morocco retains the strong cultural traditions of its Arab and indigenous Amazigh (plural Imazighen) populations.⁵

Geography

Area

Located on the northwestern coast of Africa, Morocco lies directly south of Spain, across the Strait of Gibraltar, where the Atlantic Ocean and Mediterranean Sea meet. The expansive coastline of the country's western and northern borders adjoins these two bodies of water, making Morocco the only African country with direct access to the Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Although mainland Spain lies 13 km (8 mi) north across the strait, Morocco shares land boundaries with the European country—two small Spanish enclaves on the northern Moroccan coast, Ceuta and Melilla. Although Morocco disputes Spain's claims to these two regions, they are nonetheless administered by Spain. To the east, Morocco shares an extensive land boundary with Algeria, its largest neighbor. On its southern edge, it borders Western Sahara, the site of continued territorial disputes between Morocco and the Polisario Front. With a total land area of 446,550 sq km (172,413 sq mi), Morocco is slightly larger than the state of California.^{6, 7}



Map of Morocco
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Topography



The Ammel Valley in Morocco's Anti-Atlas Mountains
Wikimedia / Ayman Abdelilah

Morocco's terrain comprises coastal plains and lowlands, rising to extensive high elevation mountain ranges, interspersed with plateaus and valleys. In the southern and eastern areas of the country, the central mountains descend to plains as the topography transforms into desert.⁸ Morocco's Atlantic coast, where the majority of the population resides, largely consists of fertile plains and plateaus that extend east to the mountainous interior. The Rif Mountains rise dramatically from the northern coast and run roughly parallel to the Mediterranean, from the northern coastal city of Tangier to the Moulouya River basin in the east. In the central region of the country,

three ranges of the Atlas Mountains (Middle, High, and Anti-Atlas) run parallel to each other on a slanted, southwest-to-northeast line. Located in the High Atlas Mountains is Mt. Toubkal, the tallest peak in North Africa at 4,165 m (13,665 ft). In southern and eastern Morocco, the Atlas Mountains gradually slope to meet the arid and semiarid plateaus and plains that form the northwestern border of the Sahara. Sebkhah Tah, which at 55 m (180 ft) below sea level is Morocco's lowest point, is located in the far south.⁹

Rivers

The waterways and recurrent runoff spawned by Morocco's high mountain ranges have provided it with the most elaborate system of rivers in North Africa. The Sebou River runs 450 km (280 mi) north from the Middle Atlas Mountains and then east into the Atlantic, carrying the highest volume of water of the country's rivers. The Moulouya River also originates in the Middle Atlas Mountains and flows 515 km (320 mi) northeast to the Mediterranean. Though numerous small streams flow into the Mediterranean, the Moulouya is the only substantial river in Morocco to empty into the Mediterranean. The Oum al-Rbia, at 555 km (345 mi) in length, is Morocco's longest river and serves as an important resource for irrigation and hydroelectric power over its course from the Middle Atlas Mountains to the Atlantic. Several small but important rivers flow in a southerly direction from the High Atlas Mountains toward the Sahara; these include the Ziz, the Rheris, the Guir, the Drâa, and the Dadès. Although most of Morocco's rivers are largely not navigable, they are heavily utilized for irrigation and hydroelectric power generation.^{10, 11, 12}



The River Drâa in the Sahara Desert, Morocco
Flickr / Darren Barefoot

Climate



A beach along the western coast of Morocco
Wikimedia / Kobersky

Two forces influence Morocco's climate: the Atlantic oceanic winds that blow from the west and the arid conditions of the Sahara to the southeast. The Rif and Atlas mountains in the northern and central regions act as a barrier between these two climatic pressures.¹³ A subtropical Mediterranean climate characterized by mild, rainy winters and hot, arid summers dominates the western and northern regions. In the south and east, the rain shadow effect created by the mountainous interior limits precipitation and produces the hot, semiarid conditions of the pre-Sahara. Precipitation in the Atlantic coastal region is moderate. The area's rainy season typically runs from October to April or

May, with the northwest receiving the highest level of precipitation. Inland, rain and snowfall occur at higher elevations in the Rif and Atlas mountains, which are often snow-capped during the winter months.^{14, 15}

On the Atlantic coast, average temperatures range from 18° to 28°C (64° to 82°F) in the summer and 8° to 17°C (46° to 63°F) in the winter.¹⁶ Occasionally, summer winds that blow in over the mountains from the Sahara can push the temperature as high as 41°C (106°F), but the prevailing Atlantic winds generally

bring a cooling breeze to the region. The Moroccan interior experiences greater temperature swings, with regional averages from 10° to 27°C (50° to 81°F) and daily highs of over 35°C (95°F) commonly occurring throughout the summer. In the winter, the interior, southern, and eastern regions can be quite cold, with temperatures decreasing to well below freezing.^{17, 18}



The Toubkal Mountain peak in southwestern Morocco
Wikimedia / Kobersky

Major Cities

Casablanca

Located on the upper Atlantic coast of western Morocco, Casablanca is the country's most populous city as well as its economic, industrial, shipping, and services center.^{19, 20} The city is home to one of the world's largest artificial ports, which directs most of the country's foreign trade.²¹ The medina, or historic center, is inland from the harbor and surrounded by the modern city, which was initially constructed by the French during their occupation. Outside the modern commercial and residential areas lie expanses of shantytowns, or *bidonvilles* ("tin can cities"), where many poor residents live in poorly constructed shelters.²²



Aerial view of the Port of Casablanca in Morocco
Wikimedia / Brio-En

The Portuguese rebuilt the city in the 16th century on the site of the medieval town of Anfa, and named it Casa Branca, or "White House." In 1755, the Portuguese abandoned the town after it was largely destroyed by an earthquake.^{23, 24} The Arab Alaouite Dynasty subsequently rebuilt the city, and it soon experienced another influx of European traders and settlers. Spaniards who moved to the city named it Casablanca. After Morocco became a French protectorate, the city developed into a major port and commercial center, leading to its rapid expansion in the 20th century.^{25, 26}

Today, Casablanca is a large-scale, modern metropolis, home to more than 3.6 million people.²⁷ Over 50% of Morocco's industrial activity and financial transactions take place within the city.²⁸ Major local products include textiles, canned food, and electronics. Fishing and fish canning are among the city's biggest industries. The tourism sector is not as strong as in other areas of the country. The massive Hassan II Mosque, the city's most prominent landmark, is one of the largest mosques in the world. Up to 25,000 worshippers can pray on a glass floor built over the Atlantic Ocean. The Hassan II Mosque is one of the few mosques in Morocco that is open to people of all faiths.^{29, 30, 31}

Rabat



Rabat's Muhammad V Avenue in Morocco
Flickr / Christopher Rose

North of Casablanca, on Morocco's upper western coast, lies the capital city Rabat. With a population of nearly 1.8 million, it is the country's second-largest metropolis.³² This imperial town was established on the mouth of the Bou Regreg River in the 12th century by the burgeoning Almohad Dynasty, which used it as a base for its military excursions into Spain. ("Rabat" derives from *ribat*, Arabic for a fortified monastery.) Subsequent rulers constructed the city's fortified wall and began building an immense mosque, which was never completed. Today, the Tower of Hassan, the mosque's immense unfinished minaret, is the city's most renowned landmark. In the 17th century, Rabat grew

rich as it provided refuge to hordes of infamous Barbary pirates. Later, during French rule, Rabat served as the government's administrative headquarters and maintained this role after Morocco regained its independence.³³

Rabat no longer functions as a significant port town because of the heavy silt deposits in the river, but it has developed significant textile and handicraft industries. Foreign embassies, international organizations, and government offices appear throughout the city.³⁴

Fès

As the religious center of Morocco, the medieval city of Fès is rich in culture, history, and spiritual character. The city, with a population of 1.1 million, is in the northern inland region, on the Fès River, near its confluence with the Sebou River. It was founded in the late eighth century CE by Idris I (a descendant of the Prophet Muhammad) and further developed by his son, Idris II, who established it as an imperial capital. Fès soon became home to Arab refugees from the Iberian Peninsula and Tunisia, who added character to an area already marked by Islamic and Amazigh influences. The Almoravids consolidated the city in the 11th century, but Fès reached its zenith in the 14th century as the imperial capital and intellectual center of the Merinid Dynasty.^{35, 36, 37}



Aerial view of Fès in Morocco
Flickr / Anna & Michal

Within the city's central historic medina are the famous Qarawiyyin Mosque, the oldest in North Africa, and its university. Founded in the ninth century, it is one of the world's oldest continuously operating, degree-granting educational institutions. Its presence ensured the city's role as a major scholarly

center of North Africa and the greater Muslim world, particularly during the medieval period. Other city districts include New Fès, the area built by the Merinids; the Mellah, the former Jewish district; and the French-constructed Nouvelle Ville, the modern area of the city. Today, the city is known for traditional handicrafts, including the iconic Fès hat. Tourism and regional agriculture are also significant economic activities in the area.^{38, 39}

Marrakech



Busy courtyard in Marrakech, Morocco
Wikimedia / Lviatour

Marrakech is in central Morocco on the Haouz Plain, north of the High Atlas Mountains. The city was founded in the 11th century by the Almoravids and was an imperial capital and military base intermittently throughout its history. Today, Marrakech is home to over 976,000 people. Its medina is known as the “red city” or “rose city” (from the red clay used for much of the construction), and it contains a large and bustling marketplace, the Jamaa al-Fna square.

Marrakech is one of Morocco’s most popular tourist destinations. Because of its southern location and proximity to the Amazigh-populated Atlas Mountains, it has maintained a marked Amazigh influence. In addition to tourism, Marrakech operates as a commercial hub for the southern regions of the country and the nearby Sahara.^{40, 41, 42, 43, 44}

Tangier

Strategically located on a bay along the Strait of Gibraltar in northern Morocco, Tangier has long been contested for trade and territory. Phoenician traders established a port there in the first millennium BCE, and in the following centuries, the region came under the rule of the Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, Byzantines, and Visigoths. The Arabs occupied the city after their conquest of the region in the seventh century CE, but the Almoravids later reclaimed the city for the Amazigh by seizing it from Muslim Spain. Beginning in the 15th century, the Portuguese, Spanish, and English controlled Tangier for different periods. Although Morocco reclaimed the territory in the 17th century, numerous Western powers (including the United States) seized or negotiated administrative and commercial rights to the area during the period of the French



Urban buildings in Tangier, Morocco
Wikimedia / cat_collector

protectorate and the two World Wars. After the country's independence in 1956, Tangier returned to Moroccan control.^{45, 46}

Today, Tangier continues to function as a shipping hub and has evolved into a significant tourist destination.⁴⁷ Tangier was once reputed to be a decaying port town marred by espionage and criminal activity, but government initiatives since the turn of the millennium have increased economic and structural development. Approximately 1.1 million people live in Tangier.^{48, 49, 50}

History

Early History



Ruins of Volubilis in Morocco
Wikimedia / Subhros

Archeological evidence demonstrates the existence of agricultural settlements dating back several thousand years along Morocco's coast. In the late second millennium BCE, the Amazigh people first migrated into the region; their origin is not known. In the coming centuries, Morocco's strategic location along the Mediterranean ensured the influx of outsiders.⁵¹ The Phoenicians, who would later found the city of Carthage in modern Tunisia, established several trading centers on Moroccan shores in the first millennium BCE.^{52, 53, 54} As Carthage grew to a regional power, numerous large but unorganized Amazigh kingdoms developed.⁵⁵

In 146 BCE, Rome conquered Carthage. Over the next century, Rome expanded its empire to include the productive areas of the Moroccan region, then known as the Mauretania Tingitana province. To gain control over the area, Rome did not use military force but instead formed coalitions with the Amazigh tribes. In the early centuries of the first millennium CE, Christianity and Judaism spread in Morocco's Roman-populated areas. Later, as Roman control over the area waned, Morocco's coastal areas were invaded and ruled by successive powers, including the Vandals, Byzantines, and Visigoths. In the seventh century CE, Arabs invaded and conquered the region, and over time, they established Islam as the dominant religion.^{56, 57, 58}

Arab and Amazigh Dynasties

At this time, Morocco became a province of the expansive Umayyad Dynasty, a Muslim empire based in Damascus that reached throughout Northern Africa and Spain. Shortly after the conquest, some Imazighen joined the Arabs in their invasion of Spain in 711. However, in the centuries that followed, a sustained Amazigh revolt against Arab rule eventually resulted in the establishment of a series of

powerful Amazigh dynasties. These dynasties included Muslim Spain, as well as the Almoravids, whose empire in the 11th century encompassed much of the Maghreb region of northwestern Africa. Subsequent Amazigh dynasties, whose domains varied in scope, included the Almohads (1130–1269) and the Merinids (1248–1465). In the 17th century, the Alaouites—Arabs who claimed to be descendants of the Prophet Muhammad—seized power. Their reign continues to this day, despite periods of weakened rule.^{59, 60, 61, 62}



Architecture in Rabat, Morocco
Wikimedia / Rotatobot

The Rise of European Powers in Morocco



Portrait of General Hubert Lyautey
Wikimedia / Eugène Pirou

After a period of relative isolation from Europe, Morocco drew the attention of European countries in the 19th century. France's invasion of Algeria ultimately led to a few skirmishes with neighboring Morocco. Later territorial disputes with Spain further embroiled Morocco in military confrontation; eventually, Spain won territorial and monetary concessions. In the early 20th century, European designs for Morocco resulted in France gaining protectorate status over most of the country, with Spain acquiring control of certain northern and southern areas, including Spanish Sahara. Morocco officially retained its independence but was occupied and controlled by French and Spanish forces. Infighting and an inferior military prevented Morocco from repelling the colonial powers, although Amazigh tribes in the Rif Mountains sustained an active armed resistance for several years.^{63, 64, 65}

Independence

Morocco's independence movement arose from nationalist agitation in the 1920s and 1930s. Formed in 1934, the Moroccan Action Committee called for moderate reforms but was suppressed by the French occupation. During World War II, the Independence Party reasserted the nationalists' demands for autonomy. Among the party's supporters was Sultan Muhammad V, an Alaouite Dynasty member; he was exiled by the French in 1953. After two years of violent civil unrest, the French allowed Muhammad V to return, and he subsequently negotiated Morocco's full independence. In 1956, France and Spain signed respective agreements formally recognizing Morocco's status as a sovereign nation.⁶⁶

Western Sahara



Celebration of Saharawi Republic in Western Sahara
Flick / jaysen naidoo

In the 1970s, the status of the Spanish Sahara region became an international issue. Spain relinquished its control to Morocco and Mauritania. In 1976, a United Nations referendum backed by the International Court of Justice advocated regional autonomy for the indigenous Saharan population, as represented by the Polisario Front. Aided by Algeria, the Polisario Front formed the Saharan Arab Democratic Republic (SADR) and soon engaged in sustained battles with Moroccan and Mauritanian forces. After military losses compelled Mauritania to relinquish control of its area to the Polisario Front, Morocco seized the entire region and constructed a massive sand berm

around 75% of the territory. A UN-administered ceasefire between the two factions was established in 1991. Morocco continues to administer most of the region.⁶⁷

The territorial dispute between Morocco and the Polisario Front manifested in a series of talks held between 2007 and 2012. Morocco proposed that Western Sahara become an autonomous region of the Moroccan state, whereas the Polisario Front called for a referendum with the option for indigenous Sahrawis to vote for their independence. The talks concluded with each side rejecting the other's positions.^{68, 69, 70}

Migrants

Since the early 2000s, Morocco has struggled to deal with African migrants entering its territory in hopes of reaching Europe. Attempts by hundreds of migrants to storm the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Ceuta on Morocco's Mediterranean coast were met by raids on migrant camps. In 2018, the Moroccan government came under criticism when, in coordination with European countries, it carried out a large scale crackdown on sub-Saharan migrants, consisting of arbitrary arrests, banishments, and deportations.^{71, 72}

Government

Morocco is a constitutional monarchy headed by King Mohammed VI. Under the constitution approved in July 2011, the king holds exclusive power in the areas of religion, security, and strategic policy choices. He also appoints the president of the government from the party that received the most votes. The president of the government presides over the cabinet, or Council of Ministers—which is approved by the king—except in cases of national security, which are presided over by the king. The bicameral parliament comprises two houses: the Chamber of Ministers and the Chamber of Representatives. The Chamber of Ministers consists of 270 members elected for nine-year terms. The directly elected Chamber of Representatives has 325 members (30 seats are reserved for women) who serve five-year terms. The parliament can pass laws on most issues.^{73, 74, 75}



Tribunal de Première Instance in Casablanca
 Flickr / Magalie L'Abbé

The constitution also provides for a separate judiciary.⁷⁶ The country has a dual judiciary system, consisting of secular and religious courts. The secular courts are charged with handling nonfamily matters and criminal issues. The Sadad, or religious courts, are divided into Sharia courts, for Muslims, and rabbinical courts, for Jewish citizens. These courts are designed to handle family issues, including marriage, divorce, custody, and inheritance.^{77, 78}

Media

The government of Morocco owns or partially owns numerous media outlets, including Radio-Télévision Marocaine, 2M, *al-Anbaa* (a daily newspaper), and *Le Matin du Sahara et du Maghreb* (another daily paper). The remaining media outlets are privately owned. Satellite television and foreign papers can also be found throughout the country.^{79, 80}

The constitution guarantees the right to freedom of expression. Neither the king nor anyone else has the right to abolish free speech, even in the case of national security. But the government has increased its censorship efforts since 2003. Journalists who write against government positions about the monarchy, Islam, or Western Sahara are subject to prosecution for defamation or libel. Such journalists may be jailed or fined, as may their publishers. These restrictions may be based on the press code, which allows regulation and censorship of the press. Observers fear that media freedoms are eroding as the monarchy tightens restrictions.^{81, 82, 83, 84}



A typical newsstand in Morocco
 Flickr / Pranav Bhatt

Economy



Moroccan fishermen working at a port
Flickr / Alain Bachellier

(GDP), the value of goods and services produced in the country within a given period. Morocco has abundant fish stocks and is the world's leading exporter of sardines as well as a major source of canned seafood.^{87, 88}

The industrial sector accounts for nearly 30% of GDP and employs 20% of the labor force. Morocco has the world's largest supply of phosphates and depends on its export for revenue. The country also relies on its developing textile and clothing industry, electronics and automobile assembly plants, food processing, and handicrafts sector.^{89, 90}

The service sector accounts for over 40% of employment and 56% of GDP.⁹¹ Tourism is a particularly important source of economic growth and development and the country's largest source of foreign exchange. Government aid to promote the sector's growth and improve infrastructure has been a major part of successful and ongoing efforts to attract and support increased numbers of tourists. Morocco's coastal resorts, historic cities (such as Fès), and proximity to Europe account for its rising popularity as a tourist destination.^{92, 93}

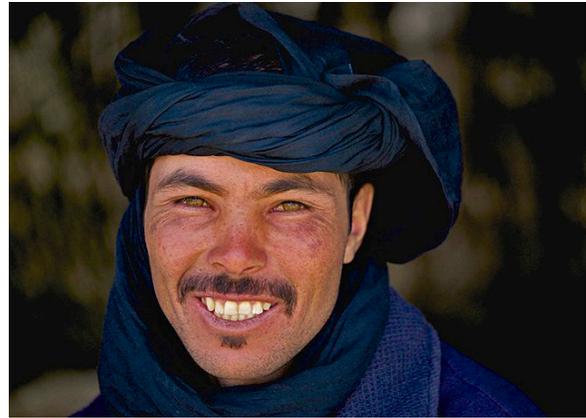


Basilica ruins in Volubilis, Morocco
Wikimedia Commons

Ethnic Groups and Languages

Imazighen

Imazighen, also known as Berbers, are indigenous tribes whose ancestors settled in the region in the late second millennium BCE. The Amazigh population is not homogenous. Several subgroups of Imazighen have historically possessed unique languages and occupied distinct regions of North Africa.⁹⁴ Three Amazigh languages, collectively known as Tamazight, are common in Morocco. Tashelhit is spoken in the Sous Valley, the southwestern region, and the Anti-Atlas and western High Atlas mountains; Central Atlas Tamazight is prevalent in the Middle Atlas and High Atlas mountains, and Tarafit is spoken in the Rif Mountains of the north.⁹⁵



Portrait of an Amazigh man
Flickr / Jamie McCaffrey



Amazigh man and three camels are led across the sands of the Sahara

Flickr / Sergey Pesterev

After the Arab invasion in the seventh century CE, most Imazighen converted to Islam, and in the following centuries, Arab and Amazigh peoples intermarried. Recent analyses of Tamazight-speaking and Arabic-speaking populations demonstrated few genetic differences between the two groups.⁹⁶ But 40–60% of the Moroccan population identifies or is described as Amazigh, based largely on linguistic and cultural differences.^{97, 98, 99}

The majority of Imazighen are sedentary farmers raising cereal grains, fruits, vegetables, and occasionally cattle and sheep. The isolation of Amazigh communities, coupled with freezing temperatures and drought, has made them a self-contained society. Even the handicrafts, such as weavings and pottery, reflect the practical needs of the community.¹⁰⁰

Amazigh communities comprise several clans living close to their ancestral lands. Family ties take precedence over all other relations, with the result that control is administered less by the government than by the community. Amazigh political systems are highly localized.¹⁰¹

Arabs



Moroccan Arabs gathering in the shade of a building
Flickr / Simon Q

Moroccan Arabs live both in the cities and rural areas. Rural Arabs are concentrated in the northern and western portions of the country along the coasts, where class divisions are pronounced.¹⁰² They commonly speak Moroccan Arabic, or Darija, a colloquial version of standard Arabic. The Darija vocabulary comes from Arabic, Tamazight, and a mix of European languages.^{103, 104}

Arabs dominate Moroccan society, controlling most of the nation's wealth and constituting much of the upper class, though not all Arabs are members of the upper class. The Alaouites, self-proclaimed descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, are the wealthiest and most powerful Arab group.¹⁰⁵

Sahrawi

In 1976, Morocco annexed two-thirds of Western Sahara, and in 1979, claimed the remaining third. The Sahrawi people responded by mounting a resistance movement and guerrilla war that ended in 1991. To date, sovereignty has not been resolved, and demands for a referendum on independence are ongoing and supported by Algeria.¹⁰⁶

The nomadic peoples in Western Sahara trace their origins to the Imazighen. Intermarriage among the migrating Arabs and the Imazighen created a new culture referred to by Europeans as the Moorish culture. Today it is referred to as the Sahrawi, or "people of the Sahara." Once nomadic, this group has become more sedentary because of the dangers posed by the armed conflict across the territory.¹⁰⁷



Sahrawi women pose for a photo
Flickr / Western Sahara

A caste system remains largely intact among the Sahrawi. The highest caste members are the descendants of scholars of Islam or soldiers. The second caste comprises mainly craftsmen and artisans. The lowest class was traditionally black slaves; although slavery has been outlawed, darker-skinned Sahrawi face discrimination. Despite their well-defined caste system, the Sahrawi are the most gender-equal of all groups in the country. Resisting attempts by Arabs to acculturate them, the Sahrawi have successfully preserved many elements of their culture.¹⁰⁸

well-defined caste system, the Sahrawi are the most gender-equal of all groups in the country. Resisting attempts by Arabs to acculturate them, the Sahrawi have successfully preserved many elements of their culture.¹¹²

Jews

There has been a Jewish presence in Morocco for around 2,000 years. In the first half of the 20th century, Morocco’s Jewish community numbered nearly 300,000, but many have left due to poverty and political uncertainty. Today, most of the 4,000 remaining Jews live in the cities of Rabat, Casablanca, and Tangier.¹¹³ The Moroccan constitution recognizes the “Hebraic” contribution to the country’s heritage. Moroccan Jews have distinct courts, family laws, and schools. King Mohammed VI has sponsored the restoration of synagogues, Jewish cemeteries, and other heritage sites. In 2019, the Jewish community held elections for internal representatives for the first time since 1969.^{114, 115}



*A group gathers at a synagogue in Morocco
Flickr / Christopher Rose*

Cultural Orientation | Moroccan

Endnotes for Chapter 1: Profile

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Cultural Orientation

Chapter 1 | Assessment

1. Moroccan Arabs control most of the nation's wealth.
2. Located at the center of Casablanca, Darija is one of the most popular tourist destinations in Morocco.
3. Most of Morocco's rivers flow northward and empty into the Mediterranean Sea.
4. Morocco shares land boundaries with Spain.
5. Morocco is a constitutional monarchy.

Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. False; 3. False; 4. True; 5. True



The Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca
Flickr / jon collier

Chapter 2 | Moroccan Cultural Orientation

Religion

Overview

Morocco's population is 99% Muslim; the remaining 1% comprises small numbers of Jews, Christians, and Baha'i. The vast majority of the country's Muslim population practices the Sunni form of Islam, which is the largest sect of the Islamic faith.^{1,2} In Morocco, Islam is the religion of the state and guides every aspect of life, from social values to the legal code.^{3,4}

Major Religions

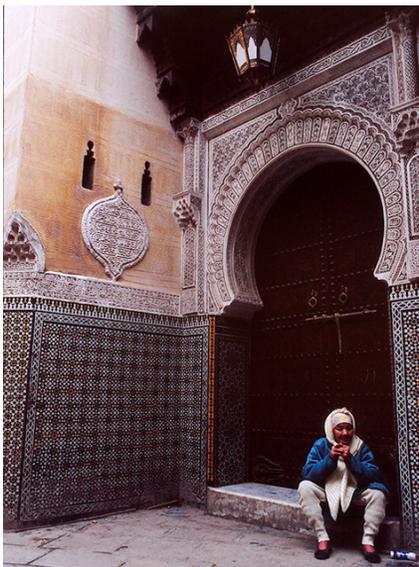
Islam

Muslims believe that the faith has been revealed over time by a series of prophets—including Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses, and Jesus—culminating with the Prophet Muhammad (570–632 CE). For Muslims, Muhammad’s message is the final and definitive revelation of the faith. The literal meanings of the Arabic term “*islam*” are “submission” or “surrender.” A Muslim, therefore, is one who submits to the will of God (Allah), the sole creator of the universe. God’s message is recited in the Quran, the holy book of Islam. Another form of Islamic teaching is the Hadith, a collection of the sayings of the Prophet and his companions. The religious practice of Islam is based on the profession of faith, the *shahada*, “There is no god but Allah, and Muhammad is the messenger of Allah,” which is the first of the Five Pillars of Islam. The rest include praying five times a day, paying alms tax to benefit the poor (*zakāt*), fasting during the holy month of Ramadan, and making a pilgrimage to the holy city of Mecca (*hajj*).^{5, 6, 7}



The interior of the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca
Flickr / Daniele Zanni

Moroccan Islam



A woman outside a mosque in Fès
Flickr / Keith Putnam

After the 2003 bombing in Casablanca, concern about the rise of jihadist ideology and the spread of Hanbali Wahhabism in Morocco and throughout Africa drove the government to pursue a more moderate and balanced form of Islam called “the middle path” (*al wasatiyya*). Government officials advocate a distinct Moroccan Islam—besides affirming that there is only one Islam—based on three principles: the Maliki school of law (*maddhab*), Ashari theology (*kalâm*), and Sunni Sufism (*tassawūf*).⁸ In rural areas, Islamic traditions are merged with ancient local practices. Conservative Muslims might view these practices as unorthodox but not heretical.^{9, 10, 11}

The direct relationship between man and God is so ingrained in Moroccan culture that it is now an accepted part of the faith, despite the Quran’s denial of this relationship. Two features that are particular to Morocco developed, in part, from the cultural intermixing of Arab and Amazigh peoples.¹² In Morocco, man’s

relationship with God is mediated by the *marabout* and the *baraka*. The marabout is a prominent and highly revered religious figure, thought to possess considerable spiritual grace and power, known as baraka. For Moroccan Muslims, baraka is a transferable force that originates with God and can be passed on to others, most notably to the marabout's firstborn son. Marabouts are more common in Morocco's rural areas, where they often hold leadership roles in the local community.¹³

Sufism, a form of mystical Islam, also has a strong historical tradition in Morocco. The basic objective of Sufi practitioners is to obtain a direct and personal experience of the divine through various mystical and ascetic paths. Historically, many Sufi mystics have become marabouts or saints because they possessed considerable baraka.¹⁴

Judaism and Christianity



The Saint-Pierre Cathedral in Rabat
Wikimedia / Nawalbennani

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are considered “Abrahamic” religions because each has roots in Abraham's covenant with God (as outlined in the Hebrew Scriptures). Judaism is the oldest of the three faiths, which share the belief in a single and all-powerful Creator God. Early Christianity arose from Judaism. In addition to adopting the Hebrew Scriptures, known to Christians as the Old Testament, Christianity developed practices and beliefs based on the teachings of Jesus and his disciples and represented in the New Testament.¹⁵

Christians and Jews held the status of Ahl al-Kitab, or “People of the Book,” during the expansion of the Arab Muslim caliphates. As a result, Jews and Christians generally could maintain their religious freedom within the larger Islamic community, although they were required to pay a special tax to do so.^{16, 17}

Role of Religion in Government

The legitimacy of Morocco's monarchy stems from the claim that the king is a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad.¹⁸ The constitution guarantees religious freedom for all faiths, but Sunni Islam is the official state religion of Morocco.¹⁹ Sunni Islam and Judaism are the only religions recognized in the constitution as native to the country; other faiths are viewed as foreign. The government monitors religious activities within the kingdom, including overseeing Muslim mosques and Islamic groups to prevent them from becoming a political rather than religious force. It is illegal to proselytize and to attempt to convert Muslims to a different faith. Materials that are non-Islamic or do not conform to the monarchy's form of Islam cannot be distributed. The government offers financial support to sustain the teaching of Islam and Judaism in public schools.²⁰

Islamic law, or Sharia, as defined in the Quran, plays a significant role in Morocco's legal code, particularly in personal and familial issues such as marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Muslim religious judges, or *qadis*, in special courts founded on Sharia, rule on personal matters for Morocco's Muslims. Cases concerning the personal status of Morocco's Jewish citizens are administered in a court system overseen by Rabbinical judges.^{21, 22} All other legal matters fall under the authority of the secular civil courts, in which the legal code is based on French and Spanish civil law.²³



The Royal Palace in Rabat
Flickr / Lukas Vermeer

Christians make up a little under 1% of Morocco's population. The Christian population includes about 30,000 Roman Catholics and 10,000 Protestants. There is a small contingent of Russian Orthodox Christian foreigners in Rabat and another of Greek Orthodox Christians in Casablanca.²⁴ During the French protectorate period, Christianity was seen as an instrument of colonialism. Many churches and cathedrals date from this period and are attended primarily by foreigners. While foreign Christians enjoy a measure of tolerance, Moroccan-born Christians face legal and social restrictions. They are forbidden from entering churches, possessing the Bible in Arabic, or having Christian wedding rites. Many are converts from Islam, a status viewed with hostility and extreme disapproval in Moroccan society. Moroccan Christian groups meet informally in domestic residences.^{25, 26, 27, 28}

Religion in Daily Life



A man prepares for prayer
Flickr / Alma Ayon

The duties of the Islamic faith shape the daily lives of Moroccan Muslims.^{29, 30} Muslims are obliged to perform five daily prayers, known as *salat*, the Second Pillar of Islam. These prayers are performed before dawn, just after noon, late afternoon, just after sunset, and before retiring in the evening.³¹ Prayer times are posted in the local newspaper.³² Friday is the Islamic holy day and the primary day of worship.³³

Religion influences daily life in other ways. Muslims do not eat pork, nor do they drink alcohol or gamble.^{34, 35, 36} Dress codes reflect Islamic values. Women may wear a scarf that covers their head

and neck (*hijab*), but wearing a face veil (*niqab*) is rare.³⁷ Muslims believe that Islam is passed to the children from the father, and for this reason, Muslim women may not marry a non-Muslim while Muslim men may do so, though this is relatively rare. Islam also prohibits legal adoption.^{38, 39}

Religious Conventions and Gender Roles



A Muslim woman with a baby
Flickr / Julie Kertesz

Islam profoundly affects gender roles. Males and females are segregated outside the home. Women remain in private spaces such as the home, while men are able to spend time outside the home.^{40, 41} Islamic law and tradition provide men with more rights and higher social status than women.^{42, 43} However, reforms in Moroccan law have made substantial gains in addressing gender inequality. In 2004, the Moroccan government, led by King Mohammed VI, instituted a new Moroccan family code, or Moudawana. The code provided numerous legal protections for women, including the minimum age for marriage (raised from 15 to 18), greater personal freedom within marriage, the legal right to initiate divorce, and greater restrictions on the practice of polygamy.^{44, 45, 46}

Gender roles are more rigid among the Arab population than the Muslim Amazigh. Men are primarily responsible for the economic well-being of the family and are regarded as the major authority figures. These roles are even more pronounced among the more fundamentalist Arabs. Upper-class Moroccans, especially urban dwellers, seem more willing to accommodate the increased role of women.⁴⁷

The workforce follows a fairly traditional division of labor. In rural areas, men tend to the livestock and work the fields while women care for the children and the home. Urban men generally work outside the home, and women commonly stay home and care for the household.⁴⁸ Since the implementation of the new family code in 2004, women have begun participating in politics and other domains. They also hold seats in parliament.⁴⁹

Religious Events

Ramadan

The observance of Ramadan, a month-long event commemorating the initial revelation of the Quran, is an essential component of the Islamic faith. During Ramadan, Muslims fulfill one of the pillars of Islam, the undertaking of a fast known as *sawm*.⁵⁰ Throughout the month, Muslims abstain from eating, smoking, drinking, or having sex during daylight hours.⁵¹ Elders, travelers, those who are ill, and people who are pregnant, nursing, or menstruating can be exempt from the fast.⁵² Non-Muslims, including visitors and tourists, are also not required to fast, but it is against the law for them to eat, drink, smoke, or chew gum in public.^{53, 54, 55}



Ramadan celebrations at a mosque in Fès
Flickr / Paolo Gamba

At sunset each evening, the fast ends with family and friends celebrating with a meal (*iftar*); this celebration usually extends until late in the evening. The pace of everyday life slows considerably during the holy month. Muslims generally work shorter hours and often suffer the effects of fasting (such as fatigue). Accordingly, businesses and shops maintain limited, irregular hours.^{56, 57}

Moussems

More common in rural areas than in urban centers, *moussems* are local ceremonies or festivals held in honor of deceased marabouts. Moroccans (and even tourists) make pilgrimages to the tombs of these holy men, and the crowds celebrate with many festivities, including dancing, music, and feasts. The size of each ceremony depends upon the renown of the marabout; festivals held for famous marabouts may draw considerable numbers.⁵⁸



Horse demonstration at the annual Tan-Tan Moussems fair
Flickr / Fr Maxim Massalitin

Religious Holidays

Officially, two Islamic celebrations are specifically cited in the Quran: Eid al-Fitr, a festival held on the last night of Ramadan, and Eid al-Adha, a feast marking the end of the pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca. These celebrations are recognized by all Muslims. For orthodox Muslims, additional celebrations are considered extraneous and imperfect because they do not match the revelations of Muhammad.⁵⁹ Nonetheless, several Muslim holidays are observed in Morocco. Because the Islamic calendar is based on the lunar cycle, the dates of these holidays change each year.⁶⁰

Eid al-Fitr



Sheep burning during Eid al-Fitr in Marrakech
Flickr / Charlie Marchant

The end of Ramadan is celebrated with a feast and extended festival called Eid al-Fitr, which lasts three days and signifies the return to normal habits. At this time, Muslims wear new clothes, visit mosques, and share traditional meals and gifts with family and friends.^{61, 62}

Eid al-Adha

Eid al-Adha, or the Feast of the Sacrifice, commemorates Abraham's offer to sacrifice his son in obedience to God. Eid al-Adha occurs in the 12th month of the Islamic lunar year, the same month in which Muslims make a holy pilgrimage (hajj) to Mecca. During this feast, Muslims sacrifice lambs or sheep and share with their families and the poor.^{63, 64, 65}

Al-Hijra (Muharram)

Al-Hijra is the Islamic New Year. The holiday falls on the first day of Muharram, the first month of the Islamic lunar calendar. This holiday lacks the deep religious significance of the Eid al-Fitr and Eid al-Adha festivals but serves as a day for Muslims to quietly commemorate Muhammad's migration from Mecca to Medina.^{66, 67}

Mawlid al-Nabi

Celebrated in the third month of the Islamic calendar, this festival commemorates the birth of the Prophet Muhammad.^{68, 69} The celebrations last two days in Morocco.⁷⁰

Ashora



A mosque near the High Atlas Mountains in Morocco
Flickr / Ian Morton

This Shia holiday, though not a work holiday, observes the assassination of Husayn ibn Ali, Muhammad's grandson and the son of Ali. His death was an important factor in Islam's division into Sunni and Shia factions. Ashura was originally a day of mourning, but Moroccans have come to celebrate it as a feast. Families enjoy special dishes of couscous and gather around bonfires. Children go door-to-door to receive gifts of money and sweets.^{71, 72, 73}



A gathering at Café Tissardmine during Eid al-Adhan
Flickr / Eleanor Whitworth

Buildings of Worship

Mosques



The Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca
Flickr / Gerrigje Engelen

the Koutoubia Mosque is one of the most prominent landmarks in the city.⁷⁷

Mosques serve not only as gathering places for worship but also as centers for education, knowledge, and conflict resolution.⁷⁴ Among the most notable is the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca, one of the largest mosques in the world. The mosque's minaret is among the tallest in the world, standing at 210 m (689 ft). The construction of the mosque began in 1986 and was supposed to be completed on King Hassan II's 60th birthday in 1989 (it was completed in 1993). Up to 25,000 worshippers can pray on a glass floor built over the Atlantic Ocean.^{75, 76} The historic Karaouine Mosque in Fès accommodates 20,000 worshippers and was built in 859 CE. In Marrakech,

Mosques consist of an open interior, enclosed by a roof, with a *mihrab* and *minbar* inside the central prayer area; often, a minaret is attached to the exterior. A *mihrab* is a niche in the wall of the mosque that faces the direction of Mecca, known as *qibla* (Islamic prayer is always directed toward the holy city). This is where the imam, or prayer leader, stands during services. According to tradition, the space in front of the *mihrab* must have a roof, and the *qibla* wall cannot have doors.⁷⁸ The *minbar* is an elevated seat to the right of the *mihrab* that acts as a pulpit for the Islamic priest, or *khatib*. The floor of the prayer area is covered with mats or carpets, where Muslims gather to pray. Minarets are towers from which the *muezzin*, or "crier," calls other Muslims to the five daily sessions of prayer. The number of minarets varies from one to six.⁷⁹ Mosques have a designated area for performing the ritual ablution (*wudhu*), which consists of washing the hands, arms, face, and feet before prayer.^{80, 81}

Murabitin

Murabitin are small, dome-shaped temples built to enshrine the bodies of deceased marabouts, whose remains are believed to retain and emit baraka. These structures are surrounded by small courtyards and are found in rural Morocco. Many Moroccans undertake pilgrimages to these holy sites in order to earn religious blessings and participate in local festivals.^{82, 83, 84} Over time, some saints' tombs become centers of learning and mysticism called *zawiya*, from where the saints' teachings are propagated.⁸⁵



A mausoleum in Morocco
Flickr / Heribert Bechen ... thanks for 3.5 mio. Visits

Behavior in Places of Worship

In Morocco, non-Muslims are generally not allowed to enter mosques.⁸⁶ One exception is the Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca, which offers guided tours to non-Muslims.^{87, 88}

When going out in public, one should dress conservatively, particularly when visiting a mosque. Men should wear pants and long-sleeved shirts. Women should also wear long-sleeved shirts with pants or long skirts. In both cases, arms and legs should be covered, and clothing should not be tight or revealing. Finally, and of utmost importance, shoes must be removed before entering a mosque.⁸⁹

Islamic tradition requires women to cover their heads (preferably with a scarf) before entering a mosque; men are not required to do so.^{90, 91}



*Interior hallway of the Tinmel mosque
Wikimedia / Acoiller*

May I enter the mosque?

Soldier:	wash yemken leeya nidKhul Iijaame'?	May I enter the mosque?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 1

Must I take off my shoes?

Soldier:	wash KhaSni nHayed SubaaTi fejaame'?	Must I take off my shoes inside the mosque?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 2

Do I need to cover my head?

Soldier:	wash KhaSni nghaTi RaaSi?	Do I need to cover my head?
Local:	laa	No.

Exchange 3



Entranceway to mosque in Fes
Flickr / Michael Gabelmann

It is not acceptable to enter the mosque when others are conducting prayers. Once inside, the basic rules of etiquette for attending most religious or sacred institutions apply: Speak softly and respectfully and do not disturb those at prayer.⁹² Women are not allowed in the mosque during their menstrual period; their presence during this time is considered impure.^{93, 94}

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Cultural Orientation

Chapter 2 | Assessment

1. Muslim women cannot initiate divorce in Morocco.
2. Judaism is one of Morocco's official state religions.
3. Non-Muslims can enter mosques in Morocco as long as they remember to take their shoes off at the entrance and wear modest clothing.
4. One of the Five Pillars of Islam is jihad, the fight against the enemies of Islam.
5. Murabitin are burial sites of saints and marabouts. Moroccans make pilgrimages to these shrines to receive religious blessings.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. False; 4. False; 5. True



Pots for dyeing fabrics on the streets of Morocco
Flickr / SToto98

Chapter 3 | Moroccan Cultural Orientation

Traditions

Honor and Shame

The preservation of an individual's honor and dignity, as well as that of one's family, is one of the most important traditional values in Morocco. Moroccans take great care to maintain a positive social standing and reputation since much of their self-worth depends on the perceptions of others. Shame, or *hishma*, occurs when a person's inappropriate behavior is recognized by the community. Such behavior may include disobedience to Islamic law, deviation from social norms, or some failure or act of delinquency. A person who is shamed may be ostracized by the community and their family; for Moroccans, this is devastating. The person's family may suffer shame through association.¹

To minimize the risk of shaming a Moroccan, visitors should avoid criticizing or embarrassing others in public.² In public settings, Moroccans often check or alter their behavior and statements to create esteem or save face. Yet their actions or feelings in private may be quite different. For this reason, it may be advisable to confirm in private any comments or commitments made in public.³



*A snake charmer in Morocco
Flickr / Fred Dunn*

Codes of Politeness

Greetings

When meeting people of the same gender as you in public, it is customary to greet each person individually by shaking hands and then touching one's heart (with the right hand) to demonstrate warmth and sincerity.⁴

Good afternoon.		
Soldier:	msa IKheyR	Good afternoon.
Local:	msa IKheyR	Good afternoon.

Exchange 4

Moroccan handshakes are lighter than the traditional firm handshake of Americans, but they may last longer. Handshaking is not done between persons of the opposite gender, especially if they are unacquainted. If a Moroccan woman extends her hand first, it is polite to follow her lead. But a small bow is more common for the unacquainted.⁵



*Business men greet each other
Flickr / icpcnews icpcnews*

Veiled women, in particular, are likely to avoid physical contact.^{6, 7} In any case, it is important to maintain a certain distance from persons of the opposite gender in public; affectionate displays are considered inappropriate.⁸

Members of the same gender who know one another greet with hugs and a series of kisses on each cheek left cheek first. Well-acquainted members of the opposite gender may shake hands and exchange kisses, but hugs between male and female are reserved for family members.⁹

How are you?		
Soldier:	keedaayeR?	How are you?
Local:	beKheyR IHamdulaah	Fine, very well.

Exchange 5

Good evening!		
Soldier:	msa lKheyR!	Good evening!
Local:	msa lKheyR!	Good evening!

Exchange 6

Moroccans commonly use titles in formal situations and in addressing acquaintances. Friends use first names. Respect may dictate that elders are addressed by a title. Sometimes family titles such as “sister” or “uncle” are used when greeting strangers.^{10, 11}

Moroccan greetings can be long. It is polite to make inquiries about friends, work, family, and other common topics. But men should never ask about another man’s wife or other female relatives.¹²

Hospitality and Gift-Giving

Moroccans are known as kind and generous hosts, and it is common for them to hold social engagements in their home. Such occasions happen around a large meal, with the hosts taking pride in satisfying the guests’ needs. When invited to a Moroccan home, it is necessary to confirm whether your spouse is included. When conservative Moroccans entertain both genders together, which is not frequent, men and women may be in separate rooms. At times, exceptions are made for foreign women, but it is best to ask.¹³ Also, it is important to dress appropriately for the occasion. As a guest, wearing the proper, conservative attire demonstrates respect for the host and the household.¹⁴



*An Amazigh man pours tea at his home in the Atlas Mountains
Flickr / Erik Olsson*

Upon entering the host’s home, it is customary to remove your shoes.¹⁵ It is considered extremely rude to show the soles of your shoes or the bottoms of your feet, especially when sitting on the floor.¹⁶

Although not mandatory in urban areas, it is generally acceptable for a guest to bring a small gift, such as fruit, pastries, nuts, or flowers. Gifts are usually anticipated in rural areas, particularly among family members.^{17, 18} Always present gifts with the right hand.¹⁹

In most cases, alcohol is not an appropriate gift because Muslims are prohibited from consuming it.²⁰ It is suitable to offer small, token gifts to the children of the household. Moroccans generally do not expect to receive presents from their guests and typically wait to open the gift when the giver is no longer present.^{21, 22}

Hello!		
Soldier:	see muHamed, esalaamu 'aleykum	Hi, Mr. Muhammad.
Local:	wa'aleykum salaam	Hello!
Soldier:	labaas 'leek?	Are you doing well?
Local:	IHamdul-laah	Yes.

Exchange 7

This gift is for you.		
Soldier:	bgheyt ne'Teek haad lkaaDu	This gift is for you.
Local:	bizaaf 'leeya haad lkaaDu, maaymkinsh naaKhdu min 'andek	I cannot accept this.

Exchange 8

Gender Roles and Interactions



The Amazigh woman and her baby in Morocco
Flickr / Hielke Gerritse Photography

Islamic tradition provides the foundation for gender roles and interaction. Men possess a higher social status and more rights than women.^{23, 24} Males are afforded more opportunities and have fewer restrictions than women.²⁵

Males are raised to be the authority and the family's representatives in public, whereas females learn the fundamental domestic duties. This association of men with the public sphere and women with the private sphere is fundamental to and pervasive in Moroccan society. Mosques, as public sites, are limited to male Muslims, with certain times and

spaces afforded to females. Other public spaces, such as cafés, are also dominated by males. Spaces reserved for women include women's public bathhouses and the flat rooftops of the home. On Friday afternoons, while Muslim men are at the mosque, women often meet in cemeteries. In Amazigh-populated rural regions, restrictions confining women to the home are sometimes less stringent. Recent reforms and modernization have provided women with greater freedom (particularly in urban areas), but segregation remains prevalent in conservative regions and households.^{26, 27, 28, 29}

Segregation restricts education, as fewer girls receive advanced education than boys. Nationwide, the literacy rate for women is 58%, compared to 78% for men; in rural areas, only 10% of women are literate.^{30, 31}

Gender segregation allows for stricter control over male-female interactions and protects a woman's virginity. Virginity safeguards a woman's value as a potential wife.^{32, 33, 34} There have been "honor killings" in Morocco in which male family members murdered female relatives who lost their virginity or committed other behaviors that were considered inappropriate.³⁵ Honor killings are subject to legal penalties, but Article 418 of the Moroccan penal code grants some extenuating circumstances to a man who injures or murders his wife.^{36, 37} The woman's death is intended to restore a sense of "honor" to the family. Premarital sex for males is fairly common.^{38, 39}

Foreign females are not expected to segregate themselves but may be harassed when in public alone. Such harassment is best ignored.⁴⁰

Dining Etiquette

At home, meals are served at round, knee-high tables, with guests seated next to the host. Before the food is served, guests wash their hands over a basin that is passed around the table. A towel is provided to dry one's hands. (This is repeated after the meal.) Napkins are not used for wiping hands during the meal but to keep the lap clean. Before eating, wait for a blessing to be given or for the host to begin eating.^{41, 42}

Meals are served in a large communal bowl, generally without utensils. Use a piece of bread or the thumb and two fingers to scoop up food from the bowl. It is imperative to use only the right hand when gathering food and eating, even if one is left-handed. It is considered rude to take food from the other side of the serving bowl. Eat only the food that is directly in front of you.^{43, 44, 45} Guests receive the choicest portions of the meal from the host, who moves these portions to the appropriate spot in the bowl. It is polite to express satisfaction with the meal.⁴⁶



Dinner time in Morocco
Flickr / travelwayoflife

The food tastes so good.		
Soldier:	tbaaRak laah 'leykum, lmaakla mu'tabaRa	The food tastes so good.
Local:	bi-SeHa	Thank you.

Exchange 9

Because Moroccan meals feature many courses, they are often long. Hosts frequently offer more food, which everyone is encouraged, though not required, to eat. It is important to pace one's eating. An abundance of food is considered a display of hospitality.⁴⁷

What is the name of this dish?		
Soldier:	shnu smeeyet haadi lmaakla?	What is the name of this dish?
Local:	haadal-lkesksoo	This is couscous.

Exchange 10

It is common for water to be served in a communal glass. Upon request, the host may provide soft drinks with individual glasses.⁴⁸ At the end of the meal, reiterate pleasure and satisfaction with the food, and thank the host for the hospitality.⁴⁹

I really appreciate your hospitality.		
Soldier:	tbaRk laah 'leykum, tihaleetu feeya	I really appreciate your hospitality.
Local:	beSeHa wRaaha maadeRna waalu	It is nothing.

Exchange 11

Cuisine and Eating Patterns

Famous for its many flavors, Morocco's cuisine displays Arab, Amazigh, Spanish, French, and Jewish influences.^{50, 51, 52} Fresh bread, lamb and chicken, vegetables, and grain dishes are staples. Fruits, notably dates and figs, and nuts are important ingredients.⁵³ Many dishes contain saffron, cumin, ginger, paprika, cinnamon, parsley, cilantro, and mint. Pork and alcohol are not generally served.^{54, 55}

Moroccans eat three meals a day. Breakfast typically consists of bread with olive oil or butter and a cup of coffee or mint tea.^{56, 57} Other breakfasts include *beyssara* (a stew made of fava beans with cumin and paprika), *beghrir* (pancakes), or lamb head and calf feet.⁵⁸



*Various foods found in a Moroccan meal
Flickr / Uwe Brodrecht*

Families usually eat lunch, the largest and most important meal of the day, together. Moroccans allow 2–4 hours for lunch, followed by a siesta. During this time, businesses and schools close, and relatives and friends convene for the meal. Typical fare includes a salad and a *tajine* dish, such as lamb with prunes.⁵⁹



A bowl of Moroccan soup called *Harira*
Flickr / Parisa

Couscous, made from coarse semolina wheat flour, is often served with a meat or vegetable topping.⁶⁰ This national dish carries strong emotional and religious overtones. Moroccans believe that those who eat it will receive God’s blessing.⁶¹

Supper is light. It may include *harira*, a thick soup generally made with tomatoes, onions, saffron, cilantro, and meat (often lamb). Leftovers from lunch are also common. Fruits and cakes are usual desserts. Water, soft drinks, coffee, and mint tea are the most common drinks.^{62, 63, 64, 65}

When dining at a restaurant, the person making the invitation normally pays for the meal. Tipping is not expected.⁶⁶

Bastilla is a famous Moroccan specialty consisting of multiple layers of thin pastry filled with pigeon or chicken and cooked with caramelized onions, eggs, and almonds. Topped with cinnamon and sugar, the dish is often served on special occasions.⁶⁷

This food is very good.		
Soldier:	haadi-lmaakla zweyna	This food is very good.
Local:	haadi lbesTeyla	It’s bastilla.

Exchange 12

What ingredients are used?		
Soldier:	shnaheeya ImakadeeR dyaal lbisTeyla?	What ingredients are used to make bastilla?
Local:	lbeyD, loz, ljaaj, lkaRfa, sukaR	Eggs, almonds, chicken, cinnamon, sugar.

Exchange 13

Dress Codes

Although Moroccan culture increasingly demonstrates modern, Western elements, particularly among young urbanites, most of the country retains traditional and conservative manners of dress, which are strongly tied to Islamic custom.^{68, 69} Western-style suits and women’s wear are common in cities and may be worn under the traditional *djellaba*.⁷⁰ Worn by both genders, this traditional garment is a long, loose-fitting robe with a pointed hood and a buttoned or zippered front.⁷¹ *Djellabas* extend to the ankles and have long sleeves. These garments range in fabric, quality, and decoration; tailored *djellabas* with elaborate needlework are more expensive and indicate greater wealth. Wearing the *djellaba* commonly

indicates that the person is likely conservative.⁷² Kaftans, hoodless robes that are similar to but often more elegant than *djellabas*, are also common, particularly at weddings and other social events.⁷³

In Morocco, personal appearance in public is an indication of a person's status and values, as well as those of the family. Visitors to Morocco should be attentive to their appearance at all times because it reflects not only upon them but upon their family and culture.⁷⁴



Men in traditional clothing
Flickr / Hielke Gerritse Photography

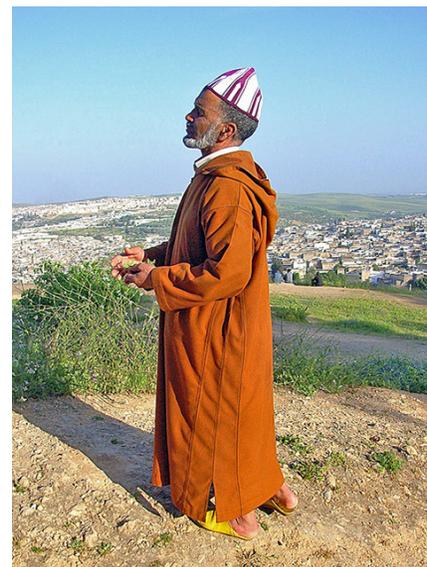
How should I dress		
Soldier:	shnu KhaSni lbes?	How should I dress?
Local:	lbes shee Hwaayej lee yghaTeewuk kulek wmaa ykunoosh mzayReen 'leyk	Wear loosely fitting clothes that cover your body.

Exchange 14

Headgear

Headgear is common throughout Morocco and indicates something about the person wearing it. For men, turbans are popular in rural areas, particularly with Imazighen. Imazighen can often be distinguished from Arabs by their white turbans. Arab turbans are frequently gold or orange. Knit stocking caps are worn predominantly by the poor, never by middle- or upper-class men. Crocheted skullcaps are a step above, and the fez is higher still. Crocheted skullcaps may be adorned with a sign indicating a religious brotherhood and are frequently worn to mosques. The fez, a felt headcover in the shape of a short cone with a tassel on the top, connotes wealth and respectability and is largely worn by older men. This headcover, also called *tarboosh* in Arabic, is fading out of use except as ceremonial headgear.^{75, 76}

In accord with Islamic tradition, most Moroccan women keep their heads covered in public, usually with a hijab, or headscarf, or the hood of their *djellaba*.⁷⁷ Wearing a headscarf is not a law



A man in traditional clothing and headgear
Flickr / Christine Vaufrey

in Morocco, but it often signifies that a woman may have more traditional Islamic views.^{78, 79} In rural areas, Amazigh women may often be seen without scarves or veils.⁸⁰

General Rules of Dress

It is highly recommended that visitors respect the country’s cultural norms when selecting their attire. In most areas of the country, a person’s legs and shoulders are considered private, so men and women should make every effort to cover them at all times. Men should cover everything from their elbows to below their knees, and women should cover everything from their wrists to their ankles. Accordingly, men should wear long-sleeve shirts and pants; women should wear long-sleeve shirts and pants, or long, loosely fitting dresses with long sleeves. Revealing clothing, such as shorts and swimsuits, should be worn only at the beach or a swimming pool. Both genders should avoid wearing vests, T-shirts, sandals, and any form of tight-fitting clothing in public.^{81, 82, 83}



*A man sits wearing traditional clothing
Flickr / Tarra Kongsrude*

Is this acceptable to wear?		
Soldier:	wash haadi IHwaayej munaasiba?	Is this acceptable to wear?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 15

Social Events

National Holidays

Moroccans observe public holidays according to the Western calendar; therefore, the annual dates of these celebrations remain the same. Morocco celebrates New Year’s Day (1 January) as well as a May Day (1 May).⁸⁴

Will you be celebrating New Year’s Eve?		
Soldier:	wash ghaadi teHtaafel bRaasel’aam?	Will you be celebrating New Year’s Eve?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 16

Many holidays commemorate significant events in the country's history. Held on 30 July, the Feast of the Throne, or Throne Day, commemorates the accession of King Mohammed VI to the Moroccan throne in 1999. The Anniversary of the Green March, a patriotic holiday observed on 6 November, commemorates the advance of Moroccans into the Western Sahara region after Spain relinquished control over the territory in 1975. Morocco's Independence Day (18 November) celebrates the nation's return to sovereignty in 1956, after years of French colonial control. Independence Manifesto, celebrated every 11 January, commemorates the country's previous declaration of independence from France in 1944.^{85, 86}



Moroccan men perform on New Year's Eve in Marrakech
Flickr / Andrew3000

Other public holidays include the Allegiance of Oued Eddahab (14 August), the Anniversary of the King's and People's Revolution (20 August), and Young People's Day (21 August), which recognizes the king's birthday. For all public holidays, the nation's banks, post offices, and many shops close in observance. These celebrations vary in importance to the Moroccan people but are less significant than Islamic holidays and events.^{87, 88}

Festivals and Celebrations



Performers at the Gnaoua World Music Festival
Flickr / Vince Millett

Many of Morocco's major celebrations are *moussems*, festivals held in honor of deceased marabouts. Some of the largest of these include the Moussems of Ben Aïssa, held in April in Meknès, and the Moussems of Sidi Bouselham, held in July in Moulay Bouselham. Medieval pageantry, circus-like performances, and dancing are some of the activities seen at these large-scale events. Other festivals of a more secular nature include the Festival of World Sacred Music, held in Fès in June; the Rose Festival, held each May in El Kelaâ M'Gouna; and the Date Festival, held each October in Erfoud.^{89, 90, 91, 92}

Dos and Don'ts

Do

- **Do** take your shoes off before entering a home.
- **Do** bring gifts for the host and hostess when invited to their home.
- **Do** eat with your right hand because the left is used for sanitary needs.
- **Do** leave some food on your plate after eating to signal you have had enough.
- **Do** dress conservatively and avoid tight or revealing clothes.
- **Do** shake hands with persons of the same gender.

Don't

- **Don't** show the soles of your feet or shoes, neither when standing nor when sitting.
- **Don't** enter a mosque without permission.
- **Don't** photograph strangers without their permission.
- **Don't** give the “thumbs up” gesture or gesture with your left hand.
- **Don't** add salt to food; it is an insult to your host.
- **Don't** give liquor, pork, items with logos, or figures of dogs or owls as gifts.
- **Don't** use vulgar language within earshot of Moroccans; many understand such slang and find it offensive.

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Chapter 3 | Assessment

1. Meals are generally served without utensils in Moroccan homes.
2. Located on the outskirts of Rabat, Djellaba is Morocco's largest shantytown.
3. Muslim women in Morocco must cover their heads in public spaces.
4. Couscous is the national dish of Morocco.
5. Honor killing is the term used for the murder of a female by male family members who believe that the female brought shame upon the family.

Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. True



*Aerial view of Fès in Morocco
Flickr / jarturii!*

Chapter 4 | Moroccan Cultural Orientation

Urban Life

Introduction

Like most countries, Morocco's population has been moving from rural areas to cities in recent years. Land-use policy, a scarcity of arable land, frequent drought and crop failure, and the desire to seek better jobs and a higher standard of living in the cities stimulated this migration.^{1, 2, 3}

The rapid rate of urbanization has affected many aspects of the nation. Not only have demographics changed, but cultural expression and traditions have been affected. Although agriculture continues to be a major contributor to the country's life and economy, the move to the cities has created a need for a diversified economy and new jobs. Greater acceptance of contraception, a decline in family size, increased levels of education, a delay in marriage age, and an increase in the number of working women reflect social policy successes.^{4, 5}

Urbanization Issues

Some 62% of Moroccans live in urban areas.⁶ This number is expected to increase, based on the current growth rate of cities and the declining rural population.⁷ The urban influx has resulted in significant housing and utility shortages. The construction of informal housing has greatly outpaced the development of standard residential infrastructure. Slums and shantytowns have swelled as a consequence of the influx into the cities.⁸

The lack of infrastructure constrains the delivery of safe water and sanitation. The increased water demand from additional residents and industrial activities makes the problems even worse: 14.6% of residents don't have access to clean water, and 23.3% don't have access to toilets.^{9,10} Morocco also must find ways to meet the demands on its educational system, provide access to and meet increasing demands for healthcare, and increase employment opportunities, especially among the young.¹¹

Beyond securing decent housing and better living conditions, other problems accompany this migration. Perhaps the most significant is the link between fundamentalist Islamic radicalization and terrorism and impoverished urban neighborhoods. This creates security concerns for the nation and the people.¹² To address such concerns, the government has initiated several programs that attempt to eradicate urban slums.^{13,14}



*The skyline in Rabat
Flickr / Mark Kirchner*

Work Problems in Urban Areas



*Child labor in a tile shop
Flickr / Jeffrey Cuvilier*

Unemployment is a serious challenge in metropolitan areas. In 2018, the national unemployment rate was 9.8%, but the rate in cities (14.2%) was much higher than in rural areas (3.5%).^{15,16}

Morocco's labor market is struggling with inclusion, job growth, and job quality. The young, particularly those with vocational degrees, suffer the highest rates of unemployment, estimated at 26%. The unemployment rate among women is nearly 6% higher than among men. Job growth is slow, especially in the formal sector, and is unable to absorb new entrants into the job market. Most new jobs are in the low-skills services sector.^{17,18,19}

Who in your family has a job?

Soldier:	wash nta lwaaHeed lee Khedaam fel'aa-eela dyaalek?	Are you the only person in your family who has a job?
Local:	laa	No.

Exchange 17

Healthcare and Health Issues



*A surgery underway in a Moroccan medical facility
Flickr / Community Eye Health*

Although improving, Morocco's healthcare system is inadequate to meet the nation's needs. The public sector provides free healthcare to residents, but public healthcare facilities are run down, beset by corruption, and drastically lacking qualified doctors. Healthcare facilities often lack the most basic medical equipment, and patients must pay out of pocket for even bandages or syringes. Urban medical facilities are considered better than rural ones. There is a private healthcare system for those with insurance or who can pay out of pocket. Fewer than 30% of Moroccans have health insurance.^{20, 21}

Suitable care for routine problems is available in cities but generally below Western standards. Ambulance services are not immediately available in emergencies. Most prescription medications and over-the-counter drugs can be purchased in cities, but newer prescription drugs may not be available. It is difficult to find an open pharmacy on the weekend.^{22, 23}

Is there a hospital nearby?

Soldier:	wash kaayen shee SbeeTaaR KReeb min hna?	Is there a hospital nearby?
Local:	aah, fiSonTer dyaal lemdeena	Yes, in the center of town.
Soldier:	wash 'Rafti shnoo waake'?	Do you know what is wrong?
Local:	laa	No.

Exchange 18

There are specialists as well as foreign- and Western-trained doctors in the cities, but specialized, advanced, and emergency treatment may be limited or inadequate. Serious conditions may require leaving the country to receive proper care. Do not expect to find physicians with advanced English-speaking skills. It may be necessary to ask for one's condition to be documented in writing, preferably in French if documentation is unavailable in English. For foreigners, including those who are insured, cash is often the expected form of payment at Moroccan hospitals and clinics. It is due at the time services are rendered.^{24, 25, 26}

Preventive measures for common problems, such as diarrhea, are important. Exercise caution when selecting food and drink, and drink bottled water where possible. Avoid swimming off the coast of Casablanca because of water pollution.^{27, 28}

Education and Schools in Cities

The educational system in urban centers is more effective and inclusive than in rural areas. The Moroccan educational system suffers significant problems in terms of quality, retention rates, and gender gaps. The adult literacy rate is 68.5%, with a higher percentage of literacy among men (78.6%) than women (58.8%).²⁹ A majority of children enroll in and attend primary school, but only 65.8% enroll in high school, with many failing to attend or to advance to higher levels.^{30, 31, 32}



*Exterior of Al Akhawayn University in Ifran
Wikimedia / Amina Lahbabi*

Do your children go to school?		
Soldier:	wash wlaadek taymshyoo lmedRaaSa?	Do your children go to school?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 19



*School children in Morocco
Flickr / GPA Photo Archive*

Only 33.76% of the college-age population enrolls at the country's institutions of higher education.^{33, 34} These shortfalls occur despite Morocco investing 20% of its budget in education.³⁵ In 2018, the government announced it would be tripling the education budget for 2019.³⁶

The government requires children to complete nine years of free public education. Enrollment and retention rates in these institutions are significantly higher in urban areas.³⁷ Courses are taught in Arabic, with French taught as a second language. Spanish may be used in certain areas of the country, and English may be taught in some private schools. There are two different educational tracks in primary education: a modern track, largely based on the French educational system, and an "original" track, which emphasizes Arabic and Islamic culture, thought, and law. The modern track maintains significantly higher rates of enrollment than the original track.³⁸

There are three tracks at the secondary level: a general track emphasizing the sciences and humanities; a technical track focusing on engineering, economics, and agriculture; and a vocational track offering certification in professional fields.³⁹ Primarily located in urban areas, the country's universities and related institutions (such as polytechnics) offer higher education for certain secondary schools. The most famous of these institutions include the Mohammed V University and the Hassan II Agriculture and Veterinary Institute in Rabat.⁴⁰ Also well-known are Karaouine University in Fès, which has been a major center of Islamic studies for centuries, and al-Akhawayn University, a private English-language university in Ifrane.^{41, 42}

Restaurants



A table with various Moroccan dishes
Flickr / Mayu ;P

In Morocco, dining out does not carry the same social significance as in Western cultures. Most Moroccans prefer to eat at home, where they maintain a tight-knit, familial atmosphere. As a result, Moroccan restaurants cater to tourists, expatriates, and wealthy Moroccans living in urban areas.^{43, 44} Cafés are popular with Moroccan men, but function as social centers more than as dining establishments. Cafés offer sandwiches and brochettes (known in the West as kabobs), as well as an array of typical beverages.^{45, 46}

I would like coffee.		
Soldier:	bgheet -ataay wla kahwa	I would like coffee or tea.
Local:	'la Raas wel'eyn	Sure.

Exchange 20

French-style cafés, which serve pastries and other snacks, are also relatively common in urban areas. Upscale restaurants are limited to metropolitan areas and specialize in a variety of international flavors. French or French-influenced cuisine is common, although there are restaurants that serve traditional Moroccan dishes, such as *bastilla* and *meshoui* (roast lamb).^{47, 48}

Do you have a dessert?		
Soldier:	wash 'andkum shee deeseyR?	Do you have a dessert?
Local:	aah, 'andna lbeghReyR	Yes, we have crepes.

Exchange 21

At mid-priced or expensive restaurants, a service charge may be included in the bill. If not, it is appropriate to tip roughly 10% at these restaurants, and perhaps a couple of dirhams (the unit of currency in Morocco) when dining at cafés.⁴⁹

Snaks (kiosks) are nearly everywhere and provide a variety of local food. When buying juice from vendors, it is a good idea to use a disposable cup or bring your own because the juice glasses are simply rinsed and reused. The cleanliness and quality of ingredients can vary, so follow the locals. Moroccans try to find the cleanest vendors selling the freshest ingredients.⁵⁰



Moroccan mint tea and cookie
Flickr / Second-Half Travels

Marketplaces and Street Vendors

Markets



A chef at a food stall in Marrakech
Flickr / KitchenSurfer

Shoppers have several choices regarding where to shop. The *souk* is the cheapest place to buy almost anything. Medina shops are more expensive, followed by stores in the new parts of the cities. Shops in rural areas are cheaper than those in urban areas, but the quality of the materials is lower and the selection smaller.⁵¹

There are also many choices when shopping for food. The best and cheapest place to buy produce is at the weekly *souk*. The *souwiqa*, or little *souk*, is not as cheap, but it is open daily. The *hanut* is a little neighborhood shop that is more expensive, but

it is a good place to replace goods in immediate need. Many cities and larger towns have a *marché* or French-style market, which is a great place for one-stop shopping for vegetables, produce, staples, meat, and fish. The *supermarché* is an indoor supermarket that caters mostly to foreigners and stocks imported food. It can be a highly expensive alternative.⁵²

All meat sold in Morocco has likely been killed recently. Pieces of meat are usually cut from whole carcasses hanging in shops. Fowl can be purchased alive or killed and dressed. If you want the chicken killed, it will be killed and plucked after you have selected it from a group of live birds.⁵³

Is the bazaar nearby?

Soldier:	wash leblaSa dyaal lbazaaR kaReba min hna?	Is the bazaar nearby?
Local:	aah, lheyh 'al leyman	Yes, over there on the right.

Exchange 22

Bargaining



An outdoor market, or souk, in Marrakech
Flickr / David Jones

In Morocco, shopping is often a prolonged process with much bargaining and negotiation. Certain items and services with fixed or posted rates are not open to bargaining, but at *souks*, negotiation is customary and expected. It is important to visit different stalls to compare prices and the quality of goods, and to become familiar with the market and its practices.⁵⁴

A vendor's initial asking price will almost certainly be high, and customers should respond with counteroffers starting at one-third the initial price. Depending upon the item, negotiation can be lengthy and may require several cups of mint tea. One

should not demonstrate too much enthusiasm for a particular item; vendors view excessive interest as an opportunity to maintain a higher asking price.⁵⁵

Although vendors in tourist areas may speak some English, negotiations are conducted in French or Arabic. After a price has been agreed upon, the customer cannot rescind the offer, although demonstrating a willingness to forego a purchase may help during the negotiation.⁵⁶



Bargaining at the market in Essaouira
Flickr / Mait Jürriado

May I examine this close up?

Soldier:	wash yemkin leeya nkalib haadi?	May I examine this close up?
Local:	aah	Sure.

Exchange 23

Money and Credit Cards



Paper money in Morocco
Flickr / David Loong

Morocco’s national currency is the dirham. Money is easily exchanged at banks or exchange bureaus, but the euro is the easiest currency to exchange. British pounds and U.S. dollars can also be exchanged, but U.S. currency issued before 2000 and F-series British pound notes will not be accepted for exchange.⁵⁷

Morocco runs on cash, and it is difficult to cash traveler’s checks or use credit cards. Some establishments catering to tourists are likely to take major credit cards, but one should always have a ready supply of dirhams. Many establishments will

not accept large denominations of the dirham because it is difficult to make change. Be sure to collect smaller denominations to use in such instances.⁵⁸

Do you accept U.S. currency?		
Soldier:	wash mumkin nKhaleS bee dolaaR?	Do you accept U.S. currency?
Local:	laa, tankebloo gheyRd-deRhem	No, we only accept dirhams.

Exchange 24

Urban Traffic and Transportation



Auto traffic in Casablanca
Flickr / Markku Arttola

Morocco’s urban areas are serviced by trains, buses, and taxis. The major urban centers—Marrakech, Casablanca, Fès, Rabat, and Tangier—are connected via a modern freeway system, which includes tollways. Although traffic signals may be inoperative or difficult to view and street signs may be absent, urban roads are mostly in good condition. Traffic congestion is typical. Moroccan driving habits are notoriously poor, and the country has a high rate of traffic accidents. Drivers should demonstrate great caution on Morocco’s roads.^{59, 60}

Where can I rent a car?

Soldier:	mneyn yemken nikRee shee Tonobeyl?	Where can I rent a car?
Local:	limdeena	Downtown.

Exchange 25

Rental Cars

Cars are available to rent, but they can be expensive, particularly after fuel costs. Drivers must have a letter from the rental company allowing them to leave the country before they drive into the Spanish enclaves of Melilla and Cueta.⁶¹

Which road leads to the airport?

Soldier:	shnaahiya TReK lee kaad-dee lmaTaaR?	Which road leads to the airport?
Local:	TReK lee ghada leshaRK	The road heading east.

Exchange 26

Taxis

There are two types of taxis in Morocco. Grand taxis, or *taxiat kebira*, are shared taxis that run on established, long-distance routes within the greater metropolitan and suburban area or between cities. Each passenger pays for one of six spaces in the taxi (which departs when full), although empty spaces can be purchased for extra room and private trips can be negotiated. Fares are generally a fixed amount. More expensive than buses, grand taxis offer quicker service between cities. They can be found at designated locations in urban areas.⁶² Be aware that grand-taxi drivers have a reputation for aggressive and erratic driving.⁶³



A taxi in Morocco
Flickr / Omer Simkha

Petit taxis are smaller and carry a maximum of three passengers. They offer request service within city limits. It is common, although not mandatory, for passengers to share these taxis as well, with the benefit of receiving lower fares. Most petit taxis have meters; if not, fares are negotiated, often with much haggling, before the trip.⁶⁴

Where can I get a cab?

Soldier:	feen yemken leeya nshid shee Taaksi?	Where can I get a cab?
Local:	lheyh	Over there.

Exchange 27

Can you take me there?

Soldier:	wash yemkin lek tedeni lheyh?	Can you take me there?
Local:	aah, mumkin	Yes, I can.

Exchange 28

Trains

Morocco's passenger trains run in two general directions: east-west from the northeast border town of Oujda through Fès, Meknes, and Rabat to Casablanca; and north-south from Tangier to Sidi Kacem and from Casablanca to Marrakech. These lines intersect, offering connecting service; there are additional existing and planned routes.⁶⁵ Classes of travel exist, but all service is comfortable, safe, punctual, and relatively inexpensive. The majority of train stations are in the cities' French-built districts.⁶⁶



The Rabat tram at a station
Flickr / Magharebia

Is there a train station nearby?

Soldier:	wash kaayen shee maHeTa dyaal Traan KReba min hna?	Is there a train station nearby?
Local:	laa	No.

Exchange 29

Buses

City buses run on established routes and relatively consistent schedules. They are generally inexpensive, but they can be crowded, particularly during rush hours.⁶⁷



Public bus in Fès
Flickr / Andrew Nash

Countrywide bus service is offered by a variety of companies, with the quality and age of their buses ranging from dilapidated to modern. Buses run on set routes and on a fixed (but often loose) schedule. They can be crowded, and their operators have a reputation for poor and erratic driving. Stations can be confusing and disorderly. Depending upon the locale and size of a station, ticket sellers can be found in booths, or they can be outside in the crowd or next to buses.⁶⁸

Will the bus be here soon?		
Soldier:	wash daaba ghaadi yjit-Tobes?	Will the bus be here soon?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 30

Street Crime and Safety

Morocco has a significant problem with street crime in major cities and tourist areas. Frequent crimes include theft and harassment of women. Thieves have been known to rob vehicles while stopped in traffic. Weapons, including knives, have been used. Such crimes may occur at any time of day, in isolated or crowded areas. Although kidnappings are not common, they do happen along the border regions and in the south.^{70, 71}

Dealing with Street Vendors and Beggars

There are many beggars on Morocco's streets. Although some are legitimately poor and destitute, many are professional beggars.^{72, 73} One of the Five Pillars of Islam is *zakat*, the donation of alms to the poor, a common practice in Morocco. Muslims believe that such acts of generosity will bring *baraka*, or blessings, to those who perform them. Typically, a gift of a few dirhams is more than sufficient but not mandatory.⁷⁴ It is inappropriate to ignore beggars completely or to treat them rudely.⁷⁵



A beggar on the streets of Morocco
Flickr / Tanel Teemusk



Beggars outside a building in Morocco
 Flickr / Fadil Elmansour

When giving money, maintain an impersonal tone. Try to differentiate between bona fide beggars and street hustlers. Hustlers will more commonly approach you, rather than wait for you to pass, and they will often speak French or English instead of Arabic. Boys and young men often make up this group.⁷⁶

Give me money.		
Visitor:	'Teyni lefloos	Give me money.
Local:	maa'indeesh	I don't have any.

Exchange 31

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Chapter 4 | Assessment

1. Moroccan restaurants cater mostly to foreigners and wealthy urbanites.
2. *Marché* is a French-style store.
3. Haggling is a part of the shopping experience in many markets in Morocco.
4. Traveling by train is considered dangerous, uncomfortable, and unreliable. Foreigners are advised to avoid traveling by train.
5. Tipping is not required or expected in Morocco.

Assessment Answers: 1. True; 2. True; 3. True; 4. False; 5. False



*Amazigh village outside of Marrakech
Flickr / Txaro Franco*

Chapter 5 | Moroccan Cultural Orientation

Rural Life

Introduction

There is a stark ethnic division between Morocco's urban and rural areas. Rural Morocco has been the traditional home of indigenous Amazigh tribes, collectively Imazighen, also known as Berbers. Despite the longstanding and prevailing influence of Arab culture in Morocco, the Imazighen have retained their distinct languages, identity, and traditions.¹ These linguistic and cultural traits are what distinguish Imazighen from the Arab population; genetic differences between the two groups are negligible, and 99% of the country's population is categorized ethnically as Arab-Amazigh.^{2, 3, 4}

The cultural autonomy of the Amazigh tribes stems largely from their isolation. The Amazigh-dominated regions of the northern highlands, central mountains, and southern and eastern plateaus and deserts

proved less accessible and less hospitable to invading or occupying foreigners.⁵ The Arab-dominated Atlantic coastal plains are known as *bilad al-makhzan*, “government land,” while the Amazigh-dominated interior is termed *bilad al-siba*, “land of abandonment” or “land of dissidence.”⁶

Today, the effects of this division are evident not only in linguistic and cultural traditions but also in socioeconomic disparity.⁷ Visitors to rural regions, particularly those populated by Imazighen, will observe a notable lack of modern infrastructure, services, and government assistance compared to the urban areas of the Atlantic coastal plains and plateaus.^{8, 9}

Because the vast majority of Imazighen are Muslims, rural residents share the same religious values and practices as urban residents.^{10, 11} Rural Moroccans may be more traditional than city dwellers, who have had greater exposure to foreign cultures, particularly European. Visitors to Morocco’s rural regions should be prepared for a lack of amenities and for traditional values, both Arab and Amazigh.¹²

Tribal Distribution and Settlements



Cattle grazing in Morocco
Flickr / Jeffrey Cuvilier

Many groups and subgroups of Imazighen are dispersed throughout rural Morocco. There are three major tribes, each grouped by region and language. In the Rif Mountains of northeastern Morocco, Amazigh tribes known as Irifiyen (singular Arifi) speak Tarafit.¹³ The tribes of central and southeast-central Morocco, also called Imazighen, speak Central Tamazight. In southwestern Morocco, the Ishilhayan subgroup (singular Ashilhav) of the Shluh or Swasa (singular Susi or Soussi) Amazigh people speak Tashelhit.^{14, 15, 16}

Amazigh settlements vary by region. In the northern uplands and central mountains, Amazigh people traditionally live in small villages on hillsides or hilltops. In these regions, the surrounding land is often terraced to create agricultural tracts, and homes and structures are typically made of adobe, stone, or earth.¹⁷ In the Rif Mountains, single-level individual homes, situated far apart, were once common. Multistoried, tightly grouped complexes that are prevalent in the villages of the central mountains and the southeast, primarily in the Anti-Atlas range and surrounding deserts, are often known as *ksour*, or “castles,” (singular *ksar*) because of their unique fortified design. *Ksour* consist of attached, multistoried earthen houses, each of which serves as a home to several families from the same tribe.¹⁸ In the desert regions of the southeast and southwest, Amazigh tribes live in settlements in human-created oases.¹⁹ In the southwest, houses may resemble *ksour*, but they also share features common to the houses of the northern mountains.²⁰

Land Distribution and Ownership



Agricultural land in Morocco
Flickr / kali.ma

Morocco lacks a comprehensive policy regarding land titles. Most land is held collectively by tribes or jointly owned by multigenerational families. Collective land cannot be sold on the formal market and is difficult to register under formal law.^{21, 22}

Formal and customary law recognizes several types of land tenure. Approximately 28% is private, freehold land that may be held, used, or transferred. Family members eligible to inherit land must consent to any transaction. Under Islamic law, private ownership rights are given to anyone who has held the land for at least a decade.^{23, 24}

Privately owned agricultural land is handed down through male heirs and is either divided almost exclusively among male offspring or maintained as a single tract. Few women own land, despite recent legal reforms.²⁵ Women generally receive one-half or one-third of a male's share, though some regions have equal inheritance rights.^{26, 27, 28}

Usufruct is the concept of the rights to farmland belonging to someone else—individuals using the land are not the actual owners. Nearly 42% of all land is held by tribes with the state as trustee.^{29, 30} The lack of formal documentation of ownership has seriously hampered investment potential in rural areas.³¹

“Guich land” refers to land given to members of the military by the monarchy. Although the state holds private domain rights, individuals possess usage rights. Recent reforms have resulted in much of this land being reclaimed by the state. Remaining parcels are insecure because the state is likely to reclaim them to meet land demands.^{32, 33, 34}

Do you own this land?		
Soldier:	wash haad l-aRD dyaalek?	Do you own this land?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 32

About 30% of Morocco's land belongs to the state and is used for parks, roads, and forests. Nearly 400,000 hectares (988,420 acres) of this land is agricultural. It is possible to obtain a leasehold for up to 40 years on these spaces.^{35, 36}

Rural Economy

Rural livelihoods depend on small-scale subsistence farming and animal husbandry.³⁷ Wheat, barley, and other cereals are the most common crops, and figs, olives, nuts, and vegetables are typical.³⁸ Cannabis (*kif*) is an important cash crop in the Rif Mountains region, despite the crop being illegal. Nearly 3% of the population relies on cannabis, used to make hashish, for income. Most of the cannabis is grown outdoors in the open air.^{39, 40, 41} In the pre-Saharan and Saharan areas, dates, alfalfa, and various grains are major crops.⁴² Plowing is often done with cows and a donkey or mule. The seasonal migration of livestock from higher to lower elevations is common in certain areas. During these migrations, shepherds live in small goat hair tents. Other small-scale livestock holdings include cows, goats, and chickens.⁴³ Rural regions in the coastal plains maintain larger agricultural and livestock operations, benefitting from richer soil and better access to irrigation.⁴⁴



*The plains of Agoudal Village in High Atlas
Flickr / jbdodane*

Where do you work, sir?

Soldier:	feyn tatKhdem, aaseedi?	Where do you work, sir?
Local:	filaaH aa seedi	I am a farmer, sir.

Exchange 33



*Workers in a field in Morocco
Flickr / Club Med UK*

The Moroccan agriculture industry is consistently vulnerable to drought. Most recently, in 2015 and 2016, a major drought led to significantly decreased agricultural yields.^{45, 46} Such instability has prevented the sector's growth, affecting the overall economy as well as the daily lives of subsistence farmers.⁴⁷

Overgrazing in certain areas (particularly in the mountains) has led to deforestation, increased erosion, and the loss of farmland. Erosion has also negatively affected the country's water supply because the increased sedimentation of reservoirs has decreased their overall capacity.^{48, 49} About 70%

of the nation's poor live in rural areas where agriculture is particularly unproductive or difficult to sustain.⁵⁰ The central mountains, the eastern and southern steppes, and deserts are among these unproductive areas. Their often unfruitful, impoverished conditions have fueled the country's rural-to-urban migration, as well as the mass economic migration of Moroccans to Europe.⁵¹

The trading of foodstuffs, handicrafts, and other goods in rural areas occurs at marketplaces, or *souks*. Rural markets, held weekly, have a variety of goods, including modern and foreign products. One Amazigh tribe, the Aith Waryaghar of the Rif Mountains, holds a unique market reserved for women.⁵²

Gender Roles



A man transports crops in a basket.
Flickr / David Jones

As in urban areas, the gender roles of rural residents are based on patriarchal, Islamic tradition. Men possess greater freedom and higher status than women. The social segregation of men and women, as well as the defined roles for women in domestic settings, are common in rural areas. In Amazigh communities, women traditionally perform the cooking, housework, and some agricultural activities, such as harvesting crops and milking animals. Men plant crops or tend livestock, and sometimes hunt. In the past, market activities were reserved for men. Presently, it is common for women to be in charge of certain market duties. Children of either gender may

be involved in goat herding, and girls often look after younger siblings. Boys are typically allowed to attend school, whereas girls are frequently required to stay home and work.^{53, 54}

If the male head of household migrates for employment (which is common), women take on further responsibilities and authority in the home. These women are heavily involved in the daily operations of the household, performing domestic and outside labor duties.^{55, 56}

Rural Transportation Issues

Driving in Rural Areas

Driving in Morocco can be hazardous because of poor road conditions and a lack of respect for the rules of the road. Driving at night is even more dangerous and should be avoided.⁵⁷

In many rural areas, Morocco's road system is underdeveloped and in poor condition. Modern freeways connect the major urban centers with the two-lane primary roads that run through rural areas to other cities. But the secondary routes and unsealed roads of remote regions are often unreliable, narrow, and dangerous.^{58, 59, 60} This is particularly true in the Rif and Atlas Mountains, where narrow roads wind through steep, rugged terrain.⁶¹ No roads exist in the Toubkal Massif region.⁶²

Pedestrians, motorbikes, animal-drawn vehicles, and bicyclists may present unforeseen obstacles on Moroccan roadways, particularly at night on unlit roads. Rural roads are also subject to flash flooding. Heavy

snowfall may close roads in mountainous areas, and desert winds can reduce visibility or cause damage to vehicles. In desert areas, some paved roads end suddenly, changing into dirt or gravel, and loose rocks can shatter windshields.^{63, 64, 65}

Policemen routinely pull over vehicles for inspection and may take the driver's license if a fine is not paid on the spot. Police checkpoints in city entrances and certain rural areas are common. Drivers should be prepared to present a passport and a driver's license.^{66, 67, 68}



*Roads in Morocco
Flickr / Heribert Bechen*

Please get out of the car.

Soldier:	KhRuj mint Tonobeel laah yKhaleek	Please get out of the car.
Local:	waakha	OK.

Exchange 34

Is there a gas station nearby?

Soldier:	kaayen shee STaSyon dyaal leySaanS Ka-Reeba min hinaa?	Is there a gas station nearby?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 35

Is there an auto mechanic nearby?

Soldier:	kaayen shee meekaanisyaan KReeb min hna?	Is there a good auto mechanic nearby?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 36

Buses, Trains, and Taxis

Morocco's extensive bus system runs routes throughout the country, offering an inexpensive (although not necessarily safe or comfortable) form of travel into rural areas.⁶⁹ Buses may be overcrowded.⁷⁰ Visitors should also be aware that schedules are often loosely followed (depending upon the company), and stations can be raucous.⁷¹

Morocco's train system is generally safe, comfortable, punctual, and relatively affordable. But service is limited to the Atlantic coastal plains and northern Morocco. There is a route that runs in the eastern

part of the country, parallel to the Algerian border. The Atlas Mountains and the southern and eastern steppes and deserts are not presently serviced by train.^{72, 73}

Grand taxi service is available for travel between rural villages. As in urban centers, these taxis offer shared rides to set destinations. In mountainous regions, taxi vehicles may consist of a van or a four-wheel-drive vehicle.⁷⁴ Taxi drivers often lack good driving habits.^{75, 76}



*Train arriving at Casablanca station
Flickr / Omer Simkha*

Trucks and 4WD Vehicles



*Men transported on a large industrial truck
Flickr / Heribert Bechen*

Pickup trucks or four-wheel-drive vehicles are commonly used by Moroccans in rural areas where public transportation is not available. These vehicles are particularly common in areas with rough unsealed roads, such as the Atlas Mountains.⁷⁷ Passengers sit in the back of the truck, and riding conditions can be rough. Frequency and availability are irregular, although service is common on market days.⁷⁸

Rural Healthcare

Because most healthcare centers are in urban areas, access to medical facilities, and healthcare is greatly limited or unavailable in rural Morocco. Outpatient care is provided by mobile medical teams, pharmacies, and clinics. Clinics may have a doctor or nurse and provide rudimentary care or emergency treatment. If possible, avoid public healthcare in rural areas. Private clinics and hospitals can provide adequate routine care but may be difficult to access and expensive, requiring up-front payment.^{79, 80, 81, 82}

My arm is broken; can you help me?		
Soldier:	yedi mhaRsa, yemken lek t'aaweni?	My arm is broken, can you help me?
Local:	aah, yemken leeya n'aawnek	Yes, I can help you.

Exchange 37



Traditional medicine practitioner on the streets of Morocco
 Flickr / travelinknu / Flickr.com

Other potential medical problems include altitude sickness (particularly in the Atlas Mountains) and waterborne and food-borne diseases. Avoid unpasteurized dairy products, and wash and peel fruit before eating. Ask locals for assistance or information about local medical facilities. In less urgent situations, ask about clinics located farther away, such as in a nearby village or a city.^{83, 84}

Hospitals and clinics commonly require payment up front in cash for medical services. In rural areas, expect to pay for basic medical supplies, including bandages. Carry any necessary prescription medications. In remote areas, clinics may use unconventional forms of treatment, such as herbal medicine.^{85, 86, 87, 88}

Is there a medical clinic nearby?		
Soldier:	wash kaayen shee SbeeTaaR kReeb min hna?	Is there a medical clinic nearby?
Local:	aah, lheyh	Yes, over there.

Exchange 38

Is Dr. Alaoui in, sir?		
Soldier:	wash kaayen Tbeeb l'alawi aseedi?	Is Dr. Alaoui in, sir?
Local:	laa	No.

Exchange 39

Rural Education

The quality and availability of education are often limited in rural areas. Rates of attendance, retention, and matriculation remain low, particularly for girls. Only 26% of rural girls enroll in primary school, compared to 79% of rural boys. For rural women aged 15 years or older, the literacy rate has been estimated as low as 10%, although official estimates place it at 54%. Rural poverty, lack of infrastructure (schools and roads), and traditional attitudes about schooling for girls significantly contribute to the inadequacy of rural schools.^{89, 90, 91} Thus, over 41% of rural residents are illiterate, and rural Moroccans have an average of 2.2 years of education.^{92, 93}

In recent years, the government and many organizations have been working to increase student enrollment in rural areas and raise the literacy rate for women. These efforts include the establishment of rural literacy centers that have drawn high percentages of female participants.^{94, 95} Another significant development in the educational system, particularly regarding Imazighen, has been the official incorporation of Amazigh languages into the public school curriculum in 2003. The recognition of Amazigh languages has been well received because allowing Amazigh youth to use their native tongue has manifested as more enthusiasm and success in school.^{96, 97, 98} Implementation of the program, however, has been slow and uneven.⁹⁹



*Students take a break against a wall
Flickr / David Rosen*

Outside the public school system, Quranic schools are often the only source of education for many rural Moroccan youth. These schools teach Arabic and Islamic verse, thought, and law; typical school subjects may be absent from the curriculum. Traditionally, these schools have been more readily accepted by remote, rural communities, who may view state-run operations with suspicion.^{100, 101}

Is there a school nearby?		
Soldier:	wash kayen shee medRaaSa KReeba min hna?	Is there a school nearby?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 40

Village Life: Who Is in Charge?

Prior to the mid-20th century, the social organization of the Imazighen was based primarily on patrilineage and the extended family, generally ranging from four to six generations. The broader social group comprised the following units, in order of increasing size: patrilineage, local community, tribal section, tribe. Since Moroccan independence and the onset of widespread labor emigration, Amazigh societies have increasingly emphasized the importance of the core (nuclear) family. Today, rural communes are the basic unit of local sociopolitical organization, and local elders from the commune form a council, *jemaa*, that meets on a weekly basis, usually at the market. All members of the *jemaa* are adult males.^{102, 103} Rural villages have a *muqaddam*, or village leader, who is elected by the village council.^{104, 105}

Can you take me to your leader?		
Soldier:	wash yemken lek tideeni l'and lkaayed dyaalkum?	Can you take me to your leader?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 41

Respected leader, we need your help.

Soldier:	see lkaayed, laah yKhaleek, bgheenak t'aawina/bgheenak tenSeHnaa/bgheena nistaashRok	Respected leader, we need your help/advice/ opinion.
Local:	waaKha	Yes.

Exchange 42

Regionalism has become a significant social and administrative driver. Because of poverty and scarce resources, rural communes and their councils often lack the financial means to implement local policy.¹⁰⁶ Several levels of state government exist beyond the rural commune.¹⁰⁷

Border Crossings and Checkpoints

To address regional security issues and reduce Morocco's incidence of traffic accidents, the police have implemented a countrywide system of checkpoints and roadblocks.¹⁰⁸ Checkpoints are commonly located near the entrances of cities and towns, and roadblocks may be found in certain areas in and around Western Sahara, near the Algerian border (which has long been closed), and in cannabis-producing regions such as the Rif Mountains.¹⁰⁹

Often, the basic purpose of such stoppages is to authenticate driving licenses and inspect the vehicle's condition. Visitors should be prepared to present their passport, international driver's license, and perhaps the vehicle's documentation.¹¹⁰

Heightened security measures have been implemented nationwide in recent years because of terrorist bombings and kidnappings in Morocco and its neighboring countries. Increased numbers of security personnel operate in public areas.^{111, 112, 113} A bombing in Marrakech in April 2011 led to further security measures, including cordoning off other cities. Additional security forces have been deployed throughout the nation.¹¹⁴



A checkpoint in Tangier
Flickr / alyssa BLACK

Is this all the ID you have?

Soldier:	wash haadi heeya biTakat ta'Reef lwaHeeda lee 'andek?	Is this all the ID you have?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 43

Show us the car registration.

Soldier:	waReena lewaRak dyaal Tonobeel	Show us the car registration.
Local:	waaKha	OK.

Exchange 44

Landmines

The Western Sahara region contains an estimated 5–10 million landmines, laid by both the Polisario Front and the Moroccan military.¹¹⁵ The area around the massive central berm, or fortified wall, running through Western Sahara is strewn with large numbers of landmines.^{116, 117} This 2,400 km (1,491 mi) stretch of land is thought to be the world's longest continuous minefield.¹¹⁸ Landmine-related fatalities and injuries involving soldiers and civilians are relatively frequent throughout Western Sahara.¹¹⁹



A sign warning of mines in the Western Sahara

Flickr / David Holt

Is this area mined?

Soldier:	wash haad IminTaKa feeHal alghaam?	Is this area mined?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 45

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Chapter 5 | Assessment

1. The majority of the Amazigh population lives along Morocco's urbanized Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts.
2. Cannabis is an important cash crop in the Rif Mountains.
3. Four-wheel-drive vehicles replace public transportation in rural areas.
4. Private clinics and hospitals can provide adequate routine care but may require up-front payment.
5. After signing the Mine Ban Treaty in 1997, the Moroccan military cleaned up thousands of landmines it had buried in Western Sahara.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. True; 5. False



*A family pose together for a photo
Flickr / Kevin Walsh*

Chapter 6 | Moroccan Cultural Orientation

Family Life

Introduction

Life in Morocco revolves around the family, which serves as the primary social and financial support for the average Moroccan. Family welfare, relations, and having children are of overriding importance; work and other relationships are subordinate. The notion of family honor, which each member is expected to uphold, is a keystone of society. In Morocco, a person's actions and demeanor almost always reflect on the family, and family members are inextricably bound by reputation and shared responsibility. This concept of honor and the familial bond is valued above everything else, and it has far-reaching significance for social values and customs.^{1, 2, 3}

How is your family?

Soldier:	shuKhbaaR maaleyn daaR?	How is your family?
Local:	biKheyR lHamdu laah	They are doing fine, thank you.

Exchange 46

Because of the family's overarching importance, it is the prime subject of interest and topic of conversation in daily life. Visitors should not interpret questions about their family as intrusive, but as a typical and appropriate topic that helps Moroccans become acquainted with newcomers and demonstrate an interest in them.^{4,5}

Typical Household



A hospitable Moroccan family
Flickr / Hiddenshallows

In Morocco, households may consist of nuclear and extended families. Moroccans practice what is known as patrilocal residence. This means that male descendants remain in the family household, and female descendants join the households of their husbands. In extended families, unmarried children and married sons along with their wives and children live with the two elder parents.⁶ Three generations—grandparents, parents, aunts, uncles, cousins, and siblings—may live in a single household.⁷

Does your family live here?

Soldier:	wash l'aa-eela dyaalek tatskun hna?	Does your family live here?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 47

Household makeup varies by region and class. Affluent families in modern urban areas may maintain smaller, independent nuclear households. In poor rural areas, it is more common for extended families to live together in one home.^{8,9} Some 20% of Moroccan households are headed by women. Most women heads of households are widows, but others are divorcées or single mothers.^{10,11,12}

How many people live here?

Soldier:	shHaal min waHid ti'eesh fhaad daar?	How many people live in this house?
Local:	'ashRa	Ten.

Exchange 48

Historically, the elderly were cared for by their families, often residing with a son. But this trend is diminishing, partly because of migration to other countries and poor economic conditions. The growing number of older persons, declining birth rates, and the shift to nuclear families suggest that caring for the elderly will become an issue in the near future.^{13, 14}

Is this your entire family?		
Soldier:	wash l'aa-eela dyaal kulha heya haadi?	Is this your entire family?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 49

Family Roles and Responsibilities



An Amazigh family in the High Atlas Mountains
Flickr / Aitor Uranga

The roles and responsibilities of family members are becoming more nuanced in today's Morocco. Traditionally, men were authority figures who were responsible for the financial welfare of the household, while women cared for the children and family.^{15, 16, 17} But changes in the family code in 2004 declared that men and women are equally responsible for family welfare and that a wife no longer has to obey her husband.^{18, 19, 20}

Modernization has allowed more women to work outside the home and afforded them a larger role in the family.^{21, 22} But because of the patriarchal customs

of Islamic culture and the gender gap in education, it is still more common for men to work in the public sphere than women. In 2018, the labor force participation rate of men was much higher (77%) than that of women (24%).²³ Change is more rapid and visible in urban areas, but rural women are increasingly becoming entrepreneurs in the informal economy.^{24, 25}

Do you have any brothers?		
Soldier:	wash 'andek shee Khoot?	Do you have any brothers?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 50

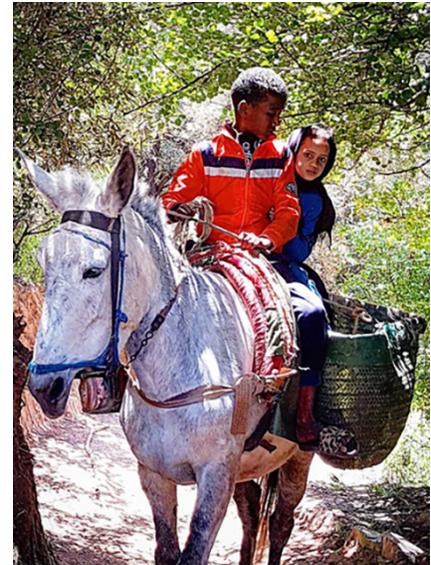
Boys have greater freedom than girls. Depending on the family's finances, boys may or may not be required to do domestic chores, such as running errands.²⁶ Boys are allowed to go to school, whereas girls do not always have that option.^{27, 28} In poor families, boys and girls perform a variety of tasks, such as goat herding, to contribute to the family's livelihood.²⁹

Status of Children and the Elderly

Children

Children are highly prized and loved in Morocco. Children commonly grow up surrounded by their extended kin, who share the responsibilities of raising and socializing them. Children are taught above all to be respectful to adults. The child's character directly reflects on the parents and can be a source of pride or shame. Children are allowed to remain emotionally dependent on parents, especially the mother.³⁰

Child labor is an issue in Morocco. Beginning in 2004, the legal age for employment was raised from 12 to 15 years. But children, especially from rural areas, are sometimes contracted out by their parents or sold by orphanages to become virtual slaves—in the guise of maids—in wealthy families.³¹ Children as young as 7 years of age have reportedly been forced into labor.^{32, 33}



Children riding a mule
Flickr / D. [SansPretentionAucune]

Elders



An old man with a beverage in a shop in Rabat
Flickr / Elvin

The elderly are generally highly respected in Morocco. Traditionally, the extended family took care of elderly parents and grandparents. But that appears to be changing as Morocco adopts modern and Western values. Although many elderly receive assistance from relatives, a growing number need support from outside sources, including the government. With an expanding elderly population, and the inability or unwillingness of families to take them in, the situation for the elderly is of growing concern to the government. The number of residential senior centers is increasing in an effort to address the problem.^{34, 35, 36}

Marriage, Divorce, and Birth

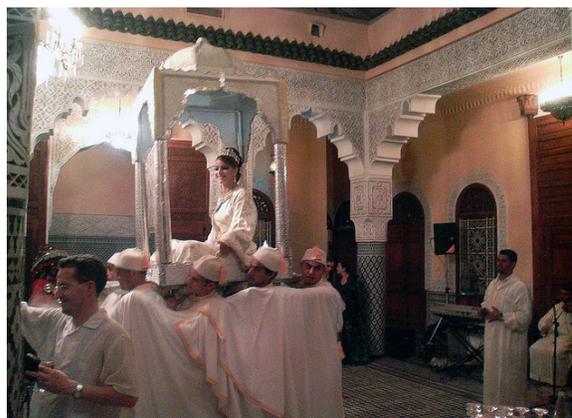
Marriage

Marriage is an essential stage in Moroccan life and a significant form of social bonding between families. Traditionally, Moroccan marriages were arranged and negotiated between the two participating families. Marriage was seen as a socioeconomic contract rather than a romantic, love-based union. Today such arranged marriages less common, especially in urban areas, as more young people find partners without family mediation.^{37, 38, 39}

Is this your wife?		
Soldier:	wash haadi mRaatak?	Is this your wife?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 51

The traditional way of choosing a marriage partner is similar throughout the country. Once a potential bride is selected, an intermediary (*khattabat*) visits the bride's family to determine her suitability and estimate the bride price. If all goes well, a formal engagement is announced. The groom's family then visits the bride's parents to determine a wedding date. During these visits, the engagement can be terminated. Families agree on a dowry and sign a formal contract.⁴⁰ For his payment of a bride price, the groom receives the bride and her dowry to support the new couple's household.^{41, 42, 43}



A bride transported during a Moroccan wedding ceremony
Flickr | Markku Artola

Because Islam is passed through the male line, Muslim men are allowed to marry non-Muslim women, although this is uncommon; Muslim women, however, may not marry non-Muslim men.⁴⁴ After marriage, the woman traditionally moves into the home of the husband, who often lives with his parents and extended family.^{45, 46} Since many families now live in nuclear households, some newlyweds establish their households near relatives.⁴⁷

Are you married?		
Soldier:	wash nta mjoowij?	Are you married?
Local:	laa	No.

Exchange 52

The law established 18 as the legal age for marriage.⁴⁸ Parents may obtain a waiver allowing minor children to marry.⁴⁹ Child marriage (under the age of 18) may be increasing.^{50, 51} A law banning forced marriages came into effect in 2018.⁵²

Property acquired during the marriage is shared between the spouses. Although legal, polygamy is considerably difficult to practice. Women have the right to officially stipulate that potential husbands maintain a single marriage, and can divorce if the husband wishes to marry a second wife. Marrying a second wife requires legal authorization and the assurance that the wives will be treated equally.^{53, 54}

Divorce



A mother and child on the streets of Marrakech
Flickr / Greg Robbins

According to the 2004 family code, women have the right to initiate divorce. Valid reasons for divorce include physical abuse, failure to provide financial support, and unwarranted absence. Previously, men could divorce wives without their consent simply through the unofficial process of verbal repudiation. Today, both parties' consent and the process must be administrated through the courts.^{55, 56}

The family code also ensures that the court system oversees the payment of alimony. Under certain circumstances, women have more custodial rights. Children aged 15 and older may choose their guardian in the event of divorce.^{57, 58} The law ensures that throughout the divorce process, there are opportunities for reconciliation.⁵⁹

Socially, there is often a sense of shame in experiencing a divorce. This is particularly true for women, who may have difficulty remarrying. If uneducated and without a career, women may lack financial support.^{60, 61} An estimated one out of six Moroccan marriages ends in divorce.⁶²

Birth

In rural Morocco, it is still common (and often necessary) for babies to be born at home, but in urban areas, many mothers give birth in hospitals or clinics.⁶³ Access to maternal healthcare during the prenatal period or the birthing process is far from universal. In recent years, 73% of births occurred in institutional facilities, and 74% were attended by a person trained in childbirth or healthcare, such as a doctor, nurse, or midwife. The percentage of pregnant women who received prenatal care was 55%.⁶⁴ In 2018, the fertility rate was 2.09 children per woman.⁶⁵



A baby held by an elder in an Amazigh village near Imlil
Flickr / Julia Maudlin

In Morocco, the birth of a child is a momentous occasion marked with celebration and special rituals. Festivities vary by region, but gatherings of family and friends to offer gifts to the mother and child are common.⁶⁶ Because Islamic culture is patriarchal and Moroccan families are patrilineal, boys are especially celebrated. When a boy is born, three “cries of joy” welcome the infant, but only a single cry welcomes a female. In some villages, women who give birth to a daughter are humiliated with the hide of a dead sheep placed at the door.⁶⁷

Are these your children?		
Soldier:	wash haadoo wlaadek?	Are these your children?
Local:	aah	Yes.

Exchange 53

Family Social Events

Weddings

Traditional Moroccan weddings are large and festive celebrations that take place in the evening and involve many customary steps. They can last from several days to a week.^{68, 69} In recent years, depending upon the region and the socioeconomic background of the family, many traditional customs have been replaced, altered, or minimized to reflect contemporary culture.⁷⁰

Before a traditional wedding, the bride’s female attendants (consisting of older married relatives and friends) give her a purifying milk bath and use henna dye to paint her hands and feet with elaborate designs. Today, in some areas of the country, many brides forego this tradition, but they often employ a person to paint small designs on the hands of the wedding guests.^{71, 72}

The wedding is traditionally separated into two receptions, one for men and one for women.^{73, 74} In certain areas, there is increased interaction between the two parties. Food, traditional music, and dancing are common to the festivities.⁷⁵



*A Moroccan wedding ceremony
Flickr / Ali Eminov*

Congratulations on your wedding!		
Soldier:	mebrook 'leekum l'eRaasiya	Congratulations on your wedding!
Local:	meRHbaa beek, nhaaR kbeeR haada	We are honored you could attend.

Exchange 54

During the reception, the groom eventually seeks out the bride, who is carried out on a table and presented to him and the party.⁷⁶ Moroccan tradition suggests that the bride circle her new home three times before entering it as her own.^{77, 78}

Funerals and Memorials

Islamic custom shapes the traditions associated with death and burial. When possible, a Muslim is visited before death by family and friends, who give comfort and offer religious support by reciting Quranic verses. Islamic tradition suggests that a Muslim's final words declare devoted faith: "I bear witness that there is no god but Allah."⁷⁹

According to Arab and Muslim traditions, burial should take place within 24 hours of death. Preparations begin shortly after death and are performed in the home.⁸⁰ Those present at the time of death close the eyes of the deceased and place a clean sheet over the body. Before the funeral procession, family members wash and shroud the body in a white sheet.⁸¹



*A public display mourning the death of a protestor
Flickr / Magharebia*

After the body has been prepared, it is carried to the burial site by male relatives and friends, who recite Quranic verse as they march. When the body is placed in the grave (usually without a coffin), it is laid on its right side, and the grave is dug in such a way that the deceased's head points toward Mecca. Unlike many Western cultures, Muslim customs do not include tombstones, ornate markers, and flowers. Relatives, friends, and community members visit the home of the bereaved family to offer food and condolence. Together, they hold a dinner, or *I-âsha*, and read from the Quran.^{82, 83}

Name-Giving Parties (*subu'*)

Seven days after the birth of a child, the family names the newborn and holds a celebratory feast to mark the occasion. It is customary to give small gifts to the baby and mother.^{84, 85}

Circumcision (*khētana*)

Circumcision is an Islamic custom for boys, who typically undergo the process before the age of six. On the day of the event, the family has a celebratory meal with relatives and friends, and the boy receives presents from the guests. Normally circumcisions occur at home and are conducted by a barber.^{86, 87} Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), sometimes called female fcircumcision, is not practiced in Morocco, in contrast to other African Islamic cultures.⁸⁸

Naming Conventions



A woman and child walk outside a mosque in Morocco
Flickr / Steve Evans

Moroccan family names pass down from the father, and personal names (first names) are chosen by the parents. When written, the family name appears first, followed by the personal name. Women do not take the family name of the man they marry; they always remain in the family of their father. It is fairly usual to address Moroccans, particularly men, by their family name or their personal name, especially because their personal name may be common.^{89, 90}

Moroccans do not have complete freedom in choosing personal names. Names must be “Moroccan in nature” in order to be legal. In 2010, the nation determined that Amazigh names meet the legal requirement and that children may take Amazigh rather than Arabic names.⁹¹

Lalla is the most common title for a woman. It may refer to royalty, similar to the term “lady.” It may be used as a prefix to the family or personal name, or, like the English term “ma’am,” as a generic term of address for an older woman or a woman of acquaintance. Similar to “sir” or “mister,” *sidi* is the general title for men. Like *lalla*, it may be used out of respect or to address a man who is an acquaintance. The term *moulay* is often used to refer to deceased sultans and saints and to some living holy men. (The phrase “Moulay Muhammad” is strictly reserved for the Prophet Muhammad.) The titles *hajja* and *hajj*, respectively, are used for women and men who have undertaken the pilgrimage to Mecca.⁹²

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Chapter 6 | Assessment

1. The Moroccan family law maintains that a wife must obey her husband.
2. Polygamy is legal in Morocco.
3. Child labor is prevalent in Morocco.
4. Muslims bury their dead within 24 hours of death.
5. For many years, the indigenous Imazighen could not give their children traditional Amazigh names.

Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. True; 3. True; 4. True; 5. True

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Final Assessment

1. Fès has been the capital of Morocco since the eighth century.
2. The current king of Morocco is a descendant of one of the great Amazigh dynasties.
3. The Polisario Front is an al Qaeda-affiliated jihadist group that seeks to bring back the Caliphate.
4. Police checkpoints are common all over Morocco.
5. Primary education in Morocco offers two educational tracks; one is taught exclusively in Standard Arabic, and the other is taught in the Amazigh languages.
6. Ceuta and Melilla are top destinations for African migrants and refugees.
7. *Ksours* are massive structures that house several families of the same tribe in rural Morocco.
8. Moroccan-born Christians face legal and social restrictions.
9. Al-Hijra is the administrative capital of the Rif Mountains region.

10. The third Umayyad Caliph built the Hassan II Mosque in Marrakech in the 8th century.

11. Foreigners and tourists cannot eat in public during Ramadan.

12. Tamazight is a traditional meat stew served during holidays and weddings.

13. Men who kiss other men on the cheek in public may be arrested.

14. Moroccan women keep their family name when they marry.

15. Moroccans use their right hand to pick up, pass, and eat food and to present gifts.

16. Moroccan Muslims do not celebrate New Year's Day.

17. On the anniversary of the Green March, Moroccans honor the farmers who marched on the capital shortly after independence with the demand for agrarian reform.

18. A fez is a type of headcover worn by Muslim men.

19. The official Moroccan currency is the Moroccan dirham.
20. Moroccans do not share taxi rides because of the risk of robbery and kidnapping.
21. It is inappropriate to ignore street beggars or to treat them rudely.
22. Unemployment is a serious challenge in metropolitan areas, especially among young people.
23. When a Moroccan woman divorces her husband, she loses custody of her children.
24. Poor farmers sell their land to rich landowners before they migrate to the cities.
25. An intensive government campaign nearly eradicated illiteracy in rural Morocco.
26. The Irifiyen and Ishilhayen are two subgroups of Imazighen.
27. Moroccans write their family name first, followed by their personal name.

28. Moroccan boys are circumcised when they enter adolescence, usually on their 13th birthday.

29. The legal age for marriage in Morocco is 15.

30. Qadis are religious judges who rule according to Islamic law.

30. True
Assessment Answers: 1. False; 2. False; 3. False; 4. True; 5. False; 6. True; 7. True; 8. True; 9. False;
10. False; 11. True; 12. False; 13. False; 14. True; 15. True; 16. False; 17. False; 18. True; 19. True;
20. False; 21. True; 22. True; 23. False; 24. False; 25. False; 26. True; 27. True; 28. False; 29. False;