

Marine Corps Intelligence Activity

Cultural Field Guide

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Morocco Cultural Field Guide

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Introduction

Moroccan culture uniquely combines aspects of Europe, the Middle East, and Africa. It is a Muslim country with close ties to other Arab countries in the Middle East, but its proximity to Europe has given it a more Western feel. Morocco experiences many of the economic hardships seen in other African nations, such as a lack of economic diversity, high unemployment, and widespread poverty.

Morocco is ruled by King Mohammed VI. He is fairly popular within the country and seen as more liberal than his father, who was king. Morocco is considered a stable nation, but there is international concern over individuals from Morocco who were involved in internal and external terrorist attacks. There is a concern by some that if economic conditions do not improve, more Moroccans might turn to extremism. So far this has not occurred and most Moroccans practice a peaceful form of Islam.

Morocco and the United States have a long history of close relations. The U.S. military trains with the Moroccan military on a regular basis. The Moroccan military is very capable, especially by African standards, and is seen as a leader to other countries in the region.

Cultural Geography

One of Morocco's most striking features is its geographic diversity. The varying topography found in Morocco has played a large part in shaping its history. Morocco has a 1,835 kilometer (1,140 mile) coastline, which has brought the country many tourists and economic opportunities but also many problems. Throughout its history Morocco has had to defend its coasts from foreign invaders and pirates. Current concerns in the coastal areas are smuggling, illegal fishing, and illegal immigration.

The largest mountain peaks in Northern Africa are located in central Morocco. There are several different mountain ranges in Morocco: the Rif, the High Atlas, the Middle Atlas, and the Low Atlas. The harsh winters and the poor roads leading into the mountains leave these regions isolated from the rest of the country for much of the year. The mountain ranges also served as a natural barrier against invaders from the east.

Far eastern Morocco and southern Morocco are desert regions. The Sahara is a harsh environment and sparsely populated. Most populations in this region are nomadic. Although the land is unable to support any agriculture, there are phosphate deposits in the Western Sahara that are an important source of income for Morocco.



Topography

Cultural History

Due to its strategic location, Morocco has always been susceptible to foreign invasion. It has a long, complicated history involving ever-changing dynasties and rulers. The Carthaginians, Romans, Phoenicians, Vandals, and Byzantine Greeks were among the many foreign powers that entered Morocco in ancient times. Although all these groups left an imprint on the local Berber population, it is the Arab arrival that had the most influence on present day Morocco.

In the 7th century, the Arabs entered what is now Morocco and clashed with the Berbers. The goal of the Arabs was to spread Islam, and they did so through force. The Arabs who came to Morocco were mostly single men. When they settled in the area they married local Berbers and the two ethnicities became intertwined. The communal style of the Berbers clashed with the authoritarian style of the Arabs and conflicts continued. For the most part, the Arabs who settled left the Berbers alone and lived as the urban elite. The next major wave of Arabs arrived in the 11th century. This influx of Arabs was hard on the Berbers because many were pushed off their farming land. Those who stayed in the plains lost most of their traditional Berber customs. Many of the Berbers moved into the mountainous areas, where most still live today.

Throughout the next several centuries, Morocco was never a truly unified country. Different sultans of varying influence controlled limited areas. The rural Berbers often refused to recognize the sultan and power frequently shifted between different tribes.

In the mid 19th century, European leaders began to show more interest in Morocco and became increasingly involved in Moroccan affairs; they advised Moroccan leaders, built infrastructure, and bought property. The Moroccans fought unsuccessfully against a French invasion in 1904. In 1912, the Sultan signed the French-Moroccan Treaty of Fez, officially making Morocco a French protectorate. Spain was given control of the most northern and southern regions of Morocco. The Sultan remained the religious leader of Morocco, but the French controlled most other aspects of Moroccan life. Regardless of the many faults of the protectorate system, Morocco was fortunate compared to most African colonies. The French resident-general to Morocco, Marshal Lyautey, was concerned about Moroccan culture. His order to not offend a single tradition or change a single habit allowed Morocco to preserve its culture and its unique identity.

Within two decades of French rule, more than 350,000 Europeans lived in Morocco. Moroccans lost about a million hectares (3,861 square miles) of agricultural land and control of mineral deposits and other natural resources to the colonizers. These issues caused resentment and economic hardships that exist today.

Rebellions against the French occurred throughout the country but the French military was able to control them. The nationalist movement against French occupation reached its peak when France exiled the popular sultan, Mohammed V. After 3 years of violent protests and attacks, France permitted Mohammed V to return to Morocco and granted Morocco its independence in 1956.

After Morocco received its independence, King Hassan II ruled for almost 40 years (1961-1999). His reign was marred by oppression and accusations of human rights violations. His authoritarian style became more oppressive after two coups were attempted by members of his military. His son, Muhammed VI came into power in 1999 and has gained popular support. Although he still demands absolute power, he has done his best to ensure that Moroccans have the rights they are entitled to under the constitution.



King Mohammed VI

Western Sahara

The Western Sahara is the geographic region directly south of Morocco and is roughly the size of Colorado. This area is currently on the United Nations' list of non-self-governed territories. The Moroccan government claims it as a Moroccan territory and the indigenous groups in the area claim it has an independent nation. The people of Western Sahara are often referred to as *Saharawi*, and they call the area the "Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic" (SADR).

The rebel group, the Popular Front for the Liberation of the Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro (POLISARIO), was formed with the help of Algeria, in the early 1970s. The Spanish finally withdrew from the area in 1975; no decision was made as to who would then control the land. The Saharawi, along with both Morocco and Mauritania, claimed the region. Morocco organized what is known as the Green March on 6 November 1975 to illustrate its claim to the region. On this day, more than 300,000 Moroccans marched into the Western Sahara carrying Moroccan flags, Qur'ans, and pictures of the king.

Soon after, Morocco and Mauritania moved forces into the Western Sahara with Rabat controlling the northern two-thirds. A 1978 coup in Mauritania and a subsequent reshuffling of leadership brought to power a regime that, in 1979, signed a peace treaty with the POLISARIO, renouncing all claims to the territory.

Sporadic fighting between the Moroccan military and the POLISARIO continued until a United Nations-brokered cease fire went into effect in 1991. Efforts to broker a political settlement between Morocco and the POLISARIO have failed.

The United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) has been in the region for 15 years, and the mission has cost more than US\$600 million. Although there is currently no fighting in the Western Sahara, Morocco maintains a large military presence in the area.

Hostilities between the POLISARIO and Moroccan military are not expected to resume, but the issue remains a major problem throughout the area. Disagreements over the Western Sahara have hindered regional cooperation. Morocco withdrew from the Organization on African Unity (OAU) in 1982 when that organization recognized the SADR. Most recently, Morocco refused to participate in the Maghreb summit because of their dispute with Algeria over the Western Sahara. While recognizing Morocco's administrative control of Western Sahara, the United States considers the Western Sahara a disputed territory, not a region within Morocco.





Western Sahara

Ethnic Groups

Berbers

Some archeologists believe that the Berbers arrived in the second century B.C. The basic social and political organization revolved around the extended family. Families banded together to form clans and clans joined together to form tribes. Independence is extremely important to Berbers and they have proven they are willing to fight for it. The Berbers have been instrumental in fending off foreign invaders. Fighting between and within tribes and clans was common but the Berbers usually joined together to confront invaders.

Some tribes converted to Christianity and Judaism during the first century. Most of the Berbers became Muslims after the Arab arrival in the 7th century. Although the Berbers converted to Islam, they did so on their own terms and combined aspects of tribal religions with Islamic practices. Many Berbers still practice pre-Islamic beliefs along with Islam.

Women in Berber societies play a larger role in the economy than in most Arab societies. Women do much of the work, including physical labor. Berber women are often somewhat independent and have property rights.

Today Berbers are defined mostly by their common language. Berber lifestyles vary depending on location. Those who live in the mountainous areas have kept their traditional lifestyles. As the economic conditions in the rural areas continue to decline, many Berbers have moved to more urban areas. These Berbers tend to adapt to a more modern lifestyle.

Berber nationalism has grown in recent years. Berbers are now demanding more recognition of their language and culture. King Mohammed VI is part Berber and has been receptive to the cause. Berber language is beginning to be taught in Moroccan public schools. Some Berbers object to the term “Berber” because it means “barbarian.” Instead, they refer to themselves as *Imazighen* meaning “free men.”

Since both Berbers and Arabs have lived in Morocco for centuries and intermarriage is common, an exact percentage of Moroccan Berbers is hard to determine. It is estimated that 75 percent of Moroccans have some Berber ancestry. Between 33 and 50 percent of the population define themselves as Berbers and speak Berber dialects.

Arabs

The Arabs, from the Arabian Peninsula, arrived in North Africa in the second half of the 7th century, soon after the death of the Prophet Mohammed. The driving goal of the Arab migration was to spread Islam. The Arabs quickly conquered the Northeastern area of Africa, but encountered problems when they reached the Western areas. The Moroccan Berbers put up a strong fight against the Arab invasion. Eventually, the Arabs began to offer the Berbers incentives to convert. The Berbers converted to Islam, but many believe it was a political move rather than a spiritual one. Regardless, Islam has become a defining feature in all of North Africa.

In addition to religion, the Arabs influenced Morocco in almost every aspect of life. They introduced new foods, clothing, and styles of governing. One of the most significant Arab influences was their language. The use of Arabic grew quickly in Morocco and continues to be the national language.

The merging of Berber and Arab cultures was often a complicated and violent process. Over time, Arabs and Berbers began to intermarry and their differences, especially in urban areas, started to diminish. Berbers who live in areas inhabited mostly by Arabs remain Berbers ethnically, but assumed many of the cultural aspects of Arabs. The reverse was also seen. Arabs who moved to areas dominated by Berbers took on Berber lifestyles.

The arrival of the Arabs has been one of the most significant events in Morocco's history. The Arab influence has become so imbedded in Moroccan life that it is hard to separate Moroccan from Arab. Moroccans view their country as an Arab nation, and feel strongly about issues relating to the Middle East. Moroccans often feel closer ties to Arabs in the Middle East than to their African neighbors.

Saharawis

The term *Saharawi* is used to describe people living in the Western Sahara. It is a controversial term, with some saying it is a political term and others claiming it is a distinct ethnic group. The Saharawi are desert-based, nomadic tribes with many similarities to the Moors in Mauritania.

During the colonial era, Spain controlled the Western Sahara region, but unlike other European colonizers, few Spanish citizens moved to the area. This allowed the Saharawis to maintain their traditional lifestyles with little outside influence. Harsh droughts have forced many Saharawi to leave their traditional roles as herders. Many of these people moved to the cities that were established by the Spanish or Moroccan governments. Lack of employment opportunities has made life hard in the cities. Urban Saharawis must often rely on government assistance and have a lower standard of living than the average Moroccan.

Saharawis have many of the same cultural characteristics as Moroccan Arabs and Berbers: they are Muslim, they place heavy emphasis on family, and they speak Arabic dialects. Due to the political climate in Western Sahara, the Saharawi often live differently than the general Moroccan population. During the 1970s, the POLISARIO and Moroccan military began to fight for the territory of the Western Sahara. The violence pushed the Saharawi citizens across the border, into Algeria. The Saharawi established refugee camps near Tindouf, Algeria and have been there for more than two decades. These

camps are approximately 80 percent women and children. This situation has affected the gender roles in Saharawi culture. Women have a prominent role in Saharawi society. In the camps, they hold almost all responsibility and have thus become very independent. Saharawi women are free to marry and divorce with no fear of social stigma. It is common for Saharawi women to have been divorced and remarried many times. There is some concern within the Saharawi population that if their nation annexed with Morocco, their women would no longer have the same freedoms.

Harratines

The Harratines are a black, Muslim population living in mostly the southern desert areas of Morocco. They are non-tribal and their place of origin has not been determined. It is widely believed that they are the descendants of black slaves. The Harratines are not well integrated with the other ethnic groups. It is uncommon for them to marry Arabs or Berbers. Although the Harratines are free people, they usually work in manual labor or other low-paying jobs. As a result, they remain among the poorest populations in Morocco.

Language

Although the official language of Morocco is Arabic, most Moroccans speak several languages. The Arabic spoken in Morocco is often referred to as Maghribi Arabic, or Darija, and is hard for those speaking classical Arabic to understand. In addition to Arabic, the most common languages are French, Spanish, and Berber dialects. English is becoming more common, especially among the youth. English is taught in all public schools beginning in the students' fourth year.

The Berber languages can be divided into three dialects: *Rifi* in the Rif Mountains, *Tamazight* in the Middle Atlas, and *Tashilhit* in the High Atlas and Anti-Atlas Mountains. On average, a third of the Morocco population speaks a Berber dialect. With the recent surge in Berber nationalism, Berbers have begun to teach their languages in schools.

Language in Morocco is a complicated issue. After the French left in 1956, there was a large push to eliminate the use of the French language. Morocco was successful in shifting the focus from French to Arabic, but French continues to be the dominant language in the most influential sectors. French is used in the government, the military, and business. Moroccans are proud people who want to preserve their heritage, but also understand the need to speak French and English to take advantage of greater economic opportunities. The Berbers face a similar dilemma. Berbers want their children to learn Berber languages, but know that speaking only Berber will limit their opportunities. For economic reasons, Moroccans are using more Western languages and fewer traditional languages.

Religion

Islam

Around 95 percent of Morocco is Muslim; most are Sunni; the other 5 percent is made up of Christians and Jews, and others.

Islam was founded in 610 A.D. on the Arabian Peninsula by the prophet Mohammed. It is a monotheistic religion that accepts absolute sovereignty of God. Islam means submission to God, and one who submits is a Muslim. Muslims believe that Mohammed's revelations complete the series of revelations received by the Jews and Christians.

After Mohammed's death in 632 A.D., his followers compiled the Qur'an, the holy scripture of Islam, using those words regarded as coming directly and literally from God. Mohammed's other teachings and precedents of his personal behavior, recalled by those who knew him, became the Sunna. The Hadith is a compilation of teachings on how to live, and specifies lifestyles of which the prophet approved. These, along with analogy and consensus among the Ulema, or Islamic scholars, form the Islamic law known as Shari'a.

Muslims are expected to adhere to Five Pillars of Faith: profession of faith; praying five times a day; almsgiving to the poor and mosque; fasting during daylight hours during Ramadan; and pilgrimage to Mecca (the Hajj) at least once in a lifetime. Muslims gather collectively for worship on Fridays at the mosque, which is also the center for teaching of the Qur'an. The Islamic community leader, the imam, is considered a teacher and prayer leader.

The beliefs and practices of Sunnis and Shi'a are similar in many ways. The fundamental difference between Sunni and Shi'a Muslims involved the issue of Mohammed's successor. Mohammed neither designated a successor nor stated how one should be chosen. The Shi'a believe the successor should be a close blood relation to the prophet, while Sunnis think that a family relation is not necessary. The Shi'a religious structure is more hierarchical than the Sunni.

Most Moroccans follow the Maliki school, and many are Sufis. Sufism is not a sect of Islam, but a movement. Sufis can be either Sunnis or Shi'a but in Morocco they are Sunnis. Sufism has no one originator or leader, and therefore, the traditions vary from one region to the next. The pre-Islam tribal traditions of the Berbers coincide well with Sufism.

Sufism is a mystical form of Islam that places emphasis on direct knowledge and personal experiences with Allah. Sufis use a loose, allegorical interpretation of the Qur'an. Sufis often use a variety of practices to worship, such as singing, dancing, meditation, poetry, and saint worship. In general, Moroccan Sufis tend to be peaceful and nonviolent.

While most Moroccans practice a nonviolent form of Islam, pockets of extremism exist. The Wahhabi movement began in the 18th century on the Arabian Peninsula. Wahhabis want to return to a more pure and simplistic form of Islam. Not all Wahhabis are militant, but recently, Wahhabism has been linked with international terrorists, such as Usama bin Ladin. Wahhabis target the poorest districts in Morocco to recruit new members.

Morocco's problem with Islamic extremism was highlighted on 16 May 2003, when suicide bombers blew themselves up in crowded tourist areas in Casablanca, killing 33 bystanders. Much like the attack on 11 September 2001 in the United States, the Casablanca bombings were a historical and cultural turning point for the nation. Prior to the attacks, Morocco had prided itself on its moderation in a region where extremism often prevailed. Morocco was viewed as an area of tolerance. Moroccans were also pleased with their growing democratic freedoms. The 12 suicide bombers brought anger, doubt, and fear to Moroccans. The attacks were originally blamed on foreigners. The fact that the attack was carried out by Moroccans meant that extremism was an emerging problem in Morocco.

The extent of extremist ideology in Morocco is hard to gauge. Prior to the Casablanca attacks, the Moroccan government claimed there were a few hundred extremists in the country. In the year following the attacks, several thousand were arrested in association with extremism. There is a fear among many that the hunt for extremism will halt the democratic progress Morocco has made.



Mosque in Marrakech

Judaism

Jews have been in Morocco for nearly 2,000 years. Jews received varying rights under different rulers. Originally, under the Roman Empire, Jews were treated as equals among the population. They formed close ties with the Berber tribes through trading. This relationship led to the conversion of a number of Berber tribes to Judaism, some of which exist today. The arrival of the Arabs in the 7th and later 11th century caused problems for the Jews; after that time, Jews were often treated as second-class citizens and were often victims of violence by the Arab rulers and other foreign invaders, who saw them as infidels. Life for the Jews began to improve when Morocco came under French rule. The French gave the Jews respect and equal rights. When Morocco was granted independence, the king realized the economic significance of the Jewish community and made amends.

With the re-creation of Israel, thousands of Moroccan Jews emigrated to the newly established state. When Morocco gained its independence, 300,000 Jews lived in Morocco. Today that number is at 4,000, most of whom live in Casablanca.

Society

People

From generations of marriage between Arabs and Berbers, today's average Moroccan has many Arab physical characteristics. They typically have brown eyes, brown or black hair and tan skin. Berber tribes that have been isolated from the Arab influence have lighter skin and, in some cases, blonde hair and blue eyes. Berber women may have traditional facial tattoos on their cheeks and chins.

Clothing

Clothing in Morocco varies depending on location, age, and religion. The traditional garment often seen in Morocco is the *djellaba*. This is a long, hooded robe with full sleeves, worn by both men and women.

Women are held to stricter standards when it comes to clothing. Older women and those in rural areas usually wear more conservative coverings, such as the *chadra*, a facial veil. It is common to see women of any age wearing a scarf to cover their hair, or specifically, a *derra*, a scarf that covers all the hair and ties under the chin. They may also mix traditional Islamic styles with modern clothing, such as wearing a *derra* with jeans. There are no laws regarding women's dress, but women are usually pressured to dress in a certain way by their family or community.

Men and women, especially in urban areas, can be seen in the same styles as in any major city. One difference between Moroccan and Western city styles is that Moroccans do not wear shorts, except at the beach or in sports. Moroccans take pride in appearances and consider it important to be well dressed and well groomed in public. Dress differs in the southern region to accommodate the desert climate. Men wear loose-fitting, baggy pants and shirts. Both men and women in the desert often wear veils as protection from dust storms.



Man in Traditional Dress



Women in Traditional Dress

Greetings

Greetings are lengthier in Morocco than in the United States. The term “*assalam oualaikoum*,” meaning “peace be upon you,” is a common way to say hello. The proper response is “*wa ‘alaykum al-salam*,” meaning “may peace be upon you also.” The initial greeting is followed by questions about family, health, and friends. Although these questions may seem insignificant or repetitive to Americans, it is a very important practice to Moroccans. To rush an introduction is seen as impolite.

Handshakes are the customary form of greeting between members of the same sex and often last longer than in the West. When entering a room you should individually shake every person's hand. The handshake is usually weaker than in the West and should always be done with the right hand. Handshakes between members of the opposite sex should be initiated by the woman. If a woman does not offer her hand the appropriate greeting is a head bow. Once a relationship is formed, people of the same sex greet each other with a kiss on each cheek. A hand placed over the heart is used as a sign of sincerity. Occasionally, people will kiss their own hands after a handshake to signify affection. A kiss on the forehead, nose, or right hand represents extreme respect. When leaving a group, it is necessary for one to say goodbye to each person individually. In general, Moroccans stand close to each other and will touch each other throughout the conversation. People of the same sex may hold hands when talking or walking. This is a sign of friendship.

Business

Those conducting business in Morocco should allow ample time for meetings because Moroccans have a relaxed attitude toward time. Business transactions are similar to greetings in that they last a long time and involve discussion of personal matters, such as health and family. Moroccans want to do business with people they know and trust; it is important to not rush the introductions.

Once the conversation has moved to business matters, things will continue to move slowly. Moroccans make decisions after long deliberation and to rush them will be viewed as insulting and aggressive. Moroccan society is also bureaucratic and requires many layers of approval, further slowing down the process.

Moroccans take pride in their appearance and judge others on theirs. It is therefore important to dress formally and appropriately. Women should dress conservatively.

Food

Moroccans are proud of their food, and see it as a part of the Moroccan identity. Meals are an occasion for family gatherings; even the simplest meal is considered an event. Moroccans eat three meals a day, the largest at midday. Formal meals or special occasions often involve meals with five or more courses.

Tea is the staple drink. It is served with most meals and also served to guests when visiting. Moroccans drink very sweet mint tea. One of the most common dishes in Morocco is couscous, a semolina-based entree. Moroccans usually eat couscous by scooping it into their hands and forming it into balls. Another popular dish is *tajine*, a stew usually made with vegetables and lamb or chicken. Bread is served with most meals and can be used to scoop food from a communal dish.

When in a group, Moroccans often eat from communal bowls. It is appropriate to use hands, and eat the selection that is directly before the diner. When eating, always use the right hand. In rural areas it is not unusual for men and women to eat and socialize at separate tables or in different rooms.

It is illegal to sell alcohol to Muslims, but the rule is often not enforced. Non-Muslims are free to drink alcohol, and it can easily be obtained in most large cities.



Dish of Couscous



Chicken Tajine

Visiting

Moroccans take pride in their hospitality. Hosts will go out of their way to offer visitors drinks, food, and even a place to stay the night. Tea is often offered to guests and it is seen as ill-mannered to refuse. Moroccans will insist that their guests take several helpings and to do so is viewed as complimentary to the host. Visits will often last several hours and should not be rushed.

It is polite to remove one's shoes upon entering the home. Prior to eating, especially in rural areas, the host will wash each person's hands by pouring water over their cupped hands held over a basin.

When visiting a Moroccan, it is appropriate to bring a small gift for the host. Common gifts include pastries, fruit, nuts, figs, or flowers. It is also common to bring a small gift to the children. Moroccans will not open the gift when it is received; instead they wait until the guest has left.

Dating and Marriage

Casual dating is uncommon in Morocco. In rural areas, partners often do not meet until they are married. The marriage is arranged by family members with little say from the husband and wife. In urban areas,

Moroccans have more freedom to marry whom they please but the family still plays a significant role. The couple is expected to obtain permission from both families prior to marriage. Marriage in Morocco is seen as a family decision, not an individual one. It is customary for the groom to pay his bride's father to cover the wedding expenses. Weddings are extravagant events and often last for several days. It is common for the new husband and wife to live with the husband's family.



Wedding in Morocco

Holidays

The following is a list of the national (bank) secular holidays:

- 1 January: New Year's Day
- 11 January: Manifesto of Independence
- 3 March: Feast of the Throne
- 1 May: Labor Day
- 9 July: Young People's Day/ Hassan II Birthday
- 14 August: Allegiance of the Oued Eddahab
- 20 August: Anniversary of the King and Peoples Revolution
- 21 August: Mohammed VI's Birthday
- 6 November: Anniversary of the Green March
- 18 November: Independence Day

Moroccans also celebrate several religious holidays whose dates vary depending on the Islamic lunar year. The three most significant holidays are Ramadan, *Id-al-Fitar*, and *Id-al-Kaha*. Ramadan is the month-long recognition of the time in which the prophet Mohammed received his revelations from God. Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset during Ramadan. Businesses will often have irregular hours during Ramadan. Although non-Muslims are not expected to fast during this time, it is important to be respectful

of the practice and not eat in front of those fasting. The Feast of Breaking the Fast, or *Id-al-Fitar*, is the celebration of the end of Ramadan, which lasts from 3 days to a week. Businesses are often closed during the celebrations. *Id-al-Kaha* is in remembrance of the story in the Qu'ran when Abraham was willing to sacrifice his son to God. Muslims celebrate with a feast of the meat from a sacrificed lamb.



Sufi musicians

Attitudes

Nationalism

Moroccans are very proud of their country and have a strong sense of national identity. This is largely due to a history of independent rule. Although it could be argued that Morocco lost its independent rule to the Arabs, and later the French, Moroccans do not perceive it this way. Since most Moroccans consider themselves Arab they do not see the Arab arrival in Morocco as an invasion or violation of sovereignty. They hold some hostility toward France's role in Moroccan history, but they also know that they were treated much better than neighboring states like Algeria. Because France gave special treatment to Morocco, many do not view this as an occupation and still consider Morocco to have a history free from foreign rule.

Even though Morocco has had numerous internal battles, they have united as one nation when foreign nations have attacked. Whereas the Turks unified most of the Arab world under the Ottoman Empire, they were unable to conquer Morocco. Moroccans also joined together to fight off colonialism during the nationalist movement in the 1940s. Most recently, Moroccans have put their differences aside in a common concern over the rising Islamic fundamentalism. Moroccans view their country as progressive and tolerant. It is not appropriate for visitors to criticize Moroccan history, politics, or policies.



Flag-lined Street

Honor

To Moroccans, family and personal honor are above all else. They are aware of and concerned about the way others perceive them. Moroccans will go out of their way to preserve their honor. To a Moroccan, preserving honor is often more important than the facts. They may say things or agree in public in order to save face or help you save face. It is important to not criticize people in public.

An individual's honor is tied to the honor of his family; once it is lost, it is hard to regain. The honor of a family is often linked to the sexual honor of the female members. It is therefore important to treat all females with utmost respect, as an insult to a woman is an insult to the entire family.

Family

The family is the most significant unit in Moroccan life. Nuclear and extended families often live on the same block, if not in the same house. Status in a family is related to age. The elders of the family are considered wise and experienced. They are regarded with respect and often have great influence on the family. Respect for parents is very important in Moroccan society. It is the children's responsibility to care for the parents when they get older. Children are taught to have absolute obedience to their parents. Moroccans view the family as a single unit with little room for individualism. Loyalty to the family is seen as more important than personal needs and desires.

Roles within a family are often tied to gender. Women are beginning to work outside the home, but it is more common for the women to stay home and care for the children. Ultimate responsibility for the family lies with the eldest male of the house. It is his duty to provide financially for his immediate family, and in many cases, his extended family.

In 2003, a controversial new family code was approved. The code gave women more rights by stating the family is a joint responsibility of both parents and allowing women to facilitate divorce. The law also raised the legal age to marry from 15 to 18. Many conservative Muslims argued that the family code was un-Islamic and threatened the traditional Moroccan values. The criticism was overshadowed by the praise Morocco received from women's groups, human rights organizations, and foreign governments.



Moroccan Family

Attitudes Toward the United States

Morocco was the first nation to recognize U.S. independence, and the two nations have remained friends since. Morocco has stated its commitment to the war on terrorism but is opposed to Operation IRAQI FREEDOM. Morocco's special partnership with the United States was brought into the spotlight in 2004 when they signed the U.S. Moroccan Free Trade Agreement. Morocco is the first African nation to establish free trade with the United States.

Moroccan and U.S. leaders work closely together, but at the same time, Moroccan extremists have been involved in international terrorist attacks. The feelings of the general population are between these extremes. Polls have shown that Moroccans differentiate between U.S. politics and the average U.S. citizen. Several recent polls indicate that most Moroccans object to U.S. foreign policy. The same studies also show that most Moroccans have positive views of American citizens and see the United States as a place of opportunity.

Attitudes Toward Neighboring States

Morocco shares a 1,559 kilometer (969 mile) border with Algeria, whom Morocco views as its primary threat. These two countries have a history of troubled relations, beginning with a brief border war in 1963. Algeria's support of the POLISARIO in Western Sahara is only the latest manifestation of a much more deeply-rooted rivalry. The tensions have not resulted in any recent fighting between the two countries, but instead is expressed through a continuous exchange of public statements, canceled meetings, and political threats. The feelings between Moroccans and Algerians are mixed. On the one hand, the citizens of Morocco and Algeria are both Muslim and share a common Arab heritage, and on the other hand, Moroccans distinguish themselves with claims of being more tolerant and less extreme in their religious beliefs than Algerians. Moroccans fear that the Algerian civil war or extremist ideology could spill across the Moroccan border.

Cultural Divides

The rural and urban areas vary widely in their cultural characteristics. Moroccans are nearly evenly split with around 45 percent of the population living in rural areas and the other 55 percent in cities. With the influx of outsiders in urban areas, Moroccans who live in the city typically have a more modern lifestyle.

They have access to numerous media sources, often dress in Western styles, and are more likely to speak English. Rural areas are more isolated from foreign influence. Many rural communities live without modern amenities and follow traditional family roles and styles of dress.

Age has also caused a cultural divide in Morocco. Many elders lived most of their lives under foreign rule or oppressive leaders. The elders are usually more conservative in their views and lifestyles. The older generation lived through the independence movement and has strong feelings of national pride. The younger generations grew up with television, cell phones, and internet access, never knowing a life without Western influence. These youth, although proud of their heritage, are often frustrated with the lack of jobs and have goals to leave Morocco in search of better employment opportunities.

Housing

Like most aspects of Moroccan culture, housing varies from one region to the next. Rural housing tends to be more primitive. Rural Berbers often live in small clusters of houses joined together. The houses are made from a combination of mud, stones, cement, and usually have dirt floors. Due to the isolated area and rough terrain, many rural communities are still without electricity and plumbing.

The influx of people to the cities has led to major housing shortages in urban areas. Those with money live in modern, European style houses with all the common amenities. The urban poor are often stuck living in *bidonvilles*, or “tin can towns.” These are slums with houses made of wood, tarps, cardboard, and any readily available scrap metal. These communities are usually set on the outskirts of major cities. They are dirty, have narrow dirt roads, and lack electricity and plumbing. In 2001, King Mohammed VI stated that there were more than 4 million Moroccans living in *bidonvilles*.



Housing in Casablanca

Economy

According to many, Morocco's most serious problem is its stagnant economy. Official statistics show unemployment rates to be between 20-30 percent, and around 20 percent of the population lives in poverty, but in reality the numbers are probably higher. More and more Moroccans are forced to live in slums. These citizens have no jobs, little education, and little hope for the future. As a result, they often

are susceptible to extremist propaganda. In the past, the government largely ignored these neighborhoods and their problems, but this changed after it was discovered that the Casablanca suicide bombers were from the *bidonvilles*. The government now focuses more attention on helping the poor, in hopes of diminishing extremist ideology.

The economic hardships have also caused many Moroccans to emigrate. Many Moroccans, seeing no future opportunities in Morocco, have sought their luck in places like Spain, France, and the United States. Jobs are scarce and pay is low, even for jobs that require higher education. Therefore, Morocco is losing many young, educated citizens.

The lack of jobs has caused many Moroccans to pursue illegal means of employment. The sale of drugs is a major problem facing Morocco. Morocco is the largest distributor of hashish to Europe. Most of the hashish comes from the poor Berber regions. The government is well aware of this trend but has done little to stop it because they do not have the means to support and provide alternative lifestyles and employment for these individuals. Arms and human trafficking are also becoming a common occupation, especially in the isolated southern regions.

Major Cities

Imperial Cities

Rabat, Meknes, Fez, and Marrakech, known as the Imperial Cities, are Morocco's most famous and historically significant cities.

Rabat

Rabat, with a population of 1.5 million, is located on the Atlantic coast. Rabat dates back to the 7th century B.C. The river port was a bridgehead for Roman occupation. A military garrison was established there in the 10th century with the conversion to Islam, and a *ribat*, or fort, was built, from which the name was derived. The French protectorate moved the capital from Fez to Rabat because Rabat was a port city and easier to supply and defend. Although a major cosmopolitan area, Rabat is a quieter city than Casablanca. Rabat is the political headquarters of the nation, housing embassies, the parliament, and the royal family.

Meknes

Meknes, with a population of 680,000 is the smallest of the Imperial Cities. The Berber tribe of the Meknassis first settled in Meknes in the 10th century. It gained importance in the 17th century when Moulay Ismail, of the Alawite dynasty, made Meknes the capital. After Moulay Ismail died the capital was moved and soon after much of Meknes was destroyed by an earthquake. In 1912 the French made Meknes their military headquarters.

Fez

Fez is the third largest city in Morocco and has a population of a little more than a million. It is the oldest of the Imperial Cities, dating back to 789 B.C. and was founded by Idriss II. Throughout Morocco's history Fez has intermittently been the capital, the first time in 809 and the last in 1912. Although the Europeans moved the capital from Fez to Rabat, Fez is still considered the capital of the north. Fez is considered the religious and cultural center of the country. Fez is unique in that it follows many of the

traditional religious practices, but is also a place known for its progressive thinkers. Many of Morocco's intellectuals, artists, and scientists are from Fez. Fez was also the birthplace of the nationalist movements and often the center of passionate protests and violent riots.

Marrakech

Like Fez, Marrakech was once the capital of Morocco when it was the principle city of the Almoravid dynasty in the 11th century. It is still considered the capital of the south. Marrakech is located at the foothills of the Atlas Mountains. This location was an important part of the Saharan trading routes which brought much wealth to the city. Marrakech is distinct from other Moroccan cities because it has a more African feel than Arab. It is a largely Berber city, known for the Djemma el Fna square, a lively area filled with storytellers, musicians, acrobats, snake-charmers, and vendors.



Djemma el Fna Square

Additional Cities of Significance

Agadir

Agadir is located in southwest Morocco with a population of 720,000. It is known for its scenic beaches surrounded by the Atlas Mountains. The city was founded in the 15th century by the Portuguese and became a major port city. In 1960, a devastating earthquake completely destroyed the city and killed more than 18,000 people. The city was rebuilt in a European style, designed to attract tourists. The plan worked, and Agadir is now the most popular beach resort in Morocco for both locals and foreigners.



Coastline at Agadir

Cuenta and Melilla

Cuenta and Melilla are two small enclaves on the Mediterranean coast which belong to the Spanish. The history of these two cities dates to the Roman Empire. Throughout history Morocco fought foreign invaders, specifically the Spanish and Portuguese, for these cities. Cuenta has been a part of Spain since 1640 and Mellila since 1496. Both cities have a large Spanish military presence. Recently these two enclaves have received international attention because hundreds of illegal citizens from throughout Africa travel here in hopes of crossing into Spanish territory.

Casablanca

Casablanca, often referred to as simply Casa, dates to the 7th century. This coastal city was originally a Berber city that rejected Muslim rule until it was finally conquered in 1068 by the ruling dynasty of the time, the Almoravids. It became a significant port but also a safe haven for pirates and as a result was destroyed by the Portuguese in 1468 and 1515. The Portuguese then rebuilt the city and stayed there until a devastating earthquake destroyed the city in 1755. Casablanca again became a significant port city in the 19th century. Many in Casablanca rebelled against the European arrival but were eventually subdued when Morocco became a French protectorate.

Casablanca is the largest city in Morocco and home to 3.8 million. Casablanca is Morocco's chief port and is considered the economic capital of the country. It is a bustling city, comparable to any major European city, and is somewhat more liberal than many other Moroccan cities. Casablanca receives many tourists, and one of the main attractions is the King Hassan II Mosque. This mosque, named after the last king, is the second largest mosque in the world. In May 2003, terrorists planted five bombs in tourist areas around Morocco. The explosions killed 33 people and injured 100. This attack brought attention to the growing problem of Islamic extremism in Morocco.



King Hassan II Mosque in Casablanca

Tan-Tan

Tan-Tan is a small desert town with approximately 70,000 citizens. Located in the far southern region of Morocco, Tan-Tan holds little significance for the average Moroccan. It is the location of Cap Draa, a military base used for foreign training and exercises. The town, built during the Spanish occupation, is small and made up of mostly military personnel.

Tangier

Tangier, located at the northern-most tip of Morocco, is often called “the gateway to Spain.” It is situated on the Strait of Gibraltar and was not a part of Morocco until after it gained independence. Its strategic location has shaped the city. Tangier has been occupied by almost every foreign power that invaded Morocco. It is still home to many foreigners, or a temporary home to those hoping to emigrate to Europe. Tangier has also been the transit point of illegal activity such as drug and arms trafficking. Morocco has recently tried to clean Tangier’s reputation by providing money to improve infrastructure. A billion-dollar project is underway to build a large international port between Tangier and the Spanish enclave, Ceuta.

Laayoune

Laayoune is located in the Western Sahara region. Although small compared to most Moroccan cities, Laayoune’s 200,000 citizens make it Western Sahara’s largest city. It is considered the unofficial capital of the Western Sahara. Morocco has spent a great deal of money to build the city and most of the citizens are foreigners. Due to the ongoing UN mission in the area, Laayoune has a large military presence.

Military Culture

The Moroccan military is a hierarchical structure with the king holding the highest position. King Mohammed VI has unlimited power over the military and monitors them closely. His attentions are a result of a past military coup attempt against the royal family.

One of the most significant characteristics of the Moroccan Royal Armed Forces (FAR) is the status gap between officers and enlisted. Getting a job as an officer in the Moroccan military is seen as prestigious. It is relatively well paying and can lead to future opportunities and advancements. Officers are required to attend a military academy and many have degrees in higher education. Moroccan officers usually speak several languages, including Arabic, French, and English. They conduct all military business in French. Officers are seen as being of a higher class than enlisted and thus they are treated better and have more privileges. Many Moroccan officers have trained at U.S. military schools.

The enlisted Moroccan, however, joins the military out of desperation, due to the high unemployment rate, widespread poverty, and lack of other opportunities. Enlisted are typically uneducated and often illiterate. Many enlisted can only speak Arabic. Enlisted are treated very poorly by the officers, and as a result, the officers are often despised by the enlisted.

Absolute loyalty to the King is demanded of all military personnel. Members who disagree with any policies would never mention it in public. Any hint of disloyalty or religious extremism can lead to termination or jail. It is not appropriate to ask military personnel their opinions on national politics.

The FAR is made up of Arabs and Berbers. In the past, Berbers were purged from the military, but this is no longer the case. Berbers and Arabs are treated equally in the FAR. There are also female military personnel, but they hold almost exclusively administrative roles.

Morocco has what is considered one of the strongest militaries in the region. Their forces frequently train with foreign militaries and are involved in several international peace keeping operations. Most of their foreign training comes from the United States and France. They are enthusiastic about working with the United States, and morale during bi-lateral training is high. The Moroccan forces are also very proud people and may become defensive if they feel they are being treated condescendingly.



Moroccan Armed Forces

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