



# Morocco: Re-staging colonialism for the masses

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## CHAPTER ONE

### **Morocco: Restaging colonialism for the masses**

Claudio Minca and Rachele Borghi

#### **Introduction**

Jamaa el Fna square, Marrakech, on a hot May afternoon: two water sellers (*garraba*) in traditional attire (Figure 1) pose for the tourists' cameras, resplendent in their colorful clothes, their weathered leather sacks full of water. This performance often includes a photo with the tourist pretending to drink the water taken from the sacks. With the *mise en scène* over, the tourist usually drops a coin into their purse and, sometimes, begins chatting with the water-seller that just moments previously was the centre of the performance (Figure 2). This passage between the 'front-stage' and the 'back-stage', where the informal chat takes place, appears effortless, as though it too were part of what Goffman (1959) would term 'the representation'.

The water sellers have for long been important figures in the global iconography that inscribes Morocco and the culture(s) of its mass tourism; an iconography that, by now, is part of the European collective travel imaginary. The water sellers also often appear in the promotional materials produced by the Moroccan tourist authorities. Their performance represents a sort of tourist 'tradition', re-enacted daily in the Jamaa el Fna. Yet what is most interesting in this scene is the fundamentally banal nature of the water sellers' tourist experience; a banality not only confirmed by the commercial transaction it entails, but also by the fact that the water sellers, after the 'staging' process, are often treated by the tourists as people like any other, thus deprived of any 'Oriental' aura or exoticism.

In this chapter, we intend to highlight precisely this (only apparent) distance between the 'exotic' aura that tourist promotion assigns to the 'cultural experience of Morocco' and the banality of many tourist practices. We focus our comments on Marrakech in particular, often presented as the iconic site of Moroccaness. We suggest that such experiences and practices are, in fact, also the result of the repetitive nature of many tourist performances: repetition in the hosts' performances – who meet different tourists but follow the same rituals/codes many times every day; and repetition in the tourists' own practices – who collect very similar experiences and play similar roles in many different moments and places while travelling (see Rojek 1996; Coleman and Crang 2002; Oakes 2005; 2006). More broadly, we focus on the (banality) of the Orientalist images adopted to promote Morocco, on the one hand, and the actual translation of these latter into 'real' geographies of tourism, into a newly spatialised

colonial nostalgia that is literally transforming the face of some *medinas* and other tourist spaces.

The recent evolution of Moroccan mass tourism towards a 'cultural turn' of sorts (see Borghi 2004; Filali 2008) has, in fact, been matched by growing attention on the part of the national government to the economic and political role that tourism can potentially play in the future development of the country. The Tourist Master Plan launched by the Moroccan Government during the *Assise Nationale du Tourisme* held in Marrakech in January 2001 aims for rapid growth in the number of visitors and the consolidation of Morocco as key 'cultural tourism' destination in the Mediterranean. The Master Plan reflects a revolutionary vision for Moroccan tourism that by 2010 should reach the magic threshold of 10 million visitors a year, thanks to a strategic diversification of its attractions and itineraries, the improvement of access and transportation, and the realization of new hotels and resorts (Daoud 2001, 28). While also making reference to existing competition with other Mediterranean destinations, such as Turkey, Tunisia and Egypt, the Plan presents tourism as a key factor in the enhancement of the prestige and the visibility of Morocco on the international scene more broadly (Franco 1996, 26; Filali 2000, 10; El Amrani 2001, 26). The aim of this 'new vision for tourism' is, indeed, creating a new 'culture of hospitality' able to accommodate mass arrivals from Europe, new, more sophisticated, expressions of colonial aesthetics, and new forms of secure (geopolitically speaking) and easy-to-reach Oriental exoticism.

The new Plan has proved relatively successful, doubling the number of visitors in just a few years (reaching about 4.1 millions in 2006)<sup>1</sup>. Combining an aggressive campaign to encourage further international investment in Marrakech (designated as Morocco's 'showcase' on the international scene) with the signing of an 'Open Skies' agreement with European carriers, the Plan also encouraged the promotion of a new international image based on the restaging of the country's colonial past for the new mass tourists. The campaign found fertile ground within the European market, long prepared to experience Morocco as the ultimate destination for the materialization of a sophisticated colonial nostalgia<sup>2</sup>.

In this chapter, we will reflect on the selling of such 'colonial nostalgia' and on some of its practical implications for contemporary Moroccan mass tourism. What we will try to highlight is how, in some places and some moments in time, tourist experiences are translated into the production of a set of (often banal) practices that often (playfully) challenge the global(ised) representations that inscribe and promote those very practices (see Baehrenholdt et al. 2004). By drawing attention to such instances, we hope to, on the one hand, deflect (at least in part) the usual criticism leveled at mass cultural tourism - that is, its presumed reliance on 'false' and static

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tourisme.gov.ma/francais/5-Tourisme-chiffres/ArriveeTouristes.htm> (19/06/08).

<sup>2</sup> A trend that has also been observed in other former colonies, see Bissell 2005; Gregory 2001;

Mahr 2007; Peleggi 2005; Rosaldo 1989.

(neo)colonial images of other cultures (see Minca 2007); on the other, we wish to underscore how such instances often support a much more mundane interpretation of tourism and of the culture that they help produce (see Crang 1999; 2004; 2006; Crouch 2004; 2005; Edensor 2001; 2006). The tourist 'staging of the colonial', in all its banality and sometime vulgarity, contributes in fact to mobilizing people, capital and images, while also materially transforming places and the meanings attached to them (see Henderson and Weisgrau 2007).

Following a brief genealogy of mass tourism in Morocco, we focus our attention on the new 'cultural' turn in Moroccan tourism. In particular, we highlight some of the processes of the restaging of the colonial for the masses in the Marrakech medina, building on our previous research on this topic (Borghi 2008a; Minca 2006; Borghi and Minca 2003). Tourism in Marrakech and, more specifically, the tourist colonization of the medina (see, for example, Escher et al. 2001a; 2001b) provides a particularly important focus for our central argument, also because the implications that these processes have and are likely to have in the future development of mass tourism in the rest of the country.

The opening up of Moroccan skies to low-cost European airlines a few years ago has, de facto, brought Marrakech much closer to European tourist markets, favoring the growth of new forms of cultural mass tourism. In Marrakech, and especially in its increasingly gentrified medina, the objectification and sacralisation of certain aspects of Moroccan life assumes almost grotesque manifestations, reflected in the tourists' own performances. This is due both to a grossly oversimplified understanding of 'Arab life' and to the fact that tourists must depend on local 'mediators' and local organizations to help them negotiate complex urban spaces that would otherwise be extremely difficult to approach or even reach. As this chapter will suggest, in such spaces aestheticised colonial nostalgia is coupled with an extraordinary degree of banality in tourist practices. The way in which such massified banal practices dialogue with representations produced and promoted by the media and by tour operators is an intriguing and partially overlooked field of investigation, at least in the Moroccan context.

### **L'Appel du Maroc**

In the early Nineties, the French advertisement company *Publicis* was commissioned by the Moroccan Government to create a new promotional campaign entitled '*Maroc: l'éblouissement des sens*', a campaign that was strongly marked by appeals to exotic and Orientalist understandings of the 'Morocco experience' (Ejeux 1993). Such understandings are recalled today by almost all Moroccan tour operators and dedicated websites, as well as publications produced by the Ministry of Tourism and the *Office National Marocain du Tourisme*. Morocco is presented as an exotic yet at the same time easy-to-reach destination, characterized by an 'uncontaminated nature', picturesque landscapes, labyrinthine medina(s), and a unique 'culture of hospitality':

As Western Europe's closest African and Arab neighbor, Morocco enjoys regular and very convenient air links across the World. It also boasts a rapidly expanding modern telecommunications network, hotels of international standard and the kind of infrastructure that makes Morocco one of the most highly developed and politically stable countries in Africa.

At the same time, Morocco is a country steeped in history and traditional culture that has lost none of its authenticity despite its close links with the West.

Blessed with some of the most stunning landscapes of any country in the world, Morocco has justly become a firm favorite amongst film makers, photographers, travel planners and, most importantly, conference organizers.<sup>3</sup>

*Alizes Travel*, a tour operator based in Casablanca claims to offer, instead, a 'Morocco where Dreams come true.' Its English-language catalogue contains a series of washed-out, hazy images, presumably evoking the country's 'dream-like' atmosphere. The pictures that embellish the catalogue are largely of Marrakech's 'magical' landscapes (the city's ochre-red walls, Jamaa el Fna square, the snowcapped Atlas mountains, etc.). In the background lie the contours of the country, marked with the key destinations of their 'tours' (Tangiers, Rabat, Casablanca, Marrakech itself, Agadir, Laayoune, etc.).

It is interesting that here, as in most of the brochures we examined, the images convey a rather ambivalent message, for references to 'upscale' modern facilities are frequently accompanied by the evocation of the work of Orientalist painters like Delacroix, Majorelle and Matisse and, in general, an Orientalist, colonial imaginary. The dominant trope is, in fact, the wholly-colonial '*L'Appel du Maroc*'<sup>4</sup> – a trope that draws on a long tradition of itinerant cultural tourism, inaugurated already by the French during the days of the Protectorate, now revived and reinterpreted within the contemporary Moroccan restaging of the colonial for the masses.

It is towards the end of the 1800s that the 'Orientalist gaze' shifted its focus from cities like Cairo and Shanghai, turning its eyes towards Morocco (Rivet 1984, 97), that soon comes to be perceived as the most fascinating materialization of the Oriental ideal. This 'vision' of Morocco was actively promoted by painters and writers, but also by the *savants* of the time (Borghi 2008a; Rivet 1984). These latter, though primarily engaged in the 'translation' of Morocco into the language of scientific discovery and colonial enterprise, were at once concerned for the potential loss of its 'magic aura' that modernization might bring:

Our love for the Morocco of old, our joy in travelling through its landscapes, in experiencing the fascination of its Islamic civilisation, primitive yet nonetheless captivating, all these are marked by an underlying melancholy, an underlying realisation: so many of these enticements, so many of these emotions will soon disappear (Ladreit de Lacharrière 1911; cited in Rivet 1988, 20)

Such a vision of Morocco was also sustained by a new '*marocanisant*' literature, inspired in large part by the scenes portrayed by Delacroix (1893; 1999; see also Turco 1995). This literature emerges at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and soon becomes very popular among the French and European readership more broadly, a readership irresistibly drawn to exotic, 'Oriental' experiences (see Potier 2006). Morocco appears to

<sup>3</sup> Travel Link, a Marrakech based tour operator, [www.travellink.ma/](http://www.travellink.ma/); last accessed on 19/06/08.

<sup>4</sup> This trope was, indeed, the focus of a recent volume edited by Rondeau (2000), published by the Paris-based *Institute du Monde Arabe*.

represent, for many, the last bastion of Oriental beauty and Islamic civilization, able to offer to the European traveler the profound sense of *dépaysement* they yearned for (Boëhm 1993). The first travel guide to Morocco is written in 1889 by M. de Kerce, at the time the editor of a Tangiers-based magazine bearing the evocative title *Le réveil du Maroc* (Lebel 1936, 347). The nineteenth century pioneers of modern tourism were mainly artists, explorers and missionaries, travelling individually. Nonetheless, their accounts of Morocco (see for example de Foucauld 1888; Loti 1889; De Amicis 1913) became of crucial importance in drawing a first (European) map of the potential tourist 'resources' of the country, a map that the French Protectorate (established in 1912) would adopt as a key referent for its own (tourist) re-interpretation of Moroccan places and landscapes (see Wharton 2003).

Despite the relative political instability and lack of military 'pacification' of many parts of the Protectorate in its early days, the French Governor, *Resident General* Marechal Herbert Lyautey decided to launch a campaign for the development of international tourism in the country on a relatively large scale. The role of tourism, in Lyautey's vision of Morocco<sup>5</sup>, was particularly important for two reasons: firstly, by attracting European (mainly French) visitors, tourism would help incorporate the 'new' Morocco into European geographies of culture and nature; secondly, this form of 'appropriation' in many ways reflected Lyautey's own ideology of the 'valorization' of the *patrimoine* of the colonized country, confirming the (political) legitimacy of his ambitious colonial vision for Morocco (see Morton 2000; Rabinow 1989). The arrival of (an albeit limited number of) tourists in the early decades of the 1900s was thus seen as an important mark of the successful pacification of this at times 'rebellious land', while also proving justification for further (military) 'stabilisation', as well as the establishment of better communication networks - and pre-disposition of some highly representative sites in Morocco's key cities for the nascent tourist market (Figure 3).

The first forms of modern tourism in Morocco develop, indeed, in the 1920s (see Cattedra 1990) and it is already in these early stages that a specific geography of tourism, closely shaped by the colonial desire for (and military control of) Morocco, begins to take a shape; a geography that will remain essentially unchanged all through the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The first all-included tour is organized already in 1920: starting in Bordeaux, over the space of three weeks it took tourists through Casablanca, El Jadida, Marrakech, Meknes, Fes, Oujda and Oran, ending in Algiers. The first tourist resorts, on the other hand, come to be realized within a securitized territorial triangle along the Atlantic coastline, marked by the pivotal roles of Tangiers, Fez and Marrakech, that soon becomes the most popular Moroccan destination among European travelers (Weisweiler 1932, 104).

Lyautey, in fact, was careful to lay the ground for Marrakech's emergence as a successful tourist destination: his comprehensive urban plan created majestic boulevards, beautiful garden spaces and prestigious colonial buildings, built in a Moresque style. What is more, the Resident General's architects used a sophisticated

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<sup>5</sup> On this vision see Barthou 1930; Benoist-Mechin 2007; Doury 2002; Hoisington 1995; Laprade 1934; Lyautey 1995; Maurois 1931; Rabinow 1989; Rivet 1980, 1988, 2002; Venier 1997.

play of perspectives in creating Marrakech's *Ville Nouvelle* in order to emphasize views of the famous Koutobia minaret, the city's red walls and the Atlas Mountains (see Borghi 2008b; Clément 1994; Minca 2006). Travelers to Marrakech (and Morocco in general) during the first decades of the Protectorate also lamented, however, the lack of adequate services and hotels able to attract and accommodate a rich and sophisticated clientele. As one commentator noted,

The hotels [in Marrakech] lack the comforts expected by a rich tourist clientele, used to the palaces of Italy or Egypt [...] We can only hope that one day Marrakech, too, will boast one of these hotels, a veritable colonial palace, set in a large garden full of exotic trees, palms and flowers, with apartments specially adapted for life in a climate that is mild in the winter and very hot in the summer months.

At that point, Marrakech will become truly the tourist destination I dream of. The railways will also join Guéliz<sup>6</sup>, carrying the suitcases, trunks and hat-boxes of elegant women who will play tennis on courts shaded by palms in the December sun, oblivious to all the work that has gone into conquering, conserving and constructing for them this winter paradise (Dugard 1918, 181-2).

The dream soon came true. In 1921, Lyautey inaugurated the majestic Mamounia Hotel that rapidly gained an extraordinary international reputation (*Compagnie des chemins de fer au Maroc* 1921, 1)<sup>7</sup>. With the opening of the Mamounia (see Figures 4a & 4b), Marrakech became a prestigious destination and a gathering point for the international 'jet-set' of the day, hosting many important events (Bauchet 1954, 44). That very same year, the French publisher Hachette released the third edition of the *Guide Bleu* to Morocco (the first one having been published in 1918); the initiative was highly praised by the Protectorate authorities and, indeed, the preface was written by Marechal Lyautey (1918, 1) himself, noting that the Guide 'provided an exceptional opportunity to publicise a country destined to be an important tourist destination'.

In 1937, after almost two decades of growth of the tourist sector, the *Office Chérifien du Tourisme* was created. Its purpose was 'to study all tourism related questions, both with and outside of Morocco, and seek the best possible means to promote its development' (Hillali 2007). The Office was shut down with the outbreak of WW2, but reopened in 1946 with a new name – the *Office National Marocain du Tourisme* – an institution that survived the transition towards independence and that is still active today.<sup>8</sup> The legacy of the colonial period was not limited, however, to such institutions or even the transformation of tourism into an important economic resource for the country. Lyautey's vision – and projects – comprehensively re-wrote Morocco for the European traveling eye, re-inscribing the country as an exotic destination: arguably still a decisive element in attracting mass tourism to Morocco today. With the end of the Protectorate in 1956, Morocco inherited both the facilities and the 'cultures' of

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<sup>6</sup> Marrakech's *Ville Nouvelle*, created by Lyautey's architects (see Borghi 2008a; 2008b; Clément 1994).

<sup>7</sup> The Mamounia remained, for many years, the winter holiday spot of choice of the international 'jet-set'. It is said to have been a favourite of Winston Churchill (see Mourad 1994).

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.tourisme.gov.ma>

tourism created by the French colonial project over the space of four decades.<sup>9</sup> These tourist cultures (and infrastructures) strongly influenced the policies of the first decades of the independent Morocco state - and are partially still with us today (Filali 2008).

### **'Mature' Tourism Geographies**

As it enters the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Moroccan tourism is characterized by a series of 'mature' tourism geographies consolidated in the 1980s and 1990s, both in terms of the management of its attractions and hospitality industry, as well as a distinct collective imaginary that continues to attract European visitors. These geographies have played and continue to play today an extremely important role for the economic and political development of the country as a whole, and reverberate in intriguing ways in the 'products' that Morocco 'crafts' for its tourist masses (see Berriane 2003).

The Moroccan Government launched its first initiatives in the tourist sector just a few years following independence. It was the Mediterranean coast that received most of the early investments, a decision that had important implications for domestic tourism, but that never seriously impacted international arrivals (Hillali 2005). Morocco was - and remains today - an 'exotic' Arab and African destination for the European market, and its limited Mediterranean tourist development could never actually compete with other countries better equipped for mass beach tourism (Lozato-Giotart 2008). Nonetheless, by clearly focusing on tourism as a strategy of economic development already in those early days, the Moroccan Government made a decisive political choice; that is, to tie the country's economy to the 'free market, liberal bloc', at a moment in time when many other African countries were instead opting for variants of state-socialism. In this respect, it is particularly significant that in 1964, a group of experts from the World Bank was invited to visit the country and to draw up a plan for its future economic development. The Bank's experts agreed that Morocco should abandon large industrial projects in favor of developing its tourism sector, seen as capable of attracting more foreign investment and revenues, while creating jobs through the 'valorization of the cultural and natural resources of the country' (Hillali 2007, 60-61).

Be as it may, from 1965 onwards, the combined effect of the encouragement of international organizations, the enthusiasm of multinational hotel groups and expectations of future investments on the part of the private sector, resulted in the launch of a series of plans for large scale tourism development. The 1965-72 Plan, in particular, inaugurated a new stage by explicitly identifying tourism as the second most important economic sector, after agriculture (*ibid.*). The Moroccan Government, having abandoned any grand ambitions of realizing a modern industrial apparatus, began to take an even stronger role in the management and promotion of the tourist sector. Tourism was seen, in fact, as a realm of development that required strong public intervention. Trying to learn from the Spanish experience of the 1960s, the Government's tourism development policies aimed at 'privileging mass tourism

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<sup>9</sup> In 1953, there were 265 hotels in Morocco, with approximately 7500 rooms accommodating

253,000 tourists (Bélanger and Sarrasin 1996)



without depending too much on it, at diversifying its clientele, at regionalizing its effects and benefits and at improving its impact for the whole country' (*Secrétariat...* 2005; see also Galissot 1999).

Significant investment in the tourism sector was also seen as a form of compensation for some of the more peripheral areas of the country that were left out of the major economic developments following independence (mainly centered on the Tangiers-Casablanca-Rabat axis) (see Lozato-Giotart 1991). Such heavy-handed public intervention – ironically, quite reminiscent of many colonial strategies of economic management under the Protectorate – persisted up to 1978. The oil shocks of the early 1970s, the State's annexation of Western Sahara in 1975, and finally the collapse of phosphate prices in 1976-1978, brought a significant downturn in the country's economic fortunes, resulting in the Government's partial withdrawal from the tourism sector and, in the decade following 1983, the implementation of a series of policies of 'structural adjustment' prescribed by the International Monetary Fund (Hillali 2007, 61).

Overall, while tourism confirmed some of its potentialities in the decades between 1960-1980, it never took off as a thriving sector able to support, with its direct and indirect impacts, the growth of the country's economy as a whole. This is reflected in some statistics from the period: starting from the very modest figure of 146,000 arrivals in 1960, the trend remained positive for more than a decade, reaching a million visitors in 1973. A long period of relative stagnation subsequently followed, with 1.3 million arrivals in 1984. Rapid growth resumed in the second half of the 1980s, culminating in the 3.2 million arrivals record figure in 1992. These numbers were to prove quite ephemeral, however, for the number of arrivals fell dramatically in 1995 as a consequence of the deadly terrorist attack in a Marrakech hotel in 1994 – recovering only partially by the turn of the century (2.4 million in 2000) (Département du Tourisme 2000).

Morocco's tourism geographies remained, by and large, those inherited from the Protectorate, with a leading role played by the traditional 'triangle' of the 'Imperial Cities' and with only limited impact of its Mediterranean coastal development. The launch of Agadir as the main – if not the sole – 'international beach destination' was partially successful, although based on a relatively standardized and lower-end tourist 'product', that soon began to suffer the competition of other 'new' Mediterranean destinations. Even the Moroccan desert South, given a further boost by the closing down of Algeria to international tourism in the 1990s, never achieved the figures and the impact predicted. By and large, the Moroccan authorities came to the realization that with the exception of the package tours headed for Agadir<sup>10</sup>, the country's real attraction was still very much its colonial legacy, with its corollary of exotic and Orientalist images that had not yet been 'exploited' in all their potential.

The affirmation, in the past few years, of a 'cultural' (and, implicitly, colonial) vocation of Moroccan mass tourism, together with a more general 'cultural shift' in

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<sup>10</sup> In the last decades of the century, becoming the first destination in quantitative terms.

Mediterranean tourism<sup>11</sup>, thus marked an important turning point in the planning strategies of Moroccan tourism. This shift has been crucial in the rapid increase in visitors over the past few years, with a doubling of international arrivals (from 2.4 million in 2000 to more than 4 in 2006), but also a renewed valorization of what has by now become a genuine Moroccan 'tourist tradition' in the European collective geographical imagination(s).

The contemporary re-staging of the colonial for the masses thus responds to a very specific strategy based on a new landscaped aesthetics and a new set of regional and urban hierarchies that are often only implicit in the promotional rhetoric adopted to engage with tourists. These geographies however are not only well known by the tourists (who sometimes seem to follow, in their itineraries, a sort of invisible tread) but represent, moreover, a real mapping of the 'places' where (global) images of Moroccaness intersect with a set of concrete practices, of mundane and banal experiences, giving life, in this way, to new forms of cultural production, new performances, new spatialities. It is for this very reason that it is worth while reflecting on how the Moroccan authorities are attempting today to re-fashion these well established geographies, both in terms of images and in terms of the aesthetics and the functional organization of tourist spaces and places.

### **Re-staging Morocco (for the masses)**

January 10th, 2001 is often presented as the key turning point for Moroccan tourism and its new 'vision'. As previously noted, mass tourism had not taken off as hoped for in the post-independence decades, due to a number of problems. The 'Vision 2010' Master Plan hoped to address many of these: the lack of adequate air connections, weak transport infrastructures and facilities; a relatively poor quality and deregulated hotel industry; the harassment of tourists on the part of local *faux guides* in some mass tourism destinations; a strong dependence on the public sector; and, finally, a relatively weak 'brand image', unable to capture the masses crowding other Mediterranean resorts.

The concrete objectives of the new plan were quite ambitious (<http://www.tourisme.gov.ma>):

- 10 million tourists by 2010 (7 from abroad);
- 160,000 new bed spaces, bringing overall capacity up to 230,000;
- total investments to reach 9 billion €;
- earnings of 48 billion € per year;
- 600,000 new jobs;
- tourism to increase its contribution to the GDP to about 20% (compared to 8,5% in 2000)

In order to achieve these objectives, the Government aimed to diversify tourist products, realize new structures and infrastructures, provide training for operators, with a new focus on marketing and promotional strategies, and the valorization of the natural and cultural 'resources' of the country. Beyond these quite common-place

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<sup>11</sup> See the 'Introduction' in this volume

strategic guidelines, however, King Mohammed VI (who chaired the *Assise du Tourisme*), called for a radically new way of looking at (and living with) tourism: tourism, in his words, was not simply about selling an exotic landscape and experiences of *dépaysement* and adventure but, rather, tourism:

beyond constituting an economic activity of great importance, is also the culture – and the art – of communicating with the Other. In this perspective, its development requires a careful management of our natural resources [...] but also the heritage of our civilisation and millennial culture, known for its tradition of hospitality (cited in El Amrani 2001, 26).

In this understanding, mass tourists should not be simply conceived as ‘spectators of the vestiges of Moroccan civilization’, but rather the witnesses of the dynamic history of a millennial culture:

[...] it is the duty of every Moroccan to consider themselves a tourist entrepreneur, in order [for us] to succeed in this endeavour. [We must] create a new welcoming culture for tourists, since we are the ‘hosts’ in our country [...] (ibid., 27).

The King’s invocation, in many ways, became a launching pad for some of the most innovative initiatives of the years that followed, while also profoundly shaping the ways in which the country began to represent itself to the new masses eager to approach (and pay for) an ‘accessible’ and ‘hospitable’ Morocco. Marrakech, in particular, became a key focus of many of these initiatives.

### **New ‘cultural’ geographies of tourism**

The promotional stand of the *Office National Marocain du Tourisme* at the 2008 *Bourse Internationale du Tourisme* held in Milan, placed strong emphasis on two strands of mass tourism: first, on the ‘Marrakech product’, promoted with a CD entitled ‘à la magie de Marrakech Medina’; secondly, on what were previously considered niche products: golf and trekking in the High Atlas mountains (both presented only in English, signaling a new strategy for new markets). Overall, the ‘Moroccan experience’ was summarized in 5 themed chapters: ‘Beach & Relaxation’; ‘Culture & Discovery’; ‘Sensations & Well-Being’; ‘Golf & Art of Living’ and ‘Business & Relaxation’<sup>12</sup>. The new brochure tellingly shows an intriguing compromise between some traditional stereotypes of Morocco and the search for a more sophisticated visual and textual language that transcends some of the ‘banalities’ previously utilized to address mass tourism.

The cover of the catalogue portrays the traditional Moroccan mint tea, served on a tray covered in rose petals, offered up to the reader (Figure 5). It is with this ‘welcoming’ gesture that the travel experience of Morocco begins. The brief textual introduction is in line with the spirit of the images:

Located between the Mediterranean, the Atlantic Ocean and the Sahara desert, Morocco is a country where Nature let its imagination run free. It is a land of stunning contrasts, characterised by a culture and an atmosphere that bring together, in the Moroccan Kingdom, the most vivid dreams and Oriental traditions. From the peaks of the Rif and the Atlas Mountains covered in snow, to the verdant oases of the desert, from its golden beaches to its luxurious forests, from its Imperial cities to its Berber villages and Casbahs, Morocco offers the traveller a fabulous odyssey, a trip into Wonderland.

The catalogue is organized, moreover, according to a newly conceived cultural geography of tourism (see Figure 6):

<sup>12</sup>

See <http://www.tourisme-marocain.com>

'*Marvelous travels into the North of Morocco*' is, significantly, the focus of the first section, highlighting cities without a long standing tradition of mass tourism,<sup>13</sup> but that today are at the core of the future geographies of tourism envisioned by the Government: Tangiers, Tetuan, Chefchaouen, Asilah and Larache. This part of the country is seen as central to the development not only of new forms of domestic tourism, but also of international beach tourism, albeit with a pinch of culture and exoticism.

The second section, entitled '*Marvelous travels into the heart of Morocco*' is focused, instead, on Fès, Meknès, Salé, Rabat, Casablanca, Safi and El Jadida. The 'heart' metaphor evokes a presumed geographical core, but also the political and historical 'centre' of the country, since the list includes three out of the four so-called 'Imperial Cities'. The opening pages depict a couple overlooking a vast urban area (see Figure 7), occupying a privileged standpoint that allows them to 'take-in' the landscape that lies below. The chosen spot is, in fact, one where all the guides in Fès take their tourists for a 'proper' visual experience of the most celebrated medina in the world. Tellingly, the couple is dressed in white linen, reminiscent of a colonial experience of the Orient.

The third section is dedicated instead to '*Marvelous travels into the Moroccan South*'. Here, the Orientalist aesthetic is taken to its extremes in describing Marrakech, Essaouira, Agadir, Tafraoute, Taroudant, Ouarzazate and Zagora. Agadir, previously promoted as a stand-alone beach destination, is now associated with other more 'cultural' destinations, in line with the new intention of the Government to convert conventional (beach) mass tourism – where Morocco still suffers fierce competition from other Mediterranean destinations – into cultural mass tourism. The catalogue, in fact, significantly omits the word 'tourist', replacing it with the term 'traveler', more apt to convey the 'cultural' nature of the new travel experience of Morocco.

The last section is even more innovative, highlighting '*Marvelous travels into the North-East of Morocco*', from Al Hoceima to Melilla, Oujda, Saidia and Figuig. This is clearly an attempt to expand and diversify the geographical reach of a form of mass tourism that is rapidly entering a mature phase in some destinations like Marrakech. Here, some of the traditional stereotypes (such as the '*the a la menthe*' depicted on the cover – Figure 5) are now accompanied by new products and a 'cultural twist' with new itineraries and new themes.

This re-crafting of mass tourism is confirmed in the closing pages of the catalogue, dedicated to a description of the cultural features of Morocco, a country 'ready to open its arms to the tourist'. Some of the major themes/resources highlighted are:

#### 'Hospitality'

Encounters with the Moroccan people are the most important of the Kingdom's riches, where hospitality is still firmly in place in all of its provinces. The Moroccan population is of Arab, Andalusian, Berber and African origins, each characterised by diverse traditions and ways of life; traditions waiting to be discovered.

Here, the colonial description of different 'types' of Moroccans – a sort of *Musée de l'Homme vivant* – is reminiscent of the cultural typologies described by French

<sup>13</sup>

With the partial exception of Tangiers in the first decades after the war.

geographer George Hardy in his influential *Le Maroc* (1930). Just like Hardy's imagined geographies, the '*découverte du Maroc*' promised by the catalogue englobes both fascinating landscapes and mysterious places, but also 'curious' people, and radically-different, objectified Others: 'a diversity evident in the various dialects that characterise the country's population, as well as their different modes of dress'. This mélange of colorful faces and peoples, however, is presented as part of a single mosaic making up the nation - but also the 'Morocco brand', offered up for the consumption of the masses.

#### 'the souk'

It is an endless feast for the eyes, a cocktail of spices and other enticing smells, an intricate web of alleyways that never seem to end. Every Moroccan city has its own Medina, with its noisy crowds, enterprising salesmen, shops submerged in an Oriental *chiaroscuro*: ordinary scenes of an extraordinary life.

Here, too, the influence of Orientalist literature persists – although the 'web of alleyways' and the 'Oriental *chiaroscuro*' do not evoke a dangerous, potentially rebellious Orient (and Orientals) lurking in the medina, but rather a fascinating, dusty-orange colonial tableau, where poverty and backwardness are presented (and arguably perceived by the tourist) as markers of tradition and cultural 'purity'. The 'noisy crowds' and the 'enterprising salesmen', become reassuring caricatures performing the *souk* for the Western gaze.

#### 'The Sahara'

Its history is that of Humanity itself. A mineral universe that gave birth to a whole continent, harbouring within it countless hidden treasures. An immensity of sand and rocks, of oases and mirages, the Sahara remains still today the land of enchantment and dreams of escape.

This is arguably the most innovative element of the presentation, although the language remains colonial, recalling an age of exploration and enchantment with the desert (see Rondeau 2000). This description evokes popular (and postcolonial) European understandings of the desert as an 'empty' space whose immensity inspires (in the contemporary traveler) meditation and self-reflection (in many ways echoing the 19<sup>th</sup> century trope of the lone (male and white) traveler-hero). But there is also an important new geopolitical dimension:

At the gates of the desert, along the Atlantic shore, several sites draw the traveller's attention: Tan-Tan Beach and further down the coast, Cape Juby, then Tarfaya... And Laayoune, emerging from the sand in its triumphant modernity. But we should also not forget Smara, the spiritual capital of the Sahara, in the heart of the Saguia al Hamra. And in the extreme south, at the sources of the Rio de Oro, Dakhla with its port known for sports fishing, and the most beautiful bay of the southern Sahara.

Here, the former Western Sahara (annexed by Morocco in 1975 and still the object of fierce political controversy) is presented simply as a semi-pristine tourist destination.

These new tourism geographies reveal a concerted attempt to re-write Morocco's imaginary and real places through the Orientalist eye – but also through the mundane, rather banal expectations of a hypothetical (again, standardized and Orientalised) European tourist. Nonetheless, the re-staging of the colonial for the masses is not a linear process where docile travelers simply buy into official rhetoric, as though visiting a fascinating *Musée Vivant* populated by equally docile 'locals'. On the contrary, our thesis is that the 'cultural turn' in Moroccan tourism, when translated (in place) into

mundane practices, often produces new spaces where meaning is endlessly negotiated and where stereotyped representations and performances of colonial aesthetics are challenged and sometimes even disrupted by both the tourists and those who work with/for them.

### **L'appel de Marrakech**

In 2003, two years after the launch of 'Vision 2010', Marrakech was already leading the growth of mass tourism in Morocco with about 30% of the foreign tourist revenues, and more than a quarter of total arrivals (Moujahid 2004, 1). According to a report released by the *Conseil Régional du Tourisme*, in 2004 the number of tourists in Marrakech went up by another 25% compared to the previous year<sup>14</sup>. This trend continued in the following years (*L'Economiste* 01/04/2005): in 2007, Marrakech registered a record number of presences (almost 50% of the national figure), also thanks to a campaign of investments that significantly increased the city's hotel capacity. The new international airport – second only to Casablanca in terms of air traffic – is now a key international gateway to the country, especially with the launch of new low cost connections with many European cities.

Although these figures are seen by the authorities with a degree of optimism, the final objective remains that of hosting 3.4 million tourists by 2010, in line with the national plan. By 2010, Marrakech expects to open 22 new hotels, 30 new tourist residences and 7 tourist villages, including a second *Club Méditerranée* (Moujahid 2004, 1). In order to achieve these ambitious goals, in 2004 the Government launched a comprehensive project of urban renewal, whose main objective is the reorganization of some key urban spaces in Marrakech according to the 'cultural and touristic vocation of the city' (Borghi 2008a; 2008b). Marrakech is, in fact, increasingly seen as the place where the whole country is on 'display'; where all of the diverse elements that compose today's Moroccan identity come together. Marrakech is presented to the tourists as the place where they can encounter the materialization – that is, the confirmation – of a long series of Orientalist tropes about Morocco. Here, Moroccan 'culture' can be staged for the masses, can become reachable and manageable. The whole city, in its role of tourist capital, is seen as the Moroccan 'product' par excellence, an international brand-image for the entire country.

According to many critics, the satisfaction of the tourist gaze has become an absolute priority in this new grand plan of tourist development,<sup>15</sup> a priority that in practical terms translates many of the city's spaces into a sort of living museum feeding off global images of 'the seduction of Marrakech'. Here, the tourist rhetoric, in its attempt to restage the colonial for the European masses, encounters the materiality of the city and the 'real' places where tourism is practiced and performed every day. This

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<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.emarrakech.info>

<sup>15</sup> Although it was already in Lyautey's times, as the Protectorate's architects re-structured entire city quarters.

also explains the recent emphasis of the authorities on Morocco's 'living heritage', presented as a unique patrimony to be preserved (Filali 2008).

In Marrakech itself, it is an entire life style that must be protected (El Faiz 2002) – and possibly put on display. The promotion of the 'Marrakech product' is thus based on the assumption that 'here', real contact with the local people and real access to Moroccan culture is actually possible. Marrakech is presented as a city redolent of history, rich in monumental material witnesses of the country's grand past. Its world-famous square, the Jamaa el Fna becomes a metaphorical urban icon, a bridge between the past and the present, the place where (spectacularised) Moroccan tradition encounters modernity (i.e. the tourists and Morocco's new global role):

Eternal as the snows on the highest peaks, imposing as the mountains of the High Atlas, rooted in history as the palms that fill its oases, Marrakech is the final touch in an image of infinite beauty.

The greatest kings have fought over it, countless noble dynasties have governed it, innumerable sages, artisans, architects, painters and sculptors have filled and embellished its stunning palaces, mosques, gardens and medersas...

Marrakech: the Imperial city that gave its name to Morocco

Here, Berbers and Arabs come together, nomads and mountain dwellers descend to sell their crafts, artisans flourish, and it is the paradise of merchants.

Together with this, countless palaces, hotels, restaurants, golf courses, casinos: Marrakech, the capital of the Moroccan South.

For its thousands of riches accumulated in thousands of years, for the enchantment of the senses, don't miss Marrakech (Brochure, ENMT).

Interestingly, Marrakech is promoted through the very same images and slogans for both the European and Moroccan readership. The Government's campaign, in fact, has the double aim of improving the country's image abroad, but also identifying a key locus where Moroccans themselves can see the concrete and (internationally) celebrated signs of their glorious past and fascinating present culture of the country (Filali 2008). In such depictions, Marrakech is presented as the heart of the country, with the Jamaa el Fna seen as the most representative place for experiencing Moroccan cultural identity (Figure 8).

Marrakech, in fact, is now (as in the colonial days) also promoted as a destination for business tourism in search of sophisticated exoticism and top quality hospitality:

Only three hours of flight from key European cities, connected by both charters and regular flights, Marrakech is one of the favourite destinations of those who desire strong emotions [...] The investments of the past decade have made it the star of the Kingdom, not only the second home for countless international artists, businessmen and celebrities, but also a key destination for the international jet-set – and one of the favoured destinations for business tourism (Brochure, Conseil Régional du Tourisme de Marrakech 2008).

Marrakech is sold as the ultimate cosmopolitan outpost for those in the know:

Marrakech, an evasion in time and space. Marrakech is, without a doubt, the 'in-city' of Morocco, with its hotels, luxurious riads, nightclubs and innumerable events [...] A unique *cachet*, a 'garden city', a perfect combination between tradition and modernity (ibid.).

Needless to say, this marketing strategy and its material consequences (including the rapid growth of mass tourism) have been the object of controversy. Moroccan writer Abdelhak Serhane has strongly criticised such representations of the 'Red City', going as far as to compare it to a prostitute, plying 'easy exoticism' to passing tourists:

They have dressed her and made her up like a hooker [...] The tourists, greedy to claim her, do so in an almost mechanical delirium. The city of Kings, now reduced to a vulgar postcard [...].

Marrakech el Bahja [Royal Marrakech] has become Marrakech el Hamra [Red Marrakech]. Red with shame, made-up with the powder of lies and artifice [...] Jamaa el Fna, made-up with heavy black eyeliner and red lipstick, gets inebriated every night to the sounds of music brought back from the grave, and wakes up every morning a destroyed, disarrayed Madame, with her wrinkles and failed dreams (Serhane 1999, 68-69).

Serhane's evokes, in many ways, the emphasis given in the crafting of the new Morocco 'product' to the *éblouissement de sens* – the 'enchantment of the senses' so often evoked in the tourist literature – and its heavily Orientalised (and often feminised) representations.

In the next section, we try to highlight some of the material effects of the new plan on the tourist colonization of the medina in Marrakech. The medina has become, in many ways, the new frontier for the restaging of the colonial for the masses, and it is here that the ambivalent relationship between images and practices is most evident – but also the object of contestation/negotiation.

### The Marrakech effect

[...] The Moroccan tea ceremony is a privileged moment of the day. sharing a tea with Moroccans gathered around their 'berrad' (teapot) is an indispensable social ritual – and the best way of entering into contact with the culture of an always hospitable people (ENMT Catalogue 2008, 27).

Returning one night following a dinner in Jamaa el Fna to the Riad<sup>16</sup> owned by a Venetian friend of ours, located in the heart of the Marrakech medina, we are greeted by the beat of African drums and chanting, accompanied by applause and loud explosions of laughter. From the roof-top terrace of our Riad – once a space dedicated exclusively to women's domestic activities – we soon see what the whole fuss was about: on the terrace of a nearby Riad, a group of newly-arrived Northern Italian tourists are being 'welcomed' with a traditional *gnawa*<sup>17</sup> show and an induction of sorts to Morocco, Marrakech and its medina. The performance begins with the 'tea ceremony' that, as the guide explains to the newcomers, 'represents the very essence of Moroccan life and the symbol of Moroccan hospitality'. The Italian women are asked to put on turbans; the men are invited to accompany the *gnawa* performers' drums with rhythmic hand clapping. In a crescendo of sound and excitement, the local guide (dressed in the traditional garb of desert Tuaregs) 'explains' Morocco, 'land of traditions

<sup>16</sup> The Riads are traditional homes located in the medina (see Figure 9). Most have an internal courtyard with a series of adjoining rooms used as bedrooms or sitting rooms. They are usually disposed on two floors and have a roof-top terrace. For a fuller description, see Wilbaux (2001).

<sup>17</sup> The *gnawa* are seen as a distinct ethnic group, descending from Black African slaves. The music of the *gnawa* ceremonies is fast and rhythmic and used to induce trance-like states. In recent years, some *gnawa* performers have achieved international acclaim among 'world music' fans, thanks in large part to a Festival that takes place in Essaouira every summer.



and culture', where, tea, music and dance are 'the heart of social life'. The Riad and the Medina are ideal sites, he tells the visitors, from which they can 'penetrate' an urban culture that 'has found a balanced compromise between modernity and a life style that goes back to millenarian traditions'.

This is nothing particularly new, of course, for the guide's presentation is a faithful reflection of some of the tropes that have marked official tourist rhetoric for over a decade now. What is interesting here, however, is that the tourists, despite appearing to be completely 'taken' by the atmosphere of the 'welcoming ceremony', begin asking questions that are too banal to be taken seriously: 'where does this tradition of good taste and exoticism come from?'; 'what is the typical local dish?'; 'should we eat with our hands as the Moroccans do?' and so forth. But even more interestingly, the visitors comment some of the staged scenes in their local dialect (since the guide presumably understands Italian): 'this tea is too sweet, how can they drink it?'; 'that dancer reminds me of my Moroccan employees back in Italy'; but also, 'let's be quiet and pretend that we are interested, otherwise the guide will take offence...'. The show continues for several hours, with the bored performances of the *gnawa* and the increasingly blasé comments of the guide accompanied by sexist jokes on the part of the tourists (for example, about their wives' interest for the dancers). Suddenly, a mobile phone rings: it's a friend from Italy, who receives a full (caricatured) description of the scene.

Now, the most intriguing aspect of this parade of banalities (and blatant vulgarity) is that it is repeated at least twice a week. The tourists change, their 'transgressive' comments might be different according to their background and mood, and to the chemistry of the moment. But the overall performance, as well as the attempts to implicitly disrupt the meaning of the 'representation' (Goffman 1959) on the part of the tourists – and often on the part of the dancers and the guide as well – is a sort of common pattern that emerged in almost all the performances we witnessed. Twice a week, the tourists are told the same stories (and the same jokes) and are welcomed with the same music and choreography. The extreme standardization of the tea ceremonial and the repetitive – and therefore paradoxical – nature of the whole performance are in fact partially 'resisted' by both the local operators and the tourists. These latter, with their (not always) subtle comments and jokes, in many ways banalize (and thus disrupt) the *willing suspension of disbelief* that the travel experience is supposed to produce (see Minca and Oakes 2006) – and that the tourist rhetoric about Morocco promises. In other words, the meaning of the performances of 'immemorial Moroccan culture and hospitality' on the rooftop of the Riad is constantly negotiated and partially disrupted by another equally important set of performances: those enacted by the disenchanted comments of both the tourists and the local performers (each commenting the scenes in their 'local' language). We can see such negotiation and disruption as forms of re-appropriation and re-interpretation of the 'philosophy of the thing' (Mitchell 1988; but also MacCannell 1999; 2001; Lorimer and Lund 2003) on the part of both tourists and 'locals'; something that reveals the somewhat mundane nature of those same practices, and that reflects a pattern of cultural exchange that seems to be

well known by all the protagonists in their respective roles – beyond (and despite) the ‘magic’ of the colonial re-enactment of Moroccan culture.

Two elements are of particular relevance here: firstly, while in most tourist representations of ‘local culture’, repetition and banality are paramount and are presumably often disrupted by the subjects involved, at the same time this disruption must remain constrained within the limits that allow the whole thing to maintain some degree of credibility (see Goffman 1959). This threshold of ‘make believe’ is a rather interesting grey zone that would be worthwhile exploring in depth, but that is beyond the scope of this chapter (see Rojek 1996). The second element has to do with the ‘real’ consequences of these performances. For example, the growing proliferation of Riads converted into hotels or B&Bs is having enormous effects on the urban fabric of the medinas of Marrakech and of other Moroccan cities (Kurzac-Souali 2006). This proliferation is the result of the growing interest on the part of European tourists for staying within the old city itself and being able to experience the atmosphere of a traditional Arab street (Escher et al. 2001a; 2001b; 2004). In Marrakech, the so called *maisons d’hotes* (as some converted Riads are called – see Chebbak 2004; Saigh Boustia 2004a), have mushroomed, spurred by the European fascination for the ‘magic’ of the medina:

Riads have brought back an art of living that the Moroccan people themselves have half forgotten. Windowless walls, in featureless side-streets conceal paradises to be discovered with over-growing wonder, leafy patios, fountains, birdsong, terraces where life is for the living and which offer stunning views of the medina and its minarets and, in the distance, the snowy peaks of the Atlas mountains (<http://www.ilove-marrakesh.com/lesriads>).

With their location in the heart of the medina, Riads offer the new ‘cultural’ tourists a luxurious, ‘comprehensive experience of Moroccan life’ – and access to spaces that are normally impenetrable:

Riads evoke the idea of a secret world ; they allow the foreigner that inhabits them to feel the thrill of discovering [...] and perhaps even experiencing a small part of this magical, enigmatic place, the universe of a Thousand and One Nights (Saigh Boustia 2004b, 159).

The partial gentrification of the medinas of some of the main Moroccan cities (Tangiers, Rabat, Fes, Essaouira) reflects a tendency towards the rapid colonization of traditional urban spaces on the part of a new and powerful colonial aesthetic that is very often at the origin of much controversy, but that appears, at present at least, irresistible (Chebbak 2004; De Graincourt and Duboy 2002). With few exceptions, the Riads are designed and decorated in order to (re)create an Oriental ambiance and a sumptuous lifestyle, often in sharp contrast with the poverty and the decay of the surrounding neighbourhood. Escher and Patermann (2001) suggest, indeed, that many foreigners staying in Riads enjoy the sophisticated ‘colonial atmosphere’ that emanates from every single detail of the hospitality provided. The ‘aristocratisation’ of some protected spots in the medina and the development of cultural tourism focused on ‘*l’art de vivre marocain*’ in some of the most deprived parts of the city are, unsurprisingly, the subject of much local controversy (see Kurzac-Souali 2007a; 2007b). The tourist authorities are often accused of encouraging the gentrification and the progressive repossession of what is seen as a fundamental part of Moroccan urban patrimony – and a heritage to be protected from the impact of tourism.

The restaging of the colonial for the masses is therefore fast becoming a highly relevant issue, here as in other parts of Morocco, reflecting in many ways a more general trend toward the aesthetisation of the tourist experience. It also reveals, however, a parallel banalisation of the cultural practices produced by the attempted massification of ‘cultural’ tourism – again, something particularly evident in Marrakech.

In the past few years, a growing literature (mainly in French and German) has analyzed the effects of the new fashion for Riads and its consequences on the local population. On the one hand, the purchase of Riads on the part of foreign investors is seen as an important factor in the rehabilitation of the built environment, having had some positive effects in terms of job creation and the survival of traditional craftsmanship, although further important measures need to be taken if the patrimony of the medina is to be protected<sup>18</sup>. Some, however, are less positive about the impacts of this new trend. Boudjafad (2005), for one, argues that this is a ‘market’ whose economic effects are often far-removed from the city, with accommodation normally paid for in advance – and often to foreign intermediaries. Marrakech based scholar Kurzac-Souali (2005a; 2005b; 2006; 2007a; 2007b; 2007c), who has extensively studied this phenomenon, has highlighted how the emergence of new urban dynamics, coupled with the modification of existing urban cultures, has produced distinct ways of inhabiting the spaces of the medina: that of the autochthones, that of the new European residents, and that of the tourists (although these last two categories are very often confused by the local population – see Saigh Bousta 2004a). These different ways of inhabiting and experiencing the spaces of the medina have also been accompanied, however, by new processes of spatial fragmentation and residential segregation:

The new inhabitants of the medina have transformed the built environment of certain neighbourhoods. Their arrival has also transformed, however, the social composition of some areas [with the emergence of] cosmopolitan quarters highly unequal in terms of income. [...] Although there appears to be a new social ‘mix’ in the medina, it is a transitory, ephemeral one, hiding significant spatial segregation whose long-term effects must be taken into consideration [...] The ‘requalification’ of old neighbourhoods has reinforced, in fact, socio-spatial and residential segregation [...] encouraging the emergence of a ‘two-speed’ medina (Kurzac-Souali 2005a)

What is fast becoming evident in the case of Marrakech is the emergence of a highly fragmented space, where gentrified areas of ‘tourist value’ rub shoulders with densely populated poor quarters (mainly in the North and the East of the medina) (Borghi et al. 2007). As Benzine (2000) notes, what emerges here is a conception of urban management that increasingly reinforces the dichotomy between economically viable spaces/heritage – and those that are ‘useless’, or at least not easily marketable.

Recent research by Saigh Bousta (2004b) reveals, nonetheless, that a sizable proportion of residents in the medina believe that the presence of foreigners brings positive effects, at least in terms of the quality of the urban environment and the creation of new jobs. Her study also highlights, however, concerns about skyrocketing house prices, lack of regulation (or at least respect of existing regulation) in renovation,

<sup>18</sup>

See the recent debates on *L'économiste* and *La Vie Touristique*.

but also the sexual behavior of some tourists staying in the Riads. These concerns are unsurprising, given the rapid changes in the urban fabric. What is interesting, however, is that the most virulent condemnations of this phenomenon actually come from *outside* the medina. According to Kurzac-Souali (2007a, 87), the most significant criticism towards the progressive ‘Westernization’ of the Medina has come from the national media and, more generally, from middle class Moroccans that in most cases no longer live in the medina themselves, but are concerned about the loss of a key site for the reproduction and preservation of a ‘truly Moroccan’ urban tradition. We do not have the space here to comment on this important debate, or its protagonists. What must be noted, however (following Kurzac-Souali – but also the work of Saigh Boustia), is that we cannot take for granted that the tourist ‘colonization’ of the medina is perceived only as a threat – nor can we presume to speak for the medina’s residents without some robust enquiry into the impact of tourist practices (in place).

### **Reasserting the re-staging**

According to Saigh Boustia (2004b), 57% of the residents interviewed declared that the gentrification of the medina was a ‘good thing’ for the urban environment as a whole, with 47% noting that it helped improve the ‘tranquility’ of their neighborhood, 27% that it improved its ‘safety’, and 20% that it was important for the preservation of its ‘architectural patrimony’. These survey results do not, of course, sum up all of the effects of the restaging of the colonial in Marrakech. What they hint at, however, is something that we believe is particularly important for the central argument of this chapter: the new forms of mass cultural tourism that are becoming increasingly important in Marrakech and elsewhere in Morocco represent a highly complex phenomenon, and cannot be analysed simply through a deconstruction of the neo-colonial imaginary they rely upon, or an a priori rejection of whatever social and cultural changes mass tourism generates. Existing studies and our own fieldwork in the medina of Marrakech show, if anything, that a different type of scrutiny is required. Such scrutiny needs to engage, case by case, with both the representations that help craft the material restaging of the colonial for the masses – and the tourist practices linked to those very representations (on this see Franklin and Crang 2001). It also must engage, however, with the ways in which such representations and practices are perceived and re-staged by the residents and by those who work for and with the tourists. This chapter, therefore, does not claim to provide any broad generalizations regarding the impact of the restaging of the colonial in contemporary Morocco. We have simply tried to critically engage with a discursive formation (and a specific set of practices) that has gained extraordinary currency on the Moroccan cultural and political scene, and that reveals the extraordinary resilience of the colonial aesthetic. The colonial restaging for the masses, nonetheless, is subject to endless re-interpretation that translates, quite literally, into ever new geographies. What we hope that this chapter has helped highlight is that such geographies are, on the one hand, the outcome of the practical enactments of the discursive formation that we have named here as ‘*L’appel du Maroc*’ on the part of the Moroccan authorities and European tour operators, in order to produce and structure ‘real and imagined’ tourist spatialities. On the other hand,

however, such geographies are also the expression of a series of practices on the part of the tourists and the residents who come into contact with them: it is these endless encounters, in place, that give life to a fascinating (and only partially explored) set of interpretations and performances, within which the official tourist rhetoric is at the same time confirmed and transgressed. It is in specific sites, we argue, that representations and practices merge; and it is there, we would like to suggest, that we have to 'redirect our gaze' in order grasp the 'deeper meaning' of the real and imagined tourist experience of Morocco.