



Chapter 1

The Ben M'sik Community Museum: *Beyond Cultural Boundaries*

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The partnership between Hassan II University, Ben M'sik, Casablanca, Morocco, and Kennesaw State University, Georgia, United States, that began in 2005 created a framework for joint academic and cultural activities—notably, a constructive collaboration between their respective museums: the Ben M'sik Community Museum (BMCM) and the Museum of History and Holocaust Education (MHHE). Both museums were fortunate to receive the Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad (MCCA) grant funded by the Bureau of Education and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. State Department and administered by the American Alliance of Museums.



The Ben M'sik Community Museum team on the occasion of the ceremony “Volunteerism in the Service of Society,” organized by BMCM on May 18, 2011

As the main role of education is to deal with problems of the heritage of the past, we must ask how they are going to affect our own future . . . and in this way to move from giving answers, giving explanations, giving more data, giving more information about a certain exhibition, to the raising of new questions, to the raising of doubts, to the encouragement of skepticism about what we are going to see.²

—from the conference proceedings, 1991 International Council of Museums Conference

Morocco's first museum, the Dar Batha Museum in Fez, was opened in 1915 under the French colonial administration. Since then more than 30 museums have been established, of which 16 are managed by the Ministry of Culture, three by public institutions, and the others by private entities. These museums display archeology, ethnography, or specific collections such as jewelry, weapons, ceramics, or fine art. They are located mainly in the larger cities of Morocco—Rabat, Marrakech, Fez, and Tetouan. However, 75 percent of Moroccans have never visited a museum³ according to a survey conducted by Hassan Cherradi, Head Office of Cultural Heritage in the Casablanca Delegation of the Ministry of Culture.

On January 1, 1995, a decree was issued that changed the government's view of museums, but not the citizenry's. For the first time in Morocco, museums were considered cultural institutions with well-defined objectives

Members of BMCM and the Museum of History and Holocaust Education (MHHE) teams in the Sidi Said Museum in Marrakech in December 2011



“whose permanent mission is to acquire, inventory, maintain, preserve, highlight cultural heritage, study, and disseminate knowledge. This cultural heritage can be historical, ethnographic, artistic, scientific, technical, or of a cultural or natural value.”⁴ Despite this official recognition and awareness of the role of museums to engage and educate the public, Moroccan museums fail to achieve these cultural and educational objectives. There is a unanimous agreement among Moroccan museum professionals that Moroccan museums are unwelcoming institutions, often housed in gloomy, lifeless, crumbling buildings that are simply seen as depositories for miscellaneous objects from the past. Worse perhaps, ordinary Moroccans have been kept isolated from these museums for many decades. Since the colonial period (1912–1956), interest in tourism has grown, and as part of that movement museums have been marketed to foreign visitors, not local communities. The exclusion of the Moroccan public from their own cultural patrimony makes museums artificial institutions removed from the social, historical, and economic realities of their environment. To put it differently, they have failed to enhance Moroccan identity and to reflect the changes Moroccan society has been undergoing. In the words of Katarzyna Pieprzak, author of *Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco: Imagined Museums*:

Moroccan museums do not exist. Moroccan museums are failed institutions... National museums do not respond to local needs; there is no developed arts education in primary and high schools, there are no departments in Moroccan universities, there is no national inventory of sites of patrimony, and ministerial politics reward political friendships over merit and quality. As cultural anthropologist Amina Touzani declares, “If one visits them today, one can ask oneself in what measure these bric-a-brac and aging bazaars can be qualified as museums, given the way in which they were created and the quality of objects that they house.”⁵

This decay of the public Moroccan museums to which Touzani referred is a logical outcome of a public policy that does not supply museums with qualified human resources or sufficient financial means to play an active role in society. The Ministry of Culture allocates between \$200 and \$700 annually to its public museums. “It is not enough to even buy soap and bleach to clean these magical places, to change a blown light bulb or a faulty faucet.... How can a museum director, in these circumstances, keep, maintain, and restore its objects, let alone to go search for other collections?” wondered one museum curator.⁶

Ali Baba’s Cave

The deterioration of the physical architecture and the disintegration of the material collection of the several public museums I have visited are appalling. For example, the Dar Si Said Museum in Marrakech displays carpets, leather artifacts, jewelry, costumes, silver swords and daggers, and traditional door and window frames. Although this museum owns an invaluable collection, it is gloomy and lifeless. Visitors likely feel they have entered Ali Baba’s cave where they are sure a treasure is hidden behind a rock, but they do not have the ability to say “Open Sesame.”

The Dar Batha Museum in Fez houses a marvelous collection of traditional Moroccan costumes, carpets, ceramic objects, embroideries, and jewelry. Visitors should be stirred and amazed by what they encounter. Yet it is a desolate and melancholy site. It is a mere warehouse where artifacts are

stored according to genre without any sense of purpose, resembling the final scene in *Raiders of the Lost Ark*. One comes to understand that these museums have not changed since their creation in the colonial period. Katarzyna Pieprzak argues:

Located in historic buildings in the medinas, colonial museums suffered from this static conception of space and time. The colonial museum did not participate in the creation or improvement of public space for the performance and remembrance of Moroccan culture through visual arts, nor did it make provisions for imagining a future of growth and change. Built on a totalizing discourse of authenticity based on exclusive "traditional" models, the museum's very definition and application of that authenticity would eventually result in its own ruin.⁷

Another example of a public museum built in the colonial period is the Archaeological Museum in Rabat, founded in 1939. The museum is divided into three sections, each devoted to a specific historic era. Visitors encounter prehistoric times, the Pre-Roman and Roman civilizations, and finally the Islamic period. But the museum lacks the interpretive framework that visitors need to understand the collection. Morocco was at the crossroads of many ancient civilizations, Phoenicians, Carthaginians, Romans, Vandals, and Byzantines. For centuries, peoples of different ethnic and religious backgrounds have inhabited Morocco: Berbers (Amazigh), Jews, Arabs, Muslims, and Christians.⁸ The Archaeological Museum in Rabat does not reflect enough of the richness and diversity of Moroccan patrimony. On a previous visit to the museum, I had an interesting conversation with one of the museum's employees who confessed that the museum displays only a small percentage of the artifacts it owns. This is not uncommon for museums around the world; most institutions feature at any given time a fraction of their collection. But there is often a plan for rotation. The difference in Rabat is that the hundreds of priceless artifacts are stored in a warehouse in the backyard of the museum, lacking funds and human expertise to care for even their most basic needs.

Worse still, in the absence of a national inventory, Morocco's museum patrimony is threatened. Few of these museums have the most basic paperwork, not to mention a database, to document their collections, and researchers would have an impossible time evaluating the scope and scale of a museum's

holding. Priceless artifacts could disappear, be stolen, or sold without anyone's knowledge. To expand on the Ali Baba metaphor, Morocco's museums are threatened by the 40 thieves.

The Moroccan government needs to become aware of the important role such a museum could play, not only in the tourism industry, but also in making the Moroccan people proud of their history. A French proverb holds: "*Celui qui ne sait pas d'où il vient, ne peut savoir où il va*" (He who does not know where he comes from cannot know where he is going.) In this respect, Ali Amahan, former head of museums in Morocco, comments on the failure of the Moroccan government to create true museums:

At the beginning of the 1970s the Ministry of Culture started to recognize the museums and their collections . . . and we realized that we didn't really have any museums, only depots for objects . . . We tried to put in place a policy of acquisition and even a revision of the concept of the museum. But unfortunately these projects have dragged on and never come to term.⁹

While there are some positive and hopeful signs in the museum world in Morocco, change is slow in coming.

Very few Moroccan museums meet even the most basic standards of museology common to North American, Scandinavian, European, or Asian institutions. On my last visit to the National Museum of Jewelry in Rabat, I was agreeably surprised that it had been refurbished and redesigned. When I first visited some years ago, the museum, despite the invaluable collection it owned, was unwelcoming. Displays featured furniture, sculptures, textiles, fabrics, decorative arts, and costumes, but the most important artifacts were from the jewelry collection. Exhibitions in the new museum feature metalworking, diamond cutting, and goldsmithing. They are professionally designed and curated, and have tri-lingual labels in Arabic, French, and English. Artifacts are mounted in a stable and safe manner, and lighting is used creatively to highlight the beauty and elegance of the objects.

Another impressive institution in the European or American tradition is the Amazigh (Berber) Museum in Marrakech. Opened on December 3, 2011, it is the first museum in Morocco devoted to Amazigh culture. This private museum, founded and owned by Pierre Bergé and the Yves-Saint-Laurent Foundation, is welcoming and is a far cry from the static Ministry of

Culture museums. Maps, explanatory texts (in Arabic, French, and English), photographs, archival films, and audio-visual displays specifically designed for the museum guide visitors through the richness of Amazigh culture. Unfortunately, in both of these museums, most visitors are not Moroccans, even though Majorelle Gardens where the museum in Marrakech is located is a popular spot for locals.

It seems that the successive Moroccan governments since independence in 1956 have paid little attention not only to museums but also to culture in general. According to a recent report submitted to the new government in January 2012, Morocco's Economic and Social Council (CES) diagnosed the deplorable cultural conditions of the country. The report explicitly blamed public policy for lacking a coherent and sustained strategy in the cultural domain. Rachid Ben Al Mokhtar, a member of the CES, pointed out that there is a worldwide tendency to make culture a marketable product:

*This reality entails the existence of a Moroccan supply for Moroccan youth. However, the cultural field witnesses big defects, such as in teaching the history of Morocco. Ninety per cent of the Moroccan youth who get their baccalaureate do not know the history of their country.*¹⁰

The report made some recommendations to the government, such as relying on new technologies to make up for the weakness in cultural education. It suggested the creation of thematic websites that would supplement school curricula. It also advised building virtual museums that would allow Moroccan youth to appreciate their own culture and be proud of their own history.¹¹

The Ben M'sik Community Museum

This brief background about museums in Morocco, whether built by the French colonial administration, the Moroccan government, or the private sector, is important in understanding the development of the country's first community-based museum. The museums I have discussed are considered elitist and unapproachable "static temple[s] of culture."¹² It is in this historical and cultural environment that the Ben M'sik Community Museum

(BMCM) was created in 2006. Unlike traditional museums built in luxurious and tourist-friendly parts of the city, the BMCM is located in one of the poorest neighborhoods of Casablanca.¹³

The uniqueness of the BMCM stems from its earnest desire to respond to the wishes of the students of the Ben M'sik Faculty of Letters and Humanities to establish a museum that would "preserve memory by interpreting, exhibiting, and promoting the stories of the diverse populations of the neighborhood and its region."¹⁴ The BMCM begins with the ordinary lives of the inhabitants of Ben M'sik and their cultural heritage, responding to local needs and serving as a bridge between student life at the university and social life in the neighborhood.¹⁵ Youssef Sourgo, a volunteer-student on the museum team, speaks about his experience:

*Thanks to joining this project...I learnt more about my neighborhood, the history of my country, and more interestingly about myself. All these things, and the list is still long, are due to being a member of our community museum team. [The] experience has been so insightful and suggestive of new perspectives towards a...generation of museums that [are] down [to] earth [and] get involved in people's lives. The Ben M'sik Community Museum...has proved to be more important than what it contains.*¹⁶

Learning from the failure of the traditional Moroccan museums, we have tried to create a museum that documents the social life of these ordinary people as they struggle to lead a decent life—a museum created by the people and for the people of the neighborhood. In this respect, a museum "can be a place to gather and debate community problems and community-based solutions. It can break down isolation, recreate feelings of obligation to one another, [and] reinvigorate civic commitment."¹⁷

Because this kind of museum is new in Morocco, it seems appropriate to define the term "community" to see whether it can be applied to the inhabitants of the Ben M'sik neighborhood. Victor Azarya points out that "[c]ommunity ... usually refers to (1) a group sharing a defined physical space or geographic area such as a neighborhood, city, village, or hamlet; [or] (2) a group sharing common traits, a sense of belonging, and/or maintaining social ties and interactions which shape it into a distinctive social entity, such as

an ethnic, religious, academic or professional community.”¹⁸ M. Scott Peck argues:

*Community is something more than the sum of the parts, its individual members. What is this “something more”? Even to begin to answer that, we enter a realm that is not so much more abstract as almost mythical The analogy of a gem comes to mind A group becomes a community in somewhat the same way that a stone becomes a gem—through a process of cutting and polishing. Once cut and polished, this is something beautiful. But to describe its beauty, the best we can do is to describe its facets. Community, like a gem, is multifaceted, each facet a mere aspect of a whole that defies description.*¹⁹

Located in the eastern part of Casablanca, the economic capital of Morocco, Ben M'sik is a marginal suburban district, lacking in major social and cultural infrastructure. Attracted by the economic boom Casablanca experienced after World War II, migrants from all over Morocco came to this city seeking better opportunities. In addition, the last few decades witnessed massive migrations from the neighboring regions (Chaouia and Doukala) due to successive years of drought. Ben M'sik has become one of the most populous neighborhoods in Casablanca. Since the colonial period the district has been inhabited by impoverished populations living in slums that are the core of the remaining shantytown. According to a report written by the Ministry of Housing and Regional Development, Direction of Housing in Rabat:

*. . . Conventional housing of European standards was provided for the French and well-to-do, while the more modest and poorer Moroccan families were obliged to live in the medinas or in “temporary” housing in marginal neighborhoods which also lacked adequate services During this time, examples of marginal housing and uncontrolled urban growth became prevalent in many Moroccan cities. For example, the 1971 census indicated that 48 percent of urban households were without water connections, 32 percent had no electricity and 45 percent were without sanitary installations.*²⁰

Ben M'sik is one of the six administrative districts of the city of Casablanca, covering 27 percent of the city. In 1982, 640,000 people lived there; by 2004 it had grown to more than one million. Since the 1980s, social, educational,

and cultural institutions have helped create a sense of neighborhood identity. Additionally, the local authorities have launched a plan to find adequate solutions to the various problems facing the inhabitants of this district.

With the financial help of the World Bank, a decision was made to eradicate the slums and build adequate houses for the people of Ben M'sik. The project “Cities without Slums” was launched in 2010 to improve the social conditions of the resident population and to increase their sense of belonging. The Ben M'sik residents have had the opportunity to purchase small apartments at reduced prices. These subsidized houses are referred to today as “social dwelling.” An architect and witness to this urban metamorphosis that Ben M'sik has undergone states:

*We must be aware that with the planned disappearance of the Ben M'sik slums, a part of the memory of Casablanca will disappear, too Let us say only that the slums contained the unnamed authors of a good part of Casablanca's anti-colonial episode, and that they still preserve some of the secret files of the armed resistance. One day, we should write the social history of Ben M'sik*²¹

Although coming from different regions of Morocco, the inhabitants of Ben M'sik today form a community that shares not only a geographic space but also social ties and interactions. On numerous occasions neighbors spontaneously provide help to each other, despite their poverty and ethnic diversity.²² Mohammed, who has been living in Ben M'sik for more than 30 years, asserts:

*The true and original people of this area are nice and kind . . . a neighbor looks after his neighbor as there are strong human relationships, but in other areas [in Casablanca], especially in the modern buildings . . . every person lives in his own flat and doesn't care about the person who lives next door.*²³

Jabrane M'barka, another Ben M'sik resident, declares:

*As you can see, I live on a block where there is the souk, the public oven, the public bath. And there are of course my dear neighbors. On my block, I meet my neighbors every day. We exchange visits on happy and sad occasions. You can't feel loneliness on this block or on any other block of this neighborhood. It is not like the rich blocks of Casa where snobbish and selfish people live.*²⁴

Julia Brock conducting a workshop for members of the BMCM and MHHE teams, December 2011



The BMCM is interested in the lives of the citizens living in this underserved neighborhood. Unlike the colonial, postcolonial, or the private museums, this community museum focuses on a segment of society that is not marketed to tourists and that even most citizens of Casablanca do not see. Katarzyna Pieprzak:

Rather than engaging categories of nation, memory, and identity from the top down, these spaces work from the ground up, drawing on the individual and his memory as starting points. Likewise, rather than duplicating state-produced narratives of the nation, these spaces work to redefine those categories from a constellation of positions and sites: the city, the family, the rural, and the nomadic.²⁵

The BMCM strives to start a new tradition of museum practice that takes into consideration its socio-economic environment and establishes and maintains an ongoing dialogue with the people living in this environment. Rather than starting with ancient or priceless collections, the BMCM has chosen to seek support from the community it serves. It has therefore taken into account people's needs and wants regarding culture and museums. As Nina Simon points out, "If visitors perceive that an institution is personally responsive to their changing needs and interests, they are more likely to visit again, become members, renew their memberships, and donate time and money to the institution."²⁶

The BMCM-MHHE Partnership

The partnership with Kennesaw State University has been a crucial factor in the success of our young museum. Faculty and staff from KSU and its affiliated Museum of History and Holocaust Education (MHHE) led a series of workshops for Ben M'sik students and faculty members to help the BMCM define its mission, its target audience, and develop its first exhibition.²⁷ They have helped us put our vision of a community museum into practice. Thanks to their experience, we have learned the current best practices in the field, which resulted in the creation of a bilingual exhibition (English and Arabic) on the Ben M'sik neighborhood. This 10-panel traveling exhibition premiered at KSU, and tells the rich story of this working-class neighborhood in Morocco, providing a general overview of the neighborhood through its cultural productions and serving as a model for future exhibitions. Though focused on one community in Casablanca, the exhibition reflects the multicultural heritage of the city and the nation. Today, the exhibition is housed at the BMCM and travels for special events and programs.

To create the exhibition, we asked Ben M'sik students to distribute questionnaires in the community and record oral histories to collect information about the themes to be elaborated upon in the 10 panels.²⁸ We were very pleased to note the excitement of the students as they embarked on this fieldwork in their community. Surprisingly, not only did they discover stories and research that helped produce the exhibition, but also artifacts donated by students and members of the Ben M'sik community. These constituted the museum's first collection: an old lamp, a radio, a sewing machine, kitchen utensils. Ordinary and inexpensive as these artifacts may seem, they represent the strong ties between the museum and the people.

This first exhibition, "Ben M'sik: Creating Community in Casablanca," was a great adventure. We adopted an interdisciplinary methodological perspective that encompassed different disciplines such as history, sociology, ethnography, and anthropology. Like a pioneer exploring some unfamiliar ground, I had to move cautiously from the world of literature, with which I am quite familiar, into other disciplines. This exhibit was a challenging and fascinating experience that allowed me not only to learn new skills but also

to appreciate my culture more. It also triggered new scholarly interests in my Moroccan cultural heritage, something I had not studied as an academic.

The MCCA Projects

The Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad (MCCA) grant allowed the BCCM and MHHE to engage in a constructive dialogue through activities that helped broaden our global engagement. The first grant, received in 2009, was entitled “Creating Community Collaboration” and involved collecting 60 oral histories in our respective communities. We engaged in Skype conferences, travel, public programs, and oral history interviews.²⁹ The project sought to change the attitudes of local audiences about their neighborhoods, and to start a dialogue with the “other” to dispel stereotypes and correct misinformation. Dr. Catherine Lewis, director of MHHE, points out:

The purpose of this oral history project was not merely to cultivate new visitors for the two museums, but to create a vehicle by which residents living near the museums can have extended conversations about topics relevant to their lives and the history of their neighborhood, community, or city. This dialogue helped both museums change the way they engage with and represent community history by relying upon local voices instead of broad assumptions and stereotypes.³⁰

In BCCM, we recorded 30 oral histories of the Ben M'sik residents. They told us their personal stories and experiences in this marginalized neighborhood of Casablanca. A feeling of pride spread through the community as they become aware of their importance as citizens who contributed to the economic growth of Casablanca and the independence of their country from the French. More important, “Creating Community Collaboration” offered an opportunity for these voices to be heard outside the boundaries of the country and to share their stories with the people of the United States. About this experience, Dr. Abdelmajid Kaddouri, Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences, Hassan II University, Ben M'sik, states: “The residents greatly appreciated the interest the Americans have brought for their neighborhood. The gaze of the other is essential in understanding selfhood. For [French philosopher] Paul Ricoeur, selfhood intimately implies otherness to



BMCM team in Washington, DC in March 2012

the extent that one cannot be thought of without evoking the other.”³¹ This global exchange of ideas has allowed both the Moroccan and American museums to explore new grounds and open new perspectives for the future of the two museums.

This project has marked a turning point in my professional life as coordinator of the Ben M'sik Community Museum. It has opened my eyes to the fact that museums should not be mere places where artifacts are displayed. They should be dynamic institutions that, on the one hand, maintain a dialogue with their local communities, and, on the other hand, establish international partnerships with museums around the world. If museum experts genuinely listen to the voices of their communities and to those of their colleagues in other countries, they will build bridges of trust and understanding and will therefore serve our global communities. Chaimaa Zamat, a student volunteer, describes her experience in this project:

I have been able to learn about the Ben M'sik community: stereotypes, customs, dreams, beliefs, needs, family celebrations, solidarity. I have also had the chance to get involved in many tasks, like doing transcription and translation of people's testimonies recorded by the previous team. These were the citizens' opinion about their daily life in the neighborhood, society, Morocco, and even the United States of America.³²

The MCCA grant made the dream of building bridges of trust and friendship come true. We had a firm belief in our cause and a complete trust in our teams. The Moroccan and American teams have merged into one. We have created a website that shows our efforts to eradicate stereotypes and foster understanding.³³ We produced a documentary that records and highlights the themes and issues that are raised by this project.³⁴ We published a book *Crossing Borders: A Transatlantic Collaboration*. This book, funded by the Ben M'sik Faculty of Letters and Human Sciences, is comprised of articles written by Moroccan and American students and professors who participated in "Creating Community Collaboration." Each participant presented his views about the project. For instance, Youssef Fdilal writes:

*The trip to Washington D.C. was amazing. We had a chance to attend a seminar colored by the presence of some distinguished figures from the world of academia who share similar interests in community-centered museums, as well as some high officials from the U.S. State Department and American Alliance of Museums, the grant provider for the project. In the museums we visited . . . we were in awe in front of the professionalism and talent shown in displaying, interpreting and preserving the artifacts . . . Not only did the trip enlighten me about the hospitality and sociability of the American people, but it also taught me about their open-mindedness and their eagerness to discover other cultures and civilizations.*³⁵

Building on the success of "Creating Community Collaboration," the American Alliance of Museums invited the project team to apply for a second MCCA grant, which we were awarded for "Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross-Cultural Context." In this second grant cycle, we built an online exhibition to show the diversity of Muslim cultures both from within a Moroccan environment, that of the Ben M'sik neighborhood in Casablanca, and from an American context of Muslim immigrants now living in the American South. We focused on 10 themes, such as tolerance, community, and family, to increase knowledge about each other's cultural traditions and to build bridges of dialogue and trust.³⁶ This intercultural dialogue improved the way the two museums represent community history, away from broad assumptions and current stereotypes. In addition, members of both communities have become aware of the numerous ways in which Morocco and the United

States are similar. Despite the so called "clash of civilizations" rhetoric of the East versus the West and Muslims versus Christians, both teams have found important similarities in their histories, traditions, faiths, and customs. Both Kennesaw and Casablanca are "melting pots" of various races, ethnicities, religions, and cultures, and excellent environments to build strong bridges and real intercultural dialogue between Morocco and the United States of America:

*By exploring Moroccan and American identity through photographs, oral histories, conversation, and personal reflection, we can learn about commonalities and differences in a meaningful, open way. As William Shakespeare wrote, "We know what we are, but not what we may be."*³⁷

The launching of the online exhibition revealed how this project allowed the Moroccan and American students and faculty to meet and get to know each other. After the trip of the American team to Morocco in last December, Soumaya Ezzahouani wrote:

We have worked side by side to finalize the online exhibit's statement, to define the themes we have chosen and to select the exhibit's photos. I have learnt so many new things about museums and good online exhibits. The workshops were very fruitful.

*This visit was a chance to make new friends. We spent together unforgettable moments, where we exchange information about our cultures, religions and also some personal stories. . . We shared laughter, tears, food, "henna," and so many remarkable feelings.*³⁸

This intercultural exchange between the two museums and their communities ultimately led to increased knowledge about each other's traditions, countries, and faiths. Both Moroccan and American participants admit that the experience was transformative. Thanks to this project, they have learned about museums, about other cultures, and about themselves.

The two joint MCCA projects have opened new pathways to Moroccan-American museum collaboration. Today, global exchange of ideas has become a necessity for museums to grow and prosper. A Moroccan proverb says, "a single hand cannot applaud alone." Though we may be one example of global work in the museum field, we are an energetic, dedicated, and passionate

team of professionals working to enrich the lives of our communities, be they in our backyards or across the Atlantic.

While I have not provided an exhaustive survey of museums in Morocco, I hope this case study of museum culture in Morocco helps an international reader understand the cultural environment where these joint projects are created. Accordingly, my criticism of the public museums stems primarily from their inability to evolve and attract new visitors. Certainly, there is room in our country for large and small museums, those focused on the ancient past and those interested in documenting today's vibrant cultural life. In a country where illiteracy is rampant and educational opportunities are limited, museums could become effective institutions that help Moroccans understand the depth and richness of their cultural life. Museums need complementary and innovative approaches to reach and serve Moroccans and tourists alike.

I will close on an optimistic note about the future of museums in Morocco. In December 2011, King Mohamed VI created the National Museum Foundation and appointed Mehdi Qotbi, a prominent artist, to be its president. For the first time in the history of Morocco an official entity was created that is completely devoted to museums. Its main objectives are, on the one hand, to create a culture of museums in Morocco, and on the other hand, to make the cultural heritage accessible to the general public. In this respect, Mehdi Qotbi declared:

It is a foundation that will have proper resources and will function independently to spread Moroccan culture and preserve Moroccan cultural heritage so that it can be bequeathed to future generations... We begin with a blank slate, and we will try, hand in hand with the Ministry of Culture, to build bridges of dialogue between cultures.³⁹

To conclude, this museum experience has shaped my life as a Moroccan, as a professor, and as a museum professional. It has done the same for my students. We have become supportive of civic engagement in the Ben M'sik neighborhood. We have become aware that scholarship in books is not the same as first-hand fieldwork. Finally, we have created a better bond with our community and helped the students become proud of the neighborhood where they were born and raised. Finally, we are helping the people of Ben

M'sik see that museums are not static places dealing only with past experiences. The BMCM, through people-to-people diplomacy, proves that museums are dynamic institutions invested in the present and the future of the communities they serve.

Notes

1. American Association of Museums, "About Museums and Community Collaboration Abroad," <http://www.aam-us.org/mcca/>. Accessed January 10, 2012. The organization recently changed its name to the American Alliance of Museums.
2. Conference Proceedings, Committee on Education and Cultural Action, "The Museum and the Needs of the People," 1992, 62.
3. Jaoud Mdidech « 75% des Marocains n'ont jamais visité un musée », <http://www.lavieeco.com/news/culture/75-des-marocains-n-ont-jamais-visite-un-musee-6681.html>. Accessed January 2012.
4. Jaoud Mdidech « 75% des Marocains n'ont jamais visité un musée ».
5. Katarzyn Pieprzak, *Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco: Imagined Museums* (Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2010), 3.
6. Jaoud Mdidech « 75% des Marocains n'ont jamais visité un musée ».
7. Pieprzak, 16.
8. "Berber" is a Greek term used to designate people speaking languages other than Greek. The Romans borrowed the same term to refer to the people in North Africa who did not speak Latin. Therefore, under the Roman Empire, the whole area of North Africa became known as "Berberia." The aboriginal people prefer to use their own name "Amazighen" to refer to themselves, which means "the free men." Thus, "Tamazight" is the term used by Amazigh-speakers to refer to their own language. Amazigh speakers do not use the term "Berber" to refer to their people or their language.
9. Quoted in Pieprzak, 30–31
10. Akhbar Al Yawm, "Arabophone," issue #662, January 28–29, 2012.
11. Ibid.
12. Pieprzak, xxiv.
13. For more information, please see <https://commons.kennesaw.edu/mcca/content/about-bmcm>
14. Mission of the Ben M'sik Community Museum.
15. The author would like to express his utmost gratitude to Dean Abdelmajid Kaddouri, professors, and students of Hassan II University, Ben M'sik, Casablanca, for their constant support and valuable contribution to this project.

16. Youssef Sourgo, application essay to join the MCCA project "Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross Cultural Context."
17. *A Museums & Community Toolkit* (Washington: American Associations of Museums, 2002), 58.
18. Azarya, Victor in *A Museums & Community Toolkit*, 74.
19. Peck, M. Scott in *A Museums & Community Toolkit*, 74.
20. *Upgrading of Marginal Neighborhoods in Morocco* published by the Ministry of Housing and Regional Development: Direction of Housing, Rabat, Morocco, and Office of Housing and Urban Development, Agency for International Development in http://pdf.usaid.gov/pdf_docs/PNAAU832.pdf. Accessed in January 6, 2012.
21. RedaBenkiran, « Bidonville et recasement, modes de vie à karyan Ben M'sik (Casablanca) » in http://www.archipress.org/reda/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=81&Itemid=27. Accessed January 12, 2012.
22. For more information on the neighborhood of Ben M'sik, see my article "Ben M'sik: Creating Community in Casablanca" in Bassamat (Casablanca, University Hassan II Mohamedia/Casablanca, 2009).
23. I am grateful to the students of the English Department and American Studies who distributed a questionnaire among the Ben M'sik residents. It comprised 24 questions about the social life in the Ben M'sik neighborhood.
24. Ben M'sik Community Museum, Questionnaire, 2009.
25. Pieprzak, *Art and Modernity in Postcolonial Morocco*, xxiv.
26. Nina Simon, *The Participatory Museum* (Santa Cruz, California: Museum 2.0, 2010), 55.
27. We are much obliged to Dr. Catherine Lewis, Executive Director of the Department of Museums, Archives and Rare Books, all faculty, and students at Kennesaw State University who participated in these joint projects.
28. Panel 1: Early History of Ben M'sik (documents the establishment of the neighborhood). Panel 2: Building a Neighborhood (examines the formation of the community through migration and immigration). Panel 3: language (Ben M'sik multi-lingual society is reflective of the country's and neighborhood's history). Panel 4: Architecture (explores how the built environment reflects Morocco's colonial past and rapidly changing present). Panel 5: Cuisine (examines what culinary traditions involving tagines, tea, and couscous reveal about the diversity of the neighborhood). Panel 6: Clothing (considers how costumes have changed and what these changes reveal about class, region, religion, and gender). Panel 7: Transportation (analyzes traditional and modern forms of transportation and how they shape the neighborhood and the people who live there). Panel 8: Traditions (considers how traditions and cultural festivals influence community life). Panel 9: Local personalities (documents how local personalities built and shaped the neighborhood). Panel 10: Religion (examines how different religious practices reflect the neighborhood's multi-cultural history).
29. For more information, please see: <https://commons.kennesaw.edu/mcca/content/about-project>.
30. Catherine Lewis and Jennifer Dickey, "The Museums and Community Collaborations Abroad Project, in *Crossing Borders: A Transatlantic Collaboration* (Casablanca, University Hassan II Mohamedia/Casablanca, 2011), 15.
31. Abdelmajid Kaddouri in *Crossing Borders: A Transatlantic Collaboration*, i–ii.
32. Chaimaa Zamat, application essay to join the MCCA project "Identities: Understanding Islam in a Cross Cultural Context."
33. For more information, please see <https://commons.kennesaw.edu/mcca/>.
34. For more information, please see <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yy9KToSZiPk>.
35. Youssef Fdilal, "Creating Community Museum : Creating a Bridge for University-Community Interaction," *Crossing Borders: A Transatlantic Collaboration* (Casablanca, University Hassan II Mohamedia/Casablanca, 2011), 80.
36. For more information, please see <http://marb.kennesaw.edu/identities/exhibits/show/photography-project/themes>
37. See <http://marb.kennesaw.edu/identities/>. Accessed June 30, 2012,
38. SoumayaEzzahouani, essay written after the visit of the American delegation in December 2011.
39. Zineb Satori, « Fondation nationale des Musées » (*L'Economiste*: 21–12, 2011), <http://www.maghress.com/fr/leconomiste/1889779>. Accessed February 23, 2012.