

## Religion and Politics in Morocco

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I was very fortunate to be awarded a summer FLAS grant to study Arabic during the summer of 2008 in Fez, Morocco. As a student of Moroccan politics, with an interest in the role of various Sufi groups in Moroccan political discourse, language skills are absolutely essential. In addition to the four hours of classroom instruction that I received each day, I lived with a family in the new city of Fez, attended a number of cultural events and also traveled throughout the country. Most importantly, this period allowed me to begin to refine the research I plan to carry out for my dissertation topic.

Fez, as the spiritual and cultural capital of Morocco, is an excellent location to live and study. During the month of June, the city hosts a sacred music festival that highlights spiritual music from around the world as well as showcasing the different Sufi groups and their rituals from within the country. Many other cities within the country also host festivals including the Gnawa music festival in Essaouira. Attending these events afforded me a glimpse of youth culture, government development strategies and the complicated role of tourism in the Moroccan economy.

By far, living with a Moroccan family was the most important cultural experience of my summer. My Moroccan mom, upon learning of my recent engagement, showered me with cooking tips and her favorite recipes. She also

served as a sort of cultural interpreter as she had excellent French and English skills and was willing to discuss a myriad of issues, from political parties to the role of Sufis in Moroccan society to her concerns about unemployment. Further, her daughter provided an interesting window into Moroccan teenage life and while I was shocked at how many Bollywood movies she could fit into a day, she was appalled at how little I knew of American pop culture! I am sure that the cultural nuances I was able to learn from living with a family will prove invaluable as I continue with my research.

Thanks to an introduction by CAS director Leo Villalón, the academic highlight of my summer was meeting the scholar Mâati Monjib, from the Institute of African Studies in Rabat, and a one-



time visiting professor at the University of Florida. I was privileged to enjoy his hospitality and his advice on Moroccan scholarship. I was particularly interested in his opinion because of his broad knowledge of nearly every piece of scholarship on Moroccan politics in multiple languages. At one point he actually began listing the dissertation topics that have yet to be done in Arabic, French or English! Professor Monjib's advice will certainly prove invaluable as I work to define the precise focus of my dissertation research.

By studying within my country of interest, I was able to gain a broad understanding of the issues relevant in Moroccan society and establish a network of close contacts while I continued to develop the language skills necessary for my research. Truly, the summer of 2008 was an important step in my development as a political scientist and a student of Moroccan politics.

*Ann Wainscott is a doctoral student in Political Science. She has held Center for African Studies FLAS fellowships in 2007-08 and 2008-09. Her 2008 summer stay in Morocco was made possible by a CAS Summer FLAS Award to the Arabic Language Institute of Fez (ALIF).*