



Our thanks to you all

*and a very special thank you to
Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Joumalla
Ambassador for His Majesty The King Mohamed VI
in the United Kingdom
without whose moral support and advice
this remarkable trip would never have been possible*



Two years ago a group of British born Moroccan girls were learning Arabic in a Saturday supplementary class in London as part of Al-Hasaniya's Youth Project. As their examination approached they were promised that if they all worked hard and passed the examination, Al Hasaniya would take them all on a trip to Morocco to see parts of the country which they had never seen before. It took two years to realise the project, but thanks to the hard work of Al Hasaniya and the generosity of:

**The Hassan II Foundation
Royal Air Maroc
The Council for Moroccans Abroad
The British Embassy
Al Akhawayn University
The Moroccan Parliament
The Advisory Council for Human Rights
and the Hassan II Mosque**

the girls landed in Casablanca's Mohamed VI airport on April 5th 2009 and embarked on a journey which was to profoundly affect them in ways which they could never have foreseen.

This is the story of their journey told in their own words as a thank you to you all



LAMIYA DUKALI AGE 21

STUDYING JOURNALISM AND DRAMA AT ROEHAMPTON UNIVERSITY MOTHER AND FATHER MOROCCAN FROM TETOUAN AND HAYAIDA



As we entered the Houses of Parliament it looked completely different to the Parliament my mother would point out to me on the Moroccan channel 2M when it came on the news. It looked smaller than I had imagined. As our guides for the day - civil servants Younis and Abdul-Aziz - explained where all the parliament members sat, Younis pointed out the area in which the press sit. A small boxed balcony overlooking the entire room. As I looked up I joked aloud that I would maybe be sitting there one day and secretly thought...why not?

After we had finished our tour they showed us to a conference room, which was said to be used by the Minister of Justice and his subordinates for meetings. Prior to this lecture the girls and myself had little to no understanding of Moroccan law. Law and order in Morocco was a grey area I felt was completely foreign to me.

As they explained the laws and regulations of Morocco, it was the first time I compared it to England, which I felt to be my home. I had always separated the two: London was my home, where I grew up and where I belonged; Morocco was just a holiday destination that had to be visited once a year to keep the parents happy. But the more he explained the more I got it. I got it because I could link it with what I know back home. It may have been a strange place to begin my transformation, but in that conference room I let my "Moroccan guard" down and allowed myself to embrace Morocco.



YASMEEN LABYAD AGE 15

FATHER AND MOTHER MOROCCAN FROM NADOR



After Parliament we went on to the CCME, which I found interesting. In a discussion with Fatiha a staff member at the council we looked at points and questions which no one had really thought of before. The main question being about our culture and identity. How we see ourselves when questioned about our place of birth or main country of origin when in London and in Morocco. When I was asked I mentioned how when I'm asked in Morocco I say I'm from London, whereas when I'm asked in London I say I'm Moroccan. We discussed why we call ourselves Moroccan. Is it from eating traditional food? From having Moroccan parents? From having Moroccan culture in your everyday life? From dressing like a Moroccan? From speaking Darija? Or simply going to Morocco in the summer?

The discussion for me concluded overall that I feel that it's not from any of these, it's from knowing naturally that I am a Moroccan, the warm feeling we have inside of belonging, which makes us understand who we really are. Personally I really enjoyed talking to her and liked the way she came across to us, her tone. She showed understanding as she mentioned being a Moroccan migrant herself, knowing what it feels like to be always watched and stereotyped, because we are seen as different from Moroccans born in Morocco.



SOPHIA MOURAD AGE 13

FATHER AND MOTHER MOROCCAN FROM LARAACHE

On our second day we went to Fez. I am sure lots of people say that they like Fez, but I *loved* Fez. As we approached Fez I remember seeing palm trees and big old white buildings and old walls which were still standing after hundred of years. We entered the city through its big old arch with its aging walls over our heads and walked around the city and we seemed to be walking under so many buildings and it looked like everywhere we went it went from small to big to small again. I understand why they call it a maze. We visited one of the bazaars selling traditional Moroccan craft. Our tour guide took us to a shop where a man was sitting on an old chair carving away with a metal chisel on a bronze plate. Within minutes he had carved intricate details and patterns.

When we had finished shopping we went to a traditional Moroccan restaurant to eat. It looked extremely small from the outside but when we entered it was very big. We sat in the corner of the restaurant on some Moroccan day beds which are called matarba and ate lots of different types of Tagine.



SAMANTHA HERRON

AL HASANIYA MOROCCAN WOMEN'S CENTRE FATHER AND MOTHER ENGLISH

On the Wednesday morning we visited the British Embassy in Rabat.

I write this as an English girl who feels herself to be as Moroccan as she is English. For during the past few years I have spent a lot of time in Morocco, embracing the country and its culture, language and religion. It was thus a significant experience for me to visit my own embassy in what I feel to be my adoptive country.

The reception we received from the Ambassador Mr. Timothy Morris and his embassy staff was most generous and welcoming. I know that we all felt privileged to be given their time and an insight into the workings of the British Embassy in Morocco. Before this visit I myself had very little understanding as to the work of an embassy abroad. I certainly was not aware of the degree of the involvement of our British Embassy in Moroccan affairs: in business ventures and partnerships, legal and prison reform, youth projects, education, the media and religious dialogue.

Ms. Fiona Rumney, responsible for press and public affairs, made a profound and lasting impression on the girls. She shared her story of how she grew up in Hackney, a somewhat deprived area of East London, and never imagined that she would, or indeed could, end up working as a diplomat for the foreign office. Like many of the girls we brought out to Morocco, she assumed such positions were only for the elite. But with hard work and determination she recognised the opportunities which came her way and reached out to take hold of them.

As an English person working with Moroccans in London I am continually seeking to learn and understand more about Morocco and I shall now follow and monitor, as much as I am able, the projects which the British Embassy is hosting in Morocco. I sincerely hope that this visit (together with the Ambassador's recent visit to the Al Hasaniya centre in London) can be the beginning of a mutually beneficial relationship.



YASMEEN LABYAD AGE 15

FATHER AND MOTHER MOROCCAN FROM NADOR



We then went on to Casablanca and to the Hassan II mosque. To be honest I have never worn a head scarf outside my house and I actually felt safe, comfortable and more in touch with my religion by wearing it in the Mosque and the grounds around it.

As I entered this magnificent place of worship I felt peace, tranquillity and a rush of holiness overcome my body. I have tried to follow my religion and be closer to God and more in touch with Islam in the past, but it has always faded away as has my praying or just reflecting about my religion.

On entering the mosque I felt tearful, upset and angry. I felt so guilty that I hadn't thought of God properly when I had prayed, as I had always rushed through it. As I was in the mosque the least I could do was to pray. So I prayed two Rak'at, which for me was not enough to make up for my lack of commitment to God. But I felt so relieved and proud and I realized how much my religion means to me as a young Muslim girl living in a Westernised country, knowing that God will always be there to help me through my troubles.



LAMIYA DUKALI AGE 21

STUDYING JOURNALISM AND DRAMA AT ROEHAMPTON UNIVERSITY MOTHER AND FATHER MOROCCAN FROM TETOUAN AND HAYAIDA



On the Thursday we went to Ifrane. Al Akhawayn University in Ifrane was one of the many places of interest we visited. Ifrane itself seemed like another world. It completely lacked Moroccan culture, which made me have an aversion to it, as I thought it was a cheat on Morocco and its unique culture for which it is famous.

After having a brief chat with Imane Amzil, one of our guides and also a student, I started to think about attending AUI for the two month Arabic course they carry out during the summer period. It appealed to me because its atmosphere resembles that of the universities in London. Also the fact that it is taught in English is a bonus - my Arabic is appalling, hence the need for me to take an Arabic course!

Both students and staff members were extremely accommodating and friendly. They had prepared a jam packed afternoon for the girls. We had a tour of what felt like every inch of the university and a lecture about Moroccan architecture.

On the coach journeying back to base the girls were asked 'Who's thinking about attending AUI?' And I was surprised to see at least five put up their hands, including me. Our job was done!



SAMANTHA HERRON

AL HASANIYA MOROCCAN WOMEN'S CENTRE MOTHER AND FATHER ENGLISH



On the Friday we visited the headquarters of our hosts The Hassan II Foundation, where the girls enjoyed a truly wonderful reception. The Secretary General Dr. Zahi explained that the foundation does not yet have much contact with the UK and he expressed his hope that our visit could be the beginning of a fruitful and lasting relationship.

We explained that in order to achieve this we need materials and communications to be available to us in English. The girls asked that books and presentations on Moroccan history be translated into English for them, so that they too can learn about their heritage. We all agreed that translation is the key to forging this new relationship.

The Secretary General also talked about the problems the Moroccan community abroad is encountering with regard to the incarceration of male Moroccan youths. The foundation recognises education as the route to breaking this trend, running courses for young unemployed men to come to Morocco to learn a Moroccan trade. The girls expressed their interest in attending similar courses in calligraphy and Moroccan dress design.

Following the session I had an inspiring conversation with Mr. Yaser Znati who is eager for us to get further involved and bring more groups out to Morocco. I have returned to the UK armed with possibilities for collaboration here and I do indeed hope that this trip was only the beginning.



SIHAM EL YAMLAHI AGE 18

STUDYING SPANISH AND ARABIC AT ROEHAMPTON UNIVERSITY
FATHER AND MOTHER MOROCCAN FROM LARAACHE



In the afternoon we went to The Advisory Council for Human Rights.

I thought this would have been interesting, but the man just seemed to talk and talk and talk. I know I should have taken in more facts about what he was saying, but I remember looking around at the beautiful architecture and seeing everyone else with half opened eyes.

After hearing the lecture by Abderrazak Rouwane I thought how remarkable it is that Morocco has successfully managed to reconcile its past with its present for a better future, and all of this without bloodshed.





Thank you for taking us on this wonderful cultural trip. You have given us an opportunity to explore the different places and brilliant features of Morocco.

We have travelled from city to city, getting more and more excited to see what's coming next. Thank you for an amazing experience, I hope one day we can do this again.

From Meryam

Dear Souad

I am writing to personally thank you for 'bending over backwards' to organize such an inspirational and influential trip which I will never forget. This trip has given me an insight into Moroccan culture and possibly what I might like to do in the future. On behalf of me and everyone a big thank you. We all appreciate everything you've done.

From Fatima Zahra

Dear Souad

This trip meant more to me than just a taste of the side of Morocco we don't see. It brought me closer to my friends and I met other Moroccan girls with whom I shared this fantastic experience.

Being a strong minded young British Muslim Moroccan woman it has helped me choose the sort of path I wish to take. The idea of possibly trying a semester in a Moroccan university or to work in Morocco was something I hadn't thought of before this trip. So thank you to everyone who made this possible for us.

From Siham



FATIMA MOURAD

**CHAIR OF AL HASANIYA MOROCCAN WOMEN'S CENTRE
MOTHER AND FATHER MOROCCAN FROM LARAACHE**



This trip came about because we wanted the girls to see and experience their Moroccan heritage from a different vantage point, one not shaped by their parents and the hometowns of their parents. Many of the girls had an unquestionable allegiance to Laraache, a small town in the North of Morocco from where most of their parents hail.

We wanted to expose them to the culturally rich country that we know Morocco to be and the Morocco that is ahead of its time in many aspects of its development. More importantly we wanted the trip to leave with them lasting memories and impressions of an experience which we hoped could be a stepping stone, an inspiration for dreams of all things possible.

Thanks to the very hard work and devotion of so many people the girls saw doors open for them which would not ordinarily have done so. And in so doing they did indeed see a new Morocco, a Morocco they could be proud of and wish to get to know more closely.

Many of the girls we brought out come from relatively disadvantaged backgrounds and without this trip they may never have realised the vast array of opportunities which can be there for them in their futures. It was a moving experience for us all to witness this shift in their perception and see the girls grow into themselves. We wish to extend our sincere and heartfelt thanks to everyone who made this wonderful trip a reality.



SOUAD TALSI

FOUNDER OF AL HASANIYA MOROCCAN WOMEN'S CENTRE
MEMBER OF THE CCME

Henry Ward Beecher once said

"The ability to convert ideas to things is the secret to outward success"

We did!!!! but not without the help, assistance, inspiration generosity and sheer enthusiasm of Dr Zahi Secretary General of Foundation Hassan II. His positive attitude and encouragement gave me the confidence to knock on all other doors which have proved to be just as generous and committed as the FHII.

Thank you to all of you who have contributed and helped me make this trip a reality for our girls. Your commitment, dedication and generosity and indeed your perseverance, care and sheer diligence applied made the trip a reality and a success.

So much has happened in our world in the last 10 years that has done nothing but multiplied the obscurity, lack of confidence and at times confusion about our children's identity. Are they Moroccan, British or neither but simply Muslim??

The trip gave the girls the impetus I had wished for and that is to acquire new confidence and self-belief in their dual identity. The ability to embrace the culture they were born into and carry the one they inherited in perfect harmony.



Fondation Hassan II pour les Marocains Résidant à l'Étranger



On behalf of all the girls and all at Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre we wish to thank you all again. Our hope is that this can be the beginning of a fruitful relationship between British Moroccans and Morocco which can lead to many more collaborations and projects in the future



AL-HASANIYA
MOROCCAN WOMEN'S CENTRE



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