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**The social significance of mint tea consumption in Morocco:
Reflections on its symbolic representation of Muslim faith, gender
prescriptions, socio-economics and hospitality**

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THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MINT TEA CONSUMPTION IN MOROCCO:
REFLECTIONS ON ITS SYMBOLIC REPRESENTATION OF
MUSLIM FAITH, GENDER PRESCRIPTIONS,
SOCIO-ECONOMICS AND
HOSPITALITY

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

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College of Liberal Arts**

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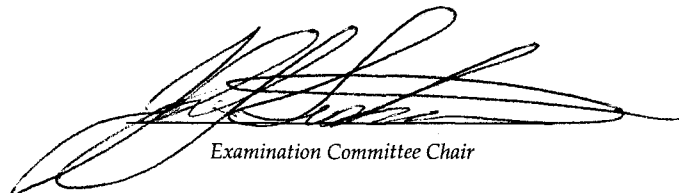
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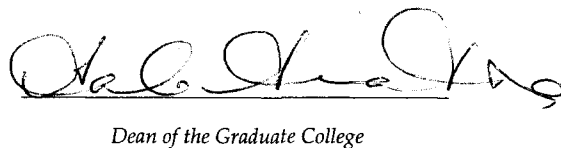
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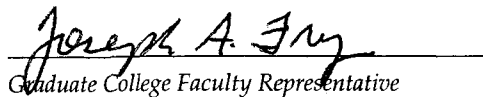
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ABSTRACT

The Social Significance of Mint Tea Consumption in Morocco: Reflections on its Symbolic Representation of Muslim Faith, Gender Prescriptions, Socio-Economics and Hospitality

by

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The purpose of this analysis is to explore the ways in which the Moroccan ritual of mint tea consumption is symbolic of and informed by the underlying core values of Moroccan culture. In particular, issues of Muslim faith, gender prescriptions, socio-economics and hospitality will be explored in detail as they pertain to the ritual of mint tea consumption. The analysis will show that ultimately “what and how you drink is what you are.” Understanding the particular consumptive practices of a culture is key to understanding what is considered to be “right” and “natural” behavior by individuals within that culture.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW OF THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the ways in which the ritual consumption of mint tea by Moroccans represents and simultaneously perpetuates fundamental core values by which Moroccans behave within their cultural structure. The ritual is not haphazard, but one that is codified into a specific form that is not only recognized by all Moroccans, but has come to be expected. It is through the enactment of the ritual that social interactions have been structured. As such, its pervasiveness within the culture does not mean that subtle differences in its enactment do not exist. These differences represent both conscious and unconscious regional, socio-economic and individual differences that order Moroccans within a highly hierarchical social structure.

Consumption of mint tea in Morocco is not simply a biological need fulfilled because of necessity. It is a social act and one that is laden with symbolism. Every aspect of consumption is carefully considered by Moroccans including whom is drinking, what they will be drinking, how the beverage will be prepared, when will it be drunk and where. These decisions are informed by the basic tenets of daily life by which Moroccans structure their activities. Issues ranging from religious prescriptions to gender prescriptions to socio-economics to exchange obligations are considered when determining consumptive patterns.

While the consumption of tea is not unique to Morocco, its specific form is. Like the elaborate rituals of tea consumption that have developed in Japan, China and Britain,

at the very heart of the ritual of mint tea consumption in Morocco is the reification of the fundamental core values and concepts of individual and group identity that pervade the Moroccan psyche. Maintaining these core values and concepts of self is highly critical in a culture where the sense of community and of one's correct place in it is highly codified. It is through the dissection of this secular ritual that these underlying core values can be deciphered and explored in greater detail and through which a greater understanding of what it means to be a Moroccan can be gained.

In order to appreciate the theoretical background utilized in researching mint tea consumption in Morocco, one must understand the fundamentals of food and culture research in anthropology. While certainly not a new field of study, food and culture studies have only recently been gaining in popularity among scholars who are realizing that there is more to a peoples consumptive practices than simply biological need and the availability of resources. Researchers such as Sidney Mintz, Carole Counihan, Penny Van Esterik, Marvin Harris, Levi-Strauss, and Diva Sanjur, amongst others, have recognized the social implications of a culture's consumptive practices and have developed various methods of analysis to investigate why people consume what they consume and how they consume it.

Sidney Mintz is often considered to be the grandfather of food and culture research. While he was not the first to begin analyzing the relationship between food and culture, he has been instrumental in establishing a symbolic methodology to food and culture research. Mintz states:

For us humans, then, eating is never a "purely biological" activity. The foods eaten have histories associated with the pasts of those who eat them; the techniques employed to find, process, prepare, serve, and consume the foods are all culturally variable, with histories of their own. Nor is the food ever simply

eaten; its consumption is always conditioned by meaning. These meanings are symbolic, and communicated symbolically; they also have histories (Mintz 1996:7).

Much of what Mintz' has focused upon in terms of his own research has involved the relationship between the expansion of sugar consumption to various parts of the globe and the social implications that this expansion has involved. He found that a key factor in the reasons for the adoption of sugar and its perpetuation throughout Britain was its association with and representation of power and status. While sugar consumption began as a luxury item available only to royalty, it soon became more readily available to the general public thus reducing its status as a luxury item. Rather than indicating power differentials among the have and have nots, it became representative of unity and a status equalizer. Sugar consumption, then, began as a powerful symbolic measure of self-identification within the British population. It represented a means by which individuals could be categorized socio-economically and therefore represented their power quotient within a society where status is extremely important for behavioral interaction.

Carole Counihan has been researching food and culture studies for well over two decades and, along with Penny Van Esterik, was instrumental in the development of one of the first edited texts devoted solely to food and culture research, *Food and Culture: A Reader*. As editors of this text, Counihan and Van Esterik sought to bring to the forefront the manifold ways in which "food is a foundation of every economy" (Counihan and Van Esterik 1997:1). Chapters were divided into the following: "Food, Meaning, and Voice," which explores the symbolic importance of food consumption; "Commensality and Fasting: Giving, Receiving, and Refusing Food," which analyzes the social implications of commensality among people within and between various cultures; "Food, Body, and

Culture,” which focuses predominantly upon the ways in which Western concepts of self-identification are undeniably intertwined with what and how we eat and the implications this has upon our behavior; and “The Political Economy of Food: Commodification and Scarcity,” which demonstrates the ways in which food commodification is involved in the perpetuation of social differences within and among various groups of people. Above all, what this text succeeds in accomplishing in the field of food and culture research is in creating a compilation of anthropological research on food and culture that cross cuts numerous theoretical assumptions and methodologies. The inclusion of these cross-cutting analyses recognizes that there is no one correct way to research consumptive practices, but rather numerous co-existing methods which in conjunction can lead to a greater overall understanding of the depth and fundamental importance of consumption across every walk of life.

Marvin Harris is best known for his cultural ecology analyses of the “Sacred Cattle” of India and of the “Abominable Pig” of individuals of Jewish and Muslim faiths. In his research, Harris establishes the ways in which religiously sanctioned foodways are informed by and perpetuated by economic and ecological conditions present within the communities where these foodways have become predominant. His conclusion, which was based upon extensive research of the foodways of much of the Middle East, was that “the most important food aversions and preferences of four major religions-Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam-are on balance favorable to the nutritional and ecological welfare of their followers,” and therefore, not solely explainable in terms of blind faith (McGee and Warms 2000:287).

Claude Levi-Strauss' "Culinary Triangle" represents a structural linguistic approach to the understanding of the ways in which foods are prepared for consumption and how these varying methods of preparation are representative of the overall structure of a society. He analyzes the cultural transformations that foods make in the process of their preparation for consumption as well as the ways in which the very process of preparing foods represents the mediation between culture on the one hand and nature on the other by various cultures. His analysis is one of oppositions between the raw, the cooked and the rotted and the ways in which foods move between these forms, namely various cooking methods such as smoking, roasting and boiling. These oppositions represent various unconscious structural differences between cultures that either may or may not be recognized by the culture itself. He concludes "thus we can hope to discover for each specific case how the cooking of a society is a language in which it unconsciously translates its structure-or else resigns itself, still unconsciously, to revealing its contradictions" (Counihan and Van Esterik 1997:35).

Diva Sanjur identifies seven basic approaches to food and culture studies. Environmentalism analyzes the ways in which the environment interacts with and influences culture and health. Cultural Ecology acknowledges the relationship between the environment and man while suggesting that food patterns are a direct response to available food supply. Regionalism observes patterns of food production and selection on a global level, focusing upon regional variation. Culture-history, interprets data from archaeology, linguistics, religion, history, and oral tradition to determine "the origin and distribution of dietary practices, traits, prohibitions, and so forth" (Sanjur 1982:23). Functionalism, recognizes that food habits serve a function, namely as a means of

“satisfying social needs,” and that the foods consumed by a culture are symbolic of the individual social relationships within that culture (Sanjur 1982:23). The Quantitative Approach utilizes computer simulation and complex systems analysis to explain cross-cultural food patterns, often with the intent of applying the data compiled for predictive purposes. The Clinical Approach, is predominantly used by individuals attempting to propose new dietary guidelines to a specific cultural group and analyzes the current food habits of a particular group while taking into account their cultural and dietary needs.

Sanjur suggests that none of these approaches independently are adequate in the study of a particular cultures food habits. A well-rounded analysis will adopt several or all of these approaches in conjunction to obtain adequate information with regards to specific food patterns. This proposed “multi-dimensional code for describing and recording the dietary patterns of people in a *functional* way” analyzes food patterns from four different standpoints: “food *consumption*, food *preference*, food *ideology*, and in *socio-cultural terms*” (Sanjur 1982:26).

By utilizing this schema, Sanjur suggests that the researcher can obtain information not only regarding the biological needs of individual consumers, but also the imposed cultural values that inform decisions about what to eat, when, where and how to prepare these foods. The latter cultural values are a direct result of a culture’s core values, which must be taken into consideration and understood in order to develop an adequate picture of what a particular culture’s food patterns are and why.

In addition, Sanjur reminds the researcher that “a major restraint within this context is food availability,” which is obviously determined by the environment within which people live (Sanjur 1982:37). Not only must the physical environment be

considered. Issues such as technological advancement and knowledge of how to process certain foods must be assessed. For example, certain useable resources may actually exist within an environment that are not exploited by a people due to their lack of knowledge as to how to process these foods and/or to lack of the proper technology to do so.

In conjunction with availability, one must consider other factors when researching the consumptive patterns of a culture, including methods of distribution and the symbolism that these may embody. Some of these factors include the following: issues of gender roles and differences in food preparation; issues of material influences or the particular devices utilized in the preparation of specific foods that often help in standardizing food patterns; the social status of food which directly relates to ideological beliefs regarding what is considered to be edible and inedible; the physical status of food which determines who is allowed to eat what, when and how; the social or ceremonial role of food; food etiquette, including eating with ones hands or praying before eating; and the division of labor, which is representative of the hierarchical or egalitarian nature of a society.

This type of approach represents a fine line between the acknowledgement of extrinsic influences upon food consumption as well as intrinsic influences and identifying the relationship between the two. In this analysis of Moroccan mint tea consumption, both are analyzed, incorporating elements from numerous approaches including cultural ecology, regionalism, functionalism and the culture history approach.

Essentially, what we are engaged in as an approach is a thick description in which ethnographic data collected during field research conducted in Morocco in December 2002 and December 2003 is combined with printed information on Morocco, tea

consumption and food and culture research. As such, it is through the description of specific occurrences of mint tea consumption that the symbolic significance of the practice itself can be illustrated. In accordance with what Clifford Geertz specifies in his article “Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture,” this kind of analysis is an interpretive one, in search of the meaning underlying the specific action in which participants of a specific cultural setting are engaged (Bohannon and Glazer 1988:532).

Because meaning is culture specific, it is necessary to situate any analysis within the culture being observed. With this in mind, the analysis begins in Chapter 2 by tracing the origins of mint tea consumption in Morocco, thereby establishing its relative immaturity as a consumptive practice within the overall schema of the culture’s history. The importance of including this information is to highlight how quickly and completely the ritual pervaded Moroccan culture to the point where the two are seemingly inseparable. It is as though the ritual had always existed, with the culture erupting around its observance. This chapter also likens the ritual to that of other tea drinking cultures, namely Japan, and explores the concept of what is ritualistic about the practice of mint tea consumption.

Chapter 3 consists of the thick description of three specific instances of tea consumption in Morocco. The focus of this description is to point out the similarities and differences in the precise form the ritual takes in numerous situations, thus illuminating the symbolic significance of the ritual itself.

Chapters 4-7 comprise the discussion portion of the analysis. Chapter 4 focuses upon how the fundamental underpinnings of the Islamic faith are symbolically

represented by, while simultaneously being perpetuated by the ritual consumption of mint tea. From this we move forward to Chapter 5, where the discussion illustrates how gender relations are woven into the overall scheme of the ritual of mint tea consumption. Chapter 6 explores the ways in which socio-economic diversity is represented by not only the flavor of mint tea as it varies from place to place, but by the very implements being utilized for its preparation. This diversity situates individual Moroccans in the hierarchy of Moroccan society, informing them of their appropriate place within the culture and the proper ways to behave as members of that culture. Finally, Chapter 7 delves into a discussion of the fundamental role the ritual of mint tea consumption plays within the observance of hospitable exchanges, which are considered to be a necessary part of daily life among Moroccans.

The conclusion of this analysis focuses upon synthesizing the discussion of the symbolic significance of the ritual of mint tea consumption and reiterating how its perpetuation within Moroccan culture in turn perpetuates the Moroccan sense of self. Ultimately, what becomes evident through the analysis is that the connection between what we eat and who we are is undeniable. Particularly in a culture that prides itself on its culinary legacy, the precise form that the ritual of consumption takes is inextricable from the precise form that the individuals doing the consuming within that culture embody.

CHAPTER 2

THE DEVELOPMENT OF MINT TEA CONSUMPTION AS RITUAL IN MOROCCO

“Tea and sugar have a tyrannical and almost obsessive centrality in Morocco. Its preparation and consumption are daily rituals of generosity and exchange... Who pays for how much of the tea and sugar, who owes whom from the other day or last week, and the quality of the ingredients are all constant themes of everyday life” (Rabinow 1977:35). As Rabinow states, mint tea consumption is a ritual that is observed with obsessive compulsion. Its observance is central to the cycle of daily life in Morocco, symbolically situating its participants within a structure of relating that is considered to be “right” and “natural” (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995:182-183).

Its centrality to Moroccan daily life would seem to be one that has pervaded Moroccan culture for centuries, with the very structure of the ancient medinas of Fez, Marrakech and Rabat having been erected in the shadows of the many teashops that now line their narrow streets. Yet, as Rabinow goes on to say “this is not the case... Tea was introduced into Morocco by the English in the eighteenth century, and its use did not become widespread until the nineteenth... during the crisis years of 1874-1884” (Rabinow 1977:36).

What caused Moroccans to adopt the ritual so vehemently? Most Moroccans believe the consumption of mint tea was readily adopted because Moroccans already had a tradition of drinking hot beverages infused with various herbs and spices as a means of

healing various physical ailments, for example digestive problems, headaches and muscle aches. Mint, which grows in abundance throughout Morocco in numerous forms from spearmint to peppermint, was commonly used as a digestive aid at the time that tea arrived in Morocco (Hanger 2000:69).

And, although, it is not discussed in detail in any text, it would be a logical conclusion that the social adaptation of mint tea consumption followed a strong social consumptive ritual that already existed with respect to beverages like these infusions or tisanes and coffee. As with most other countries in the Middle East, coffee was also being consumed in Morocco pervasively during this time, both socially and privately. Many rituals exist to this day regarding coffee in particular, including the practice of reading coffee grinds to predict the future, which is a practice originating in Turkey. Based upon this assumption, the adaptation of the British method of drinking tea with sugar seems a natural progression, particularly when the digestive benefits of green tea is taken into account. The Moroccans took the technique and added their own twist, developing the national beverage of the country.

The ritual of mint tea consumption in Morocco can in many ways be compared with the elaborate traditions for tea consumption that have developed in countries like Japan and China. A central argument in many articles written on the topic of tea consumption in these regions, including those written by Richard M. Klein, Herbert Plutschow, Jennie Siat-Bevlyadi and Jennifer L. Anderson, is that of tea as ritual. It is particularly important to recognize how a seemingly mundane act can embody such an elaborate form that it is perceived to be ritualistic.

In his article on Japanese Tea Ceremony, Herbert Plutschow writes that “tea is a ritual which, like other ritual, relates to reality in a multi-dimensional symbolic way...Given the strict rules of conduct to which Tea subjects hosts and guests, Tea seems to correspond to the rules of conduct in the presence of the sacred that Emile Durkheim discovered in ritual...Tea uses a sacred space where sacred symbols are on display” (Plutschow January 11, 2003:1). Like this reference to Japanese tea ceremony, the Moroccan ritual of mint tea consumption also adheres to strict rules of conduct which are known by all participants and which are adhered to unfailingly.

While there is no requirement of a deity being called upon in the process of the preparation of or consumption of tea by Moroccans, the space can be seen as sacred by virtue of its liminality. Within the confines of the teashop, ideals of self-conception and of community are re-enacted and reinforced. Plutschow echoes this idea of the liminality of the space within which tea is consumed by defining it in terms of Victor Turner’s conception of liminality. He states that the space where the ritual takes place is “structurally separate from the ordinary, everyday space of human activity and, therefore, ... is not central but peripheral to the community... Liminal space allows one to separate from one’s normal, everyday ‘milieu,’ a separation which is preliminary to reflecting upon and restoring the human order” (Plutschow January 11, 2003:3).

However, it should be noted that tea consumption is not limited to these spaces and is therefore more than simply a ritual for consumption in “marginal” settings. It can be found in the very spaces occupied by Moroccans during their daily lives, namely their homes and their businesses. Yet even in these situations the preparation and consumption of tea is highly structured. While the teashop represents a liminal space reinforcing the

symbolic roles of men and contributing to the development of *communitas* among them, the home becomes a liminal space where these roles are reinforced in contrast with the presence of women and family.

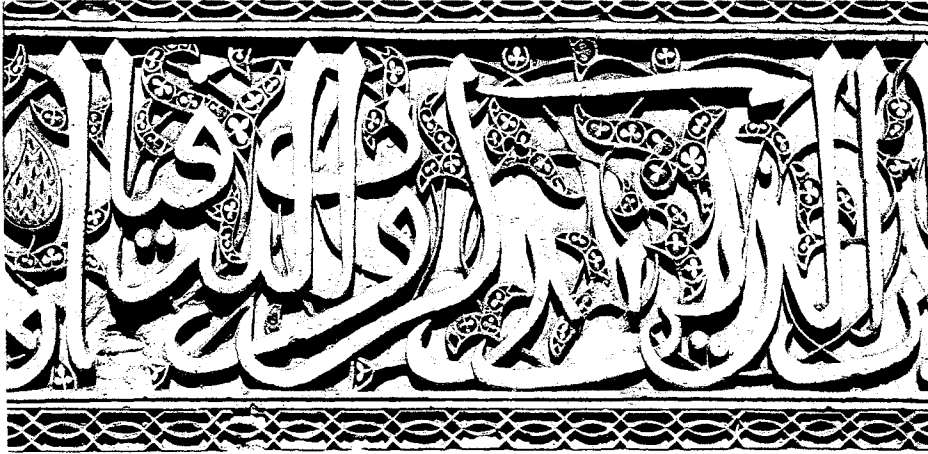
“Since all rituals had and still have a social dimension, ritual esthetics aims at emotionally uniting diverse people under uniform cultural norms, that is, creating unity and harmony within diversity. Ritual achieved this goal by creating a common culture that all members of a community shared. Ritual required universal emotional participation in a common culture” (Plutschow January 11, 2003:2). Therefore, the very act of consumption is representative of a common culture that is not only shared symbolically by the members of the community involved in the ritual, but physically as well. Participation is corporal and emotional; therefore making its social impact even more palpable.

There is a further consideration, however, regarding Moroccan mint tea consumption as ritual “art.” To Plutschow, tea ceremony was considered to be an art in Japan precisely because it occurs in a sacred space using utensils that are works of art, which mediate between the participant and the sacred (Plutschow January 11, 2003:2). Like the Japanese example, Moroccan mint tea ritual not only occurs in a “sacred” or “confined” space, which the teashop aptly represents, but its preparation also involves elaborately decorated implements which also mediate between the sacred beverage and the individual consuming it. “The utensils are works of art that owe their ‘beauty’ to the fact that they mediate between man and the sacred...Unlike ritual objects discarded as taboo after use in ritual, these utensils could be used over and over again, hence their desirability to anyone with a vested interest in ritual. Tea utensils draw their economic

value from their nature as ritual implements without which the ritual cannot be carried out” (Plutschow January 11, 2003:2-3).

To expand upon this notion of ritual as art, art necessarily involves an artist through whom the mediation between implement and participant occurs. It is the artistic individuality of this person that directs the precise form the ritual takes. When considering tea making as an artistic process, it is important to note that taste is subjective and therefore the precise form that the final product will take depends greatly upon the tea makers’ taste. “Tea-making in Moroccan society is a purely personal thing, it is said, totally creative and inventive. No cup of tea is ever the same, and no rules can be given for making it, for everyone’s taste is different, and each person’s hands make it in their own way and give it a unique flavor” (Fernea 1975:358).

One final comment on mint tea consumption as ritual--it should be noted that when asked about the “ritual” of mint tea consumption, Moroccans deny that the practice is a “ritual.” While they recognize the social significance of the practice, the word itself “ritual” by definition in the Arabic tongue suggests something that is solely based within the realm of religious practice, for example ablutions or fasting. Secular ritual as a term does not exist within their language, even if it does by our definition exist in their reality.



(Tea and the Blessing of Parents,
No One Satiates Oneself of It Arabic Quote in Plaster Carving)

CHAPTER 3

A TALE OF THREE TEAS

The focus of this chapter is to engage in a thick description of three distinct occurrences of mint tea consumption in Morocco. This process of analysis is similar to that utilized in the article “Eating Habits and Cultural Boundaries in Northern Iran” written by Christian Bromberger (Zubaida and Tapper 1994:217). In this article, Bromberger utilizes the process of thick description to bring to light the specific details of tea and coffee consumption in three different parts of Iran. The analysis then goes on to discuss the ways in which the particular cultural setting within which each of these examples occurs not only shapes the specific pattern of consumption that occurs there, but is also representative of the fundamental hegemonies underlying daily life there.

This type of analysis provides a visual concept of the ritual of mint tea consumption. By having this type of visual picture, the reader is better able to understand what the symbolic significance of the ritual is within Moroccan culture and how the ritual perpetuates the fundamental core values that shape it. While the basic form of the ritual is the same throughout Morocco, the precise form it takes from one context to another varies quite obviously. These variations are congruent with subtle regional variations that indicate not only differences in the ecological niches occupied by people throughout the country, but socio-economic differences as well.

Variations are also attributable to what in the previous chapter was defined as artistic variation in ritual. Each tea maker is both part of the larger tradition of mint tea consumption, which defines him as a member of Moroccan culture as a whole, while being simultaneously a Moroccan from a particular town and more importantly a particular family. The tea maker is at once a member of the group while being definable as an individual with particular tastes that have been shaped by his specific upbringing and experiences.

These examples will be followed by a discussion regarding the specific similarities and differences between them. By illuminating these similarities and differences, the overall pattern of the ritual can be recognized and the symbolic significance of the ritual within the overall scheme of the social structure can begin to be deciphered.

The first example of tea consumption to be discussed is the experience of visiting a teashop in the old medina of Fez. The old medina of Fez dates back to the 12th century A.D. A medieval village surrounded by walls, the entire medina is approximately 13 km² and has a population of nearly 600,000 people. Amongst the labyrinthine streets of the old medina, various souks or shopping districts can be found that sell goods ranging from copper and wood to fish and produce. Every individual has his or her favorite vendors to visit daily to obtain the necessities of life. This is true for the teashops as well.

Teashops are scattered throughout the medina within the various souks or markets selling such goods as leather, wood and copper, each of which service the local vendors and inhabitants of their particular neighborhoods. These shops are frequented daily by the

same individuals, enabling the tea maker and his regular clients to develop a real sense of camaraderie. It is not uncommon to see the same four gentlemen sitting inside the teashop at 4pm every day having heated discussions, smoking hashish, playing cards and drinking tea.

One such teashop, located in the heart of the coppersmith's Souk, exemplifies the ambiance and ritual nature of the teashops in the medina. Like many of the shops in the medina, the physical size of the shop is not large, measuring approximately 8 feet in width and 20 feet in depth. The tea maker stands behind a counter that is situated in the front right corner of the shop. Next to him is located a large copper samovar in which hot water is kept to be dispensed as needed when customers arrive, and a small sink. His tools include a handful of wood handled copper urns in which individual portions of tea can be made, a few hourglass shaped glasses, and a propane fueled stove.

In the back of the shop a number of men sit along banquettes that lace the periphery of the shop surrounding two small tables. The only other furniture in the shop is a couple of small stools at the entry way on which two little boys are perched, waiting for the tea maker to send them on their next tea delivery to a local shop.

The décor in the shop is modest, with floral print plastic tablecloths and a few scattered cushions for banquettes and framed photos of King Hassan and his sons centrally located on the back wall. The ambiance is dark, but friendly, with Arabic music being piped through a small radio perched on an upper shelf.

As a customer enters the shop, he is greeted by the tea maker and the others in the shop with the obligatory phrase of s-salamu alikum or peace on you, to which the appropriate response would be wa alikum s-salam. After exchanging pleasantries with

everyone in the shop, the customer takes a seat along one of the banquettes. While he waits for his tea, he joins in on the existing conversation that has been going on between those already at the shop. A pipe of hashish or kief (a version of marijuana) may be passed back and forth and a game of cards may be commenced.

In the meantime, the tea maker goes to work on preparing a glass of tea for the new arrival. He fills one of his wood handled copper urns with hot water from the samovar and places it on the propane burner. The water is brought to a boil along with a small scoop of Chinese gunpowder or green tea. After the first boil, the water is discarded, leaving behind the resuscitated tealeaves.

A second helping of water is added to the urn filling it approx. 2/3 full along with a handful of fresh mint. This is then heated until warm enough to melt the sugar. At this point the tea maker adds a large helping of cane sugar to the urn and brings it to a boil again.

Finally, the urn is topped off with water and brought to a third boil. The tea is then poured into one of the glasses and then back into the urn several times until the proper aeration is achieved. Finally, the entire mixture is transferred to the glass and the tea is served. The customer chants bi-smillah, in the name of god, picks up the glass with his right hand, holding it gingerly by the curved portion of the glass so as not to burn his fingers, and takes a sip. And so it goes, glass after glass, until it is time for the customer to leave.

Prices are not displayed anywhere, but rather negotiated upon completion of the visit. The customer offers a price and if the tea maker agrees to it, he nods, acknowledging acceptance of the price. If the price is deemed unfair, the tea maker will

make a counter offer. Offers and counter offers will be made until both parties agree upon the final price. The customer pays the tea maker on his way out, saying shokrun or thank you, and bids everyone a fond s-salamu alikum.



(Tea Service in the Medina of Fez)

The second example of tea consumption also occurs in the public arena. This example occurred at the base camp of Erg Zhigaga, which is located at the mouth of the towering sand dunes of the Sahara desert in southern Morocco. Mint tea in this part of Morocco is much stronger and less sweet than that found in the north, as was previously described in the example from Fez. Also, since the area is ecologically a desert, fresh mint is not regularly found in the tea prepared. Generally speaking, the tea itself is laced with dried specks of mint, giving it the flavor of mint without actually having fresh mint.

The overseers of this base camp are desert nomads called Tuaregs. Tuaregs have existed in the desert for centuries, having adapted their lifestyle to the harsh desert environment. While most have moved out of the desert and into nearby towns, their primary occupation still revolves around the desert, namely to lead camel treks for would be Lawrence's and Laurencia's of Arabia.

Consummate hosts, the Tuaregs prepare food and drinks for visitors nightly. The setting is simple. An enormous burlap tent is pitched above walls of mud, creating a hut-like environment. The ground is covered with elaborate woven rugs, which add not only color and warmth to the environment, but serve the practical purpose of keeping the sand out of the hut. Several small round tables are set up with simple wooden chairs surrounding them. Propane tanks and lanterns that are scattered throughout the tent provide light and heat. At the back of the tent, various instruments such as drums and cymbals sit awaiting their players.

The Tuaregs arrive dressed in their blue caftans, their heads covered with black scarves. They walk around barefoot, accustomed to the coarse sand. About six of them appear, assuming their positions in the center of the room. They sit on the ground while their guests remain in their chairs. A propane burner is lit and the tea making ritual begins.

One of the Tuaregs is the designated tea maker, obviously having performed the ritual many times. Displayed next to him on an aluminum tray or Siniyya are a number of small glasses that are soon to be filled with tea. He places a medium sized aluminum Manchester teapot or Barrahd over the burner. The pot is filled with some water and tea leaves laced with dried mint. After allowing the concoction to boil, more water and

tealeaves were added along with a sparse amount of sugar and then brought to a second boil. Then the pot is filled to the top with water and the liquid brought to a third and final boil.

Now begins the drama of the tea service. The skilled tea maker performs the ritual with ease, pouring the tea from the teapot to one of the glasses from a height of two feet above the glass. He tastes the beverage to ensure the proper ratio of sugar to tea. The liquid is then returned to the teapot and sugar added according to the tea maker's discretion. Again, he pours the tea into the glass and tastes it. Confident that the flavor is correct, he returns the liquid to the teapot a second time.

The third time he pours the liquid, again from a height of two feet above the glass, he proceeds to pour the liquid from glass to glass until it has been poured into each of the glasses once. He returns the tea to the teapot to reheat it. One last time he pours the tea into the first glass and repeats the process of pouring it from glass to glass until a light head or foam forms in each glass. The liquid is poured back into the teapot and the glasses are all filled, the tea maker pouring each glass seamlessly from on high.

The glasses are distributed to all who are present. Holding the glasses in their right hands, all raise their glasses and say bi-smillah. As the tea is savored by all, the Tuaregs converse with each of the individuals present. Once the glasses are emptied, they are collected and placed back onto the Siniyya. The entire ritual is commenced anew.

As the glasses are filled a second time, no care is taken to ensure that the same glasses are given to the person who drank from it the first time around. All present have now formed a communion, this communion being reaffirmed by the sharing of glasses and of the tea.

The evening is made complete by musical entertainment provided by the Tuaregs, who transform simple objects like milk jugs into instruments. Throughout the whole thing, the head tea maker maintains his post, ensuring that the glasses are never empty. This ritual is performed several times until the thirsts of all have been quenched and their appetites satiated. As the guests retreat, they thank their hosts by saying shokrun and bid them s-salamu alikum.

The final example of tea consumption to be outlined here takes place in the private arena, namely inside a Moroccan home. Moroccans love to entertain and do so quite frequently. There is a Moroccan saying that if there is enough food for one, there is enough food for many. And this is proven true when one is hosted for dinner. Guests are encouraged to eat until they can consume no more, and it would be an insult to refuse the hospitality offered by a generous host.

Of course, no dinner would be complete without the sharing of several glasses of mint tea. Not only is the tea consumed as a means of establishing communion among the group, it is also a powerful digestive aid following the consumption of an enormous meal. As such, let us discuss a particular meal shared among friends. This meal was consumed at a home in Fez. The invited were my husband, my mother, my father-in-law, and myself. Our host was our tour guide and friend, a middle aged man married with five children who lives in a suburb of Fez in what would be considered to be a somewhat more modern apartment-style building.

The home is not large, consisting of a kitchen, small dining room, living room, sitting room, a master bedroom, a smaller bedroom and a half bath. In Morocco, showers

are not often found inside the home, as all Moroccans attend a hammam or public bath a couple of times per week as part of their ritual cleansing, which is mandatory in the Muslim faith. The furnishings are minimal, consisting of banquettes, which surround the periphery of the sitting room, living room and dining room. A table or two are placed in the center of each room.

Dinner was prepared and served by our host's wife and her housemaid in the dining room with all eleven of us crowded around the small table, approximately one meter in diameter. Entertainment during dinner was provided by satellite TV, which was set to a Hungarian channel out of respect to my mother, who was born and raised there. As instructed, we ate first, using our right hands as spoons to scoop up the meats and vegetables in our tagine. After dinner, we all adjourned to the living room, where we awaited our tea service.

Contrary to what we had seen in both the medina and at the base camp at Erg Zhigaga, tea was not prepared in our sight, but rather in the kitchen by our host's wife and/or housemaid. It was presented to us in a nice silver Barrahd that was placed on an ornate Siniyya. The tea was sweet and our host had gone to great pains to ensure that there was plenty of fresh mint in our glasses. As with all other experiences we had had drinking tea, we began our tea service with the compulsory raising of the glass and our well wishing bi-smillah.

The tea was poured for us by our host's brother from a height of about two feet above the glasses, as is generally expected. It was accompanied by macaroons, freshly baked by our host's wife. As with the Tuaregs at Erg Zhigaga, empty glasses were returned to the Siniyya and refilled without concern for keeping each individual's glass

separate. The tea, as well as the glasses, were shared, reinforcing the communion we had established as good friends.

Once again, as the evening ended, we thanked our host and hostess “Shokrun,” and departed with a kiss on both cheeks, a hug and a s-salamu alikum for every member of the family.

At first glance, the most obvious similarity between these three experiences is the way in which the beverage is consumed. Always in a small glass, often hourglass shaped, and always prefaced with the obligatory toast of bi-smillah, in the name of god, before taking the first sip. This ritual highlights the significance of the Islamic faith to Moroccans and their acknowledgement of the presence of Allah in all facets of life. It is thanks to Allah that they have been afforded the food and drink they have access to and therefore it is in his name that all food and beverage is ingested.

The next striking similarity between the three examples is the individual serving the tea, who is always male. While women may prepare the tea within the home, particularly when men are hosting guests, it is ultimately the male who presents the guest with the beverage, reinforcing the distinct role differentiations that exist between genders within Moroccan culture. This tradition also symbolizes the importance of the act of giving and receiving within Moroccan culture, particularly between men who take the act of hospitality very seriously. A good host is respected and therefore will have a good reputation within the community, while a bad host is seen as unforgivable in a society where hospitality is considered to be the duty of a good Moroccan and Muslim.

Conversely, the very act of hospitality involves the receipt of the gift being given. It is also expected that the receiver be a “good” receiver. One who is appreciative, gracious and doesn’t turn down the gift he is being offered. Even after a large meal, when one is filled to capacity it is customary to drink at least three glasses of tea with one’s host. Any less would be seen as insulting and a refusal of the hospitality, which has been offered by a gracious host. It also enables guest and host to prolong their visit, offering them time to ruminate about the meal they have just enjoyed in communion.

A third similarity that stands out involves the vessel for preparation of the tea and the process of the actual preparation. Although in the medina individual portions were being made, the vessels used were similar to the barrahd or Manchester style teapots used in the desert and within our host’s home in the second example. The vessel is most frequently made of aluminum or copper, but may very well be made of silver in wealthier homes. It is a necessary tool in the making of mint tea and one, which is found in every home, no matter how modest in nature. Even the Tuaregs traveling across the desert on their camels carry a barrahd with them to make tea with at any time.

In terms of preparation, the basic routine is always the same, involving a total of three boils to create the final pot of tea. The ritual begins first by adding the tealeaves and water to the barrahd or teapot. In the north the tealeaves are simply the Chinese gunpowder or green tea leaves as such. In the desert of the southern regions, this gunpowder may be laced with dried mint for flavor. These are subsequently brought to a first boil to take away the bitterness of the tea. In the medinas of the north, where water is abundant, this first liquid will be discarded and the vessel filled again with water. In the

desert, where water is scarce, this first liquid will be maintained and added to, creating a much stronger and bitterer final flavor than in the northern cities.

Next, where fresh mint is available namely in the north, the barrahd is filled with a hefty handful of mint, sugar and water. In the south, the vessel will simply be filled with more water and a small amount of sugar. The beverage is then brought to a second boil. In both the north and the south, the third and final boil simply involves the addition of some more water to fill the pot. The beverage is always aerated before serving and the taste assessed by the tea maker before offering it to his guests.

Why not dump everything into the pot and simply bring it all to a boil, adding sugar to taste individually once the beverage has been served? First of all, there are practical reasons for the development of the three-boil process of mint tea preparation. The first boil aids in weakening the pungency of the green tea leaves, which would not be consumable in their raw state. During the second boil, the sugar is allowed to dissolve, thus sweetening the entire beverage completely through. Also, the processes of the second and third boils allow for the cellular structure of the mint leaves to be broken down so that maximum flavor can be released into the beverage. The process of pouring the tea from a requisite height of two feet above the glass actually aids in aerating the tea, as does the process of pouring it back into the pot and from glass to glass. Aeration is important in extracting the most flavor from the beverage, like one would aerate a bottle of good red wine after opening it and before drinking it.

Yet, beyond this, a tradition has developed which has an elaborate form that is not only recognized by all Moroccans, but also adhered to. It is a choreographed dance that must be performed the same every time in the same way. The individual tea maker's

artistic ability is exhibited through his particular proportions of tea to mint to sugar, but the dance remains the same. By perpetuating the way in which tea is made and consumed, the ritual itself and its fundamental importance to the Moroccan culture is also perpetuated and thus all the underlying symbolic representations its consumption represents.

Another similarity that is important to recognize is the setting in terms of physical space. In all three instances, the space in which the tea was consumed was intimate, allowing for the communion of consumption and facilitating conversation. The most common form of seating is on long banquettes shared by individuals participating in the ritual. The space is warm, inviting and the focal point turned within to the center of the room where the ritual activity is occurring and being shared. It vehemently contrasts the impersonal dining spaces found in most American restaurants and coffee shops. Does anyone feel as though they are in communion with the guy sipping his latte across the way at the local Starbucks?

In considering differences between these three examples of mint tea consumption, one cannot escape the fact that these instances occurred in three geographically different settings, namely a marketplace or souk, a home, and a makeshift tent in the middle of the desert. This difference in and of itself dictates the differing forms the ritual will take from region to region. Issues of space, availability of resources and socio-economics are all factors in where the tea is prepared, who prepares it, who serves it, what it is prepared in (aluminum or silver barrah), what it is served in, how much mint if any will be used, how much sugar, and even what it is served with, if anything.

Yet, despite these differences, the basic rules remain the same, and this is what sets Moroccan mint tea consumption apart from say Japanese or British tea consumption. Understanding the underlying principles behind the rules and deciphering the symbolic representation of the act itself are key to appreciating the role the ritual holds within Moroccan culture.

The following quote in french was found on a french website devoted to the topic of mint tea consumption in Morocco:

Faire le the est un don d'Allah, il n'y a aucune proportion, aucun regle pour faire le the: deux verres n'ont jamais le meme gout-
To make tea is a gift from Allah, there is no recipe, no rules for making tea: no two cups have the same taste (Dalet July 28, 2003:3).

CHAPTER 4

ISLAM AND MINT TEA CONSUMPTION

As with any culture, which has a strongly identifiable religious bent, Moroccan daily life is intertwined with the prescribed rituals that must be observed by each individual as a good Muslim. Every behavior, not excluding consumptive behavior, therefore revolves around the faithful observance of the prescribed rules that have been set forth as part of the religion. Mint tea consumption, while a secular ritual by nature, is not excluded from this relationship and therefore its precise form can be understood through a greater understanding of its symbolic representation of the various aspects of Islam itself.

The basic structure of Islam, by which a ritual for daily life is constructed, is the adherence to the five pillars of Islam as prescribed within the doctrines of the Qu'ran by the prophet Mohammad. The pillars include, the Profession of faith: "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is the Messenger of God," prayer performed five times a day, almsgiving, fasting during the month of Ramadan and the pilgrimage to Mecca (Chebel 2000:32).

These pillars establish a basic cycle throughout which daily life is weaved and constructed. This cycle frequently begins and ends with acts of consumption, which are interspersed with duties of prayer, work and the management of the household. Often,

particularly for men, the primary respite from the often-grueling pace of daily life is a stop at the local teashop for a glass of mint tea. This stop is generally a man's only opportunity throughout the day to relax, enjoy the company of other men, and to let go of the constant sense of duty and obligation they feel not only toward their families, but toward their faith.

An additional prescription for the devout Muslim that influences daily consumptive patterns is the ritual observance of various feasts and fasts which occur throughout the Muslim calendar and often involve additional restrictions on what can and cannot be consumed and when. In addition to the daily ban on the consumption of pork and alcohol, during these feasts, specific foods may be considered necessary for consumption, such as dates and milk, which are always consumed when breaking the fast at sunset during Ramadan. Often the dishes consumed during these feasts are much richer and fattier than those consumed during an average meal and therefore, a glass of mint tea will always accompany the meal as a means of aiding digestion.

Of particular importance with regards to the consumption of mint tea is the ban on alcohol consumption by the Qu'ran. "They ask thee concerning wine and gambling. Say: 'In them is great sin, and some profit, for men; but the sin is greater than the profit'" (Qu'ran, The Cow, II:219). While in reality this rule is not always adhered to, ideally, and particularly publicly, Muslims abstain from drinking alcohol. In Morocco, there were no stores within the medina that sold alcohol. One would on occasion find Moroccans drinking a kind of moonshine made from the fermentation of dates, particularly in the desert just beyond the Atlas mountains; however, this was the exception, not the rule.

When questioned about the consumption of mint tea in the teahouses, men would frequently comment that mint tea was like “Moroccan whiskey” or “Moroccan beer.” The teahouse in essence fulfills the need that alcohol consumption would elsewhere where it is not forbidden. Namely, it is a place where men can congregate without their women to talk about business or world affairs and develop a sense of community or belonging within their society and their particular social circle. One man in Fez equated the tea house to a British pub or an American sports bar, a place where the men go to get away and drink, only in this case the beverage of choice is not ale, but rather a glass of hot mint tea. On a side note, it is important to mention that while alcohol is not consumed at the tea houses, men can often be seen smoking hashish or kif, which is a marijuana-like substance providing the same type of hallucinogenic effect.

One also cannot help but notice the symbolic nature of mint tea as a substance in terms of its color and composition. Water, the basic component of mint tea, has long been considered to be highly important for its life sustaining and cleansing properties within the Islamic faith. It is therefore symbolically significant that the base ingredient of mint tea is water, as it serves a constant reminder to the Muslim believer of its life-sustaining and cleansing properties, encouraging the ritualized consumption of the beverage with a kind of religious fervor.

Color is also considered to be highly symbolic to Muslims. Dating back to the Prophetic period, the color green has been considered to be of primary importance in Islam, symbolizing hope, peace, success and happiness (Chebel 2000:116). It often appears as a common theme in the decoration of various buildings, including mosques, and has been seen as the prominent color in many flags, including the Moroccan flag. It

also figures prominently in Moroccan cuisine particularly in the form of herbs like parsley and cilantro, a dash of which is always included in the majority of tagines. Its presence in mint tea in the form of bunches of fresh mint stuffed into a glass of the tea, or dried mint in the southern Moroccan rendition of the beverage, is congruent with this theme and represents the physical manifestation of this symbol beautifully.

A final symbolic aspect of the Islamic faith that can be seen in various aspects of mint tea consumption is the importance of the right hand side within the faith. Muslims always eat and drink with the right hand versus the left hand, which is the hand used for wiping oneself after going to the bathroom. Architecturally, one often sees the shopkeeper in many of the shops located within the medina, including the teashops, located on the right hand side of the shop from the perspective of the shopkeeper. According to Muslims, the right hand side is considered to be the side of God, Allah, the divine side, while the left-hand side is considered to be unclean, unholy.

Overall, what remains evident is that while mint tea consumption may not be a religious ritual in and of itself, it is a ritual that symbolically represents many facets of the Islamic faith. It serves as a constant reminder of some of the basic fundamental tenets of the Muslim faith ranging from prescriptions as to what can and cannot be consumed to how they should be consumed, for example with the right hand and not in the presence of women. It is this latter issue, the issue of gender to which we turn our attention in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 5

GENDER DIFFERENTIATION AND MINT TEA CONSUMPTION

As M.E. Combs-Schilling states in “Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality, and Sacrifice:

Islam’s dominant sexual culture allocates to women the position of being that part of humanity that is closest to nature and hence least able to connect with the divine who exists beyond the natural realm. Consequently, females are understood to be in need of male supervision, because men –in the culture’s imagination-are defined as able to keep their natural inclinations in control (Combs-Schilling1989:92).

In the previous chapter we explored the ways in which mint tea consumption as a ritual symbolically represents various aspects of the Muslim faith. One of the primary focuses within the Qu’ran is the explicit differentiation between men and women. Clear instructions are given as to the proper relationship that should exist between them and this involves the establishment of a male dominant society in which male supremacy is exhibited in every aspect of daily life from sex to consumption.

While men are clearly dominant within the public arena, they are just as controlling within the private arena, although the lines of distinction may become blurred. With regards to consumptive practices, men often decide what will be consumed and when. They will be seen doing the morning marketing and will bring back suitable goods for their wives to prepare for the main meal of the day. This is not to minimize the originality women may exhibit in terms of the precise recipes they have developed for

these ingredients; however, it does speak to the degree of male influence in every aspect of society from the public to the private.

In "Food and Gender in a Yemeni Community," Ianthe MacLagan states:

Food is one of the main idioms through which gender relations are expressed. The women's world and the men's world meet at food. Men buy it, women prepare it. Men and women eat it but often separately, men in contexts of public display and women privately. They also eat together as a family group. Women's relation to food-what they are able to eat, how much of their time must be spent preparing it-is defined by their relation to men. Men's relation to food is also delimited by women through whose labour the food must pass after purchase and before consumption (Zubaida and Tapper 1994:159).

While tea consumption is a secular ritual which serves to break down barriers between men, the very nature of its exclusion of women from its participation within the public sector reinforces an inherent division between the sexes in the prescribed behaviors that are considered to be "natural" within the structure of Moroccan society. In addition to the rules set forth by Islam regarding gender relations, there are deeply felt truths that have been informed by Morocco's history and political structure. These factors taken together as a whole must be evaluated to gain a complete understanding of the nature of what is considered to be appropriate and "natural" in terms of consumptive behavior between men and women in Morocco (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995:182-183).

It is through the enactment of ritual that Moroccan males exhibit their agency in the perpetuation of both self and collective identity. From the annual sacrifice of the lamb during the Id-al-Adha to the careful and precise preparation of a barrahd of mint tea, the Moroccan male is actively involved in the process of self-making and being made (Ortner 1996:10). These identities are solely dependent upon underlying core values which take for granted the assumption of male superiority and continually reinforce the

“naturalization” of Moroccan women as being dangerous, evil and capable of dominating only in the temporal domain of the household. This includes “the preparation of food and clothing and the care of small children” (Combs-Schilling 1989:62).

As it is clearly stated in the Qu’ran:

Truly, for all Muslims, men and women, and all Believers, men and women, for all devout men and women, and all true men and women, and all steadfast men and women, and all humble men and women, and all men and women who give alms, and all men and women who fast, and all men and women who guard their chastity, and all men and women who are continuous in God’s praise-for all of these God has prepared forgiveness for all their sins and a great reward! (Qu’ran 33:28-37).

At first glance, the Qu’ran appears to ascribe equality in status to both male and female worshippers based upon their upholding of the five pillars of Islam. However, upon deeper analysis of the prophet Muhammads decrees, women are portrayed as being closely related to nature and therefore inherently dangerous by virtue of their sexual desire. A man must control his woman in order to avoid the temptation of becoming emotionally involved with her and thus distracting him from his focus on God and the afterlife, for “the dog, the ass, the woman interrupt prayer if they pass in front of the believer” (Lindholm 1996:229).

Women are therefore seen as a commodity, made the vessel by which men can proliferate their genetic lineage in a highly patrilineal society where the birth of male progeny is valued above all. As is indicated in the Qu’ran, “Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because Allah has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means...As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them...refuse to share their beds, (and) beat them” (Qu’ran 4:34).

It is not by accident, therefore, that men will often escape their duties as protectors and controllers of their women by congregating together within the teashop. It is during this congregation that men are free to let down their guards, if even for a moment, and simply enjoy themselves without the threat of their women distracting or derailing them from their ultimate paths in life. It is a time for relaxation and for reflection upon the often-grueling daily duties to which they are obligated to commit themselves. It is also a time for communion with one another as males within the human species and specifically as males within the Moroccan cultural scheme.

Traditionally the identity of women is largely relegated to domestic chores such as cooking, cleaning and taking care of children within the sanctity and protection of the home. Ideally, she is restricted from appearing in public without being properly covered and she must conduct herself with the greatest of modesty so as to avoid invoking the inappropriate attentions of men outside the home. "O Prophet! Tell your wives and daughters, and all the other women Believers, that they should put their outer garments over their bodies when they are in public-for this is the most convenient to their being recognized in such a modest manner and not molested" (Qu'ran 33:58-9).

While this is the ideal for Muslim women in general, Morocco, being a more moderate and liberal Muslim nation compared with Saudia Arabia, does not necessarily uphold these virtues for all women. It is not uncommon to see women within the medinas wearing modern clothing and even business suits. As a result, it is even more important for men to monitor themselves and gauge their own behavior so as not to appear distracted and derailed by the power that the presence of these women may exercise

over them. As such, the teashop will often become a refuge from the temptation of the liberal and seductive Moroccan female.

Yet despite this liberalism, women are still restricted with regards to where they may appear and when. It would not be appropriate for women to appear at a men's hammam, nor would it be appropriate for her to show her presence at a teashop, which occupies the same liminal space as a hammam or public bath, one where masculine identity is identified and upheld. A woman's presence at either of these socially significant masculine spaces would not only appear to be out of place, but would be unnatural, disruptive of the daily order of the gendered Moroccan life.

Beyond daily life, women are also restricted in numerous ways in their religious practices and aspirations. They are considered to be impure during menstruation and must therefore refrain from prayer, one of the five pillars of Islam, until their periods have ended and they can cleanse or purify themselves. Further restrictions apply with regards to fasting during Ramadan as a result of a woman having her period or being pregnant. While prayers do not have to be made up after the end of menstruation, missed days of fasting must be made up at a later time in order to satisfy religious obligations. By sheer virtue of feminine biology, women are at a spiritual disadvantage.

One of the most striking examples of how pervasive this separation of gender is within the scope of the Islamic faith is the actual layout of King Hassan's mosque in Casablanca. King Hassan's is the largest mosque in Morocco, and the third largest in the world next to the ones in Mecca and Medina, both of which are in Saudi Arabia. While all cities have hammams that are gender specific and are utilized for ritual purification and cleansing, King Hassan's has the additional feature of having completely separated

Ablution chambers for both men and women. While the hammams require that an individual strip down to virtually no clothing at all, hence necessitating the separation of men from women, the ablution rooms serve more as a means of symbolizing the cleansing and purification characteristic of the hammam. Clothing is kept on, and the procedure followed by both men and women is identical. Separation in this case serves more as a function of maintaining the distance between women and men at the time where female presence may interfere with the men's capacity to focus upon their religious obligations.

An extension of this segregation is in the physical space of the interior of the mosque. The mosque is divided into two levels, the main floor or ground reserved for male worshippers, while female worshippers are relegated to the upper or secondary level. Functionally the separation is obvious, but symbolically what emerges is a very distinct visual reference to the primacy of males within the culture and the inferiority of females.

What this signifies in terms of the teashop is the physical extension by which the gender differentiation among men and women in Morocco can be identified. Like King Hassan's mosque, where physical space separates men and women in a visually apparent way, the teashop does the same. The shop does not truly have a door signifying interior versus exterior or two floors, one designated for male, one for female. Rather, the space is defined imperceptibly by the wafting aromas of mint tea and the alluring smoke of the hashish and kif being smoked within. It is like a veil, cloaking the external world of women from the internal world of men and clearly defining the space as unsuitable for the presence of anyone but the initiated male.

Beyond religious references to gender differentiation, one must consider the political history of Morocco and its role in the perpetuation of these prescribed male and female idyllic roles. Established in 789 A.D., the Moroccan monarchy is the oldest surviving politically active monarchy in the world. A prerequisite to monarchical rule is that the King is a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad, thus reinforcing the importance of Islamic faith as the dominant factor in the underlying core values by which Moroccan culture and identity is constructed. The monarch is considered to be the archetypal, man, to whom other males compare themselves in their establishment of a collective Moroccan male identity. He is the overseer of the political, economic and spiritual well being of the country and is the primary head of many of the greatest rituals associated with the Islamic faith.

The efficacy of the monarchy in establishing the cultural identity of the Moroccan people can be considered in ways that suggest similarities to Carol Delaney's discussion on the birth of a Turkish identity in her article "Father State, Motherland, and the Birth of Modern Turkey" (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995:177-193). In her analysis, the leadership of Mustafa Kemal and his ability to transform the political and social identity of the people of Turkey into a unified conception of a Turkish nation was highly influenced by the notion of the Muslim family as being an extension of Muslim society as a whole. It identifies the authority of the father as symbolic of the authority of God and therefore, "God, the Head of State, and the father form a devolving but unilineal structure of authority" (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995:184).

In similar ways King Hassan, as the Head of the Kingdom of Morocco, is a father figure, exhibiting ultimate authority over his family, the people of Morocco and the

Motherland. He is able by extension of the ideologies underlying Muslim faith to develop a sense of collective identity in which gendered power differentials are naturalized while maintaining what Schneider defines as “diffuse and enduring solidarity” amongst the Moroccan people (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995:178).

As such, the image of the King takes on an almost god-like appeal, signifying Moroccan collective identity, religious identity and by extension masculine identity. It is with this concept in mind that the display of his photograph in most households and businesses in Morocco, including the many teashops within the medinas, becomes significant. Specifically within the teashop, it serves as a constant reminder of the “enduring solidarity” that males enjoy as a group within that liminal space. It is a visual reference that is fundamentally intertwined with the definition of the Moroccan self in a culture where visual idolatry and iconography are forbidden by the Muslim faith, therefore making it even more significant of the Moroccan self. In essence, it serves as a daily reminder of what it means to be a Moroccan, what it means to be a Muslim and what it means to be a “good” man.

What becomes evident then is the pervasiveness of the proper virtues of masculinity and femininity within Moroccan society. The place of the woman is in the home, while the public arena is the domain of men. The king serves his people and in turn his family by providing for them, as a good Muslim man should do. Clearly the daily life of the Moroccan is emblematically magnified in the guise of the Moroccan monarchy.

Having analyzed the importance of various aspects of Moroccan culture, religion, and socio-political structure within the establishment of male and female identity, we

now return to the discussion of the secular ritual of mint tea consumption. While the ritual is not religious in nature, it is certainly informed by the dominant concepts of the religion in terms of its separation of men from women publicly. Where in general “men must be on their guard, careful, controlled, and contained around women, never giving females their essential selves,” it is within the context of the teahouses that men can let down their guard and release these essential selves (Combs-Schilling 1989:93).

Yet, the above should not suggest that women never drink tea, for tea is not exclusively consumed in the teashops of the medina. As has been shown by the tale of the dinner consumed within a Moroccan home in Fez, women were not only present, but also partook in the consumption of tea at the end of the meal. Families at the conclusion of a meal often consume tea at home most frequently as a sign of hospitality to visiting guests, but also to aid in digestion at the conclusion of a large and saucy meal. What is not clearly evident within the private setting, however, is who actually prepares the tea for consumption.

In the teashops within the medinas, men prepare the tea for consumption. It is a man’s beverage, prepared by a man for men. The sanctity of the beverage seemingly preserved by not allowing it to be touched by female hands. In essence, a cycle of masculine expression is controlled from beginning to end so as to perpetuate itself in a completely pristine and untainted manner. However, being that women are deemed as domestic goddesses, charged with preparing the daily meals for their family while observing religious prescriptions for consumption, it would be a logical assumption within the private setting women would be the ones to preparing the tea as well.

Yet this is not entirely clear, as in the context of a diffa, or feast to which guests are invited to eat within a family home, it is generally the male of the house that serves the tea to his guests after the meal, not the woman. What occurs within the confines of the kitchen remains hidden and protected. Even so, the sheer fact that men ultimately serve the tea within the private setting as well clearly reinforces the dominance of the male within Moroccan society.

Symbolically, then, the teashop, tea preparation and tea consumption in the public versus the private domain can be seen as indicative of the pervasive gender hierarchies that exist within the cultural core values of Moroccan life. While publicly the definitions of dominance versus subservience are clearly distinguishable between men and women, privately these lines of distinction become as murky as the very liquid that can be found in the tea glass.

Gender differentiation is not the only social distinction represented symbolically by the ritual of mint tea consumption, many other socio-economic differences can be established through the analysis of the ritual, the beverage itself and the implements utilized in its preparation. These differences are clear markers indicating where individual Moroccans belong with regards to the social hierarchies that are embedded within Moroccan daily life. While these hierarchies may not be sanctioned by the Muslim religion, their importance in establishing appropriate interactions between Moroccans is equally as important.

CHAPTER 6

SOCIO-ECONOMIC DIVERSITY AND MINT TEA CONSUMPTION

As has been previously noted, tea making requires very specific utensils that can be found in every household throughout Morocco. While the methods in which these utensils are used does not vary, the materials with which they are constructed and the artistry of design or lack thereof upon them are very unique from one household to another. The basic, and most important, utensil for tea making is the Barrahd, or Manchester shaped teapot, which is generally made of stainless steel, copper, aluminum, or silver. Even if a teamaker has nothing else, with a teapot, glasses, some Chinese gunpowder or green tea, sugar and mint, tea can be made.

Beyond the Barrahd, wealthier households will often have a number of additional implements for tea making and serving which establish their social superiority within Moroccan culture. These are the Siniyya, or round tray with legs that is used to hold the Barrahd, glasses, mint, tea and sugar that are used in tea making; the Rbaia, or cylindrical box used for holding the gunpowder, sugar and mint; and the Bahbur, or samovar, which is often used to hold the boiling water used for tea making (Hanger 2000:70).

The possession of these implements reinforces the social superiority of individuals who can afford the luxury of owning them. Yet, even among those prestigious enough to have a full tea making set there can be differentiation in terms of the materials

from which these accessories are made and the intricacy of design with which they are adorned. According to one shopkeeper in the silver souk in the ancient medina of Fez, silver teapots are considered to be the most valuable, particularly when they have a mosaic-like pattern engraved upon them. The value is both real and perceived. Silver as a material is very expensive by comparison to aluminum, copper or steel, but there is also a value placed on the time spent by artisans to create the elaborate designs which adorn not only Barrahds, but the Siniyya, the Rbaia and Bahbur.

Why would a Moroccan invest in such expensive implements? The answer is twofold. First, owning an elaborate silver tea set denotes status in a society where there is much value placed upon status differentiation and social hierarchies. Additionally, one must consider the use of these implements. In a culture where great pride is taken in the act of hospitality and where the service of mint tea to a guest is considered to be the ultimate and necessary act of hospitality, a worthy host is willing to put a little extra money into equipping himself with the finest possible tools with which to express his unfailing hospitality.

So the social order goes as follows. The lowest class of individuals will likely have an aluminum Barrahd and nothing else. A modest or middle class individual may have a copper or silver Barrahd, but no additional implements. A wealthier family will likely own a silver Barrahd along with an entire set of additional implements including the Rbaia, Siniyya and Bahbur, all of which will likely be made of silver. Yet the distinction can go even further, as in certain cases wealthier families will own two tea sets, a formal one for entertaining and an informal one for daily use, which generally

does not consist of the individual Rbaia or a Bahbur, only the Barrahd, glasses and perhaps Siniyya.

There is yet another distinction that can be made in terms of social status with regards to mint tea consumption and this involves the ingredients that are used to make the beverage. As aforementioned, there is a distinct difference from region to region and household to household in the degree of sweetness and strength of tea. This distinction generally occurs along north/south lines with larger urban centers with greater populations and more industry located in the north and smaller farming and desert communities located in the south.

In the north, tea is generally much sweeter and not as strong, and almost always is served with a healthy bunch of fresh mint stuffed in the serving glass. In the south, where there often is no fresh mint to be found, tea tends to be much stronger, less sweet and is not served with fresh mint, but rather dried mint is mixed in with the gunpowder for flavor. Part of this distinction is obviously relegated to ecological differentiation, namely the arid climate of the deserts of the south versus the fertile soil of the north where produce is much more readily available. Yet the distinction goes beyond this.

As was the case in Britain during the expansion of sugar consumption in the mid-1600's, sugar in Morocco became often associated with wealth, something that only upper class families could afford to stock in their pantries (Mintz 1985:151-186). Even today, the gift of a large cone of sugar is considered to be highly desirable and valuable. Therefore, it follows that those who can afford sizeable amounts of sugar can and do use it to flavor their tea, not just for flavor, but as an exhibition of their financial security and hence their elevated social status.

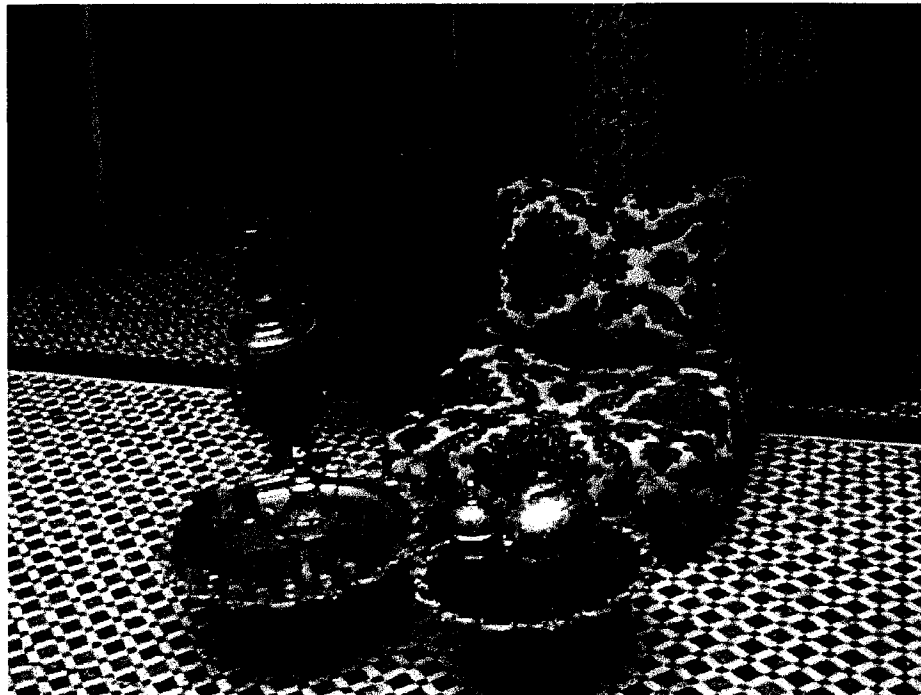
Since most of the larger and more modernized cities within Morocco are located in the northern urbanized regions of the country, it is not surprising that the wealthier elite gravitate towards these cities, leaving those of more modest means to the less developed regions in the south of the country. These individuals have the financial wherewithal to purchase large quantities of sugar and fresh mint, establishing the predominance of the sweeter and less bitter tea as reflective of the northern part of the country.

With these regional differences in mind, one must consider the borders of what is considered to be acceptable or unacceptable in terms of mint tea consumption. While these differences are generally true, this is not to say that individual variation may not occur within a region that diverges from the general pattern of mint tea consumption found within that region. For example, there are some individuals who may not enjoy the highly sweetened mint tea served in the medinas of the northern cities of Fez, Marrakech and Rabat. During our second visit to Morocco, my father-in-law came with us and he does not like sugar in his tea. While he did not want to be disrespectful, he did not want to consume the tea as they served it. He requested they leave the sugar out of his tea and they graciously obliged, albeit with a look of surprise on their faces. To ease my father-in-law of any concern of having offended his Moroccan hosts, one Moroccan male said to him that he often has mint tea without sugar as well.

Our tour guide made it clear that while there are general rules for the way in which Moroccans consume foods and beverages, they will often defer to foreign tourists and amend their practices in order to make them more comfortable. This extends to such practices as utilizing utensils when eating rather than their hands and allowing a female

tourist, like myself, into the sacred male domain of the teashops within the old medinas. This willingness to adapt is driven by both socio-economics as well as the underlying core value of exhibiting hospitality to everyone. Socio-economically, Moroccans know that they must please foreigners so that they will continue to frequent their communities, thereby bringing money into their economy. In terms of hospitality, a Moroccan values his position as a host as a necessary one, one that is prescribed within the Qu'ran and which extends beyond the realms of the daily life of the Muslim into the interactions that take place with foreigners visiting their land. While hospitality behooves the Muslim as a devout worshipper, it also behooves him as a Moroccan seeking to better his socio-economic status within a culture that depends upon the tourist market for its stability.

Despite differentiations in social status that are represented by the implements and ingredients utilized in mint tea preparation, one truth remains. Mint tea consumption throughout the country from north to south is an important means of establishing communion among individuals sharing in the ritual. Whether wealthy or poor, urban or rural, men everywhere take great pride in making tea with which to host a worthy guest. Even the most humble Tuareg in the Sahara desert with his aluminum Barrahd, dried mint leaves, gunpowder and minimal supply of sugar will go to great pains to make sure everyone has a fresh glass of mint tea in the middle of the afternoon after a long day of camel trekking. His display of this ritual of hospitality is no less worthy of appreciation than that of the wealthy businessman in Casablanca with his silver Barrahd, Siniyya, Rbaia and Bahbur.



(Formal Moroccan Tea Set from the Dar el Ghalia in Fez)

CHAPTER 7

THE HOSPITABLE GLASS

In “The American Dimension: Cultural Myths and Social Realities,” W. Arens and Susan P. Montague succinctly state the following regarding the importance of exchange relationships with regards to the establishment and perpetuation of social relationships within a culture:

As anthropologists have long recognized, exchanges are the very lifeblood of social relationships. In a particular culture the items and terms of exchange are appropriate to the specific social relationships. The gift is never pure, but rather sets in motion a process of continual giving and receiving. The recipient understands that the offering stands for a whole series of future exchanges in which he is now obliged to involve himself...In many cultures a food offering holds a particularly important place in symbolizing the quality of a social relationship...The exchange of particular foods thus becomes such an important aspect of a social relationship as to stand for or symbolize it (Arens and Montague 1976:143).

In Morocco, the exchange of food items, namely mint tea, represents the relationship of host to guest, which is perhaps one of the most important social relationships that can be developed in a society where almsgiving is considered to be sanctioned by Allah as one of the five primary tenets of Islam. While almsgiving specifically involves giving money or food to the poor and needy, this ethos of exchange extends to others of equal status as well. As such, it represents an even more important aspect of social relationships where, by sharing one's own goods with another, in

particular food goods, becomes a means of status equalization and of establishing *communitas* between two people.

To quote Pierre L. van den Berghe on the importance of sharing food within a culture:

Food is not only shared in all cultures, but is *ceremoniously* shared in ways which differ in detail but have the same basic meaning and function: to establish, express, and consolidate social ties...The shared ingestion of food, drink, or some other internally taken substance is the universal hallmark of hospitality, and symbolizes a desire to maintain friendly relations. In stratified societies, commensalism is generally a token not only of good relations but also of social equality. Conversely, the refusal to share food or drink is universally interpreted as a mark of mistrust, hostility or contempt. Food is not only the ultimate gift, but the gift that cannot gracefully be refused (van den Berghe, 1984:390).

It is important to recognize the significance of the italicized word “ceremoniously” in the above statement. Individuals do not haphazardly share food. Often, a very specific set of rules is established not only for the preparation of these shared goods, but for their consumption and ultimately for the reciprocation of the original gift being shared. Mint tea consumption is such a ceremonial act of hospitality, where very specific rules regarding the ways in which tea is prepared, served and consumed are followed, establishing a “right” and “natural” way in which the process should and does occur (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995:182-183). The knowledge of this ceremony and thereby its observance situates the host within a grander community, namely as a Moroccan as opposed to a Japanese or British host serving tea to a guest.

In addition Pierre L. van den Berghe states:

Through the communal and ritualized ingestion of food, we reinforce social bonds and express at the most fundamental level the unity of nature and culture. Our cuisine is the symbolic expression of our sociality, first in the intimate domestic sphere, and by extension with the larger group that shares our specific culinary complex; the inventory of food items, the repertoire of recipes, and the rituals of

commensalism. Along with language, the food complex thus becomes a basic badge of ethnicity (van den Berghe 1984:392).

It is interesting to note the connection between language and the food complex as ethnic markers within a society. Languages, like foods, can be similar from one cultural context to another, for example much of the Middle East speaks some form of Arabic that is somewhat recognizable from one country to the next, yet the specific dialects that exist from region to region are markers representing the cultural diversity of each region. Food itself is like a language. While similar ingredients may exist in numerous countries, the specific recipes developed by a group of people in a particular region can differ immensely. These differentiations are attributable to numerous factors including regional availability of resources, local knowledge and technology available for the use of particular ingredients, religious food proscriptions and of course the personal palettes of individual chefs.

In her discussion on gender in “Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and the Revoicing of Tradition,” Deborah A. Kapchan expands upon the concept of the role of sharing in the establishment of socio-economic hierarchies as follows:

The social body in Morocco is defined between the communal sharing of food at the table and the acknowledgement of profit-seeking that such community affords... ‘Eating profit’ is an apt metaphor for social relations which define and affirm the community that emerges in the process of the negotiation of goods (Kapchan 1996:68).

In other words, hospitality and the sharing of food has to be recognized as a powerful means of distributing and sharing valuable resources and commodities within Moroccan culture. Hospitality does not simply involve the good intentions of a host towards his guest and the need to establish superiority as such, but it also involves the

concept of reciprocity and the knowledge that what is given now will be returned in one form or another, benefiting the host and his family.

As Rabinow states in his book "Reflections on Fieldwork in Morocco," the role of host embodies one of the most important values in Morocco, that of generosity (Rabinow 1977:48-49). A good host is one who exhibits his bounty endlessly to his guests. "One of the highest compliments one can pay to the man is to say he is *karim*, generous" (Rabinow 1977:48). Note the term "*karim*" or generous. The basic tenets of reciprocity that underlie Moroccan hospitality very much mimic the concepts of karma, a word which in and of itself undeniably resembles the term "*karim*." The basic ideas are the same. Essentially, individuals that give and are giving will be reciprocated in kind. Or, more basically, what goes around comes around. Those hosts exhibiting great hospitality will eventually receive like hospitality from their guest in return.

Rabinow goes on in this same passage to describe how the acceptance of hospitality in Morocco establishes a pattern of social hierarchy, which perpetuates the power structures considered to be "natural" within Moroccan culture. "The guest, while being fed and taken care of, is by that very token acknowledging the power of the host. Merely entering into such a position represents an acceptance of submission" (Rabinow 1977:49).

Hospitality necessarily involves the defining and redefining of social hierarchies within Moroccan culture. While the sharing of foods can produce communion and a feeling of shared national identity, it can also create a sense of dominance and submission between the host and his guest. This shift in power demands reciprocity so as to equalize

the power relationship between the two individuals and return it to a more or less egalitarian status.

The concept of status as a factor in hospitality goes even further, however, as “extending hospitality and showing generosity to the guest is one way of establishing or maintaining status and respectability...In Islam, even when the host has higher status than the guest, he should serve him and eat later” (Zubaida and Tapper 1994:180). I personally witnessed this type of exchange while in Morocco, not generally between Moroccans, but certainly when Moroccans were hosting me. They always served me first and generally served the largest portion to me. At one gathering with a family in Fez, the entire family refrained from eating until my whole family and I had finished eating. They nibbled on what was left over while we digested an uncomfortably excessive but delicious meal. Thus, “generosity is expressed and measured by the quantity of food offered to the guests” (Zubaida and Tapper 1994:182).

“Hospitality is a kind of display of maleness, of male power and generosity and success” (Zubaida and Tapper 1994:163). While there is certainly a greater exhibition of hospitality exhibited by men, especially publicly, there is also a strong ethos of hospitality among women. Albeit, these exchanges are less likely to be focused upon status differentiation/equalization and more about the sharing of community in a society where women are already considered to be of lower status than men.

In “Food and Gender in a Yemeni Community,” Ianthe Maclagan discusses the following with regards to exchanges among women in another Muslim culture, Yemen, which has similar exchange rituals to that of Morocco:

Like all visiting and hospitality, women’s visiting among themselves is closely bound up with food and drinks. Women make tea or qahwa or both when they get

up in the morning, and fill a vacuum flask so it is always ready to be offered to any visitor who may drop in...A guest, whether male or female, is always offered tea, qahwa or a choice on arrival (Zubaida and Tapper 1994:165).

For women a unique set of variables is involved in the exchange of food and drinks. They are restricted in many ways as a result of strict regulations separating men from women within the Islamic faith as have been earlier established. In general, women are relegated to exhibiting their hospitality in a more private setting, namely within the home. They are not often found in the souks offering tea or sweets to a friend, although female shopkeepers are frequently seen drinking mint tea in the course of their daily business. Their presence in the souks as such would be considered an invasion of what is considered to be male space. However, this division of space does not affect the form that hospitality takes, which most frequently revolves around the sharing of food and beverage, specifically mint tea, which is prepared in the same ritualized manner that is followed by men.

Finally, hospitality revolves around the use of exchange as a powerful marketing tool. Morocco is predominantly a market-based economy. Daily life revolves around the buying and selling of goods, particularly in the smaller towns and ancient medinas, like that in Fez. While word of mouth is perhaps the most powerful marketing tool they have, Moroccans rely upon exchange to build relationships with customers and to establish a level of trust with them.

This exchange most frequently involves the offering of mint tea to prospective buyers entering into one's shop. It is not uncommon to spend an hour drinking three glasses of tea before a shopkeeper even begins offering his wares for sale. Perhaps the most notorious of businessmen to use this type of marketing are the carpet sellers. Would

be buyers, even those who never intended to purchase a thing, but only to window shop, are whisked away into a world of color and the powerful perfumes of mint leaves only to walk away with an empty pocket and a dazed look upon their faces, wondering how they got talked into spending their entire vacation fund on an authentic hand woven rug that they do not even know where to put in their house. It is certainly a case of buyer beware.

In the end, the point that needs to be made is that the ritual of mint tea consumption is not one that is dictated by any one factor within Moroccan culture. It is a pattern of behavior that exists simultaneously in many spheres representing business relationships and friendships. The two can and do occur as natural extensions of one another in a culture where reciprocity is seen not as a burden, but as a natural part of daily interaction.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The following is an arabic proverb about tea consumption:

The first glass is as bitter as life;
The second glass is as sweet as love;
The third glass is as soothing as death
(Collins July 20, 2003:2).

The purpose of this thesis has been to explore the ways in which the secular ritual of mint tea consumption symbolically represents and simultaneously perpetuates the fundamental core values by which Moroccans conduct their daily lives. Moroccans do not simply share food and drink, they do so following specific rules of conduct that establish “right” and “natural” ways of behaving in a culture where the proper place of each individual within the social structure is vehemently maintained and observed (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995:182-183).

This analysis began by introducing various aspects of food and culture research in general. The purpose of situating any analysis in the overall scheme of analytical research is to give credibility not only to the subject, but also to the method of analysis utilized. The methodology utilized in the exploration of the ritual of mint tea consumption in Morocco involved a Geertzian thick description of the specific ritual as it occurs in three distinct social settings. By providing a visual picture of the precise form the ritual takes,

the reader is better able to understand the symbolic significance of various aspects of the ritual with regards to the culture at large.

What this analysis points out is that Moroccans do not drink mint tea simply because it is good or because they are thirsty. If it were as simple as this, the elaborate performance that has developed for its preparation would never have evolved. Rather, Moroccans have created a tangible, visual and palpable representation for some of the basic truths by which they identify themselves as Moroccans within their cultural setting. In each of the three examples of tea consumption that were presented in Chapter 4, the tea was prepared in a highly codified manner that was consistent in terms of the overall tradition of mint tea preparation throughout the country. Yet, what was also evident in these examples was the individuality that is expressed by the tea makers in each circumstance. This individuality is what turns the ritual into more of an art form, exhibiting the individual tastes and talents of each tea maker in every glass of mint tea prepared.

The ritual extends beyond just the preparation of mint tea, into its service and consumption. These acts are equally important in maintaining the choreography of the dance as it has been choreographed. Individuals participating in the dance know the steps and they perform them as they have been taught to do since childhood. How did they learn the dance to begin with and why is it important that they do so? It is embedded in the daily ritual of life that all Moroccans live and which revolves around the devout observance of their faith, appropriate interactions between males and females, restrictions based upon socio-economic factors and the necessity of being hospitable.

Therefore, in order to gain a greater awareness of the overall picture that is painted by this non-secular ritual, one must understand the specific factors that inform the ritual. As such, the remainder of this analysis focused upon the explication of the various aspects of Muslim faith, gender relations, socio-economics and hospitality that directly influence and are represented by the ritual of mint tea consumption. In particular, it sought to link the above factors by indicating the ways in which daily life is patterned about them in a very particular ritual of being, which is reflected within the ritual of mint tea consumption.

The Muslim faith in particular establishes numerous proscriptions which are outlined in the Qu'ran that instruct devout believers in the right way of living and behaving. True believers understand that the ritual by which they live their daily lives will eventually lead them to Allah and therefore they follow the proscriptions with great care, right down to what they eat, when, how, and with whom. These rules and regulations are necessary to the maintenance of the "essential Moroccan self" and one that is considered to be "right" or "natural" (Yanagisako and Delaney 1995:182-183).

The proscriptions set forth in the Qu'ran for devout Muslims extend beyond the daily ritual of life, which includes prayer, almsgiving and the observance of the fast at Ramadan. They extend into the relations appropriate between men and women, establishing a social order and a balance between "nature" and "culture." It is the task of the devout Muslim male to mediate the "natural" woman with the "culture" of the Muslim lifestyle. He is charged with taming her instincts and desires and keeping her from distracting him or other men within his culture from their ultimate duties to Allah.

The real and symbolic separation between males and females in Moroccan society is very clearly represented within the context of the teashop, where men dominate and women are excluded. It is a safe haven for the Moroccan male to congregate without the fear of being distracted by their women. They commune there, in a place where they are able to enjoy a beverage as a group while talking openly and behaving in an unrestricted manner.

In the private world, as for example within the Moroccan home, the line of distinction between men and women may become blurred by virtue of a neutral territory in which both can command some dominance. However, men are still able to exhibit their prominence as the leaders of the household by enacting their rightful place as host, which always involves the ritual presentation with much fanfare of a glass of mint tea to ones guest. Women may make it behind the scenes, but the artful presentation of the beverage lies in the hands of the man of the house.

Socio-economically, tea itself and its implements are representative of the precise place of a family or an individual within Moroccan culture as a whole. From north to south, one can determine the social status of a person by not only the flavor of the tea they prepare and serve, but by the implement utilized in its preparation. Sweet or bitter, fresh mint or none, aluminum or silver. All these factors directly correlate to ones social status. They are factors that are known and understood by all Moroccans. Nobody can escape their place in the social structure or hide their affluence or lack thereof.

This is a significant point in that Moroccans are expected to be hospitable and this hospitality is best expressed by the offering of mint tea to a guest. When one makes this offer, his social status is automatically on display whether he wishes to advertise it or not.

It establishes a means of relating and behaving with one another in an unspoken fashion, thus either equalizing the playing field between individuals or establishing a hierarchy by which they will continue their future correspondences.

In the end, it is appropriate to entertain the old cliché “you are what you eat.”

With regards to the case of Morocco and in particular the ritual of mint tea consumption, the appropriate use of this cliché would be “you are what you drink.” To take this concept further yet, “you are how you drink” or “what and how you drink is what you are.” The inference here is that a person’s identity is decipherable through the careful observance of that individual’s eating and drinking practices. Each culture has its own ways of preparing and consuming foods and beverages. What they prepare also differs, depending upon not only the availability of various food sources, but also the presence or absence of local knowledge as to how to exploit particular food sources.

Certainly in today’s world, migration and the resulting diffusion of food practices tends to blur the lines of culinary distinction; particularly in more industrial first world countries like the United States where numerous culinary traditions are observed and combined into new ones. Yet, certain countries do maintain what can be called an indigenous cuisine. As Paula Wolfert defines in her pivotal book on Moroccan cooking “Couscous and Other Good Food from Morocco,” the prerequisites for the development of a “great cuisine” are “an abundance of fine ingredients...a variety of cultural influences...a great civilization...and the existence of a refined palace life” (Wolfert, 1973:3).

All of these conditions are met within Morocco, where not only is there virtually every kind of ecological niche from mountain to arid desert providing for numerous

ingredients, but also various cultural influences from French to Spanish as a result of years of colonialism. Additionally, the monarchy still reigns supreme, by which it follows that a refined palace lifestyle has evolved where the Moroccan ethos of hospitality and entertaining has taken an elaborate form, namely the *diffa* or royal banquet. This is evidenced by the elaborate palatial structures that have been erected in every major city of Morocco and the glorious King Hassan's mosque which is the third largest in the world.

Ultimately, then, Moroccans as a people are tied to their culinary identities, to culinary practices that have been passed down from mother to daughter and from father to son for generations. The ritual of their daily lives has come to revolve around consumption, which in turn is informed by the underlying core values by which they have come to understand themselves and their nation. Mint tea consumption, as an integral part of the Moroccan culinary tradition is a mirror reflecting the basic tenets of what it is to be a Moroccan. Hence, what and how a Moroccan drinks mint tea is what a Moroccan is.

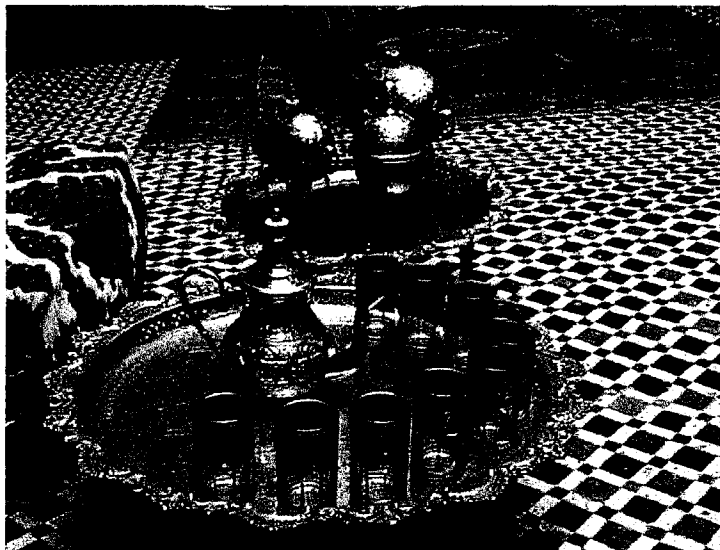
Yet, keeping in mind the relative youth of this practice and the speed at which foreign cultures are quickly making their mark upon Moroccan soil in the form of fast food chains and supermarkets, what will happen to this seemingly unflappable ritual in the coming years? Will it maintain its integrity and its pervasiveness throughout the country or will the precise form it takes change and eventually disappear? In my experience, the ritual is there to stay. While certain adaptations may occur, namely in the balance of ingredients utilized, for example the ratio of tea to sugar and the addition of fresh mint leaves, the form the preparation and service takes will remain largely the same.

This assumption is based upon the nature of tourism in Morocco. Tourists come to Morocco to see handicrafts being made by local artisans and to taste legendary Moroccan foods like couscous with seven vegetables and the national beverage, mint tea. In the name of maintaining and increasing the market for tourists, it behooves Morocco to leave good enough alone so to speak.

The one other aspect of the ritual that may see some fluctuation is the degree to which women are excluded from participation in the public arena. As women become more modern by Muslim standards, they will likely be seen more frequently in the open marketplace, dressed in modern clothing and partaking of the foods and beverages available to them in the marketplaces, including mint tea. Although, I dare say, women may never be welcomed in the teashops of the old medinas of Fez, Marrakech and Rabat. A certain level of equalization between the sexes is to be expected with the influence of foreign cultures, but certain boundaries will remain. Men will always need their safe havens where they can congregate without concern for appearances or distractions. As British men will always have their pubs, so too will Moroccan men always have their teashops.

French proverb about mint tea consumption in Morocco:

La theiere est un monde, une fois ouverte, elle reveille odeurs, parfums et couleur de la terre, le sucre des gens et leur joie leur parole-
The teapot is a world unto itself, once opened, she reveals odors, perfumes and the color of the earth, the sweetness of men and their joy, their words
(Dalet, p. 3).



(Side View of Formal Moroccan Tea Set at Dar El Ghalia)

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