The Tighza Valley:
A Traditional Culture in a Changing Morocco

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by
Rachel M. Ferchak
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“If you go to Morocco, you will see the first world living with the third world,” said Aziz Mekouar, Moroccan ambassador to the United States. In the news, we typically see Morocco as a Westernized nation that is becoming more democratic and modern. Though the king, Mohammed VI, has made many social and economic reforms for the country as a whole, the Tighza Valley has developed at a slower rate.

The Tighza Valley — a remote and impoverished area of Morocco that is located in the Atlas Mountains — is a village region with approximately 1,500 people, who use subsistence farming and agriculture as a means of survival and for their economy. The villagers maintain their traditional Islamic values, and they prefer not to use much Western technology unless it improves their way of life. Just within the last decade, the government provided a water tower and electricity for the homes of the villagers. With the help of small service organizations, the villagers now have cold-water taps within their homes; however, their biggest needs continue to be basic medical attention and sanitation. Studying this region is important to understand the socioeconomic gap within the country of Morocco.

Though the government is attempting to lower the unemployment rate (about 9 percent) and alleviate poverty through the National Initiative for Human Development (INDH), many problems continue to go unnoticed. In fact, according to the U.S. State Department, the urban unemployment rate could be as high as 30 percent. Out of a population of approximately 35 million, only about 52 percent of those over the age of 15 are literate. The country sees 40 percent literacy among females; however, only about 10 percent of females in rural areas can read and write. The government has
provided free and obligatory education for those under 15, but most children in rural areas drop out of school after the elementary years. Although the INDH strives to bridge the socioeconomic gap within the country, rural areas continue to lag behind. (“Background Note: Morocco”)

Morocco is also important in today’s political climate, because it is a Muslim country working to maintain a strong relationship with the United States, particularly in terms of fighting terrorism. The country receives much funding from the U.S. — Morocco requested $42.5 million in assistance during the 2011 fiscal year — to advance the economy, reduce poverty, become more democratic, and to preserve stability in a region that is highly volatile (Sharp 14-18).

Morocco is not considered by U.S. media to be a core country — commonly Western or influential countries where the decisions have a direct impact on the world — therefore, it does not always make news unless it has somewhat of an effect on the U.S. (Gade 96). Even when Morocco does make news, this news deals with major cities, the government, democracy, or social uprisings. The rural people hardly get recognized. In countries such as France, however, Morocco appears frequently in the news because of cultural bonds and colonial history.

In January 2010, I had the idea to produce a professional project based on the lives of people in a foreign culture. I wanted to combine my fascination and love for people with my experience as a traveler, my desire to write features, and my passion for the French language into one final project that presented an overview of my first three years of study in the Honors Tutorial College and E.W. Scripps School of
Journalism. Morocco jumped onto my radar as a politically stable, French-speaking country in North Africa with a more modern and Westernized society than other African nations.

Because I chose to produce a magazine and needed pictures, I asked photography major Kimberly Hackman, who can also speak fluent French, to accompany me. For the next 18 months, I studied Moroccan culture, Francophone Moroccan media, and travel writing in tutorials to hone French language skills and interviewing and observational techniques necessary for the voyage. Within my final tutorial, a research seminar for journalism majors, I finalized my project plans and compiled a list of story ideas.

I knew the best way to complete the task was through immersion journalism, in which I would live among the people, observing from an insider’s perspective. Through Internet searches, I discovered Homestays Morocco, a program in which I could live among Berbers — an ethnic group with populations concentrated in North Africa, particularly in the mountainous regions of Morocco. I contacted Carolyn Logan, operator and founder of Homestays Morocco, and after much correspondence, I decided it was the best and most cost-efficient option. Logan arranged all of my travel and lodging within Morocco, which included sending me a guide to take me around Marrakech and help me get to the village.

In order to tell about this rural culture or the personal stories of the villagers, I needed to experience life from my subjects’ perspective. This is even more so the case for international journalism, which has been on the decline in the last decade because
of changes in media and decline in income within media outlets. International journalists rarely have the opportunity to immerse themselves within a different culture, particularly in non-European nations, because these journalists tend to cover multiple countries. This raises a growing problem: how can journalists report on different cultures without taking time to observe and study those cultures?

**Foreign Journalism and Correspondence**

“In a pluralistic world, journalism has a duty to act as a bridge between diverse classes, ethnic groups, religions, and cultures within and among countries. Journalism has a two-fold task to make visible, for consideration and critique, both the commonalities and the differences among citizens, and to encourage tolerant but frank cross-cultural discussion of issues,” writes Stephen J.A. Ward, author of *Global Journalism Ethics* (Ward 170).

Foreign correspondence — a form of this cross-cultural discussion — has a long history in the United States, dating at least back to the Mexican War, from 1846 to 1848. The Mexican War was the first foreign war to be covered on a large scale by the American press. It was also the first war in which the U.S. press dispatched professional, full-time journalists into a foreign country. These first foreign correspondents included editor-publisher of the *New Orleans Picayune* George Wilkins Kendall, who covered major battles along with at least 10 other “special correspondents” who followed Kendall into the field (Reilly 390).
During the Mexican War, the press created a 2000-mile system of transportation — including the Pony Express, railroads, steamships, and the telegraph — to communicate news from the frontlines (Reilly 389). The American press served as link from the frontlines of Mexico to the officials of Washington, and also as the American public’s only form of information.

With the invention of the telegraph — the first electronic communication device that allowed instantaneous correspondence over large distances — news spread more rapidly, although the cost of reporting went up because of charges imposed by the telegraph companies. In 1848, New York journalists established the Associated Press — a collaborative among news organizations to share information — in response to the rising costs.

As the Industrial Revolution arose in the U.S. in the nineteenth century, the value of foreign news increased. Technology allowed for faster modes of transportation, and, therefore, faster travel times, providing more people with the opportunity to go places. Newspapers started to hire their own reporters to travel abroad and cover stories, most of which focused on American travelers or tales of adventure.

In 1898, William Randolph Hearst and Joseph Pulitzer are credited with fanning the flames of American sentiment toward the Spanish-American War because of their competition to sensationalize the news. This came to be called “Yellow Journalism.”
After the U.S. gained “world power” status after winning the 1898 war, America became more involved in international affairs, which increased the amount of international news coverage. During the World Wars, foreign correspondence shifted focus to concentrate on more serious issues, including the wars, peace talks, and political instability. Although more and more correspondents traveled overseas to report, the U.S. government and the armed forces censored much of the coverage and forbade the journalists from having full access. CBS correspondent Edward R. Murrow became famous for his radio reports from the war zone during WWII, signifying a transformation in international reporting. His coverage of the German Blitz on London in 1940 was seen as shifting American opinion toward the need for the U.S. to aid Britain. From this point, public opinion for the war flipped in the U.S.

Within the next few decades, the American press remained in a battle of censorship by the military, especially during the Korean War. This censorship took many forms. At the beginning of the war, journalists practiced self-censorship with the approval of commanding General Douglas MacArthur. However, some sensitive information slipped passed self-censorship, including a premature announcement of MacArthur’s strategic plans for an invasion at Inchon. American journalists also censored certain information for patriotic reasons. Journalists were aware of the deliberate slaughter of civilians, such as Korean refugees at the village of No Gun Ri and the bridge at Tuksong-dong in 1950, but chose to minimize the accounts. After the Chinese army entered the conflict in late 1950, the American military imposed formal censorship in December of that year. It continued until April 1951, when it was
replaced by voluntary censorship after the front stabilized and President Truman removed MacArthur as commander. (Sweeney 126, 130-36)

Correspondents such as Homer Bigart fought both voluntary and formal censorship by continuing to report accurately from the frontlines, even if the coverage did not reflect well on America’s position. Although television was in the infancy stage during the Korean War, Americans had access to the images of war and wartime photography through newspapers and magazines, as well as limited television news coverage provided by broadcasters such as CBS’s Murrow. The war showed Americans that superpower status does not necessarily result in security or detachment from world problems. “Korea ripped away our complacency, our smug feeling that all we had to do for our safety was to build bigger atomic bombs,” said New York Herald Tribune war correspondent Marguerite Higgins. (Sweeney 126, 130-36)

The Vietnam War also brought about drastic changes in foreign correspondence and wartime reporting. The South Vietnamese government granted journalists access to combat and the frontlines. For the first time, viewers in America could see video footage of the war on their television sets. As a result of journalists’ frontline access and footage available to the public, Americans began to see the truth of Vietnam, which often conflicted with the government’s views. This created much public dissent for the war.

Less than two decades later, foreign correspondence took another turn when, in 1991, Cable News Networks (CNN) broadcast live coverage of Operation Desert Storm. During the first hours of the bombings, CNN was the only news channel with
the ability to communicate from inside Iraq in real time. At this point, CNN, the only 24-hour news network, already maintained bureaus in Germany, the Soviet Union, Egypt, and Israel. Thus, the American public had constant access to domestic and foreign news.

After the Cold War, America claimed status as the sole superpower. Along with the new title came a decline in international news as the country focused itself internally. News media have blamed the audience for not caring about the news in order to justify the shrinking of the international bureaus, number of correspondents, and limiting the amount of foreign news. In reality, by marginalizing international coverage, the news media have created a “self-fulfilling prophecy,” in which viewers are apathetic toward foreign news because of “superficial coverage of the world,” writes Tony Burman, author of “World Perspectives” (Burman 129-135). Another reason for the decline can be traced to the intense economic pressure, particularly on newspapers. Many news organizations and newspapers, like The Boston Globe, have closed their foreign bureaus in an attempt to save money and keep their organizations afloat financially.

As a result, in recent years, news outlets have shut down many foreign bureaus and have decreased the number of correspondents overseas. Most outlets now rely fully on The Associated Press, Reuters, and Agence France-Presse for foreign news. Although the majority of Americans have access to the Internet and, therefore, international affairs, there remains a need for professional journalism, interpretation of foreign news, and how it relates to the United States.
In “Foreign Correspondents as Mediators and Translators Between Cultures: Perspectives From Intercultural Communication Research in Anthropology, Semiotics, and Cultural Studies,” authors Ralph Beliveau, Oliver Hahn, and Guido Ipsen explain the need for foreign correspondence. They write:

Media audiences need the information provided by foreign correspondents in order to perceive and to build up images of foreign countries. This, in turn, also means that foreign correspondents create and transfer images of foreign countries. This fact potentially leads to stronger effects on the societal image formation of foreign countries. They have to frame and contextualize current affairs and events happening abroad in order to help media consumers at home evaluate and order them in a particular context to avoid misunderstandings and misperceptions (Beliveau 130).

During the three centuries of journalism in the United States, three categories have developed under the umbrella of foreign correspondence: objective or parachute journalism, participant observation, and ethnographic or immersion journalism.

Professionals in each of these categories of foreign correspondence have the responsibility to communicate between two distinct cultures or groups. The correspondents also live in different cultures and explain their experiences in writing. These professionals must fill in the information gaps to help an audience better understand another society.

Before venturing to another land or society, foreign correspondents would do well to understand how their perceptions of the world, or personal biases, could affect their work. Gender, ethnicity, economic or social class, nationality, and especially cultural assumptions all play a part in how journalists treat others or how they convey certain themes in their writing. These biases can dictate how correspondents act and
react toward foreigners or new situations, and ultimately influence journalistic objectivity.

Regina Jere-Malanda, assistant editor of the London-based *New African*, is an example of bias that affects the outcome of stories. In the September 2004 issue of *Ode Magazine*, Jere-Malanda published a confession from the time she served as a foreign correspondent for Western media in South Africa. Although originally from Zambia, Jere-Malanda said she reinforced the Western media’s stereotypes of a “desperate and hopeless Africa” (Jere-Malanda). She writes:

> In the eyes of Western editors, the newsworthiness of an event—famine or floods for example—depends on how well the story sustains the beliefs of most Western observers that Africa is a huge, tragic basket case. Indeed as an indigenous African journalist, I fell into this trap and, sadly and shamefully, portrayed Africa the way the Western world wanted, and still wants, to see it. (Jere-Malanda)

Authors Beliveau, Hahn, and Ipsen explain the image and role of a foreign correspondent, as well as the effects of bias on journalistic objectivity. They write:

> Furthermore, all foreign correspondents — like journalism researchers — are members of at least one culture and native speakers of at least one natural verbal language, a fact that both influences their intellectual work and communication patterns continually. Since they are unable to free themselves from their own cultural and linguistic baggage or risk going native in their host culture, the journalistic “objectivity” demanded from them can only be evaluated against the backdrop of their respective cultural context. (Beliveau 135)

Foreign correspondents have the responsibility to acknowledge any possible biases. Although authors James Spradley and David McCurdy write that ethnographers — a type of anthropologist that focuses on the holistic study of a culture — must maintain an awareness of their cultural backgrounds, this is also true
of all foreign correspondents. These professionals must also recognize their identities according to themselves and perceived by others. Spradley and McCurdy mention the importance of fighting ethnocentrism by recognizing the attitude, having an awareness of the society’s customs and values, and embracing a perspective that accepts the different customs (Spradley 67).

**Objective/Parachute journalism**

Objective journalists, or traditional journalists, are known for reports that produce the facts of a situation, eliminate ambiguity for readers, and present more than one side of the issue, allowing the audience to decide their own opinions. In terms of foreign correspondence, objective journalists use framing and gatekeeping to provide the audience with internationally salient issues, or topics that the journalists believe have the highest importance around the world. American foreign correspondents often localize the global news to capture the audiences at home, making the news more relevant to the American public. Journalists in this category of foreign correspondence provide the audience with news of events, diplomacy, international relations, natural disasters, disputes, and war.

Parachute journalists also fall under this category with objective journalists. Parachute journalists are foreign correspondents who are “dropped,” with little preparation, into a situation to cover the facts and details for audiences at home. Unless they have a background in the culture on which they are reporting, parachute
journalists commonly enter the culture for a short period of time, gather easily available facts and the necessary stories, and then leave when finished.

Before moving on, it is necessary to address the debated and ambiguous meanings of the word “objectivity.” Authors Steven Knowlton and Bill Reader define the term “objective” according to how popular belief defines it. “An objective journalist is one who is detached, neutral, impartial, and unbiased” (Knowlton 45).

The original concept of objectivity in journalism is misunderstood, according to Bill Kovach and Tom Rosenstiel, authors of The Elements of Journalism: What Newspeople Should Know and the Public Should Expect. The intent of the first use of this term did not imply that journalists are free from bias. In fact, the term developed in the 1920s, after the recognition that journalists were “full of bias” (Kovach 72).

Kovach and Rosenstiel write, “Objectivity called for journalists to develop a consistent method of testing information — a transparent approach to evidence — precisely so that personal and cultural biases would not undermine the accuracy of their work” (Kovach 72).

Out of this idea came “realism,” in which journalists would get all the facts and arrange them so the truth would reveal itself. Realism gave birth to the traditional journalism style, the inverted pyramid, which journalists use to order their facts from most important to least important. As propaganda arose, prominent journalists in the field, such as Walter Lippmann, called for journalism to stand on a more scientific method to produce a truthful product. Evidence and verification stood as the foundation of this method.
Kovach and Rosenstiel state, “In the original concept, in other words, the method is objective, not the journalist. The key was in the discipline of the craft, not the aim” (Kovach 74). In order to have truly objective journalism, the journalists must use the techniques of fairness and balance as a means of developing and verifying their facts.

Knowlton and Reader state that the problem with objectivity today, based on its misunderstood definition of doing away with all bias, is that it is difficult for people to be completely detached, neutral, and unbiased. Stanley J. Baran and Dennis K. Davis, authors of *Mass Communication Theory: Foundation, Ferment, and Future*, elaborate on Knowlton and Reader’s ideas, saying that humans see the world through their own biases and perspectives. People socially construct their expectations based on experiences, and they often apply these expectations without any awareness. In his book, *Public Opinion*, Walter Lippmann describes our socially constructed expectations, “For the most part we do not first see, and then define, we define first and then see” (Lippmann 81). Because all people inevitably interpret the world, journalists inevitably interpret the stories around them, causing them to frame stories based on their own judgment. (Baran 314-315)

Baran and Davis explain the aspects behind journalistic framing, a mass communication theory in which reporters select the angle and perspective of the story. Journalists have the ability to frame stories to make them more effective or to give off a certain light. They write, “Although the intent of these practices is to provide objective news coverage, the result is news stories in which events are routinely
framed in ways that eliminate much of their ambiguity and instead reinforce socially
accepted and expected ways of seeing the social world” (Baran 320).

Wolfgang Donsbach, in “Factors behind Journalists’ Professional Behavior: A
Psychological Approach to Journalism Research,” uses the ideas of R. Entman to
provide a definition of framing. He writes, “To frame is to select some aspect of a
perceived reality and make it more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to
promote a particular problem definition, casual interpretation, moral evaluation and/or
recommendation for treatment for the item described” (Donsbach 74).

Along with framing, journalists also use the theory of gatekeeping. According
to Peter Gade and Dave Ferman, authors of “Theoretical Frameworks Guiding the
Study of International News: Gatekeeping, Agenda Setting and Framing,” gatekeeping
is the process by which journalists and news organizations decide on what news to
share with audiences (Gade 88). “In fact, gatekeeping in mass communication can be
seen as the overall process through which the social reality transmitted by the news
media is constructed” (Gade 89).

On an individualistic level, gatekeeping involves the person’s individual
prejudices, perspectives, or ideas about the world that come into play when deciding
what is most important for the reader to know. In order to understand the individual
motives, one must examine the journalists’ cultural backgrounds (Löffelholz 29).
Donsbach explains that the work of a journalist includes judgments, perceptions, and
conclusions. He states that journalists make decisions based on “a need for social
validation of perceptions and a need to preserve one’s existing predispositions”
(Donsbach 66). Because of these predispositions, journalists tend to choose certain stories over others, placing higher news value on the topics that support the journalist’s opinions or values (Donsbach 73).

For the purpose of this paper, I define objective journalism as a type of journalism in which reporters strive to produce factual and verifiable stories with fairness and balance. The stories commonly consist of hard news and information, without digging deeper into feelings or emotions behind the stories. While personal biases and opinion are inevitable, objective journalists use their best judgment to report on stories with respect to the audience and the sources.

**Participant Observation**

In their chapter “Ethnographic Journalism,” authors Janet Cramer and Michael McDevitt explain the differences between objective journalism and ethnography, a branch of cultural anthropology that holistically studies a culture. They write, “For journalists, objectivity is typically construed as detachment from the object or persons being reported, along with the assurance of balanced perspectives. Ethnography, however, represents the antithesis of this with its emphasis on immersion and its goal of telling a story as intimately as possible from the standpoint of the group being studied” (Cramer 9).

Ethnographers, professionals working in the field of cultural anthropology, take a holistic approach, aiming to describe all aspects of the culture. This type of in-depth anthropological research attempts to supply meaning for the culture’s ways of
life, emotions, reactions, etc. The ethnographers attempt to provide an insider’s perspective via total immersion into the culture (Cramer 2).

According to Cramer and McDevitt, ethnographers engage in the foreign culture at different levels of participation: complete participation, participation as observer, observation as participant, or complete observation (Cramer 4). These levels of participation vary from project to project, but the most common for an ethnographer is participant observation.

Participant observation requires personal involvement in the lives of the subjects, which is fundamental for anthropological fieldwork. The participant observer takes on the role of the people and attempts to see life through their eyes. It means that the participant observer shares the experiences with the subjects. (Spradley 59)

Two examples of famous ethnographers in the field of anthropology include Margaret Mead and Derek Freeman. Mead studied under anthropologist Franz Boas in the 1920s, a time when scientists and anthropologists debated over “nature versus nurture.” Boas believed that culture was learned and not passed through biology. In 1925, Mead left for American Samoa in search for a people group in which culture was learned. In Samoa, Mead examined adolescent behavior, particularly in terms of sexuality, by using key informants in the culture and by interviewing multiple adolescent girls. In her book *Coming of Age in Samoa*, published upon her return, Mead determined that the transition for Samoan children into adulthood caused far less anxiety and pressure than the transition into adulthood in the United States. After publishing her book, Mead received much fame and recognition.
At first, Freeman praised Mead’s work, but then he became skeptical. He studied Samoan culture for six years and came to the conclusion that Mead’s informants and sources lied to her in a hoax. As a part of this hoax, it is believed that Samoan girls purposely told Mead what she wanted to hear instead of the truth about their culture. Freeman also said he spoke with one of Mead’s key informants decades after Mead left Samoa, and the informant claimed to have lied to Mead as a joke. Freeman also attributed Mead’s false information to the short amount of time she stayed in the region, lack of preparation and understanding of the language, and setting out with a specific agenda. It remains unclear which anthropologist had the more accurate account of Samoan life and culture. One can conclude, however, that anthropology can be subjective because the research is based on the perceptions of the researcher. No matter how much one tries to be objective, everyone views different cultures through their personal lenses.

In terms of journalism, participant observation is far less objective than traditional objective journalism. According to the standards of American journalism, objective journalists should stay at least somewhat detached from the lives of their sources. Getting too close to sources could result in a conflict of interest or imbalance in the story; therefore, most traditional journalists shy away from participating in the culture, and they instead observe the culture as an outsider. For the ethnographer, objectivity means to stay as true as possible to the real culture, especially if that means participating in the daily life of a subject.
In *Anthropology: The Cultural Perspective*, authors James P. Spradley and David W. McCurdy explain the importance of ethnography. They write, “The goal of ethnography is specific: to find out what people know. Ethnographers aim to discover people’s perception and evaluation of their experience, their customary ways of categorizing the world around them, and their definitions of behavior” (Spradley 59).

The major differences between objective journalism and participant observation are the level of involvement the professional has in the subject’s life, and the perspective through which the professional sees the subject’s life. S. Elizabeth Bird, author of “The Journalist as Ethnographer? How Anthropology Can Enrich Journalistic Practice,” states that anthropologists aim to see the world from the informant’s point of view; whereas, traditional journalists separate personality and information (Bird 303). According to Bird, in the separation of personality and information, traditional journalists strive to present facts without much emotion written into the story.

**Ethnographic and Immersive Journalism**

Foreign correspondents play an important part in bearing images to and breaking cultural misunderstandings for the people of their home countries. Therefore, they would benefit from utilizing anthropological methods in their work. This combined form of journalism is known as “ethnographic journalism,” which is similar to immersive journalism in that both types of journalists embed themselves in new cultures in order to obtain in-depth accounts of the ways of life and the lives and
stories of the people. For purposes of this paper, I define ethnographic journalism as a type of journalism in which reporters draw from anthropological methods, such as participant observation, interviews and interview schedules, conversations, genealogies, and life histories, to produce a holistic perspective and analysis of the culture. Ethnographic practices also require longer exposure to a culture to get a better idea of the whole culture, rather than parachuting into the scene for a few days or weeks to gather facts and information. Immersive journalism is a type of journalism in which the reporters use techniques such as observations and in-depth interviews in order to describe people and/or their cultures. Immersive journalists embed themselves in a culture (and could remain for a longer period of time as compared to parachute journalists), while still remaining somewhat detached from their subjects so as to not alter events. (Gross).

Cramer and McDevitt explain the importance of ethnographic journalism in examining cultures, while they also point to the dilemmas it poses to the ethical standards held by journalists.

They write, “Ethnographic reporting challenges journalists’ understanding of objectivity, neutrality, and balance, but it should appeal to professionals’ commitment to enlighten rather than to obscure in the portrayal of everyday life” (Cramer 5).

Adding to Cramer and McDevitt’s concerns, Bird writes, “The lesson is that when journalists become more like anthropologists, they also shed the protective cloak offered by news values and objectivity and open themselves to the same criticisms
anthropologists have long faced: subjectivity, over-identification with informants, personal bias, and so on” (Bird 305).

Although the combination of ethnography and journalism challenges traditional objective journalism by having the journalist engage more in the lives of his subjects, ethnographic journalism allows for the journalist to provide a new cultural perspective.

Ethnographic reporting is hailed by some as giving journalists a better idea of a culture because they are insiders as opposed to the detached observers of traditional news. It provides new approaches for gathering, analyzing, or writing about information. Using anthropological techniques allows journalists to more easily understand sources and to gain a better cultural context than would a journalist who simply searches for facts and quotes. This reporting adds a more personal touch to stories, specifically pertaining to people’s lives and histories (Bird 304).

Immersive journalism shares qualities with foreign correspondence and ethnographic journalism. The immersive journalist does not claim the same journalistic objectivity as traditional news, according to Sarah Statz Cords, author of The Inside Scoop: A Guide to Nonfiction Investigative Writing and Exposés. Immersive journalists involve themselves in the story by either living out the stories or living in the surroundings. They often provide their own reflections in the story.

Cords writes, “Immersion journalism is what writers engage in when they go beyond the bounds of objectively researching a story and instead step directly into it, living whatever experience they’re writing about and periodically injecting their own
reactions and thoughts into their narrative” (Cords 148).

Two such examples of immersion journalism include H.G. Bissinger, author of *Friday Night Lights: A Town, a Team, and a Dream*, and Thomas French, author of *South of Heaven*. Bissinger, a writer for *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, decided to examine the role of high school football in American society. He landed on Permian High School in Odessa, Texas, where the Permian Panthers football team had a long history of winning. During the 1988 football season, Bissinger moved to Odessa to immerse himself in the lives of the players, parents, coaches, and people of the town to get a better grasp of Odessa’s football culture. In his book, Bissinger reveals the social and racial segregation of the town, along with its shaky economy. But he also uncovers the importance of football in breaking these barriers, if only for the length of a game.

Thomas French, a writer for the *St. Petersburg Times*, chose to return to high school for the 1989-1990 academic year to study the culture of the students at Largo High. For that year, with permission of the principal and faculty, he followed the lives of students, sitting through classes, eating in the cafeteria, attending parent conferences, and participating in social events. During his time immersed among the students, French discovered the internal struggles of the teens, exposing the reality of the burdens they carried with them to school.

The immersive journalist essentially embeds himself in a different setting and attempts to describe it to his audience. Much like the ethnographer of anthropology,
the immersive journalist uses methods such as observation, participation, and in-depth interviews in order to thoroughly explain every facet of that setting.

**Method: Ethnographic and Immersive Journalism**

Conventional journalistic narratives attempt to maintain balance, and therefore often have competing ideologies or perspectives. In ethnography, the subject essentially becomes the narrator of the story. Ethnographic journalism seeks to provide readers with context and information in order to move them toward understanding others’ lives (Cramer 16).

Cramer and McDevitt state, “One advantage of the ethnographic method is accurate portrayal of various groups in society that may not be realized when adhering to traditional methods or newsmaking criteria…. Ethnographic reporting aims for pluralism in its coverage of everyday people, stressing individual character and quotidian victories over bureaucratic or political achievements” (Cramer 8-14).

Because ethnographic and immersion journalism place the greatest importance on understanding the lives and cultures of others, I chose this method to research the Tighza Valley and the people who inhabit the region. Unlike traditional objective journalism, the objectivity of ethnographic and immersive journalism has a basis in “accuracy, rich description, and an insider point of view” (Cramer 21).

By immersing myself into the Tighza village life for a period of time, I now have a better understanding of the people and their traditions through in-depth interviews, conversations, and observations. My stories, in the form of ethnographic
and narrative journalism, attempt to place readers directly into the scene as the subject talks. Not all of the stories come directly from interviews, but they also capture events and daily life through observation.

**Critique**

In my research, I took on what Cramer and McDevitt call the role of the “observer as participant,” in which the ultimate goal is observation with the secondary goal of participation (Cramer 4). Although I was a detached observer for much of my time, I had the opportunity to participate in some of the events of the village, particularly in terms of the wedding ceremony. Though I did not completely detach myself, I believe my participation did not alter the outcome of the events or the culture. By attending social events as an observer, I had the ability to see life from an insider’s perspective but without altering the event. Although I could attend these events, it was impossible to know everything that was happening or the dialogue between people because I did not speak the Tachelhit language, a dialect of Berber spoken in the Tighza region. Thus, I gathered much of my background information through interviews and unstructured conversations with interpreters or villagers (with the help of interpreters).

Prior to the interviews, I received permission from the interviewee to talk to him or her. Once receiving permission, I arranged an interview date and time. Only a few interviews were spontaneous, meaning the interviewee had no prior knowledge that I wanted to talk to him or her.
To ensure accuracy in my interviews, I used a tape recorder and a video camera. Each person interviewed agreed to the use of these items, though I did not have permission to record the faces of every woman. When denied permission, I did not take video footage and Ms. Hackman did not take still photographs.

The purpose of my interviews was to gain as much knowledge as possible about the subject’s way of life, his or her history, and then to learn about the person specifically. Knowing a bit about some of my interviewees beforehand, I asked more pointed questions to draw out information for pre-determined stories, such as the single mother, Hajjah, the poor family, and the wedding ceremony. In my interviews, I used an ethnographic journalism approach because I asked questions to get a broad context of the culture and to get the individuals’ specific stories.

Cramer and McDevitt compare the interview styles of objective journalists and ethnographic journalists. They write:

A [traditional] journalist interviewing for an in-depth feature would seek to establish rapport with sources while maintaining some distance as an autonomous observer and recorder. Reporters are sometimes advised to demonstrate knowledge about a topic while conversing with a source, in the hope that the interviewee will reciprocate and offer valuable insights. In ethnographic journalism, however, the reporter must not let professional expertise impinge on her effort to observe and gather information in a natural setting. (Cramer 15)

I went into interviews with specific questions and, in some cases, with a general theme in mind, using a combination of journalism and ethnography interview techniques. Cramer and McDevitt use the “miner” and “traveler” approach when comparing the two techniques. The “miner” digs to get nuggets of information and good quotes, while the “traveler” wanders through uncharted territory, asking the
subjects to tell about their lives. In my interviews, I asked pointed questions about the people, their life stories, and also why and how they do certain things. I related the specific questions to the more broad cultural questions in an attempt to understand why the Tighza culture is the way that it is.

I also received information through unstructured conversations with villagers (through interpreters), my interpreters, and the family with whom I lived for six weeks. Although these conversations were not “on the record,” any information given to me that would aid in the context of the project, I used, unless the information could violate confidence or the privacy of my sources. Generally, though, anything I heard off the record and wanted to use, I asked the sources as a follow-up question.

Throughout my time in Tighza, I conducted interviews in French, which my three interpreters then translated into Tachelhit. The interpreters, all of whom were born in the village, spoke Tachelhit, Arabic, and varying degrees of French. I worked closest with Mina El Mouden, a 24-year-old woman with a strong academic background and a proficiency in French. El Mouden interpreted for a majority of the interviews, including all interviews with female villagers. Because of El Mouden’s gender and the lack of men present in the rooms where I interviewed, the women shared more openly about their stories and daily struggles. The most powerful stories came from the lives of women, who seemed empowered that someone would take an interest in them and listen to them.

When in Tighza, I stayed in the home of Carolyn Logan, originally from the United Kingdom, and her husband, Mohamed El Qasemy, who was born and raised in
the village. The 29-year-old Mohamed and his 25-year-old brother, Ahmed, served as my other interpreters. Both left school in their pre-teen years, but because of their experience working alongside foreigners visiting the village, they picked up French. The brothers, sons of a respected village elder, were well known among the people of Tighza, giving us access to more sources and contacts. Ahmed helped with multiple interviews and also functioned as my guide in the village. Though he spent all his time outside of interviews joking around and entertaining, he took each meeting seriously and paid careful attention to detail in the conversations.

My experience with Mohamed proved different than with those of the previous interpreters. He spoke in broken French and often misunderstood my questions. I could not use most of the interviews with him as the interpreter because facts did not connect with each other, and often, he significantly shortened the responses of the interviewees. By going through two of Mohamed’s interviews with El Mouden to get the spelling of names, El Mouden revealed that Mohamed changed a few of the questions and at points changed the subject of the interviews entirely. For the useable interviews, I had to piece quotes together based on my best interpretation of his French.

In using interpreters, many times I had to reword questions so the interpreters could understand and translate properly. However, because I do not speak Tachelhit, I may never know whether they translated everything correctly or in the proper context. The direct quotes I use by the villagers can never be fully direct either, because of the
translation between three languages. In the stories, however, I consistently mention the use of an interpreter.

One cultural difference emerged from the interviews. Trained journalists are reminded to obtain the basic facts of sources, such as full name and spelling, age, and title, but the villagers didn’t necessarily have the answers. Most adult villagers do not know how to spell their names due to lack of French or English writing, reading, and speaking. Much like Arabic, Tachelhit has a different alphabet with different symbols as letters. El Mouden, my main interpreter, spelled the names of all my interviewees phonetically.

The older villagers also do not keep record of birthdates, ages, or dates of events. I came to understand that the older generations do not know their birthdates or ages because their parents waited a number of years to officially register them in government records. There was a high infant and child mortality rate in the mountains up until a few decades ago, so the parents waited to register the children until they were confident the child would survive. Many of the oldest villagers with whom I spoke could not provide the years of certain events or the duration of events, such as the number of years they served in the military. If I could not verify dates or piece them together on my own, I acknowledged this in the writing.

I could not conduct all of my interviews in a private or quiet setting. Some of the interviews with family or friends present in the background often distracted the interviewee and interpreter. In a handful of interviews, the tape recorder picked up more of the background noise (such as babies screaming, women chattering, or
relatives yelling directly at the interviewee) than the person being interviewed. Though the general idea of the quotations and topics remained intact, the noise made many of the direct quotations impossible to hear. During a few interviews, family members were more than merely distractions. Some family members actually influenced the interviewee by jumping into the conversation. But because of my inability to speak or understand the language, I will never know how much these family members affected the outcome.

In dealing with people’s lives and stories, I concentrated on interviewing them, but much of what they said can only be verified by interviewing anyone close to the subjects or through observation. Because of this, I used much attribution. If I saw a fact or a statement as questionable, I asked for clarification, checked historical dates of major events, or used scholarly resources (specifically in terms of religion). After this process, if a statement remained questionable, I chose not to use it.

Overall, I put an incredible amount of trust in the hands of my interpreters, and I have no reason to suspect that they were dishonest or had an agenda. Though there is always the possibility, however slight, that the interpreters translated something incorrectly or did not provide all the information, I believe that they gave me honest, sincere, and correct interpretations of my interviews or questions to the best of their abilities.

As far as sources were concerned, I believe the majority of them were honest about their stories or situations in their lives. Unlike the sources of Mead and Freeman, my sources gave me no reason to think they lied or manipulated their
answers, with the exception of about five of 55 sources. Through observation of these people and outside information, it is likely that a few members of one family lied to me and deliberately kept major details from me. Their one-word answers, refusal to answer certain questions, lack of detail, and multiple contrasting stories, led me to believe that they did not tell the truth. The information I did use, I specifically addressed as questionable information within the story.

As an immersive and ethnographic journalist, I did not simply rely on interviews or facts for my stories. I used observation techniques. Feature writing benefits from the use of descriptive and sensory details. Specific elements place the reader in the room with the journalist and help the reader relate to the scene, mood, and atmosphere. When visiting a person’s home, I concentrated on sensory details, while also paying attention to the effect of sunlight on the room to add another dimension. To remember these elements and to help the reader connect with the setting, I used similes to compare what I experienced with something the audience could understand. I also took note of gestures or facial expressions of the people with whom I interacted in order to give the reader more specific detail and to better capture the moment.

Because of my gender, some of my observations were limited. I was not allowed to be in the social gatherings with men, particularly with respect to the wedding ceremony. I was, however, able to spend much time with the women, seeing their side of the culture. This may have caused slight bias because I mainly saw the village from the woman’s perspective. And because I am a woman, I could relate more
to the women. Therefore, my perspective toward men was different in the village because I saw the way women were treated and compared it with how women are treated in the West.

Not only did I need to receive permission to interview villagers, but my photographer, Kim Hackman, also needed permission from everyone to take photographs. Some families gave us multiple answers, and, therefore, we are left with the ethical dilemma of whether we can publish the photos of those specific people. For example, Fatima, the young woman whose wedding we witnessed, would not allow us to take pictures of her face because her soon-to-be husband would not allow it. However, her brothers said we had permission to take a few photos with her wearing the full veil. As it turns out, one of her brothers and her sister-in-law posted pictures of her wedding and her unveiled face on Facebook. Although the pictures are now public on the Internet, we have decided to respect their original wishes and not publish the photos in the final project.

In publishing photographs in the final project, we strived to adhere to photojournalism ethics codes. Gary Knight, author of “Letter to a Young Photographer,” writes, “It is really just a question of exercising one’s best judgment at the time and ensuring that the images one makes available to the public are an accurate and fair representation of the events” (Knight 83).

Ms. Hackman and I have made an effort to select photographs with journalistic integrity, photos that, if need be, could stand alone without text and still tell the story.
Our purpose is to present an accurate account of the lives of the villagers, both through text and through photos.

Knight writes, “The primary purpose of the photographer is to challenge the audience to think about the issue that is being photographed and to respond to it. You need to inform the audience so they can act” (Knight 81).

Another ethical standard of journalism states that journalists should refrain from conflicts of interest with their sources. The only possibility I have for a conflict of interest is my relationship to Logan and El Qasemy. In Tighza, I paid Logan to stay in her Riad Kasbah Oliver (which also functions as her home), and therefore developed a business relationship with her. I also developed a friendship with Logan, who, being the only English speaker in the village, was my primary source of contact because we could communicate without interpretation, and she was familiar with the culture and people of the region.

Throughout the process, I trusted Logan to provide insight and explanation of events and cultural differences because she had lived in the culture for five years, and she explained these things in a way a Westerner could understand. Her views of village life proved to be very similar to my own perspective because we were both foreigners.

Though I spent much time with Logan, I strived to not identify myself with her interests. Bird says, “Journalists do develop relationships with their sources, maybe even socializing with them, but one of the acknowledged and very legitimate problems
in journalism is the danger of becoming identified with sources and their interests” (Bird 305).

I believe Logan helped me in all of my arrangements because that is the type of person she is. There is a small possibility that she helped me for publicity of her business, though I do not think that was ever her primary goal. I decided to write an article about her because her story is unique, but she had no prior knowledge of this until after I had been in the village for a few weeks.

David Schlesinger, author of “The Future of News Services and International Reporting,” writes, “As is true anywhere, the correspondent has not only to evaluate the character and veracity of the sources, but also to try to understand their motivations for giving information” (Schlesinger 32).

Though Logan, I believe, gave her honest opinions and perspectives of life in the village, it is possible that her views were biased because she is a woman from the West. She evaluated the Berber culture by Western standards, and she was especially attuned to the realities of life for women in the traditional Islamic culture. I think Logan was more inclined to share her story because she had an outlet to share and to give her honest opinion.

Throughout the process, I had the ability to maintain journalistic independence as a freelance reporter. This project was not under the influences, pressures, or financial constraints of corporations or news organizations. I received complete funding for my travels and my project from the E.W. Scripps School of Journalism and the Honors Tutorial College at Ohio University. The only requirement upon
receiving the funding was to write a report detailing the funding and produce three stories for the Institute for International Journalism weblog.

I did not have a time limit (with the exception of the final due date for the project), immediate deadlines, or a specific agenda to follow. Though I had the oversight of my advisors, I worked independently and with editorial control.

Through the process of framing and gatekeeping, I informed readers of what I believe to be the most important aspects (salient issues) of the culture, using individuals’ stories and relating them to the village as a whole. I based the major stories I chose on the frames of impact, emotion, culture, timeliness, and relevance.

Results

My professional project is an in-depth case study on the lives of the villagers in Tighza. The project critically examines the ways of life of the villagers and why they live as they do.

The purpose of completing a professional project is twofold: to gain valuable, hands-on experience, and to tell readers about a virtually unknown culture. I had the opportunity to fill various journalistic roles: an international journalist, copy editor, layout designer, editor-in-chief, and publisher. By diving into an underreported region, I attempted to provide an outlet for the villagers, who otherwise do not have a voice. I hope that my professional project is not simply a means of enlightening readers, but that it will be a source of inspiration and motivation to action. It will provide a new perspective of this area of the world.
Throughout my time in Tighza, the language barrier proved to be the most dominant obstacle in my work because I could not communicate with the villagers without an interpreter. I also could not pick up on dialogue, which I would normally use as context for my stories. If I did my project over again, the only thing I would change is having a grasp of the Tachelhit language, enough to have basic communication with the villagers and enough to understand the gist of their dialogues and conversations. Knowing Tachelhit would build trust with sources and prevent words and thoughts from getting lost in the translation.

As a result of the overall experience, I believe I did the best I could have done given my journalism skills and the conditions in which I was working. Though I ran into many journalistic challenges along the way, including language and cultural barriers, and interviewing and interpreting difficulties, I was able to gather an abundance of information that allows me to give a detailed overview of the culture and the people’s lives.
Bibliography


Caché
Tighza Valley
Caché means “hidden” in French. Caché aspires to inform and entertain readers by providing a compelling, in-depth look into the cultures of underreported and hidden regions throughout the world. This issue, Caché, Tighza Valley, focuses on the village region of Tighza, including its culture, religion, education and social welfare. The magazine hopes to reach audiences who have an interest in international travel, who enjoy learning about diverse ways of life and who feel empowered to make a difference in the world. Caché showcases top-quality photography and features that are directed toward the armchair traveler and get-up-and-go traveler alike. We hope it will inspire readers to travel to or make a difference in these unknown parts of the world, as well as increase readers’ knowledge and perception of the world.
ABOVE: The steep dirt road winds around earth and stone houses on the way to Tighza (in the distance).

RIGHT: Bourciod, the minivan driver, carefully maneuvers around another vehicle on the one-way path. (Photo taken from inside the minivan)
The 1970s-looking, red-carpeted bus had finally arrived in Telouet nearly five hours after departing from Marrakech. Telouet, a small town in the Atlas Mountains, serves as the hub for all villages in the surrounding area. At the bus stop, the men traveling with us transferred our 100 pounds of luggage from the top of the bus to the top of a minivan, which would take us — my photographer Kim Hackman and me — to our final destination, the Riad Kasbah Oliver in the Tighza Valley.

With only six seats and eight people crammed into the truck, the 1990 Ford minivan resembled a white metal cage. Because of all the weight on the minivan, the driver, Bourciod, could only go about 30 miles per hour. The van kicked up rusty-orange dust as it rattled up the windy, one-way dirt path around the mountains. One wrong move by Bourciod, and we would have been flung over the guardrail-less edge into the lush and fertile valley below.

The barren mountaintops look as if God took giant sand bags of crimson, pastel pink, bronze, and apricot and poured them in piles, and the piles just naturally went the way they wanted.

To get a ride to a village farther up, young boys and men latched themselves onto the back of the van as it whipped around the perimeter of the mountains. One wrong move by Bourciod, and we would have been flung over the guardrail-less edge into the lush and fertile valley below.

To get a ride to a village farther up, young boys and men latched themselves onto the back of the van as it whipped around the perimeter of the mountains. They jumped off, without the van slowing, when they neared their destinations. Out the window of the van, we could see the sun begin to set behind peaks, creating a spectacle of lights as the rays bounced off the mountains. We passed though small villages with red-earth and concrete homes, the van nearly grazing the buildings because of the narrow path. As we passed villagers, they smiled and waved at Bourciod, who, knowing all the faces from Telouet to Tighza, responded with a flick of the wrist and a gentle smile.

Closing in on the river that separates the Tighza Valley (a collection of villages) from lower-lying hamlets, the path grew bumpier. We shook back and forth, bobbing up and down like buoys on an open sea. To get to our final destination, Bourciod had to cross the river with the van, something I thought was impossible for the rundown vehicle. Switching to a lower gear, Bourciod triumphantly traversed the shallow river, stretching about eight feet in width at this point.

At the river, which is surrounded by boulders ranging from one to 20 feet tall, women dressed in headscarves and full-length clothing and children fetched water in two-gallon plastic jugs and began folding their laundry, which had been left to dry on rocks in the sun. I also noticed patterned tapestries aligning the rocks high above the river, creating a beautiful display of color.

Upon crossing the river, the van began trekking uphill toward the Riad Kasbah Oliver. We drove over mini plateaus, all overlooking the greenery in the valley below, where the river runs through. In the summer, the valley produces apricots, almonds, apples and alfalfa for the animals. On the left stood the one-roomed school buildings, refinished and painted with the help of volunteers groups.

On our way up the steep hills, we observed women, ranging from teenagers to the elderly, hunched over with woven sacks full of grasses, as they climbed the path to return home from a day in the field. Each sack, which appeared to weigh between 30 and 50 pounds, seemed half the size of the woman herself. There weren't many men in sight, except for the little boys — their mismatched clothing covered in dust and holes — playing in the roads.

The path weaved us around earth houses — each with a different, vibrantly-colored metal door and a few windows with crafted iron windowpanes — until the van came to a bumpy halt. By looking...
around the van, I did not see the Riad Kasbah Oliver, only a few houses and red dirt paths. As I paid and thanked Bourcioud, the men unloaded our luggage and then carried it on their backs, up a steep hill of loose soil that felt like quicksand. My steps dragged heavily through the soil, while the men danced up the hill with no problem.

After a day’s journey from Marrakech to Tighza, we at last arrived at the large wooden doors of the kasbah, our new home for five weeks.

**The Project**

For my senior professional project, I wanted to combine hands-on journalism with my French language studies. So, I chose to spend five weeks in Morocco to compile interviews and observations in order to produce my final product, Caché. My friend, Kim Hackman, a photojournalism student, served as my photographer during the trip.

Because ethnographic and immersion journalism place the greatest importance on understanding the lives and cultures of others, I chose this method to research the Tighza Valley and the people who inhabit the region. By immersing myself into the Tighza village life for a period of time, I now have a better understanding of the people and their traditions through in-depth interviews, conversations and observations. My stories, in the form of ethnographic and narrative journalism, attempt to place readers directly into the scene as the subject talks. To provide a sense of the subjects’ lives, I interviewed approximately 55 villagers and had informal conversations with many others. The stories also capture events and daily life through observation. While in the village, we attended wedding ceremonies, watched women bake bread, went to a Ramadan feast and hiked four hours uphill to camp by Lake Tamda and talk to shepherds. We were also able to observe social gatherings and the villagers’ daily lives.

By attending social events as an observer, I had the ability to see life from an insider’s perspective but without altering the event. Because I did not speak the language, Tachelhit (tesh-la-HEET), it was impossible to know everything happening at social events, or even in everyday dialogue. Thus, I gathered much of my background information through interviews and unstructured conversations with interpreters or with villagers (with the help of interpreters).

Throughout my time in Tighza, I conducted interviews in French, which my three interpreters then translated into Tachelhit. The interpreters, all of whom were born in the village, spoke Tachelhit, Arabic, and varying degrees of French. I worked closest with Mina El Mouden, a 24-year-old woman with a strong academic background and a proficiency in French. El Mouden interpreted for a majority of the interviews, including all interviews with female villagers. Because of El Mouden’s gender and the lack of men present in the rooms where I interviewed, the women shared more openly about their stories and daily struggles. The most powerful stories came from the lives of women, who seemed empowered that someone would take an interest in them and listen to them.

When in Tighza, I stayed at the home of Carolyn Logan, originally from the United Kingdom, and her husband, Mohamed El Qasemy, who was born and raised in the village. Logan, the only English speaker in the village, was my primary source of contact because we could communicate without interpretation, and she was familiar with the culture and people of the region. Throughout the process, I trusted Logan to provide insight and explanation of events and cultural differences because she had lived in the culture for five years, and she explained these things in a way a Westerner could understand. Her views of village life proved to be very similar to my
own perspective because we were both foreigners. The 29-year-old Mohamed El Qasemy and his 25-year-old brother, Ahmed, served as my other interpreters. Both left school in their pre-teens, but because of their experience working alongside foreigners visiting the village, they learned French. The brothers, sons of a respected village elder, were well known among the people of Tighza, giving us access to more sources and contacts.

In using interpreters, many times I had to reword questions so the interpreters could understand and translate properly. The direct quotes I use by the villagers can never be fully direct either, because of the translation between three languages. Though there is always the possibility, however slight, that the interpreters translated something incorrectly or did not provide all the information, I believe that they gave me honest, sincere and correct interpretations of my interviews or questions to the best of their abilities.

One cultural difference emerged from the interviews. Trained journalists are reminded to obtain the basic facts of sources, such as full name and spelling, age and title, but the villagers didn’t necessarily have the answers. Most adult villagers do not know how to spell their names due to lack of knowledge of French and English writing, reading and speaking. Much like Arabic, Tachelhit has a different alphabet with different symbols as letters. El Mouden, my main interpreter, spelled the names of all my interviewees phonetically.

The older villagers also do not keep records of birthdates, ages or dates of events. I came to understand that the older generations do not know their birthdates or ages because their parents waited a number of years to officially register them in government records. There was a high infant and child mortality rate in the mountains up until a few decades ago, so the parents waited to register the children until they were confident the child would survive.

I believe the majority of my sources were honest about their stories. My sources gave me no reason to think they lied or manipulated their answers, with the exception of about five of 55 sources. Through observation of these people and outside information, it is likely that a few members of one family lied to me and deliberately kept major details from me. In the information I did use, I specifically addressed as questionable information within the story.

Because of my gender, some of my observations were limited. I was not allowed to be in the social gatherings with men, particularly with respect to the wedding ceremony. I was, however, able to spend much time with the women, seeing their side of the culture. This may have caused a slight bias because I mainly saw the village from the woman’s perspective. And because I am a woman, I could relate more to the women. Therefore, my perspective toward men was different in the village, because I saw the way women were treated and compared it with how women are treated in the West.

Not only did I receive permission to interview villagers, but Ms. Hackman also needed permission from everyone to take photographs. Ms. Hackman and I have made an effort to select photographs with journalistic integrity, photos that, if need be, could stand alone without text and still tell the story. Our purpose is to present an accurate account of the lives of the villagers, both through text and through photos.

We sincerely hope that after reading the stories of the villagers of Tighza, you will come away with a better understanding of their lives and the rich culture of the Berbers of the High Atlas Mountains. Like the photo below says in French, “Bienvenu[e] à Tig[h]za.” Welcome to Tighza.
A pair of henna-covered hands works swiftly and almost effortlessly. The woman’s movements come as habit, like a science. At first, the hands dig into her white plastic container, which resembles a tackle box, and pulls out a handful of bags of multicolored, pinhead-sized beads. Rustling through the plastic bags, she finds five shiny beads with perfectly coordinated shades of amethyst and dark lime green. With an inch-long piece of sterling looped at one end in her right hand, she scoops up the beads one-by-one.

She repeats the process until she has six pieces of sterling, all with a matching amethyst and lime green color scheme. Pliers in hand, she makes a small loop on the other end so the beads won’t budge. Then, she places three of the silver pieces onto a question mark-shaped sliver of sterling, tightening the loops as she goes. Within 10 minutes, she has finished a pair of earrings, which she plans to sell for 50 dirhams, or about $7. Earring-making is just one of the few ways she supports herself and her 8-year-old daughter Ikram. Fatima also makes and sells her own tapestries, helps a local family with housework and sells clothing and baking items to neighboring villages to earn a living, on top of the traditional housework of a Berber mother.

Fatima Ouahassou, 32, moved to the village seven years ago. Her uncle offered for her to live in a two-room home, rent free; thus, she moved to the village because it was all she could afford, considering her income was barely enough to pay for food, transportation and rent in the city. Prior to the birth of her daughter, Fatima’s boyfriend ran off, leaving her pregnant and alone.

Fatima Ouahassou holds her head in her hand as she recounts her life story.
“When he found out I was having a girl, he left me. He left me alone,” said Fatima, speaking Tachelhit through an interpreter. She still does not know the whereabouts of Ikram’s father.

By age 24, nearly everyone had disowned her because having a child out of wedlock is shameful in the Muslim community. But regardless, she kept her child, though she had offers from people who wanted to buy Ikram from her, and she continued to try to support herself and her infant daughter. Because she could not afford childcare, Fatima carried her daughter by her side as she worked in a hotel in Ouarzazate. Eventually, living expenses such as food, electricity, water and continuously raised rent became too great; thus, she could no longer afford to live in the city.

Moving to the village, to a free house offered by her uncle, was one of the hardest things she has done, mainly because of the rumors floating around about her. Word spreads rapidly in a small village where everyone knows everyone. Fatima said most people in this village refer to her as a “whore” or “prostitute” because Ikram doesn’t have a father.

“The people here don’t give me any importance. They think I am a bad person because I’m not married and I have an illegitimate daughter,” Fatima said, as she hid her crying eyes with her right hand. “They don’t think it’s good for me to stay here.”

For a brief moment, Fatima exited the room to cry privately. She returned with tears still in her worn eyes.

She said Ikram suffers as well.

Most of the young girls either make fun of Ikram, or the girls’ parents won’t allow Ikram to play with their daughters.

“The girls don’t like me at school, and sometimes the girls say things to me because of my mother,” Ikram whispered in Tachelhit through an interpreter. “And sometimes when the girls are playing, they won’t let me play with them. This is hard for me.”

At school and around the village, she is subject to ridicule and gossip about her mother, which often makes her cry, Ikram explained, avoiding eye contact. Sometimes she tells her mother, other times she doesn’t, because when she does, she and her mother cry together. She hates seeing her mother cry.

Ikram, a curious and bright-eyed child, loves learning French, Arabic and mathematics in school, and she said she enjoys spending time in the village. Eventually, she wants to become a police officer primarily so she can protect her mother but also
so she can help others in similar situations to her mother.

By this point, Fatima said that she has explained the situation to her daughter and she said Ikram understands. Ikram said she doesn’t condemn her mother for what happened or for the life they live, because it is their fate to live life with just the two of them.

“My mother replaces my father,” Ikram said with a slight smile. “My mother takes on the responsibility of my father and my mother at the same time.”

However, Fatima said, eyes becoming glassy with tears, she will send Ikram to live with her grandmother in Ouarzazate in order that she receive a better education than the one offered in the village. But, with a deep breath, Ikram said she is leaving because of constant mockery by other children.

“It will be hard leaving the village and leaving my mother here,” Ikram said.

However, both Ikram and Fatima believe that Ikram will have a better life in the city because many children are in the same situation there. Also, in the city, Fatima said, people are not in each other's business, and most even keep to themselves.

“Eventually, I want to live somewhere else with my mother [outside of the village], because the majority of the people treat us badly. I want to move somewhere where no one knows our situation, like here,” Ikram said with hope and a smile. “I want to get a job and buy my mother a big house and lots of things for her.”

Caring for a child on her own is not the only major trial Fatima has had to overcome. When she was seven years old, her mother and father got a divorce. Her father did not want her, and when her mother remarried, her stepfather did not want her either. She did not explain why her fathers rejected her. So, her stepfather sent Fatima to live with her grandmother. When her grandmother died, she left 16-year-old Fatima on her own, and she has worked to support herself ever since.

“I took on all the responsibilities when I was younger than 18 years old. I started a life alone. There was no one to help me,” Fatima recounted, quickly wiping tears from her puffy eyes, almost as if she was embarrassed by her emotions.

Later, after Ikram was born, Fatima discovered a growth on the right side of her own jaw. It turned out to be a dental abscess. For months, she suffered hardship and difficulty because she could not work, and therefore did not have the means to pay hospital bills or for food for Ikram. She also could not afford the surgery necessary to remove the abscess.

“It was a nightmare,” Fatima recalled.

In 2007, with the help of a nun from Ouarzazate, and Claire Marris, 46, her sponsor from the United Kingdom, Fatima had extensive surgery to take out the abscess and remove part of the jawbone, where the infection began to spread. (Claire continues to send financial support to Fatima and Ikram as needed, particularly for medicine and school supplies.)

Claire, who continues to reside in England, first heard about Fatima in 2006 from her friend Andy McKee, project coordinator for Baraka Community Partnerships (BCP) in Tighza. After hearing about Fatima’s struggles, Claire decided that she was in the financial position to help Fatima receive surgery to remove the dental abscess and save her life, a surgery that cost Claire 300 British pounds, roughly $450.

“Once I did the first bit, I couldn’t let them go,” Claire said. “Very small amounts of money make a massive difference in their lives.”

“It will be hard leaving the village and leaving my mother here.”
— Ikram, Fatima’s daughter

ABOVE: Ikram dances in the living room, while her mother completes chores in the kitchen behind her.
It wasn’t until Easter 2010 that Claire and Fatima finally met. “We just hugged for ages. And it was very moving; it was lovely.”

Claire also described the meeting as more of a reunion with long-lost family.

“She kept calling me ‘oulita,’ ‘oulita,’ which is ‘my sister,’ ‘my sister.’ And that’s how it felt really, we just felt very close straight away.” When Fatima shows pictures of Claire to others, which she does often and proudly, she continues to refer to Claire as her sister or her family. Fatima’s face lights up and her smile won’t disappear.

“I just adore her,” Claire expressed, in awe of Fatima’s story and her resilience. “She has so much spirit. She is just fabulous.”

Regardless of her situation and the setbacks of her past, Fatima said she tries to continue life as normally as she can.

She managed to work out a deal with a shop owner from Ouarzazate, who allows her to sell clothing, bedding and baking accessories to women in the Tighza region (her village and the three surrounding villages). Fatima receives a portion of the clothing sales, making about 100 dirhams per week. She proudly shows visitors the bed sheets, clothing and pans that she sells for a living, smiling and pointing to the items as if it were a blue ribbon. She also makes a little extra money by helping Carolyn Logan around her kasbah — the kasbah that Carolyn and her husband Mohamed finished in 2011 — and by making small tapestries and jewelry, which she sells to tourists.

With all of her earnings, not only can she support herself and Ikram, but she has also been able to save money to purchase items such as a refrigerator and new clothing for herself.

Living a normal life for Fatima also includes a return to Islam.

“Before, I didn’t say my prayers, and I didn’t listen to the Koran. But now, I say my prayers everyday and every time throughout the day. When I approach Allah, I say, ‘Forgive me for what I have done in my life before.’”

Fatima believes she deserves her fate because of her past, but she says she has been forgiven. “I think that I’ve returned to Allah, and I’m close to Allah. I’ve prayed for what I have done before, and now I am relaxed.”

Despite her many challenges and the past that lingers in her memories, Fatima continues to greet visitors with a gentle and joyful smile, the kind of smile that will warm your heart.
Every morning, women in the village gather in each other’s homes to bake bread together. The women say the work they can do together makes the job a little easier and less lonely, especially because each woman has the same work to do around the house: take care of the children, cook, clean, care for the animals, entertain guests and wash clothing.

Like the other mothers in Tighza, Malika Bouhmade works from inside the home, waking up at 5:30 a.m. to start her tasks for the day. At 7:30 a.m., Malika climbs through what seems like a secret passageway, up a dark, windy, stone and earth staircase to the roof of a segment of her house. Across the earthen roof stands a two-foot, domed clay oven, covered by a small, roofed shelter to protect the oven and the person baking the bread from the hot sun.

Malika grabs a pillow-sized rock with a plastic sack on top to sit upon. At her side is a shallow but wide, blue plastic tub to store the bread dough, which contains white and wheat flour, salt, olive oil and water.

She starts a fire on one side of the oven, using wood and a cigarette lighter, which heats the pebbles on one side of the oven. While waiting for the stones to become hot, Malika scoops out a portion of dough, enough to fill her two hands. On a large, flat stone, Malika places an old, worn tablecloth, and then sprinkles a light covering of flour on the cloth.

With a thump, she tosses the dough onto the stone and begins to flatten it like a pizza crust. Malika pats the dough three times with her right hand, then flips up the dough using the tablecloth and her left hand (so the dough won’t stick to the cloth). She repeats the process until the dough is stretched to the size of an extra large pizza crust.

After flipping the dough onto a round wooden board, she slaps the dough onto the hot pebbles. Every few minutes, she uses a metal stick to shift the dough in a circular motion to cook it evenly. Seven minutes later, Malika overturns the half-cooked dough, then proceeds to rotate it while scraping out pebbles stuck in the mini craters. Finally, with a swift motion, she rolls the dough out of the oven like a wheel and sets it off to the side.

The hot and fresh aghrom, bread in Tachelhit, comes out of the oven golden brown with small grooves from the pebbles. When tearing off a piece of the aghrom, which tastes like plain pizza crust, you can hear the crunch of the outside and the crisp of the flaky inside, as steam billows out.

After another hour, Malika finishes five “loaves” of bread — about a day’s worth of bread for the family — just in time for two of her neighbor friends to join in on the bread-making party.
TOP: Malika Bouhmade, 43, takes a break from her daily chores, which begin at 5:30 a.m.

BOTTOM LEFT: (From left to right) Malika (mother), 43, Nezha, 13, El Hssaine, 47, Ibrahime, 10, Fatima, 5, and Aicha, 8.

BOTTOM RIGHT: El Hssaine Bouhmade, 47, looks at a family goat. Bouhmade, a subsistence farmer, has seven children, two with his first wife and five with Malika, his current wife. His first wife died, leaving him in need of a mother to take care of his children.
Four hours and 16 kilometers (10 miles) uphill from the Tighza Valley lies Lake Tamda, a trek that takes you over shattered rocks, murmuring streams and layers of barren mountains. The rocks sound like clinking glass and gravel beneath your feet. Sandy, distant mountain peaks hide behind taller and closer peaks, creating the feeling that the hike never ends. But the feeling passes with the beauty of the rising sun that paints hues of apricot, burnt sienna and sepia on to the colorless mountain landscape. Silhouettes of mountain peaks create the only shadows on the other mountains, since there are no clouds to block the sun.

This land is virtually untouched, with the exception of adventurous tourists on foot, mule drivers, nomads and shepherds, who barely leave a trace in the dusty dirt of the High Atlas Mountains. Lake Tamda serves as a pit stop for trekkers and animal herders. A source under the lake constantly feeds it fresh water, which remains the primary reason that shepherds return to the spring each evening. The bright blue and turquoise lake rests in a small valley, completely surrounded by high mountain peaks.

Just as the sun begins to disappear behind the mountains, the shepherds and their sheep start to roll over a mountaintop to the South. To a spectator at the lake, the mountains seem so close, yet the flocks resemble brown and white dots in the distance that slowly work their way down the beige landscape. The spectacle echoes the stampede scene from *The Lion King*; however, instead of the fast and huge wildebeests, picture gentle, unhurried goats and sheep.

At dusk, the two shepherds arrive at their bergerie, or “sheep barn,” about 100 meters from the lake. Though the bergerie in this sense refers to where the sheep and goats rest each night, there is no barn, or even a fence. On one side of the bergerie rests a 5-foot-tall stone hut, used as a shelter, a storage area and a kitchen for the shepherds. They spend five months of the year, May through September, in this region of the Atlas Mountains, returning every evening to the Tamda bergerie. In the remaining cold-weather months, the shepherds migrate to a warmer climate in the lower elevations.

For these shepherds and many other men including salt miners, jobs involve intense physical labor, long hours, extreme working conditions and low pay. In the village, men are considered to be the laborers of and providers for their families.
Men are expected to earn a living to feed and clothe their wives, children and sometimes extended families, doing whatever job necessary to fulfill these obligations. Many are forced to work hours away from home to keep their families fed. For Hassan Ait Mousa and Salah Ait Bafas, they are willing to make sacrifices to keep their families afloat. For them, the futures of their wives and children are worth the present struggles.

Approaching the bergerie at sunset, you can hear the “baa-ing” of the sheep and the barking of the sheepdog. An orange flame flickers from within the hut, foreshadowing a fresh meal and a steaming cup of “Berber whiskey,” or sugar-filled hot tea. A man with worn, sad eyes emerges from inside the hut. He wears a white Islamic prayer cap, blue cotton pants, a navy blue robe and an army green jacket.

Hassen Ait Mousa, 51, looks well into his 60s. His face is thin from long days without much to eat and wrinkled from the relentless sun of the Atlas. He has labored as a shepherd for 22 years, going home to his wife and six children only when he is ill or if there is a family emergency.

He grew up the child of a shepherd, and so he inherited his father’s sheep. When he was younger, Ait Mousa worked in construction for six years, but he reverted to shepherding because it is familiar and provides a steady income for his family.

When speaking about taking a vacation, he chuckles, shaking his head and waving his pointer finger from side to side. “Oho,” Ait Mousa says through a male interpreter, who was speaking broken English. “Unless there is a problem or illness, I work every day.”

Ait Mousa explains that his daily routine includes looking after the sheep and traveling with them as they graze. During the day, he eats only bread and drinks tea to keep his body energized. But his job doesn’t end in the evening. Upon
returning to the bergerie, he must search for wood and make a hot meal, usually vegetable tajine or couscous, as he watches over the animals.

“Every day, you have just sheep. You come in and look for wood at night. Then you look after the sheep. Tonight, I won’t sleep well, because I’ll be up every hour checking the sheep.”

With the help of one other shepherd and a sheepdog, he guards his flock. In all of his years as a shepherd, he has lost five sheep, in comparison with other shepherds who lose 50 to 60 per year, according to Ait Mousa. If an occasional red fox or jackal comes near the sheep, he says he runs toward it and yells to scare it away. He only uses his voice and a stick to chase away wild animals. As the interpreter mimicked the action of shouting at a animal by making a deep “la” sound in the back of his throat and shaking his hands in the air, Hassen laughs humbly, genuinely joyful to be in the presence of company.

Though he says his work is lonely, he knows that his money supports his wife and six children, which is why he presses on. He has become accustomed to the loneliness, and his flock and the one other shepherd with him are his family while he is away.

“The sheep are my family,” he says.

One member of his real family visits him by the lake one day each month to bring him clothes and food, purchased through the earnings he receives at the start of the year. He watches a total of 500 sheep, 100 of which are his own. He receives a 50-dirham stipend for each sheep (400 total) for one year, bringing his total earnings this year to 20,000 dirhams, or about $2,600.

“With sheep, you have money,” he says, referring to the other families’ animals for which he cares.

“One day is good, one day is bad. You have rain, you have snow, you have cold. You have problems for sheep,” he says with a half smile. He says he is used to this life.

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BELOW: Hassan Ait Mousa, 51, rests by Lake Tamda after walking with his flocks all day in the High Atlas Mountains.
Under the mid-afternoon sun of the Valley, men of every age stand in anticipation for the clash of rivals that's about to begin. The fierce rays of heat beat down on the all-male spectators, some of whom rest on individual strips of battered cardboard. Young men from ages 17 to 20 take their positions, half in solid red uniforms representing Animeter, the other half in thick red and white stripes representing Tighza. Black blocky numbers show brightly on their backs.

The whistle blares. An old tennis shoe smacks the soccer ball to begin the game. The crowd — some in traditional kaftans and others in second-hand T-shirts, jeans and dusty rubber sandals — claps quietly, as they wait for the real intensity to begin.

The burnt crimson dust-covered ball bounces from foot to hard, dirt field, and off to another foot. The players, who wear mismatched shorts with no shin guards, begin to sweat immediately due to the pummeling heat.

No one gets relief from the fiery sun because of the complete lack of shade and the position of the sun in the sky, nearly overhead. The dirt field rests in a valley somewhere in the 11 kilometers between Tighza and Animeter. The area is encompassed by hills of stone and earth that range in height from five feet to 100 feet.

Suddenly the ball flies out of bounds. It bounces off hills and rocks and disappears. This sends the ball boy (dressed in heavy jeans) chasing after it as if he were a part of a fox hunt.

During the first half, one player in stripes sends the ball soaring smoothly into the filthy brown net with rusted metal posts. The ball zips by the goalie dressed in a shiny blue track jacket. The crowd from Tighza goes crazy, with arms flailing and hands clapping. Some jump to their feet and run around.

There is an obvious energy boost. Tighza spectators begin chanting in Tachelhit, clapping to the beat. Soon after, the rival team
ABOVE: Salah Ait Bafas presents salt crystals. Once mined, the salt travels to major cities in Morocco to be processed into granular salt.

The referee whistle blows with a squeak to signify the end of the half. Spectators switch sides along with their respective teams, as the players re-hydrate with one of the five communal liter bottles of water, the same bottles that the spectators use as well.

Minutes later, with a change in scenery for both teams and spectators (some of whom move onto one of the 30-foot hills and sit in a groove or on a boulder), the game resumes. The volume of the crowd and the pressure on the players increases with the passing minutes. In a frantic rush to score the tie-breaking point, the players kick the ball haphazardly.

Eventually, near the close of the second half, Tighza finishes the duel by scoring one final point. The Tighza supporters sing Tachelhit chants of joy, which are heard in every village that they pass along the two-hour hike back to their home village. Victory and pride return not only to the team, but also to the village.
Somewhere between Telouet and Animeter, sits a sign that reads, “Mine de Sel: 300 meters,” with an arrow pointing down a dirt path laced with trails of salt. Because the path meanders between steep hills, the salt mine hides from view until it’s just about in front of you.

Upon arrival at the locked metal door of the mine, you see a small stone and earth house in the distance, which is where the directors of the salt mine live. Two men, one in an olive green robe and white prayer cap with gold embroidery, and the other in jeans and a long-sleeve T-shirt, appear from inside the house. A few moments later, the men open the 5-foot metal door, and a rush of cool air escapes from inside the mine, a nice change from the intense dry midday heat of the valley.

On the other side of the door stands a large pile of rock salt crystals surrounded by 10-kilogram bags of salt. To the left, a lonely wheelbarrow lies unused next to two cone-shaped piles of rock salt crystals each with a diameter of four feet and a height of six feet.

The sun streaming through the open door and one small flame attached to a tank of gas, act as the only illuminants. Despite little light, the mine resembles a cool, damp, dark cave, with stalactites and a lone bat circling the interior.

Treading through the darkened mine, you observe four geographically separate work areas, all of which look similar. Each section has been strategically blasted in, using small sticks of dynamite. Once workers bomb a section, they clear away the fallen crystals and begin chiseling out more salt.

One particular section remains on level ground, while the other three have been blasted to create downhill slopes, forcing visitors to descend to see the base of the crystal-covered hill. Two of the downward sections have shallow pools of water, which from a distance resemble white foam. However, upon moving closer, you notice clear water with large deposits of ground salt sunk to the bottom.

From the mine, the salt travels to one of eight major cities such as Agadir and Marrakech to be processed into table salt, or workers sell the salt in crystals to locals to be given to their animals.

“The quality of this salt is very good and well known. I give it to my animals to help them gain weight,” says Salah Ait Bafas, 65, director of the mine (the man dressed in the traditional robe and cap). “For example, I give it to the cows to get a lot of meat. There is another place that produces salt 200 kilometers away, and it is bad quality. It kills the animals.”

You will usually find 16 workers in the mine, including the four mine directors. For now, the work has stopped because “it has been a dead year,” says Ait Bafas with a low, raspy voice.

Miners get paid 60 dirhams at the end of each day they work (about $7.50), while the directors receive 1,500 dirhams at the end of month (about $185). However, when the salt doesn’t sell (0.5 dirhams per kilogram to locals, or less when purchased by the ton), no one gets paid.

This is difficult for Ait Bafas because he has a wife and five children to support. “It has been eight...
months without money. For money to eat, there are a few shops in Telouet that accept credit. You can pay with credit until you have money.”

He spends much of his time working — for one month consecutively — and then travels four hours to Marrakech to rest with his family for 15 days. Then he repeats the cycle.

“It [the work] is very difficult. There are many problems here,” he says. “The first, there isn’t any water to drink; it’s very far away, the potable water. Second, I’m very far from my wife. And there aren’t many people around.”

He says his work in the mine is tedious and often lonely, but he accepts the sacrifice if that means making ends meet for his family.
For Moroccans in and around Telouet, every Thursday is the designated "souk day," or market day. Telouet is the largest city near the Tighza Valley, though it is about the size of a town in an old western film, just take out the cowboys and insert the Berbers.

At the break of dawn, you can hear the rickety 1990 Ford minivan rattling up the mountain to pick up the eager, souk-going men. On his first trip through the mountains, Bourciod, the 6-foot-2, bulky minivan driver, opens the rusty doors to beckoning men, picking up a total of 20, all of who cram themselves into the van or hang onto the back. On the narrow dirt and rock "road" they drive, winding around the mountains and through little villages. One wrong move by Bourciod could send the van plunging over the mountain to the valley below.

By the time this caravan arrives, Telouet has already been bustling for a few hours, since before the sun began to rise. All the men from nearby villages gather in Telouet and spend all day at the souk, not returning home until after sunset, says Carolyn Logan, a British woman married to a Berber man from Tighza. She says it’s an excuse for them to get away from the house, wife and family. The souk is a man’s game, considering the women must stay home and take care of the children and their daily chores. Out of hundreds of people in the crowd, only 10 were women.

In Telouet, one road passes directly through the center, dividing the 20 food shops and cafes — standing about 4 by 6 feet — into two sides. Behind one side of shops is the souk, or the market, which is a large square with lines of vendors under their makeshift tents. Some of the vendors are lucky enough to have wooden stands for their wares, but most have tarps on the ground with their goods on top.

Meat vendors align the outside entrance of the souk. Goats, sheep and beef hang from hooks in the ceiling. Bloody goat heads rest in disarray on the counter, their open eyes looking in every direction. Flies swarm the area, and the smells of rotting and sun-baking meat fill the air. As for coolers with meat, if they do exist, they are not in plain sight.

Outside the meat clearing sit vendors around the perimeter of the square with fresh fruits and vegetables, but only what is in season
in the villages: potatoes, watermelon, figs, dates, onions, carrots and apricots. It seems as though there are more dates than anything, and sellers always try to give you a taste. Dates look like brown prunes, but have a slight crunch — like a squashed exoskeleton of an insect — when you bite into them.

As you move to the center of the square, the souk begins to resemble a flea market with teapots, old furniture, rustic and tarnished jewelry, pottery for tajines and cookery, old clothes and second-hand rubber shoes that either resemble 1990s jelly shoes or off-brand Crocs. The shoes sell for about 10 dirhams per pair ($1.50), and nearly everyone in the village has a pair.

And every once in a while, you stumble upon a spice stand, complete with cinnamon, cumin, saffron, turmeric, ginger, paprika, ground and whole coffee beans, lentils, legumes, pasta and kilogram cones of sugar. The colors are vibrant and the scents are fragrant, but because the spices sit in the open air all day, they lose their biting flavor, unlike bottled spices found in Western countries.

Customers line up to pay between 30 and 60 dirhams ($3.75-$7.50) for a kilo (2.2 pounds) of spices. Pointing to the spice, the customer tells the vendor how many grams, and with a scoop in hand and a flick of the wrist, the vendor slides the spice into a quart-size plastic bag. With another twist of the wrist, he flips the bag and ties it closed. The more adventurous type requests for the spices to be combined into one bag.

At the souk, men stock up on groceries such as rice, beans, flour, oil, salt, sugar and fresh seasonal fruits and vegetables. These products need to last until the next souk, because the village shops do not carry all of these goods.

As it becomes later in the day, and the men start to head back up the mountain, Bourciojd’s van increasingly carries more weight, especially on top, where the men stack burlap sacks of flour, rice and beans. With loads of groceries, about 20 people inside the van, and another half-dozen hanging on the back of the van, it’s no wonder Bourciojd’s van moves at a pace of 10mph. Still, at the end of the day, you hear the rattling return of the 1990 Ford minivan, the sign of a successful day at the souk.
Armed with a Moroccan flag, as well as a gold-adorned, green Qur’an, Mohamed El Mouden led 350,000 Moroccans into the bordering Spanish Sahara in November 1975 as a part of a nonviolent demonstration for the independence of the Saharans from Spain. This is known as the Marche Verte, or “Green March.”

The name comes from the symbolic significance of “green” in Islam. It is believed that the prophet Muhammad’s favorite color was green and that Muslims will wear green in paradise.

“I was very courageous and didn’t have any fear,” said El Mouden, through an interpreter. He gave his age as 87, but it is only an estimate.

Many families did not register their children until between the ages of 5 and 10, because the families wanted to make sure the children would live long enough before registering. This is so they would not have to register the children’s deaths as well.

A respected elder in the Tighza Valley, El Mouden volunteered to be first in the march “because if I left, I left. If I died, I died, because of my country and my king,” he said, shaking both fists proudly with a dignified smile.

El Mouden was not the only villager from Tighza who participated in the Marche Verte. Hassan El Qasemy, about 94 years old, decided to make the trip across Morocco to support the king, because he felt it was his duty.

“I had the Qur’an in one hand and the Moroccan flag in the other,” El Qasemy said. “No one was
afraid. We had courage during the march. The king was our king, and the desert was our desert.”

In October 1975, King Hassan II of Morocco asked for the aid of all citizens to peacefully protest in favor of the annexation of the Spanish Sahara from Spain. Less than a month later, in November, citizens from all over Morocco responded to the king and gathered in Tarfaya, a coastal city nearly 20 miles from the border.

As soon as King Hassan II gave the order, the Moroccans trekked across the border into the disputed land. To avoid bloodshed and war, Morocco, Spain and Mauritania (the other country bordering the Spanish Sahara) signed an agreement to share authority of this area, just days after the demonstration.

The region became known as the Western Sahara, and Spain’s role in the territory decreased significantly. After Spain left the region in 1976, Morocco annexed the northern two-thirds of the Western Sahara. Eventually, Mauritania withdrew from the region in 1979, giving all claims to the territory to Morocco.

“The king, Hassan II, he gave great importance to the people like me because [we] participated in the Marche Verte,” El Mouden said with enthusiasm booming in his low, aged voice. “I was like the others. I sacrificed everything for my country, because if we wouldn’t have left, if we would have been scared, Spain would’ve taken over our land.”

Both men received medals and green cards of participation from the king as symbols of honor for those who marched for Morocco and for peace in the region.
TIGHZA

IN BLACK and WHITE
The following series of images should not be mistaken as a photo story. This collection of photographs is a representation of the culture and quiet moments found in the Tighza Valley. It is my hope that this sequence succeeds in its attempt to accentuate the traditions and hard work that are important aspects of the Berber way of life.

The vibrant colors that decorate the village can be a distraction to the combination of light and contrast that compose each shot. The black and white toning of these images mimics the simplistic way of life, adding to a sense of timelessness. Although the photographs were taken recently, I am certain that similar moments could have been captured years and years ago.

Tighza villagers uphold a very traditional culture that abides by long held beliefs and customs. This old fashioned mentality is exemplified photographically through the concept of time, which can be attributed to a dedicated work ethic. The delicate nature in which each task is carried out applies to all areas of expertise, whether it be spending hours cooking a meal to ensure perfection in taste and texture or weaving a carpet with persistence and patience. A strong sense of community unites villagers and contributes to their hospitable nature.

The following is a short photographer’s perspective of Tighza made possible by the accepting individuals who shared the beauty of their culture with me during my time in the village.

By Kim Hackman
BREAKING THE FAST
Celebrating the Ramadan feast in Tighza
The sun begins to set behind the mountains encircling Tighza. Naima El Mouden’s household starts to buzz with chatter and excitement as the women prepare for the 7 p.m. breakfast feast with the family.

Fatima El Mouden, dressed in a yellow-orange, floral-patterned cotton dress, sparks a flame inside the domed clay oven. Above this room on the roof, smoke immediately billows out, flooding the air with the stench of burning wood. Sitting on a rock, she grabs a handful of bread dough, pats it into a ball, then slaps it onto a tablecloth-covered, circular stone. After beating the dough to create circles the size of extra-large pizzas, she flips the dough into the oven. While the aghrom transforms to a golden-brown and the scent of the baking bread begins to linger, the woman moves to the next doughball.

From the rooftop garden in the background, you hear the laughter of her three daughters, Fatima-Zahra, Mariyam and Asmaa, and their cousin Khadija, as they chase three chickens, a rooster and goats around the squash plants. The faint sound of clanking pots, a gas burner and bubbling oil arises from the concrete kitchen, just a few steps down from the roof.

Fatima’s sister) runs into the 7-by-10-foot kitchen, checking on the boiling harira soup, and then scurries out to check on mutton tajine, a traditional Moroccan meal of seasonal vegetables and meat. This dish gets its name from the specifically shaped clay pot in which it is cooked, the tajine. The bottom of the pot resembles a plate with high edges, while the lid is cone-shaped with a hole at the top to release steam. Naima positioned the tajine to cook over an open flame, which she continues to keep ablaze with a worn bellow.

Harira, famous in Morocco, is a staple of “breakfast” because of the filling ingredients — tomatoes, lentils, chickpeas, pasta, oil and spices — that provide sustaining energy, according to the villagers. For a moment, Naima pauses from her scampering to start boiling pots of cinnamon- and-sugar-infused coffee and Moroccan mint tea, saturated with white sugar. Then she continues.

Also in the kitchen, packed with jars, pans and cooking utensils, Mina El Mouden (Naima’s niece) sits on the floor, struggling to stretch inelastic dough into 9-by-9-inch squares. For minutes, she presses her fingers into the dough, which spreads out, only to spring back. Yet, she handles it with patience until the dough is flattened to a
TOP LEFT: Khadija El Mouden milks the family cow just before sundown. The family used the milk for the cinnamon-infused black coffee.

TOP RIGHT: The women in the El Mouden family watch as Naima flattens the bread dough to make *aghrom*, traditional Berber bread made in a clay oven.

LEFT: Naima fans the flames under the tajine to keep the dish cooking properly and at the right temperature. Tajine is a traditional Moroccan dish named for the clay pot in which the food cooks.
thickness of a half-inch. She proceeds to cut the dough in half, and each half into thirds, making six rectangular pieces.

A skillet of bubbling oil sits on a metal grid attached to the gas tank, which feeds a flame started by a cigarette lighter. The sound of the gas whistles, as the hot oil crackles above. Mina places the strips of dough into the skillet to make Berber-style elephant ears.

Meanwhile, the little girls do their part by milking the family cow to have fresh milk for the coffee. From the inside of the house, you can hear the cow mooing, as the milk squirts into the blue plastic bucket.

The women are busy, because in an hour, when the sun has disappeared, they can finally have breakfast and eat and drink after a day of fasting. One of the five pillars of Islam is fasting, known as Siyam or Ramadan. For one month, the ninth month of the Islamic calendar, all Muslims over the age of puberty must observe Ramadan, which includes abstaining from food, beverages, sexual activity and obscenity between dawn and dusk.

The purpose of fasting is to draw closer to Allah as a personal act of worship. Muslims believe that fasting turns the heart from worldly pleasures and back to Allah. Muslims increase prayer, self-reflection and the amount of good deeds during this time. They also become more aware of the needs of the poor and of Allah’s generosity. Ramadan is also a time to build community with family and fellow Muslims.

The El Mouden family exemplifies this community building. Naima’s four sons (two of them stepsons) have returned to Tighza from their jobs in Marrakech to be with their family during Ramadan. Naima’s elderly mother also joins the feast. They all gather at one end of the 5-by-15-foot room, complete with a box, color satellite television, a wooden table six inches from the ground and brightly colored, mismatched tapestries. They wait in anticipation as Naima, her sister and Khadija begin to arrange the feast on the table. One by one, the joyful procession enters, each with a different item in hand.

First, the dates, a symbol of the prophet Muhammad and of good health. Then, freshly
picked, lime green figs, with sweet magenta interiors. Followed by platters of fried, crispy dough and wheels of *aghrrom*, all made within the last few hours. Miniature decorative tajines hold thick strawberry jam, strong-tasting olive oil and watered-down, extra-sweetened honey. As the family begins to feast, now that the sun has hidden itself, Naima brings in the last remaining items: coffee, mint tea and harira.

The family turns from the clamoring TV in the background and focuses on the food and family in front of them. Everyone slides closer to the table, to be within arm’s reach of the feast. Naima serves the harira, the most anticipated item on the menu, then the tea in small cups that resemble decorated shot glasses. Finally, she pours the coffee into similar glasses, mixing the cow’s milk in as she goes. The heat of the boiling beverages stings the fingertips, as Naima hands them to each family member.

It’s as if eating generates conversation and laughter among the three generations of El Moudens. To an outsider who doesn’t speak Tachelhit, the gossip and dialogue is incomprehensible, but their gestures and facial expressions are universal. They enjoy each other’s company. They laugh, roll their eyes and tease each other, all while devouring the food, even after their stomachs are full.

From the back of the room, Khadija pulls out a box stereo and presses “play.” Moroccan festival music booms through the speakers, and the girls begin to dance like Berbers. They tie scarves around their upper thighs, raise their arms at their elbows, then step-touch side to side while shaking their hips. The mothers and grandmother look upon them with pride and delight.

Within 20 minutes, no one can eat anymore. The dynamic has changed. The girls stop dancing. The laughter and chatter calm significantly. The focus returns to an Arabic soap opera on the television. One by one, the family reverts to leaning against the walls and resting their stretched stomachs.

Slowly, the mothers start to clean the mess and put the food away so it will not spoil. The men hold on to their last few moments of relaxation before washing and preparing for the 10-minute trek to the mosque for the traditional nighttime, congregational prayer.

Upon their return from the mosque, the process starts over with the second feast of the evening at 10 p.m. Many Muslims eat once more just before dawn. However, the growing trend in the village is to sleep through the last meal and wait to eat until sundown the next day, when they complete the cycle again.
Before the sun begins to think about rising each morning, Mohamed Idouasaadane’s booming voice ricochets off mountains and concrete houses to awaken the villagers. He reads the sacred text of the Qur’an into the mosque intercom, which then amplifies his words so those dedicated to saying their prayers will learn and join in the recitation of the words of Muhammad, the prophet. He repeats the process four more times each day, each time quoting a different passage from the Qur’an so that everyone has the opportunity to hear the book, especially those who cannot read it for themselves.

Though the times change based on the sun, there are always five prayers: dawn, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset and nightfall (about two hours after the sun sets). At these specific times, Muslims are required to first clean their hands, face, mouth, nose, head, feet and ears. Then, facing Makkah (Mecca), they pray and repeat text from the Qur’an, twice at dawn, four times at noon, four times in the mid-afternoon, three at sunset and four at nightfall. Each repetition is known as a rakah. In Islam, multiple forms of and rules for prayer exist, because Muhammad does not give specific guidelines in the Qur’an.

For men and women, prayer is slightly different. For example, women must completely cover themselves except for hands and faces, otherwise the prayer is invalid. It is also considered more modest when the women bow with hands on their knees, instead of outstretched arms. Men and women must pray in separate rooms, including inside the mosque. However, it is better for women to stay at home and pray, while the men should pray at the mosque.

When the imam calls the prayers in the village, especially in the morning, there is usually no sign that all villagers say their prayers at those designated times or even stop to say their prayers at all. The exception shows itself during Ramadan, which functions as a period of renewal of the body, mind and heart. In the evenings throughout Ramadan, around the time of the nightfall prayer, the men travel together to pray at the village mosque, and the women take more time during the day to pray. But one rarely sees this during the remaining 11 months of the year.

Prayer is just one aspect of Idouasaadane’s job as the village imam. In between times of prayer, Idouasaadane, 34, teaches children ages 5 to 12 at the mosque school, he visits families in need and he answers questions regarding Islam and interpretations of the Qur’an.

“The mosque signifies the practice of Islam,” he said through an interpreter. “You have a mosque in every village, small or big. You have a place for Muslims, for prayer, for teaching children and for interpreting and explaining the Qur’an to the villagers.”

Idouasaadane has been the village imam for eight years.

“I like Islam more than any other work or job. I like it because of Muhammad and Allah,” he said. Each year, the village pays him 6,000 dirhams ($750), which does not include an extra 8,400 dirhams ($1,050) per year for food. Finally, the government provides 10,000 dirhams ($1,250) to cover remaining expenses, such as clothing for his family.

Before becoming an imam, he studied Islam for 15 years, four at a Qur’nic school in Agadir.

“I like reading the Qur’an. There are a lot of good texts for the people. When the people practice Islam, it is good for Allah and Muhammad,” he said, explaining why he wanted to study Islam. “When I read the Qur’an, I believe it. Each text tells a story.”

He completes all of these obligations while observing his own practice of Islam and taking care of his wife and three children under 8 years old.
Fadma Ait Hasser, 64, waited her entire life to make the sacred pilgrimage to the Islamic holy land, Makkah (Mecca). This pilgrimage, of which most Muslims try to be a part, can be completed only once per year, during the Islamic month of Dul-Hajj. After her marriage as a teenager, she never left her village. But, in 2008, she finally had her chance to venture far from home, about 2,800 miles to the Saudi Arabian desert, where Makkah lies.

“Before I left, I thought about a lot of things: what it will be like, how it will be living with other people, because it was the first time I went anywhere by myself and left my family here,” said Ait Hasser. “But after I left, I met the others, and everything went well.”

A few years before her pilgrimage, Ait Hasser put her name on a government list to have the chance to go to Makkah. The Moroccan Ministry of Islamic Affairs limits the number of people who can receive Makkah passports each year to avoid the overpopulation during the Hajj. Each year, the government selects from the list one person per village to make the Hajj. In 2006, the government selected Ait Hasser.

In 2006, she started the Makkah passport process by submitting her name and paperwork to the Moroccan Ministry of Islamic Affairs. She waited two years, until 2008, for approval from the ministry. The Islamic minister then sent her the proper papers to obtain the physical Makkah passport. She returned them, along with 3,000 dirhams ($375) to cover all expenses including the passport, airfare, hotel, and food for one month. Her son Mohamed Bouzouhair, who lives in Marrakech with his wife and seven children, paid for her trip.

Upon receiving the passport, she began to physically and mentally prepare herself for the journey ahead. She packed clothes, sugar, oil and canned meat in her suitcase so she could cook while on the trip. Mentally, she did more of a soul cleansing, creating a blank slate and clearing away the clutter in her mind to ready herself for the holy experience.

“The psychological preparations, it’s as if you do something to a piece of paper. You clean it,” said Ait Hasser. “My heart and my mentality, I made them very white, like a white sheet of paper. It’s as if you clean something to make it very clear. It was cleaned well.”

After packing her luggage and purging her mind of bad thoughts and past mistakes, she was ready. In November 2008, she flew from Ouarzazate, Morocco, to Makkah, where she participated in the necessary stages of the Hajj. The stages, or rites, of the Hajj represent the beginnings of Islam, according to Muslims.

For the Hajj to be valid, Muslims must complete every rite. These include circling the Ka’bah (the three-story stone cube where Muslims believe Abraham prepared to sacrifice his son) seven times counterclockwise, walking back and forth seven times from Safa to Marwa (quarter-mile laps that represent the search for water by Hagar, the mother of Abraham’s son, Ishmael), drinking from the Zamzam well (the well that Hagar found), trekking five miles and camping in the Mina Valley, attending a vigil at the Plain of Arafat, throwing stones at three pillars that represent resistance to temptation and wrongdoing and celebrating with a three-day feast called Eid ul-Adha.

At the end of her trip, Ait Hasser did not want to return home because she loved Makkah so much. But as a reminder of her time in her holy land, she bought the traditional souvenirs of dates, Zamzam water, henna and jewelry to take back to her family. She purchased one white cotton scarf, with rusty red zigzag embroidery for herself.

“Each person likes to choose a lot of things, but the most important are dates and water. When you leave you take the dates and water to your family,” she said. “The Prophet Mohamed liked dates and this water. They’re good for your health.”

Ait Hasser said the experience significantly changed her life.

“Before I left, I did things that weren’t very good for myself, but after I left, all of that passed, and I forgot about everything that was bad,” said Ait Hasser. “[Now], I want to do all good things for people, to help people, to do good works and to be close to Allah. It’s like, when you go to a place [Makkah] to hold on to Allah and the Prophet. Therefore, there was a big difference before and after.”

Since she has made the pilgrimage, and therefore completed one of the pillars of Islam, she is now known as Hajjah, a symbolic title that replaces her name.

“People give great value to those who visit Makkah. It is a pleasure to know someone who has been [there],” said Hajjah Ait Hasser. “It’s the best thing in your life, to go to Makkah.”
From outside the crafted iron windowpanes of the two-story, concrete Berber home, you can hear echoes of all-female laughter and chatter. A cluster of free-roaming goats and chickens blockades the metal door. After a few taps on the door, a slender woman answers, a warm and friendly smile beaming across her young face.

In the next room, she joins her five sisters, relaxing from the heat of the midday, August air. As the dramatic Moroccan soap opera booms in the background, the women of the Oulamaalem family continue their conversation, resembling girls at a slumber party. The laid-back and homey atmosphere could put any visitor at ease.

Immediately, you notice something different about this family. The daughters, ranging in age from 16 to 30, hold themselves with confidence, and they can easily engage with outsiders, without fear or reservation. After speaking with them, you quickly discover why these women do not fit the mold of the other village women.

“Education is the base of everything,” said Jamila Oulamaalem, 22, in fluent French. “If there isn’t education, there isn’t life.”

Jamila is studying biology at a university in Marrakech, where her sister, Hasna, a 21-year-old, studies people’s rights. They do not want the same lives as women in the village.

“It’s very difficult for girls [to receive an education in Morocco] because the people always have the idea that girls must stay in the house and not leave or finish their studies, [the purpose for women] is only for marriage,” said Jamila, who does not want to get married in the near future.

She said the villagers think education is for boys, so the girls have difficulty completing their studies. However, she noticed that there is equality for boys and girls attending school in the city, making it easier to finish school. Therefore, both daughters decided to complete their education in Marrakech, rather than in the village.

“I finished in Marrakech, because I saw a difference between the people here and the people in Marrakech,” Jamila said. “The girls must leave to see the world, to have experiences. If they have a good job and a good education, they can educate their children and can help in the development of their country.”
Despite free education through the university level, the dropout rates continue to be high in Morocco, especially in rural regions. Many times, girls must stay home to help their mothers and do not finish primary school. The literacy rate for women in rural areas is 10 percent, compared with a national literacy rate of 55 percent (40 percent for women, 66 percent for men), according to the U.S. State Department.

The village has one primary school. Children who want to move forward with their education must pass an exam to go to secondary school, known as college. College, the American equivalent of junior high, lasts three years. Students from the village attending college must travel to Telouet (40 minutes by car or 2.5 hours walking).

Those who want to complete their schooling must take another exam to move on to high school, where they spend three years. Many students who want to continue their education past the primary level move to bigger cities, such as Marrakech or Ouarzazate. Education in cities is more developed and equal, in terms of gender and class, according to Hasna.

Education in Tighza is just starting to advance beyond the six years of primary school required to move on to secondary education. In February 2011, the minister of education in Telouet decided to add a preschool for children ages 3 and 4, taught by Nora Oulamaalem, 17.

Nora dropped out of secondary school at age 14 because she did not want to continue her own education. She wanted to help others. At that point, having more schooling than most of the women in the village, she decided to put her energy into teaching these women, ages 30 to 50.

“I took the initiative to teach women who didn’t have the opportunity to go to school,” Nora said through an interpreter. “I taught the women what happens during prayer because the women didn’t know how to pray and didn’t know how to read the Qur’an. I also taught them to write Arabic letters.”
LEFT: Nora Oulamaalem, 17, demonstrates an Arabic learning game for her preschool students. Nora gives the children a word in Arabic, and they must spell the word using cubes with Arabic script.

BELOW: Nora Oulamaalem teaches her preschool class in the building on the left. In her first year, she had 37 students.
After a few years, the minister of education moved Nora to the preschool position because she had not completed her studies and did not have governmental authorization to officially teach the older women.

Now, the local government pays her 1,200 dirhams per month ($150) to care for the young children. The preschool had just started in 2011, halfway through a typical academic year; thus, it was only open for four months. This academic year, preschool classes began in September and continue until May.

Because Nora is the first preschool teacher, she created her own curriculum, which includes learning letters and numbers in Arabic and French.

“The first thing I do when I start their study is read a little of the Qur’an. After, I give time for the children to play a little for them to be satisfied to study. Then, I start with letters and words, and how to put the letters together (in Arabic and French),” Nora said. “The 3-year-olds, they just listen and respond. But the 4-year-olds start to write the words.”

The oldest sister, Fatima, returns to the room with two shopping bags of puzzles and educational games. Nora rummages through the bags and begins pulling out 3-inch cubes, demonstrating the puzzle she created. Each cube face displays a different Arabic letter.

With her students, Nora writes a word in Arabic, and in response, the children find the corresponding letters to build the word. Through this game and other puzzles brought in by volunteer groups and tourists, the children get a jumpstart before primary school.

For four hours per day, six days each week, Nora plays the role of teacher and babysitter for 37 children. She said she takes responsibility for the children in and out of school. Many times, when a guardian is sick or when the parents forget to pick up their children, she must walk them home. Nora did not receive training for her pre-school position; however, she said her love of children makes her job easy.

Nora’s parents have supported her and her sisters throughout their schooling. Hasna said her experiences caused her thinking to differ from women’s ideas in the village, but her parents also played a part.

“My parents always encouraged us to finish our studies and to get a good education.”

— Jamila Oulamaalem

BELOW: Nora Oulamaalem illustrates the Arabic word game she created for her students. The children do not speak Arabic as their first language; therefore, they must learn it in school.

“My parents always encouraged us to finish our studies and to get a good education.”

— Jamila Oulamaalem
Zahra, mother of the six daughters, as well as two younger sons, believes that education is important for her children’s futures and their place in society. Zahra’s parents died when she was little, so she didn’t have the chance to attend school.

“My thoughts are different from other women in the village because I had a very difficult life, I worked very hard, and I did not want the same for my daughters,” Zahra said through an interpreter. “I wanted them to have a better situation.”

Jamila added that her father sees education as a priority because he worked from the time he was a young boy. Her father labored most of his life in the city, where he noticed the difference between those who received an education and those who did not. This observation contributed to his high opinion of education, particularly for his daughters.

Even with the new ideas of the Oulamaalem family in the village, Hasna and Jamila agree that the problem of education for women stems from their lack of knowledge of their rights.

“The women here don’t yet know their rights. They think that they are less than men. In the city, they know they have importance in society,” Jamila said. “The men here think they are superior to women. There is equality between men and women in the city. But here, they give importance to the men.”

Hasna continues to study human rights in hopes of changing the ideas of women and the situation for women in the village.

“Unfortunately, Moroccan men, not 100 percent, they think that women should be forbidden to study. Now, there is an increase in women getting higher-level jobs, and also in the government,” Hasna said. “There are women who have been victims of violence, and that’s why I study rights, to help and to change ideas.”

Unlike many in the village, the Oulamaalem family recognizes the importance of education as a means to a brighter future, specifically for women. They are looking to a time when they can set an example for younger women and when they can change the lives of Berber women for the better.
A rooster crows, interrupting the stiff silence of a dimly lighted, square, concrete room inside the village mosque. In the room sit 15 well-behaved students, ages 7 to 12, resting on benches made of hay.

The village imam, Mohamed Idouasaadane, speaks in his deep, gentle voice, instructing the patient children about the Qur’an, one page at a time.

Each day, the pupils spend five hours at the mosque school — two in the morning and three in the evening. During their time, the imam helps the children memorize the Qur’an and apply the passages to their lives.

To do this, he writes a passage in ink on a 1-by-3-foot polished wooden tablet, and the children copy the passage with ink on glossed wooden tablets the size of a journalist’s steno pad.

The school does not have the means to purchase larger panels of wood, so they must wash the panel after each use. The children write with ink made from a mixture of bad sheep’s wool and saffron heated over a flame for an hour.

For the older children, they memorize a different page each day, going in order of the Qur’an. The younger children spend one week memorizing one page.

"[The students learn] Islamic education: the rules of the Qur’an and how to read the Qur’an. If you read the Qur’an, there are rules, and you must respect those rules," Idouasaadane said through an interpreter, explaining that the Qur’an provides rites that must be obeyed.

Many of the children attend public school in between the hours of the mosque school to get a versatile education. Idouasaadane also said parents send their children to the mosque school to supplement the children’s public education, and so they can specifically study the Qur’an.

"[It is important for the children to learn the Qur’an] because it is a book from Allah and Muhammad," Idouasaadane said.
“It is also to continue Islam, because if the children don’t come here to read the Qur’an, it is possible that in 10 to 20 years no one will read the Qur’an.”

The imam’s 8-year-old son, Abderahim, has memorized 20 pages, which according to Idouasaadane, is more than most Muslims.

“Maybe by the time he is a teenager, he will finish memorizing the Qur’an,” the imam said.

In Morocco, King Mohamed VI has built many mosque schools and has funded the study of Islam, as well as the salaries of imams. He has also encouraged Moroccans to continue the Islamic faith. Because of a rise in modernization of the country, more people can easily follow Islam.

“The Qur’an is on the Internet. You can receive text messages to your phone with the Qur’an,” Idouasaadane said. “Before, you would find just one or two people who have truly studied the Qur’an, now everyone studies the fundamentals of Islam, and everyone knows the principles of the Qur’an well.”

TOP: Children use containers of homemade ink to help them write on wooden tablets during school.

ABOVE: A collection of the children’s writing tablets rests in a pile after class. The children copy passages from the Qur’an each day to help them memorize the book.
A wedding ceremony mixes modern and traditional and brings two families together.

The sugar-filled dough hits the round, blue-painted wooden table with a "whomp." Giggles and chatter of seven female family members echo off the concrete walls of the crammed 8-by-10-foot room as the whomping continues. The gallon-sized gas tank wheezes as the gas heats the green metal oven, the size of a 2-by-2-by-3-foot cabinet.

The women, sitting on rocks or foot-tall wooden stools, hunch over their tasks: one kneading, one mixing, one checking the oven. The one kneading slaps a handful of dough against the table and pounds it until flat. Using a knife, she cuts the dough into strips. The women swarm around the table and begin rolling the strips into foot-long snakes. Those who do not fit at the table scissor-snip the snakes into half-inch bits, which the women then space evenly on a metal pan.

Amid the crew of animated women making hundreds of cookies for a five-day Berber wedding ceremony, one 19-year-old rests to the side. The clatter is almost too much for Fatima El Qasemy, the shy teenager. Every so often, the other women joke, tease and laugh. In reaction, Fatima giggles softly and blushes in embarrassment. The remainder of the time, she keeps to herself, not saying much. Her blank stares and quiet demeanor indicate a sort of nervousness or fear.

She is the bride-to-be.

Fatima said she was happy about the marriage. But other stories were floating around the family. Though no one in her immediate family admitted it directly, another story came out through Fatima's British sister-in-law, Carolyn Logan.

Logan said that the marriage was in fact arranged by the men in the El Qasemy family (the father and two sons). The sons, Mohammed, 29, and Ahmed, 24, pushed the marriage because they were friends with Aziz and because the family approved of him as a suitable husband. Aziz is about twice the age of Fatima, although Fatima said he was in his 20s.

Logan also added that Aziz truly wanted to marry a 15-year-old girl from a nearby village, but because the legal age for marriage is 18, Aziz could not marry her. Immediately after being denied his first choice, Aziz proposed to marry Fatima. Her father and brothers told her that if she said no, her older sister, Fadma, 22, could not get married the following year.

Fatima never refuted these claims, but instead said she and Aziz were in love. Despite everything, Fatima chose to go through with the marriage, and the five-day ceremony that goes with it.

Days before out-of-town family and friends arrived in droves and before all the preparations began, Fatima and Aziz were legally married by the caid, or mayor, in Telouet, where they received their marriage papers and signed the big book documenting village marriage records. But, according to village tradition, the marriage is not official until the ceremony.

Traditionally, the ceremony lasts five days — three before the couple consummates the marriage and two after. Prior to the consummation, the bride and groom remain separated.
Day One

On the first day of the ceremony, the men and women on the bride’s side carry out separate activities. In the late afternoon, Fatima’s house buzzes with women cooking, cleaning and serving. Fatima’s father and two brothers are the only men permitted to have contact with the bride. So they, along with Fatima, and her mother and sister, begin to decorate the 6-by-20-foot concrete room, painted in robin’s egg blue, bubble gum pink and white.

At the far end of the room, the men drape a white linen cloth with dark green embroidery. This cloth, or the wedding linen, stretches the length of the back wall. Under the material, they add a firm foam cushion, 2 feet tall, that also fits snugly between the two walls. They drape matching linen over the cushion, adding decorative, mismatched Moroccan pillows at either end. Finally, with a more-is-better mentality, the men pin multicolored artificial flowers to the wall, along with glittery, gold, pop-out garland. Once finished, the men leave to prepare for the slaughter of the cow, while the women prepare to host the entire female population of the village that evening.

Some time passes and Fatima’s female aunts and cousins begin to arrive. The family members welcome Fatima into the room with loud chants and yodeling customary to Berber weddings. Fatima, dressed in a cream headscarf and a full-length, turquoise satin robe with gold trim and embroidered flowers, sits on the white linen cushion and prepares for the traditional henna ceremony. As her family crowds around the beautiful, delicate bride, the kitchen also bustles with the henna preparations.

Fatima Nakacha, a young girl from a neighboring village, mixes a packet of henna with water, olive oil and the juice of a lemon and a lime until it forms a gel-like texture, which resembles gray creamed spinach and smells of ink and pungent olive oil. The all-natural ingredients enhance the henna’s color upon application and are also good for the skin. After fully mixing the ingredients, Nakacha draws the contents into a syringe, made especially for henna application.

Nakacha, a veteran in henna design, was hired by the El Qasemy family to draw the henna on Fatima’s hands and feet, and provide the henna art for all women in the village later that evening. The tradition is for the bride to receive the henna first, followed by immediate female family members, close friends, then finally the remaining women in the village.

ABOVE: Bite-size cookies, dates and Moroccan mint tea cover the table. Families traditionally serve these items during the wedding celebrations.
Bride Fatima El Qasemy presents her final henna design. The women of the village celebrate the first day of the wedding ceremony by receiving temporary henna tattoos.

The family gathers around Fatima, rolling up her sleeves and pant legs. Her family chants Tachelhit love songs and yodels — a sound made by rapidly moving the tongue from left to right as a yell comes from the back of the throat — as Nakacha begins to draw elegant strokes of henna on Fatima's flawless tanned skin. With each sweeping stroke, Nakacha pumps the end of the syringe with her thumb. At first, the design looks like squiggles and chaotic lines. But soon, the lines transform into intricate floral patterns stretching from Fatima's fingertips to her upper wrists.

Nakacha continues the fluid moments for nearly two hours until Fatima's hands, wrists, feet and ankles are completely covered. While the mixture dries for about 30 minutes, a rusty orange ink stain sinks into the skin that lasts for a few weeks. Once the goopy substance fully dries on top of the skin and starts to crack, Fatima's family dips her hands and feet in water, gently rubbing off the mixture. The cleansing of the hands and feet reveals the final design on Fatima's skin. To add to the henna's longevity, the family coats the stained skin with a mixture of sugar and oil.

Once finished, Fatima continues to rest on the white linen cushion as Nakacha completes the henna tattoos on other family members and friends. More and more women begin to arrive to greet Fatima with chants, yodels and gifts. It is customary for all women to receive at least a spot of henna on their hands as a symbol of the marriage. The parade of guests remains until the early hours of the morning, all while the bride's mother and sister keep the guests fed with cookies, tajine, dates and mint tea.

While the women kick off the wedding with a henna celebration, the men have their own fun preparing for the main course of the feast. A few days prior, the El Qasemy men purchased a cow from the souk for 6,000 dirhams ($750). As a part of the ceremony, men from the village gather to watch another man slaughter the cow with a foot-long butcher knife, sharpened on a rock. The men treat this as a game, laughing as they tie up the cow, which struggles to get away. They rope the animal by its hooves, sending it violently to the ground. While a handful of men hold the cow down, the
Day Two

In the mid-afternoon, the village women in their best shiny, multicolored robes return to Fatima’s home in clusters. Fadma answers each pound on the bright blue metal door. Because the 8-by-20-foot room is already packed with chattering women taking up every open spot on the floor, new guests must squeeze their way into the 8-by-15-foot room nearby, which is nearly filled as well. But before sitting, they greet everyone individually with the traditional touch of the right hand, then touching the right hand to the heart saying, Salaam. La bas?, or “Hello. How are you?”

At least 60 pairs of shoes sit in two piles outside each doorway. The sound of chanting from the bigger room causes the volume of voices to rise in the smaller room. The women, who bring their female children of every age and male children 3 and younger, treat this as a social gathering, catching up with each other and the lives of their families. The volume continues to escalate as the women try to talk over each other. Meanwhile, the babies cry and children giggle with excitement.

Fadma, her mother and aunt race to and from the kitchen, preparing to feed the house full of guests. They have set up extra individual burners to brew enough sugar-filled mint tea. Once most of the women have arrived, Fadma, her mother and her aunt begin serving the six varieties of cookies prepared a few days in advance. On 12-inch silver platters, they stop at each guest, who then takes her share. Next, they bring a teapot and two dozen glass tea cups on similar platters, one for each room. There aren’t enough glasses to go around, so the women share.

Once everyone has been served, one village woman travels through each room, spraying every woman six times with bargain-priced perfume, smelling of pungent flowers and baby powder. Another woman follows, dabbing cinnamon onto every woman’s neck, using her fingers. Both symbolize good luck. The aroma spreads rapidly through the sauna-like room, making it difficult to breathe.

The family continues to serve the guests until they have all trickled out that evening.

Day Three

Today marks the final day for Fatima to live in her parents’ house. Fatima, in her unblemished beauty, wears a robe of white satin with silver embroidery, which complements the orange henna on her tan skin. Around her head is a traditional crimson scarf — one that does not cover her face.
— with gold coins dangling from the forehead. Her silky, black hair is kept in two braids, one draping over each shoulder and falling to her stomach. Fatima’s 10-by-8-foot bedroom has been arranged and redecorated in order to seat more guests. Her brothers also moved the wedding decorations from the main room into her room. Although the room is more cheerful and family and friends greet her all day, Fatima wears the same nervous and fearful look on her face. By nightfall, she will live in a new home, taking care of her husband’s family and helping his mother with the household chores.

As sunset approaches, Fatima’s immediate family spends a few moments with her. Her mother and sister have not spent much time with Fatima in the last few days because they were busy serving the constant stream of houseguests. They help to prepare Fatima’s shower, and then after, dress her in a full-length white robe, a scarlet veil that covers her face and fine sheep’s wool wrapped around her hands.

Traditionally, after the sun has set, the groom rides on a mule to the bride’s home, bringing a suitcase in which to pack her belongings. A procession of the groom’s family and friends follows him as they chant love songs in Tachelhit. From Fatima’s house, one can hear the distant chants and yodels, clapping of hands and the jingling of tambourines. The sounds amplify as Aziz draws closer. Fatima’s family gathers outside to watch. Finally, Aziz arrives. Fatima’s brothers take the suitcase into the house to pack some of her clothes. Aziz returns home with his procession.

Within a half-hour, Fatima is ready. Surrounded by family, she descends the exterior staircase of her house. At the bottom, her brother, Ahmed, waits for her on a mule, which they will ride to Aziz’s house, ten minutes away by foot. Traditionally, the bride’s brother dresses in a white kaftan with a white hat. He, then, is responsible for giving his sister away. As Ahmed and Fatima start the journey, a similar procession follows with chants, yodels, and claps. From behind come the cries of Fatima’s immediate family, who do not follow her to Aziz’s house.

The procession escorts Fatima down steep and rocky terrain, where no light is visible until reaching Aziz’s house. Upon arrival, Fatima climbs off the mule and ascends the stairs to her new home. Her brother, aunts and cousins walk behind into the house, and then finally into Fatima and Aziz’s bedroom. The family continues to chant, and other villagers sing along outside the window. The party eventually fizzles out, leaving the couple to consummate the marriage. One female family member must traditionally stay behind. She must wait for Fatima to bring out the bed sheet with a bloodstain to prove that Fatima was a virgin.

Meanwhile, another celebration has already begun. Fatima, 19, dressed in a full red veil, is carried to the mule on which her brother, Ahmed, 24, awaits to take her to her new husband’s home.
begun just a few minutes from Aziz’s house. The rest of the village gathers to watch the best female dancers and male musicians from the area. The villagers rest on boulders and jagged rocks in an open space, which resemble amphitheater seating. On a flat plot of land surrounded by the hill of rocks, the musicians have placed their handmade drums, assembled with wood and animal skin. As they pound the drums in rhythm, the dancers, dressed in shiny, multicolored robes and headscarves, step-touch in a circle around the drummers. The dancers also chant, with an occasional raspy yodel from one of the women. The ceremony continues for hours late into the night until all guests have returned home.

The Final Two Days
During the two days following the union of the bride and groom, friends and family of both sides unite, and celebrate as one. However, this was not the only wedding in the village at the time. Fatima and Aziz’s wedding was shared with the marriage of Aziz’s brother, also in his 30s, and his 18-year-old bride.
On the fourth day, both brides, who could pass as sisters, rest in Aziz’s room while villagers visit to bring congratulations. Wearing similar white robes, crimson headscarves and flashy gold bracelets and earrings, the young brides gladly welcome their guests, gossiping and making small talk. Both women have thin saffron lines in the shape of diamonds drawn from eyes to chin. The saffron signifies the transition from childhood to adulthood.

Fatima’s demeanor has changed within a few days. Now that much of the anticipation is over, along with her wedding night, it is almost as if she is relieved. And she now has a new sister who can relate to her situation.

The next day, the final day of the ceremony, both men and women of the village congregate to celebrate for the last time. The bride’s mother makes the traditional rice and butter dish at Fatima’s new house to symbolize the joining of families. On four 12-inch silver platters, she adds a mountain of puffy white rice about six inches high. She then flattens the center of the mountain peak with a ladle and pours a pool of melted butter. The vibrant orange butter seeps throughout the rice mountain, but because there is so much butter, half the pool remains in the crater. The majority of the guests dig into the rice with their fingers; however, there are a few spoons circulating around, which are shared among the remaining guests.

Life After the Wedding

After the ceremony ends and the guests return home, the El Qasemy family tries to return to their normal routine, but with one less child in the house. Fadma took on both her chores and Fatima’s old responsibilities, while recovering from three days without sleep because of the wedding preparations. Fatima’s parents go into a state of mourning, in which her father just sleeps and stays in the house and her mother carries on with chores, but with a melancholy attitude. They say they feel as if they lost a child, and the mother lost one of her helpers. They are happy for the couple.

But they miss her.
The cloudy summer sky shows through the open roof of the Riad Kasbah Oliver.
In September 2006, Carolyn Logan, then 34, climbed the High Atlas Mountains for the first time. By chance, she and her best friend chose the Atlas Panorama walking holiday with Exodus Travels, a company dedicated to exploring the little-known regions of the world. Little did Logan know that her decision to visit the Atlas Mountains would dramatically redirect her life.

On the third day of the tour, the group reached the villages of the Tighza Valley. She remembers meeting villagers, who seemed happy even though they had very little. But Logan noticed elements of their lives that could be improved without the threat of disrupting their culture. Standing on the terrace of a gite — a hotel-like accommodation for tourists visiting the village — and gazing at the star-filled sky, Logan said she had a “I need to change my life sort of moment.”

She hadn’t been happy with her job in England, and she said she wanted to do something useful with her life. The trek through the village had such an effect on her that upon her return to the UK, she contacted Exodus Travels, and eventually made contact with Andy McKee, Exodus walking guide and then the project coordinator for Baraka Community Partnerships (BCP) in Tighza.

Logan wanted to spend more time in the village to better communicate the needs of the people to Exodus and BCP, both of which aid the villagers through community service projects. These groups bring tourists to contribute to the Tighza economy, to educate the visitors on life in the region and to help in the development of the village. The groups work with the villagers, who must provide funds or workers.

For example, the villagers provided labor to lay piping and to construct a water tower, while the groups and travel companies raised the monetary funds to make it happen. Through working together, the villagers aid in their development, and are therefore taught to value what the groups give to them.

“Andy was very keen to have somebody who spoke English to do things here, because he said it was very difficult because of the language barrier to get anything done,” Logan said.

Also during this trip, Logan spent much of her time speaking (in French) to one villager in particular, then 24-year-old Mohamed El Qasemy. As the son of a respected village elder, El Qasemy is well known throughout the region. At the time of Logan’s visit, he worked in the gite and served as a tour guide for foreigners or groups visiting Tighza.
A few days into the trip, the group took a four-hour trek to Lake Tamda to camp. Logan suffered a bout of abdominal pains and wanted to stay behind, but her Exodus guide insisted that she not separate herself from the group. She carried on to the lake with the help of El Qasemy. During much of the hike, Logan shared with El Qasemy the problems she observed with Western culture.

Upon returning from the camping trip at the lake, El Qasemy and Logan sat outside the gite and talked through the evening. That night, El Qasemy said he would like to marry Logan. Originally, Logan didn’t believe him because she said all Moroccans do that.

The next day, the group left the village, and Logan recalls how upset El Qasemy seemed because they were leaving. She said she would write, not realizing that villagers cannot read French. Logan wrote a few letters, but never received a response. She decided to go back to Tighza.

“I thought it was worth coming back to see what could be done in the villages, because I just wanted to do something useful and not think, ‘What else could I have done with my life?’”

A few months after her first trip, she returned to Morocco, spending one month traveling through villages in Tighza to observe the lifestyles and culture of the people. She spent four days with El Qasemy and his family, sharing a room with his mother and two sisters.

Elsewhere, Logan stayed in the homes of villagers, sparking her idea for homestays, a program in which visitors spend one or more nights in a local host family’s house. The visitors get to more thoroughly experience the culture from the perspective of an insider. She noticed online that most homestays were specifically for students and not for families on vacation.

“I thought it was a possibility for [the villagers] to get an income from tourism basically, but not the normal sort of tourism,” Logan said. “I saw it as a cultural experience that people coming to somewhere like this could have, as opposed to staying in a gite, where you really don’t have very much to do with the people.”

Logan made several trips between the United Kingdom and Tighza from September to March, when she sold her home in England moved to the village. Each time she visited, she brought clothes and toys for the villagers and their children. Her friends and family in the UK started donating used items, which Logan brought with her.

Once permanently in Tighza, Logan began her homestays business of bringing tourists in to stay in the homes of villagers. She also started to spend all of her time with El Qasemy. During this time, she discovered El Qasemy was serious about his original marriage proposal.

“I did find out from there, that most Moroccans, from the first time they meet you, if they’re not married, they ask if you want to marry them,” Logan said. “They just ask somebody if they want to marry them, or their mother asks the family if the girl wants to marry her son. If the girl says yes, the marriage goes ahead. If the girl says no, then they go for somebody else.”

The marriage arrangements for Logan and El Qasemy started in April 2007. Logan had many reasons for saying yes. She said El Qasemy lavished attention on her and made her feel important. She added that she was getting older and wanted to have children.

“You can’t guarantee that you’re going to meet somebody else when you’re in your mid- to late 30s, because it takes time to build up relationships with people, and then it’s a risk if you have children,” Logan said. “It was lots of different factors, but I was quite sure he was genuine.”

The process to complete all bureaucratic documentation for the marriage was much more complicated than she had expected. For one month, the couple traveled back and forth from the village to major cities throughout the country, Rabat, Casablanca, Ouarzazate and Telouet. The journeys to Rabat and Casablanca each take more than eight hours of travel one way.

At each government office, embassy, or consulate the couple visited, officials brought up different or new paperwork they needed. Logan said she could not find a comprehensive list of marriage documents needed anywhere on the Internet, so there were always papers missing.

“It was a total nightmare. I started writing a little book called, ‘How to marry a Moroccan, but I suggest you don’t,’ because it’s so complicated.” — Carolyn Logan

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“It was a total nightmare. I started writing a little book called, ‘How to marry a Moroccan, but I suggest you don’t,’ because it’s so complicated,” Logan said. “It’s not an easy process; I wouldn’t recommend it to anybody. It’s too difficult.”

After finally completing the necessary papers, Logan and El Qasemy were officially married by law. According to the Moroccan government, the couple receives the marriage license in a solicitor’s office, where they present papers and sign a register with a witness present. Then, the couple celebrates with a traditional ceremony. In Berber culture, the couple finalizes the marriage through the ceremony.
Logan participated in the traditional Berber ceremony, although she said she had no idea what to do. She had never attended a Berber wedding, so one of El Qasemy’s sisters led her around. She couldn’t speak Tachelhit, and hardly anyone spoke French. But, she said she had no expectations because she had never experienced anything like it.

After the wedding, Logan and El Qasemy shared a room in El Qasemy’s parents’ house for nearly three years. While living in a 8-by-10-foot room, Logan began to coordinate with Exodus Travels to bring in the first volunteer group in March 2008. The volunteers worked on the village school alongside the villagers. Because of the success of the trip, Exodus decided to organize for another volunteer group, and BCP set up a partnership with the village.

The partnership with BCP and volunteer groups triggered the idea for village improvement projects. “Because [McKee] loves the village so much, and he’s been coming here for so long, that’s where the projects really started,” Logan said. “And I came in, and it just snowballed into ‘I can do this, and I can do that.’ People came up with ideas, and the village saw that things were happening, and they would come up with ideas.”

El Qasemy serves as the chief of village projects, one of the 12 chief positions in the Tighza Village Association. Because of his lifelong connection to the villagers, he serves as their voice. He communicates these needs to Logan, who also witnesses and responds to problems in the village. Logan then relays the message to BCP and Exodus.

Since the beginning of the projects, the village has seen improvement and development. The groups helped to build restroom areas for boys and girls at the village school. They have set up medical clinics for villagers who do not have easy access to doctors. The two biggest projects are a village water tower and a village hammam, a public bathhouse that functions like a sauna. The water tower pumps spring water from the mountains into cold-water taps in nearly 30 homes.

Construction of the hammam started in May 2011, when an Exodus volunteer group helped villagers clear the land for the foundation. Thanks to monetary donations, the villagers had the means necessary to begin building the structure in August 2011. Another volunteer group helped construction in September. The village plans to open the hammam in April 2012. The hammam will provide employment for local women, to help them have financial independence.

Along with the coordination of volunteer groups and homestays, in 2008, Logan and El Qasemy began construction of the Riad Kasbah Oliver, which now dually functions as their home and a guesthouse for tourists.

El Qasemy had to file official paperwork to build a house in the village because only villagers can get land. Logan successfully fought to have her name on the documents, because she provided the funds for the building. Designing the kasbah herself, Logan used local contractors, carpenters and stone crafters to build the energy-efficient structure.

The riad kasbah is energy efficient because of its strategically placed windows to allow for the optimum amount of natural light and for a cross draft in each room, and the design materials allow the kasbah to retain heat in the winter.

Logan designed the building as a combination of a riad, a kasbah and a Berber house with interior and exterior windows and square turrets. She wanted the kasbah to blend in with the other houses in the village, so she kept the traditional look. A riad, a Moroccan hotel or home, has a central courtyard that allows entrance to each
was also supposed to start as soon as I got here, but it didn’t start the first year, because the builder was building somebody else’s house. Then, in the second year, he didn’t turn up for 252 days of that year. So, the main builder was virtually never on site. And it was all down to the laborers doing it.”

As the construction began, Logan became pregnant with their son Oliver, born in February 2009. Logan spent the end of her pregnancy in England, leaving the kasbah construction to El Qasemy. Since the birth of Oliver, she spends half of the year in England and the other half in Morocco, continuing to coordinate homestays throughout the year.

Logan and El Qasemy moved into the kasbah three years later, in March 2011. Although minor construction continues — the stone walkway, the rooftop terrace and furnishing of the rooms — tourists now can stay in one of the four rooms. A stay at the kasbah includes traditional Moroccan meals and tours through the village, where they can meet villagers and spend time in their homes.

The kasbah has provided employment opportunities for villagers, including construction workers, mule drivers and women who help Logan cook for guests and clean the kasbah. Logan also encourages visitors to purchase handmade jewelry and tapestries from local women. If tourists opt for a homestay, the family receives payment.

In 2011, Logan hired a housekeeper, Mina, a 24-year-old woman native to the village studying room. A kasbah, a fortified North African home, resembles a castle, with a square turret on top of each corner of the building. Berber houses consist of stone and earth walls and flat roofs. These houses have multiple levels, with concrete interiors and long and narrow salons.

The kasbah took more than three years to build because of what Logan calls “Moroccan time.” She said westerners and Moroccans value time differently. Westerners have deadlines and plans, whereas, Moroccans have laidback attitudes and no set schedule, according to Logan.

“As a westerner, you find it hugely frustrating for everything. When I started building the kasbah, I was told it would take a year, but it’s taken three and a half years to build,” Logan said. “[Construction]
business and management in Marrakech. Mina — who is fluent in Tachelhit, Arabic and French — remained for the summer to help Logan with her workload.

Although Logan had help for a few months, the stress of managing a business, coordinating with travel companies and tourists, finishing and maintaining the kasbah and raising a toddler continues to weigh on her. The villagers also rely on her for basic first aid and medical treatment because the closest doctor is 45 minutes away by car.

She said she hasn't fully adapted to the cultural differences, and oftentimes, she feels isolated from the village because she does not speak the same language and because she doesn't have many friends. El Qasemy spends so much of his time running errands, managing village projects, visiting his family and communicating with villagers, that he sees his wife and child in short intervals.

Despite the strain on Logan and El Qasemy, they witnessed much success in terms of village development and sustainable tourism. Visitors to the kasbah expressed their enjoyment with the unique experience Logan’s business offers. Villagers have received medical treatment for serious conditions such as cataracts and dental abscesses. Women have new opportunities to have financial independence. The people of the village have shared responsibility in the progression and improvement of Tighza. And all of this because of one initial decision to trek through the mountains.
On her first trip to the village, Cathy Pook saw a strange sight. A couple of village children were leading 12-year-old Fatima Oulkadi because she could not see. Pook's curiosity led her to action. She, along with two other members of the Exodus walking tour, sent for Fatima's father to inquire about the girl's condition. After the father spoke with them about the problem, he asked Cathy for help.

Upon visiting the doctor, Fatima discovered she needed an operation. The cataracts in Fatima's eyes made it impossible for her to see clearly, especially in the intense sunlight of the valley. At this point in her life, Fatima could not attend school, and spending time in the sun was too painful for her. Pook, a native from England, collected some donations from other members of her group for the operation, and she supplied the remaining funds. Pook said she was in a position to help.

"I think it's a bit in my personality. I think it's also her being a girl. In the mountains, she could've just been passed on from family to family," said Pook, now 61. "Because of her eyesight, she was a liability and couldn't go out on her own. Even to have a husband would have been difficult because she couldn't do anything."

A few months later, Fatima received the first of two operations (one for each eye) that changed her life. Before the operations in Ouarzazate, a two-hour drive from Tighza, she rarely left the house — a dimly lighted, split-story structure so old the walls are crumbling. Most days she stayed home and helped her mother clean, because she said she could not do much else.

"Sometimes I walked until I fell, because I couldn't see well," Fatima said. "Before [the operations], I couldn't read letters."

After both operations, she said that everything became clear to her, including the faces of other villagers and her family. One other person became unmistakable to Fatima. It was Pook. As soon as Fatima found out that Pook provided for her operations, Pook said, Fatima would follow her around the village every time she visited. Pook has visited the village seven times since her first trip.

"Whenever Fatima sees me, ever since [the operations], she's always kissing my hand and holding my hand, or carrying my bag or walking along with me," Pook said.

When Pook travels to Tighza one to three times per year to see Logan and Fatima, she brings clothes for the five children in Fatima's family and a hamper of food filled with items such as jam, sugar and flour. Pook stopped providing money for the family because she said Fatima's father, Mohamed Oulkadi, spent it on himself.

Because the Oulkadi family feels indebted to Pook, Pook has an influence in the lives and futures of the children, specifically Fatima's. At one point, Pook learned through floating rumors in the village that Oulkadi wanted to send Fatima to Rabat, Morocco's capital, to work as a maid. Also, at this time, Fatima was not attending school. That prompted Pook to threaten to stop supporting the family. Fatima immediately returned to school, and she continues to remain in the village. Most recently, Pook heard that Fatima's parents are searching...
for a husband for her. In order to keep Fatima in school for another few years and to prevent a young marriage, Pook is offering a dowry for the family. Pook wants Fatima to maintain the freedom that she said the operations gave to her.

"After so many years of knowing her and watching her grow up, and go from a disabled child to a girl with a normal, healthy life. And that her family was willing to send her to Rabat earlier this year, I just wondered if I offered, they’d think twice," Pook said. “They choose the husband, and I can’t interfere too much, but if I could gently sway, and let them hold off."

Now in her third year of schooling, Fatima said she can read and write well. In her gratitude, she continued to repeat, “It’s not like before.” The operations allowed Fatima to dream about a new future, a successful future. When she finishes her studies, she wants to visit Pook and live in England.

“It was like I was in a black box. Now, everything is good,” Fatima said. “I want to be a doctor. I want to help my family and buy a big house for them. I want to also aid others who need help.”

TOP: Ali Oulkadi, 7, peeks through a door in his home. Eye problems, such as cataracts and detached retinas, runs in the Oulkadi Family.

ABOVE: Khadija Oulkadi, 3, stands with her brother Ali, 7, as their mother Touda El Glaoui, 43, watches.
Living in Tighza as both an outsider and a photographer in an unfamiliar country was challenging due to a strong cultural divide between Americans and Berbers.

Instilling a sense of trust within the people I photographed took time and honesty, as well as a genuine desire to understand this foreign land.

After meeting different members of the village, I was able to form relationships with certain people who allowed me to photograph them on a regular basis. While this was certainly not typical, those who gave me permission to photograph them were comfortable enough to allow me to take intimate portraits. The close proximity to these individuals provides outsiders with the opportunity to study their faces and get an essence of their personalities.

Although I have encountered individuals in different countries who have declined my requests to photograph them, I have never been refused on such a large scale as in Tighza. This obstacle was a hard adjustment (although I anticipated it); however, the difficulty of the task made each successful relationship that much more rewarding. This experience tested my ability to connect with my photographic subjects on a deeper level, and helped me to gain a better understanding of values and boundaries in non-Westernized countries.

These portraits are reminders of the differences that distinguish us from one another, but more importantly the similarities that will always prove to unite us on a more profound level.
Rachel Ferchak, journalist

Rachel Ferchak is a senior in the Honors Tutorial College and E.W. Scripps School of Journalism at Ohio University, studying journalism and French. After graduation, she plans to do international mission work. She hopes to combine her French and journalism skills and love of Jesus, travel, people and cultures to have an impact on the lives of those around the world.

Kim Hackman, photographer

Kim Hackman is a senior in the School of Visual Communication at Ohio University, studying photojournalism and French. After graduation, she hopes to work on personal photography projects that allow her to document cultures and people in an international setting. She is looking to create meaningful pieces, such as profiles and documentaries, that will give her the opportunity to incorporate her interests in photography and French.

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