Ancienne Médina

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Prof. Roger Diener Prof. Marcel Meili

Bart Lootsma Emanuel Christ Simon Hartmann Christina Holona

Lorenz Bürgi Bhavana Hameed

SS 2005

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Ancienne Médina

Casablanca

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Surface

Over the last two centuries the medina of Casablanca has acquired layers of transformations, to become one homogeneous dense mass. Today, sitting at the very radial centre of a fast growing city this dense fabric seems to be locked inside its walls neglected and almost forgotten. Is the medina with its 70,000 inhabitants still growing or is it on its pathway of fermentation?

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Surface

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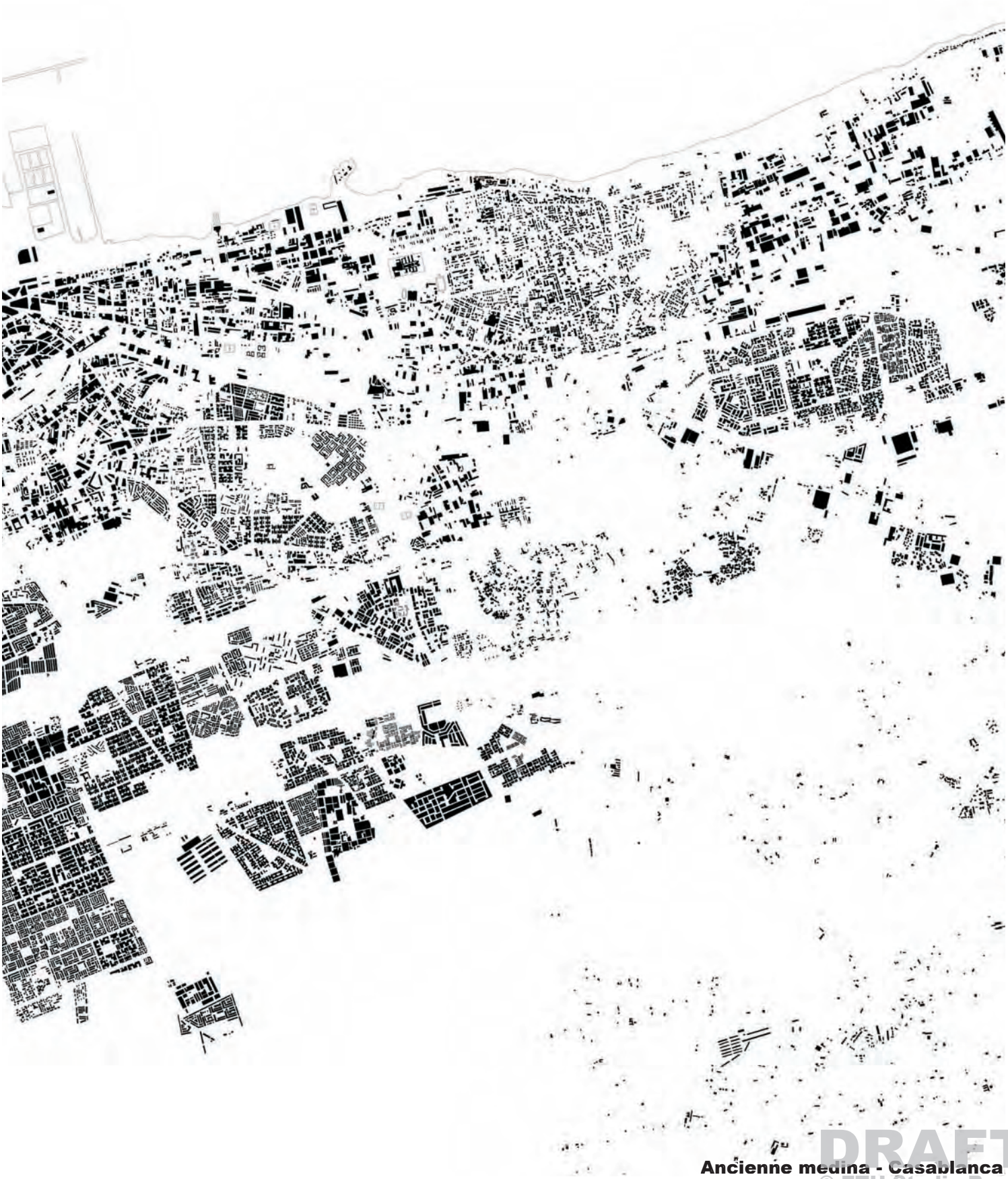

Ancienne medina - Casablanca

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Ancienne Médina 1914

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Ancienne Médina

On a pathway of fermentation

Is the medina of Casablanca today a place of no particular note?

This dense city fabric does not carry with it the medieval charm that other medinas boast about. The story of this medina contrasts with the medinas of Fès or Marrakech in Morocco. Has it had one specific way of life or several? Does the medina of Casablanca try to achieve the classical and medieval title and merge with other Arab cities? Or does it try to reach out and join the pioneering new city that sprung up rapidly outside its walls? Where does the medina of Casablanca fit?

In our research we try to understand how and why the city took the form it did. This task involved the study of the growth pattern inside the medina and its effects on the life of the people. We briefly look into the history , to understand the ethnic and cultural changes that it has undergone to generate a particular behavioral pattern. In order to achieve this it might be necessary to look at the problem like a biologist. A biologist studies the cell to understand the whole animal. The cells of different organisms are more similar to each other than the organism itself. We try to zoom into a single cell/ dwelling of this medina. Study the transformations and growth patterns for this individual cell and the socio-ethnic and economical factors governing its transformations. What we arrive at may or may not be applied for the medina as a whole. But it gives a better understanding of what the medina is built up of.

The city of Casablanca, the modern metropolis sprang up so rapidly immediately outside the walls of the medina. Today the city stretches over thousands of acres all built over a span of 60 years. Over this period of time lots of urban development plans were being drawn up for Casablanca. But surprisingly none materialised inside the walls of the medina. Does that mean that since the last fifty years or more the medina has been neglected and left to stagnate?

An aerial image of the medina of Casablanca from 1914 served quite precise as our road map while we were doing our research in the year 2005. The roads, parks and borders of this medina haven't changed very much since then. In fact from a birds eye view it appears that the medina has stood stagnant ever since the city began to develop outside its walls. But zooming in closer, you start seeing how dynamic it actually is.

Outside the old city walls the nouvelle medina, the European quarter and the city edges are going through a re-structuring process as well. Is the medina part of an over all city transformation or is it left out from the new city?

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Zoning by character

The zoning of the medina helps to orient better within the old city. There exists different typology of built forms within the medina, that owes it existence to various factors in history .The differences in the character of different parts in the medina allows a marking of five zones. The conditions of the houses, the density of the streets , the particular type of transformations and reconstruction that various parts have undergone and the general quality of lifestyle were the deciding criteria to zone the medina by character.

zoning by character

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Different areas of ancienne médina

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Local area

The local area is the newest built part of old medina. It occupies the once Mellah (Jewish quarter) and the Tnaker area. It is crowded and alive with street vendors and local markets. Though the residential streets are narrow and dirty and some houses are in bad condition. In this area water and electricity connectivity is not a luxury that every house enjoys. In fact most of them depend on public fountains for water.

French area

The French area was built around the time Casablanca became part of the French protectorate. This area reflects the European influence in the medina more profound than other zones. The streets are less dense, and they have large boulevards and green parks that are not otherwise part of a typical Islamic fabric. The houses are better equipped than other parts of the medina but have less of the Islamic character. It is also the most white part of Casablanca.

Silent area

This area is more a transition between the north, south, east and west zones. Here there is now a mixture of the middle class community of the medina residing together .It is a pure residential zone with no commercial activity and belongs to the oldest part of the medina. Some of the houses here are Spanish and Portuguese built but has long since been occupied by the Muslims.

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Local area

French area

Silent area

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Tourist area

The tourist area borders the European quarter outside the medina where most hotels (incl. the Hyatt) of Casablanca are. This area distinguishes itself with a newly formed commercial band. Lines of clothes, craft- and souvenir shops gives the area a lively face and a high density of jobs. It has evolved into a tourist market the last few years. Though the upper layer still continues to be residences. These residences are congested and have multiple families living in single houses.

Harbour area

The harbour area is the oldest part of the medina and it's next to the harbour. It shows signs of being the richest part of old medina with nice bourgeois houses. It was the location of all the embassies, consulates and agencies of all the commercial enterprises. There's also a Spanish church, a school and some confined hotels. The streets aren't as dense as other parts of old medina and some places have vehicular access. The area even locates two small parks.

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Tourist area

Harbour area

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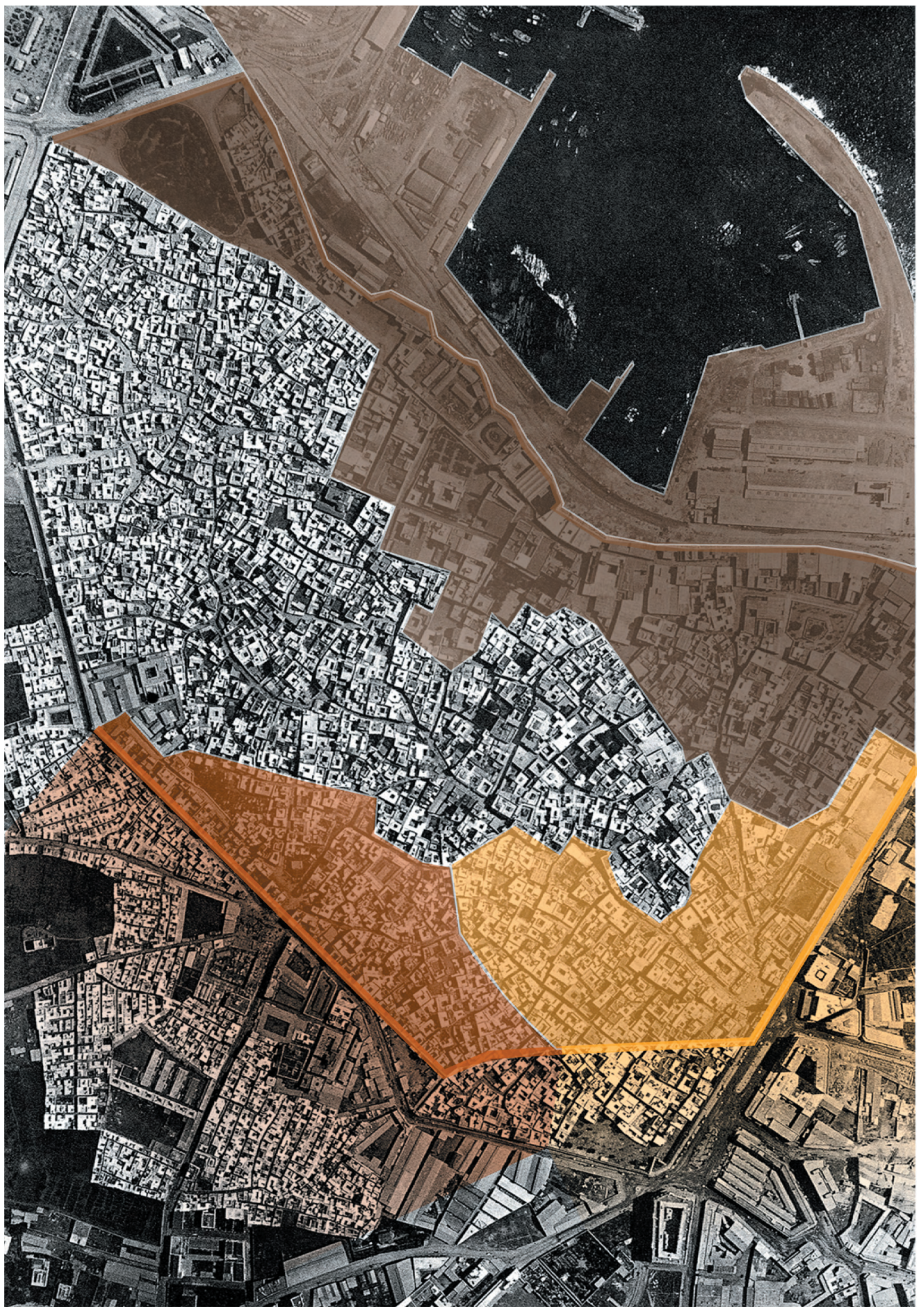
Zoning by border

What is the physical connection between the new city and old medina? The influence of the new city is quite strongly felt at the borders of the medina. Certain transformations which have occurred are due to a direct influence of the city outside. This observation leads to another separation into three different borders: a tourist border, a harbour border and a market border.



Zoning by border

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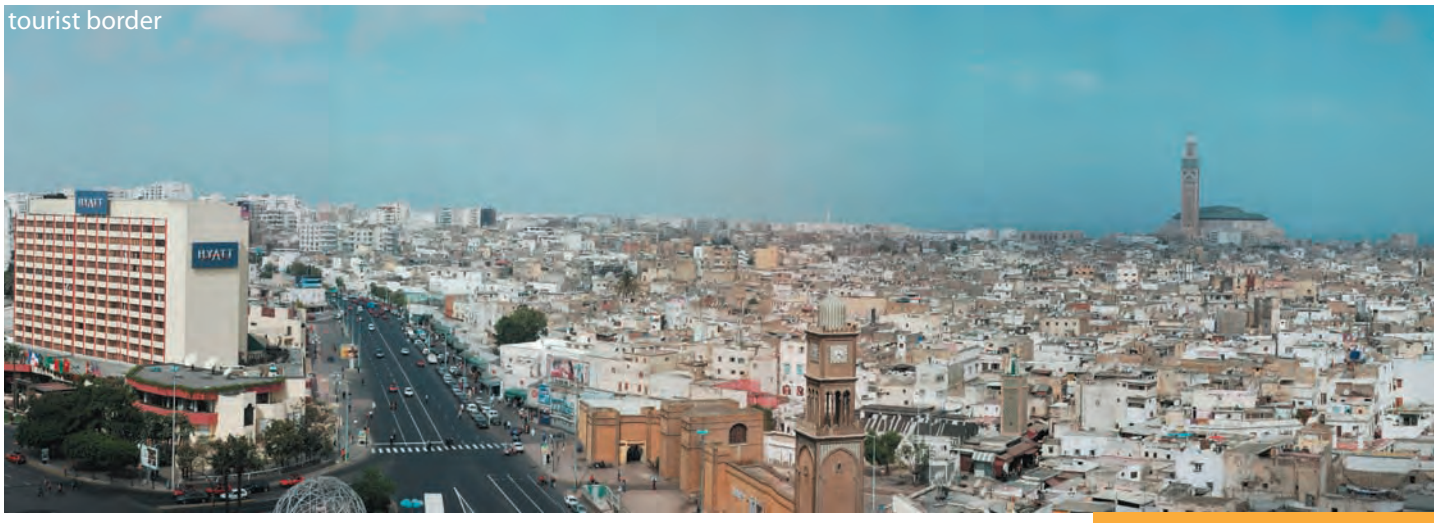
harbour border

tourist border



market border

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Harbour border

This is probably the richest border of the medina. The Arabs and the French once occupied these parts and they formed the city centre located close to an active port. There are big parks , wide roads and several guest houses in this area which indicates how it still serves as a gateway to the city from the port .There has been less pressure on the medina from the city outside in this area, and hence this border remains free of many transitions that other parts of the medina went through.

Tourist border

The south edge of the medina is where the new city starts. Hence this border is the gateway to the médina from the city. Here the medina has realised its commercial potential and hence the streets in this border have transformed to a tourist market. Shops, small cafes and tourist inns have sprung up in different corners. This border is the most crowded and the hub of all activity within the walls. Some part of this side of the médina was acquired by the city in the late seventies.

Market border

The western border of the medina is unaffected by the harbour or the new city. The medina on this border has spilt outside its walls. It has souqs and dense housing units dating back about seventy years right outside the walls. The markets continue inside the medina and the city congestion outside is felt inside as well. This border is mostly residential with local commercial activities.

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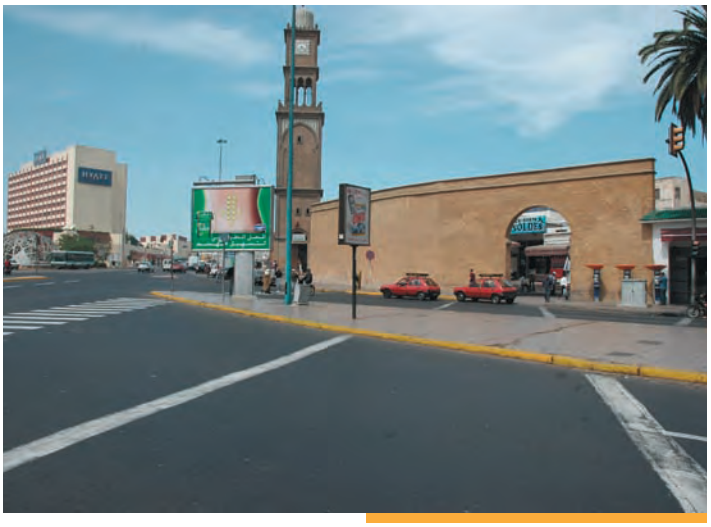
Harbour border

Touristic border



Market border

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Transformation

The medina of Casablanca is younger to other medinas in Morocco. The oldest pat of this medina is only two centuries old. And within this span of time it had to transform itself to accommodate several cultures. These various layers have now grown into a single homogeneous fabric, going through a densification process.

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History

-The historians argue if Anfa was founded by the Romans or by the Berbers.

-1068: Youssef Ibn Tachfin conquered Anfa
-XIIe century: the geographer Al Idrissi described Anfa as a harbour with an active commerce
-XIIIe to XVe century: Anfa is one of the main places where the Almohades and the Mérindas and later the Mérindas and Ouattasides fight against each other. At the end of this dynasty Anfa becomes independent and forms a little republic of pirates.
-1468: Portugal decides to attack Anfa. Afterwards it stays inhabited by the Portuguese for three centuries.

-1770: Sultan Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdullha (1757-1790) decides to reconstruct the city to prevent the landing of the Portuguese. Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdullha builds mosques, medrassas and hamams.
-1794: La ville becomes the residence of the governor of the province of Chouia under the name of Dar el-Beida, the white house.
-1830: Sultan Mouley Abderraham (1822-1895) opens the harbour of Dar el-Beida to European commerce
-1894: Under the regency of Sultan Moulay Hassan 1st the city reaches 20000 inhabitants, but the absence of a harbour hinders real development of commerce.
-1906: The Algerian conference gives to France the right to renovate and extend the harbour of Dar el-Beida
-1907: Serious incidents after the one Algerian-Moroccan confines gives the French the right to military intervention in Morocco.

-1912: Morocco comes under French protectorate
-1912: Very fast after the occupation of the last free space in the ancienne médina the city starts to grow outside the city wall.
-1916: Le plan Prost – frenetic speculations and uncontrolled constructions outside ancienne médina leads to anarchic occupation of ground, that ends up to be corrected with the plan Prost
- The European and local bourgeoisie gradually left the ancienne medina. The empty houses get occupied, and divided, one apartments host often many families, floors are added on and extentions are build in the yards and on the terrace. The area becomes proletary.
- After the second world war there's an important emigration of jews to the USA, to Europe and the new founded state of Israel in Palestine.
-1956: Independence Morocco

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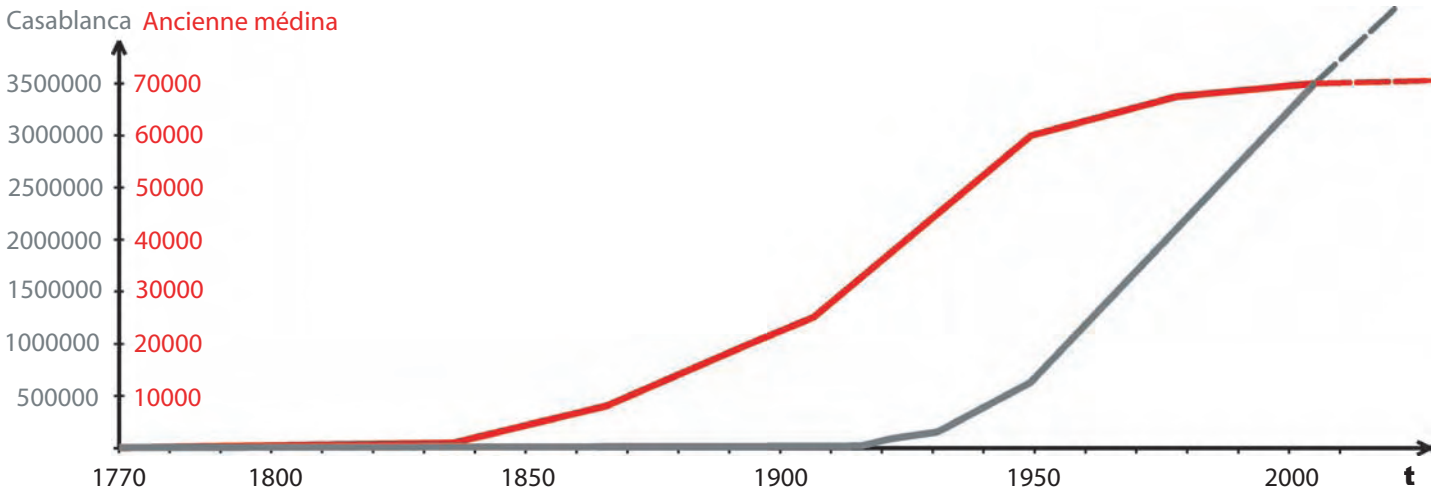
1910

2005

habitants



Demographic development

-1468 – 1770: 0 habitants
-1836: 700 habitants
-1866: 8000 habitants
-1894: 20000 habitants
-1907: 25000 habitants
-1916: 59000 habitants
-1921: 97000 habitants
-1931: 160000 habitants
-1949: 640000 habitants (60000 habitants inside old medina)
-2005: 3500000 habitants (70000 habitants inside old medina)

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Transformation **1910 - 2005**

Place du commerce

1912

2005

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Port de la marine

1910

2005

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Bab Marrakech

1910

2005

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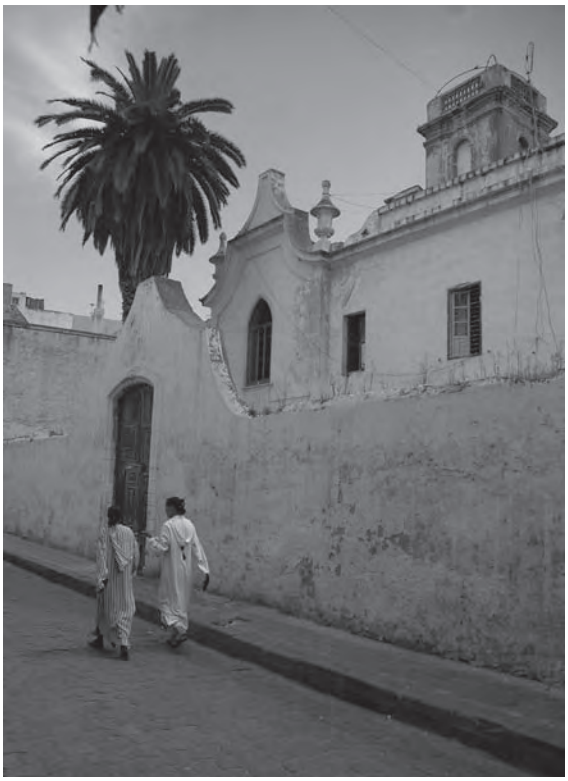
Spanish church

1910

Port de la marine

1910



2005

2005

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Towards homogeneity

In the beginning of the twentieth century, the medina constituted mainly of three areas. The Arab medina, the Mellah (the Jewish quarter) and the Tnaker .The main built area of the medina was concentrated at the southern side where the Arabs and the Jews lived. The Tnaker area was more of a residual space, which was occupied by the poorer community of both the Muslims and the Jews.

There was a clear distinction between the areas of the two communities. There were a lot of regulations imposed on the Jews. For example, the Jews were not allowed to build their houses or synagogues higher than the Muslim houses or mosques. They had very poor living conditions. They lived in one storey houses built of stone and straw. Around 1910 onwards the Jews started to move outside the medina and the Muslims took over these empty houses and rebuilt over them.

As the population increased, the medina started to extend towards the Tnaker area. By the year of 1915 the entire walled city was packed with a dense city fabric.

Construction in stone

Huts made of reed

Mixed construction in stone and reed

1895

1900

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Tnaker c. 1910

Mellah c. 1912

1910

1915 - 2005

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The Arabic city structure

The city structure of this medina resembles other medinas of the Arab world. Narrow and sinuous streets of varying widths, small open spaces but not really places and numerous blind alleys are common features of this medina as well.
The main street network followed the basic rule - The main thoroughfares were integrated into the souks, secondary lanes into the residential quarters and the dead end alleys into the cluster of private houses to which they give access.
The sequence corresponded to a well established hierarchy, and is punctuated by gates or thresholds that indicate the transition and announces a change in social behaviour.

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Casablanaca

Fès

Streets of ancienne médina, Casablanca

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Transformation

Even though the medina of Casablanca follows the same city structure of other Arab medinas, it contrasts in the language of construction. There is no monolithic language followed in this medina. It has had more than just one way of life and unlike other medinas the process of growing does not follow one single pattern. There are no strong construction regulations that are followed. The government ignores most of the illegal extensions that happen in the medina, unless it were to cause any local disputes.

Casablanca

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Marrakech

Fès

Ghardaia, Algeria

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Densification

Under the French protectorate, after the last free space in the medina was occupied, the city started to grow outside the walls. The Europeans and local bourgeoisie moved to the new city and the proletariat occupied the medina. As the families multiplied, single houses were divided to multiple flats, new floors were built and extensions were added. A process of densification began.

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Cluster Jama el souk

There is a well established networking of the public, semi public and private zones within the structure of the medina.We zoom in to a single cluster to study this increasing degree of privacy that occurs from the street level.

This particular cluster belongs to the tourist zone of the medina. A lot of transformations interms of commercial activity has occured in this area. The relationship of the houses to the streets have now been completely rearranged.

These are examples of different types of streets within the cluster, and the kind of activity that follows throughout the day.

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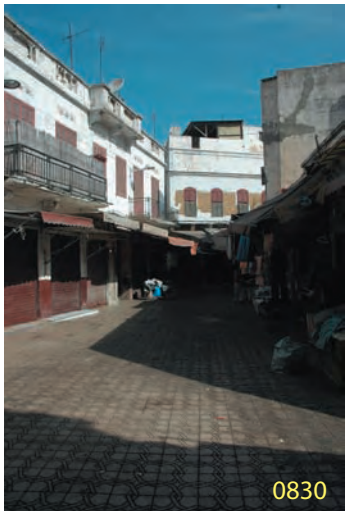

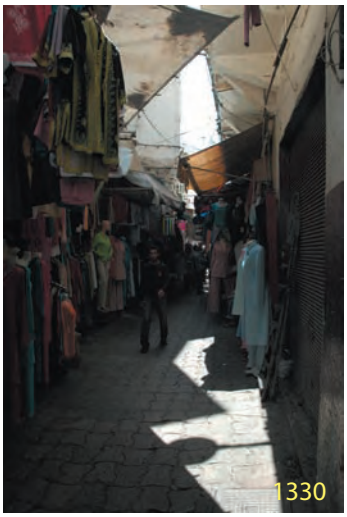

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Commercial layer

Every street facing house has been converted to accomadate a shop on the ground floor.Thus the main thoroughfare becomes a souk, while the entrances to these houses have been shifted, such that they are approached through more private back alleys.Some of the Spanish and Italian houses which had street facing entrances now have a maze like access to the inside.

The shops are often rented out by the owner, and in many cases the shop keeper lives on top.

Commercial layer and mosque

Spanish house 1

Spanish house 2

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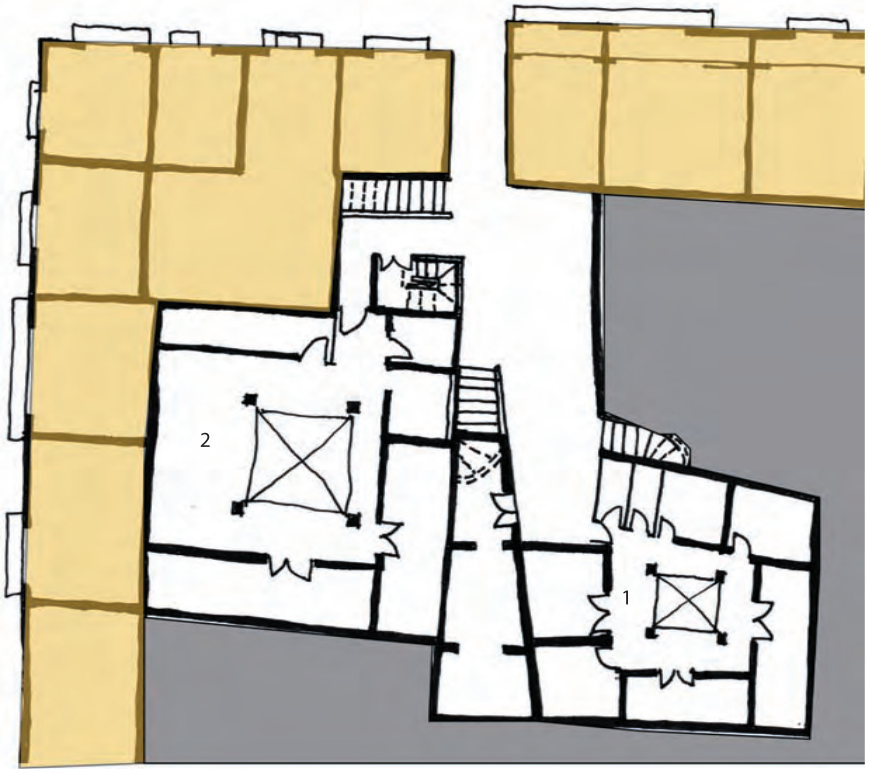
Ground floor-Spanish house



The streets lined with shops, with residences on the upper floors

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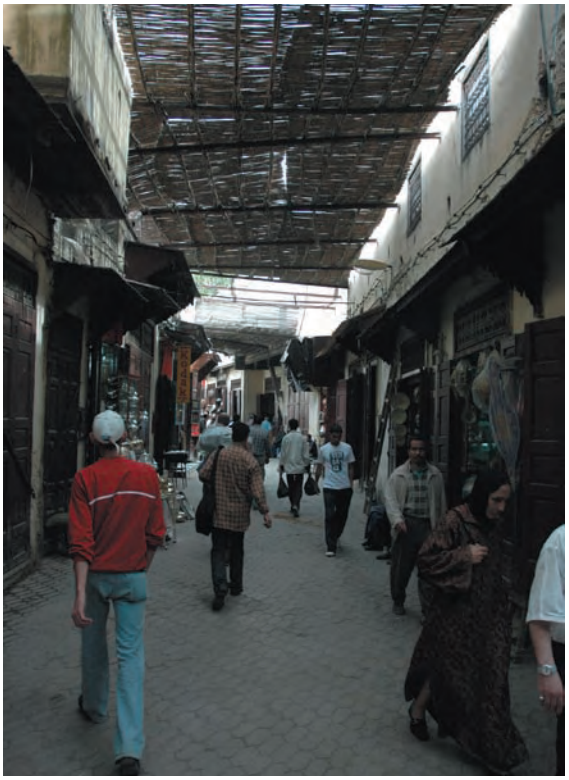
Fès



Casablanca

Cairo

Casablanca

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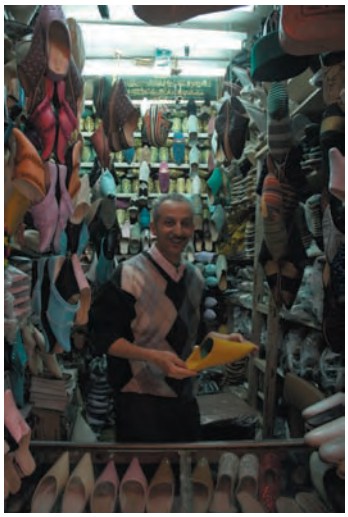
Mr. Abdul Khader (32) works as an assistant in a cloth- and tailor shop. Like many others he came to Casablanca in search of a job and found a place in the medina. He has been working in this medina for the last three years and has plans of settling down here with a new family. Today he lives in a shared flat with other wage-earning men, but it is very likely that his present flat turns into a multiple family residence like every other place inside.



Sayid (65) works in a shoe shop, which is part of this newly formed commercial band. Originally from a village next to Agadir this shop has been his family's livelihood for more than two decades now. Surprisingly Sayid was a student of computer engineering doing his studies in Paris when his father called him back to take care of this shop. His father still owns the shop, and probably it is going to be passed on to Sayid and then the generations that follow.

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Rue Naciria

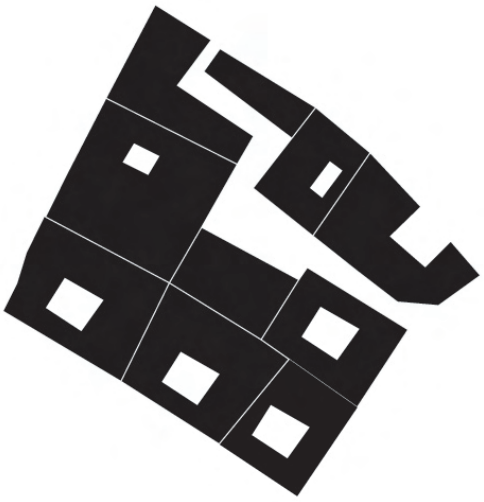
The social unit of the traditional Muslim house is usually an extended family with several generations living together. As the family grows, the houses often undergo a cellular division in order to accommodate a new family. A system of houses within a house is established. Additional storey is added to the house, new units are attached or existing neighbours are connected to the main house. These often involve changes in the access systems by turning semi-public streets into private corridors or by sharing common entrance lobby to connecting houses.

An overall process of densification occurs within the confines of the built structure.

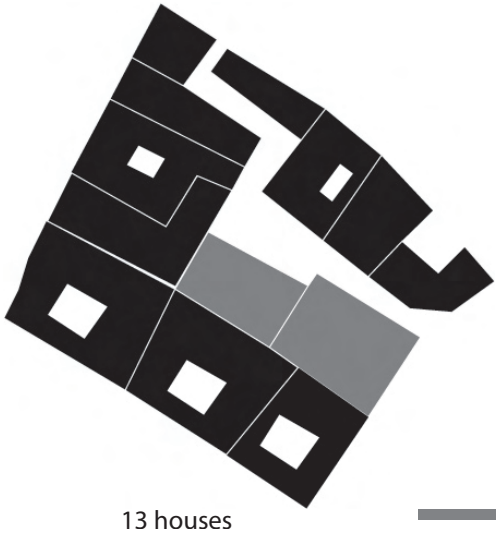
Section

Plan

Densification within a house



10 houses



13 houses
including two abandoned houses

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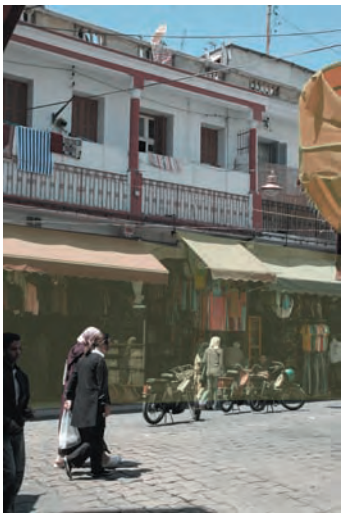
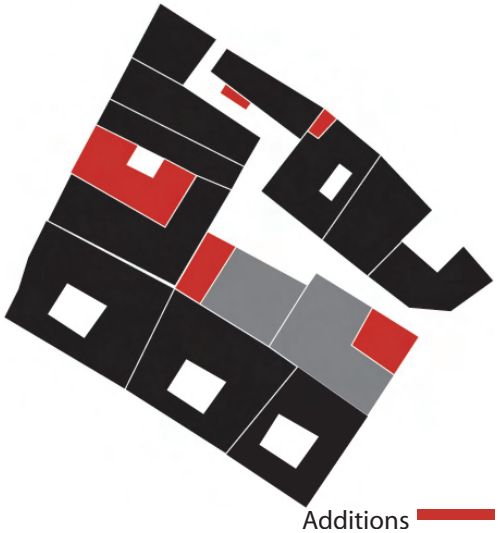
Abandoned house

Addition

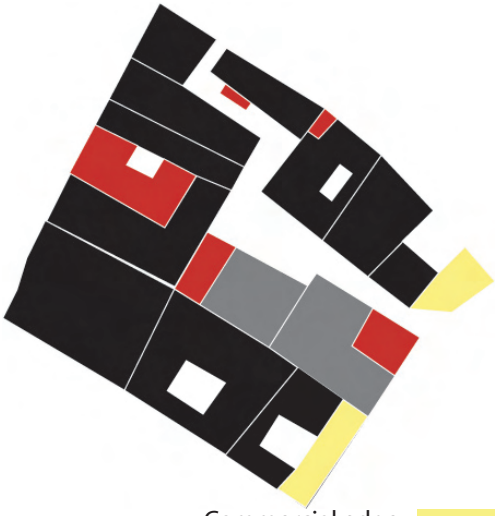
Addition



Commercial edge



Additions



Commercial edge

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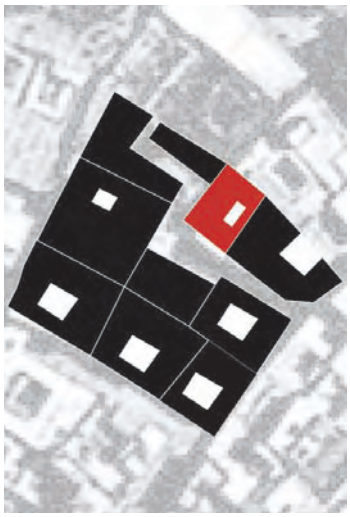
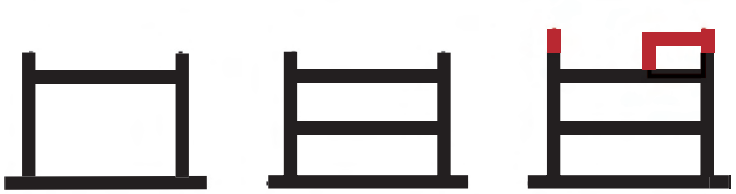
House of Karim

This house was previously owned by a Jew and occupied by a Muslim family after they moved out. In this example the various families living inside are from the same family tree. Each floor has been distributed among the brothers and sisters of the family.

The youngest sister of the family has made a hut like addition on the terrace of this house and lives with her husband and two children inside. This is probably because she can't afford one whole floor of the house like the rest of her siblings.





one family | two families | three families

Mr. Attar Miloudi, (64) husband of Kareem's eldest sister and a retired civil servant lives on the first floor of this house with his family. He is probably the richest among the entire family and is more or less treated as the master of the whole house. Mr. Attar expressed his discontent with his living conditions in the medina and was eager to leave the medina as soon as he saved enough.

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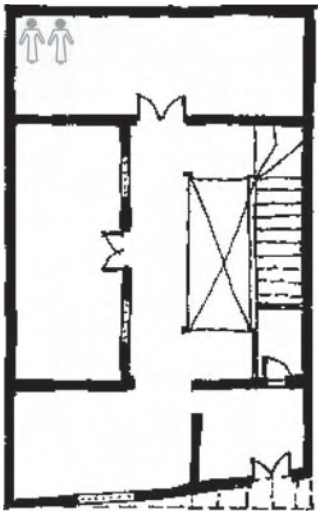
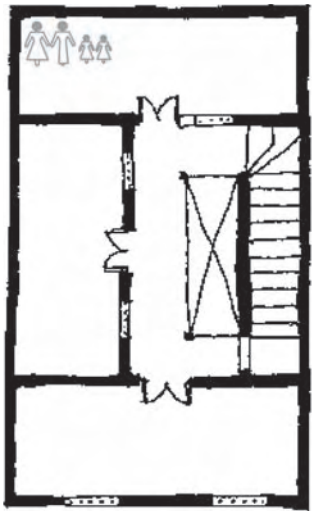


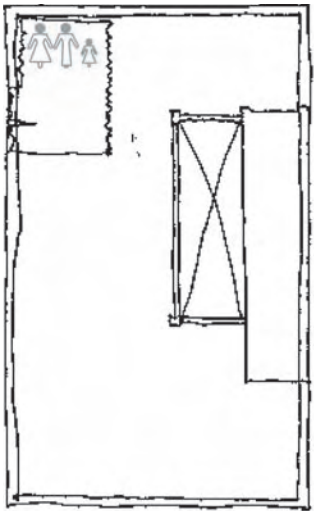
Ground floor

zz and brother



1st floor

Attars family



Terrace floor

Youngest sister's family

Interior of the house

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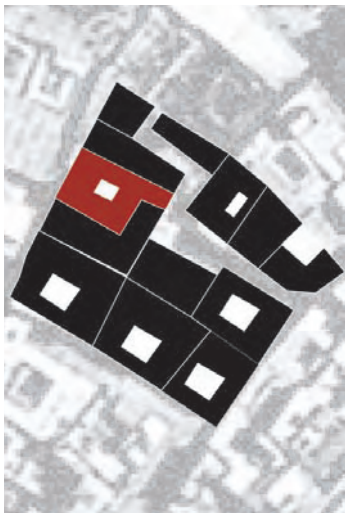
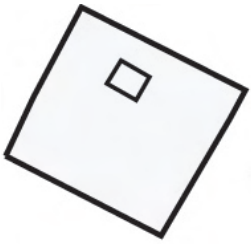
House of Aadil

This house is an example from the segment, to explain the densification that occurs within. The owner of this house has moved outside of the medina and since the past fifty years the house has been occupied by various tenants.

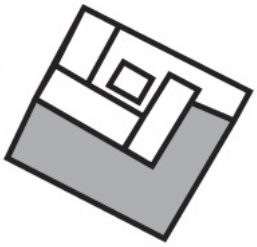
The house has been divided into two with seperate entrances, and each contains several individual apartements inside.

Aadil and his family live on the first floor on one of these individual apartements that his brother bought from the owner. Not everyone can afford to buy their own flat like his case.His neighbours are various families paying rent to the owner or tenants who have sublet them the flat. Families continue making additions within the house and it gets further densified until some of them are forced to move out.





one family



three families

Mohammed (28) Brother of Aadil. He is an emigrant from Casablanca living in Germany. He left Casablanca when he was 21 years of age and returned seven years later with his German fiancé. He has earned enough to be able to buy his brother this flat and also a house for their parents outside the medina. Even though he is fond of Casablanca he is assured he cannot enjoy the quality of life he desires if he continued to stay here. He plans to go back to Germany and continue earning for his family who are back here.

This is a pattern followed by many in the medina. When the living conditions go on deteriorating they move out and go in search of better lifestyles, while their house in the medina gets taken over by families who cannot afford this luxury.

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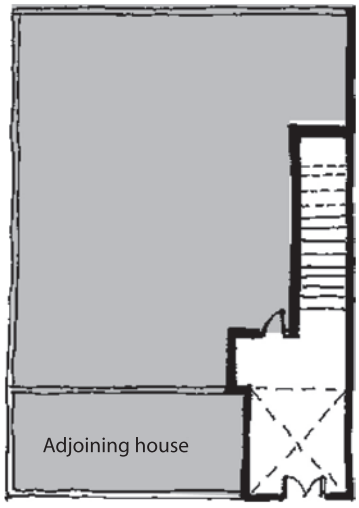
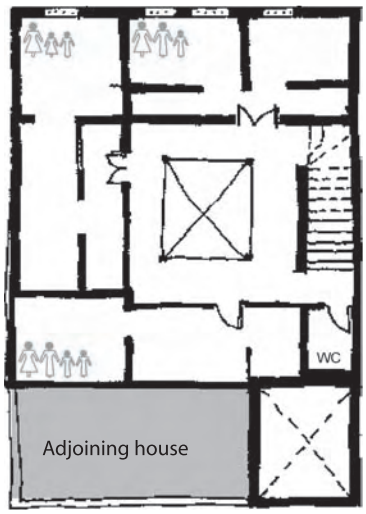
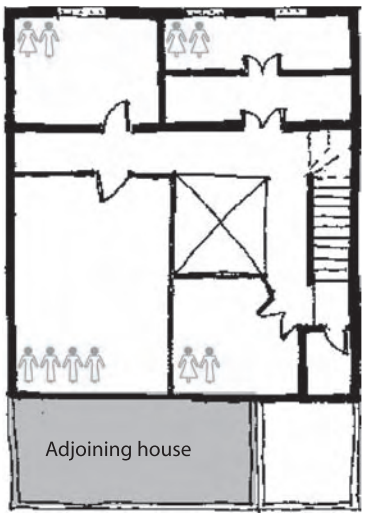


Ground floor



1st floor



2nd floor

2 inhabitants

4 inhabitants

2 inhabitants

2 inhabitants

Aadil's Flat

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Lack of a medivial charm

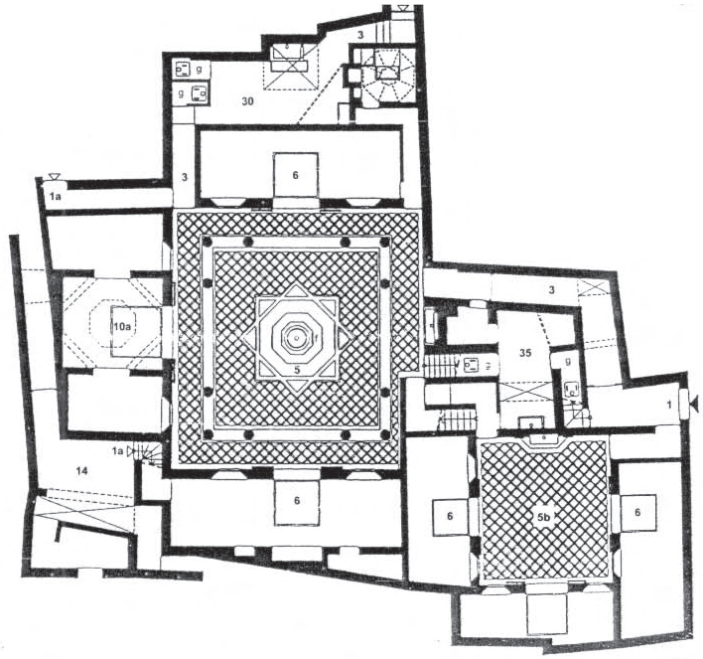
Courtyard houses are the most basic unit of a Muslim fabric . Normally, there is an absolute centrality in the placement of the courtyard and the rest of the house is built around it. It is always a dialect between a perfectly geometrical courtyard and an irregular shaped plot.

The courtyards of these houses hence take the most important place for social gatherings. In the case of Casablanca, they are no more than sources of light and ventilation. They show none of the traditional traits of an enclosed and introverted Islamic house.

The doors and windows of all main rooms are focused towards the courtyard. Windows and balconies on the facades of houses are not characteristics of traditional Muslim homes.

Courtyard in Fès

House of Aadil



Plan of an Arabic housē

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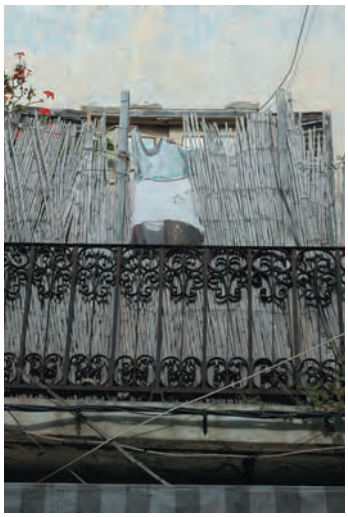

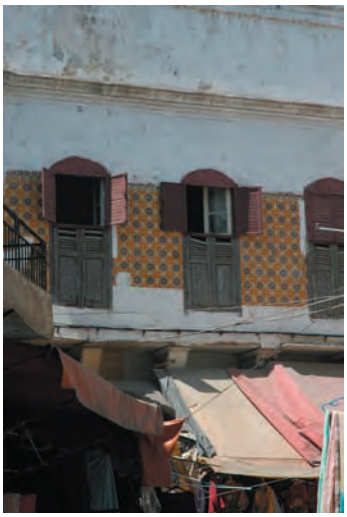
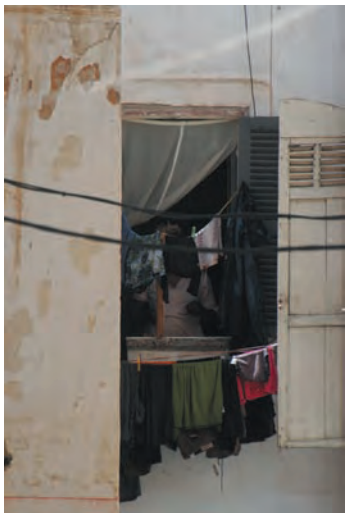
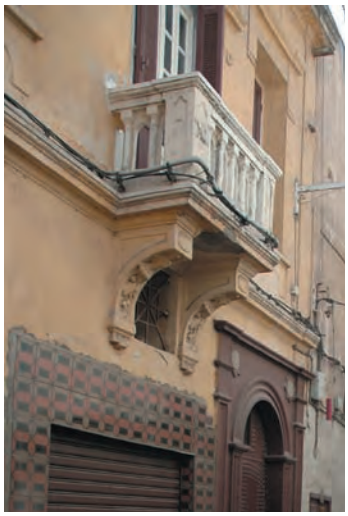
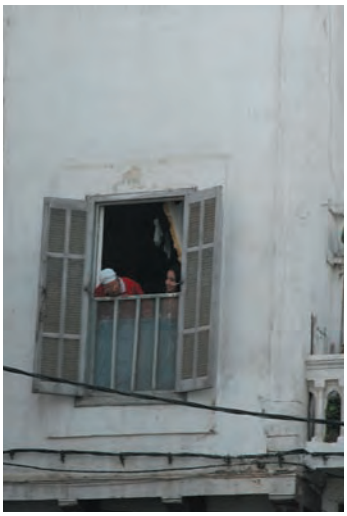

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The phenomenon is the same everywhere. Our interviews with Mohammed (truck driver-Germany), Abdul (Cafe owner in the medina and small time business in Germany), Ben Abdul (retired photographer for local news papers in Casablanca) and many others tell the same story. The life inside this medina gets tough and more congested, and the richer opt to move out, while the poor occupy the leftover. At the Caid's office (the local administration office) we found out that most of the additions and divisions that take place inside the medina are ignored by the administration unless the structure might be harmed or the owner was to complain. The administration did not care for all the changes that happened within these houses as long as it didn't show on the outside. This continuous densification will have to come to a stop sooner or later.

Nevertheless the medina has an identity of its own that is well worth preserving. And it has the potential to become a vital part of Casablanca again.

Mohammed, Truckdiver Germany

Hassan, Hotel manager

Ben Abdul, Photographer

Youssef, Hamam guy

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Aadil, Baker
Abdul, Cafe owner
Abdul Khader, Sales clerk and tailor
Atar Miloud, retired civil servant
Ben Abdul, Photogragher and retired Social worker in Paris
Hassan, Hotel manager
Karim, Sales clerk
Mohamed, Construction worker in Germany
Mohammed, Truckdriver in Germany
Sayid, Shoeseller
Youssef, Hamam caretaker

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