

Morocco at the Movies

By Dan Cahill (Kenitra 68-70)

Responding to recent suggestions in the Newsletter regarding starting a film series of movies that take place in Morocco and/or were filmed in Morocco, I volunteered to start a column in each issue which would profile a film or two, discussing the entertainment value, artistic significance, and Moroccan aspects of movies currently available. I will first lean toward films that take place in Morocco, which should postpone several recent ones filmed there (*Kundun*, *Gladiator*, *Black Hawk Down*) but happening in other parts of the globe. We will inevitably cover the gamut from great classics which were filmed entirely in Hollywood (*Casablanca*), to less distinguished fare that actually featured Moroccan locations (*Outpost in Morocco*).

A few ground rules at the outset:

- Being a filmmaker and an avid film collector, I will display my strong preference for DVD as the best medium to screen any film. In some cases, such as *Outpost in Morocco*, the only available VHS tapes are of vastly inferior quality, and the DVD is a newly restored version. Some DVD's also have deleted scenes, as well as enlightening extra features such as audio commentaries by the filmmakers. This may exceed your interest level, but the improved image quality will surely please any audience.
- In discussing each film's story, I will respect the innocence of those who have not yet seen the film, and reveal any story elements beyond the first act only in a special paragraph marked "SPOILER WARNING!" The last thing anybody wants is to learn from me, of all people, which characters walk off into the fog together at the end of *Casablanca*.
- My e-mail address will be at the end of each column, and I invite readers to comment, criticize, enlighten, and suggest new films for future columns.

My first selection is a classic: Alfred Hitchcock's *The Man Who Knew Too Much*, a 1956 Hollywood remake of his 1934 British film of the same

title. Each story is about a couple whose child is kidnapped by a gang of international assassins. The title character is the father, who learns of a plot to murder a statesman and is forced into silence by the threat to his child. In the original version, the English couple is in St. Moritz, where the wife, in a interesting bit of sex-role reversal, is a marksman competing in a skeet-



shooting event. In the remake, the wife, played very effectively by Doris Day, is a retired singer vacationing in Morocco with husband James Stewart, a physician from Indianapolis.

The Master of Suspense makes stunning use of Moroccan locations, chiefly in Marrakesh, although it's worth noting that he often uses them in rear projection behind the principal actors who were filmed inside a studio. Hitchcock had a career-long preference for studio shooting because of the extra control it afforded, even at the expense of artificial-looking backgrounds. An example of this is the first scene on a bus from Casa to Marrakesh, where we're introduced to the traveling Americans. The dialogue inside the bus is played against highway backgrounds that don't quite match. At least we get an authentic exterior shot of the bus, which

helps remind us how the old CTM's looked.

While drinking in the scenic beauty of Marrakesh, note that none of the interiors, including a hotel room, a restaurant, and a police station, was actually shot in Morocco. Even the exotic night view outside the Mamounia Hotel suite is really just a background matte painting. One factor in the decision to shoot in the studio, other than Hitchcock's demand for control, was the need to reduce the shooting time in Morocco: not only was the crew pressured to finish before the start of Ramadan, but there was also increasing political unrest against the colonial power (note the references to "French Morocco"), with sporadic eruptions of violence in Marrakesh. Further pressure came from Doris Day, who was disturbed by the poverty she saw in Morocco, particularly the poor condition of the animals in the streets. She refused to play in any scenes with them until they were properly fed. And, to make matters even more complicated, the script was not finished before shooting began, increasing the tension of the entire production.

We get a nice view of the entrance to the Mamounia Hotel as it looked during shooting in May of 1955, before its recent renovations. That was the era when there was a CTM station at Djemaa el Fna, which appears to be nearly timeless (watch for Hitchcock's cameo in the crowd, with his back to the camera). Other unchanged Medina streets are beautifully employed for an exciting chase scene through the dyers' souk. One authentic element can be very rewarding to those of us who not only know the country but speak the languages: there is frequent use of unsubtitled French and Arabic, which we could translate when we screen the film for our friends.

Those familiar with pop tunes from the 50's will recognize "*Que Sera, Sera*" which won the Oscar for Best Original Song. Corny as it sounds, the lyrics introduce issues of free will vs. fate that recur throughout the story.

(Continued on page 13)

(Continued from page 12)

Another serious theme which underlies the protagonists' relationship is the conflict between career and home for Day, echoed in Stewart's efforts to control her-- issues which still divide our society nearly five decades hence.

All of this activity in Morocco only comprises the first 49 minutes of a 2 hour movie. From Marrakesh, the characters move on to London, where Hitchcock uses his home town locations very effectively. Not to be missed is the climactic concert sequence at the Albert Hall, one of the best-constructed suspense sequences in all the Master's oeuvre. Although it has little to do with Morocco, it is interesting to compare

this section with the similar one in the earlier version of the film, observing how Hitchcock had grown in his craft over 22 years, exemplified by the different placements of an all-important scream.

The entire film, judged as a whole, is one of Hitchcock's best. He was operating at the peak of his powers, and benefitted most specifically from his ongoing collaborations with cinematographer Robert Burks, a master of lighting and composition, as well as composer Bernard Herrmann, who has his own cameo as the orchestra conductor. Although, as part of a film series about Morocco, one could stop the screening after 49 minutes, the audience, swept into an epic international suspense classic, would want to start its

own plot to assassinate the projectionist.

[DVD NOTE: The image quality is predictably superb. the extra features are limited to a too-short "Making Of" documentary with absorbing commentary from the screenwriter, associate producer, set designer, and Hitchcock's daughter Patricia.]



Graduate student seeks Moroccan immigrants for thesis research

The Evolution of Food Patterns of a Migratory Moroccan Population

By Monika Sudakov

"We are what we eat." Few statements seem so trite, yet have such pervasive meaning. Humans are biologically programmed to eat, yet how they eat cross-culturally varies immensely. When examined as an aspect of a specific culture, the food practices observed by a given group of people in their unique environment can be reflective of every facet of their existence, from their socio-political structure to their economic structure to their ideological beliefs. These practices create a dialogue, a distinct structure of meaning and symbols that allow not only the members of a culture to behave in what they perceive to be socially acceptable ways, but for the outsider looking in to gain insight into the underlying mechanisms that drive that particular culture.

Having said this, it is interesting to note that within the discourse of anthropological research, little has been said about the food practices of specific cultures, save as passing commentary leading to the exposition of some greater analytical point. Food as the driving source of research is just beginning to emerge as a legitimate and indeed extremely critical aspect of understanding culture. In their forward to the book "Food and Culture: A Reader," Carole Counihan and Penny

Van Esterik point out that "food holds the keys to any culture and presents manifold channels for analysis." (p. 2) As such, it is fitting that it should begin to attract the attention of more scholars, seeking to gain a true understanding of who we are and why we behave the way that we do.

In my own research as a Master's student in Anthropology at UNLV, I have decided to focus my thesis primarily upon food and, in particular, the ways in which a culture's food practices can and do change when a people migrate from one locale to another. As Sidney Mintz points out, "...large-scale structural changes, such as war and migration, may change the rules of the game, so to speak, compelling people to reorder their categories of meaning in new ways, and (hence) to eat (and drink) differently." (Mintz, 1996) The structural changes involved in migration which affect a people's food practices include changes in environment, differential availability of resources, technological variation, economic/social status, modification of ideological beliefs and/or practices, differences in political structure and degree of acceptance by an indigenous population toward the migrant population.

The decision to concentrate on Moroccan Cuisine and food practices in particular came about purely by chance. Having already been interested in food and its role in cultural development/

expression, my curiosity about Morocco specifically was piqued when my husband took me to a Moroccan restaurant for the first time. The feast was stimulating and interactive, involving every one of my five senses in the experience. The smell of coriander and mint infused the air we breathed as we tasted the intense flavors of preserved lemons and saffron. Each course was an artistic masterpiece, vibrant with color, shape and fluidity. As we picked up our bread and ripped it into pieces to soak up the lavish sauces of our tagine, we could feel every ingredient with the tips of our fingers. The warmth of the harira soup, the coolness of the cucumber salad, and the soft, velvety touch of the couscous granules heightened the flavor of each bite. All this coupled with the relaxed atmosphere of pillows and dim lighting served to illuminate fundamental Moroccan philosophies of hospitality and abundance.

What intrigued me the most was the sense of ritual involved in the consumption of this meal. It was orchestrated in a very particular way, each dish occupying its appropriate place within the grand scheme of the meal. There was a sense of a right or correct way of eating that had to be observed if the meal was to be completely and authentically experienced.

(Continued on page 24)