CHAPTER III
SOCIAL HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF MOROCCO
IN THE MIDDLE OF NINETEENTH CENTURY

This chapter deals with social background of Morocco in the middle of
nineteenth century and it will be connected to the structural elements of the
novel. Therefore, the writer discusses some aspects of social, economic,
politic, religion, culture, science and technology aspects, and Moroccan
women.

A. Social Historical Background of Morocco

1. Social Aspect

The native people of Morocco are the Berbers, an ancient race
who, throughout history, have seen their country invaded by a
succession of foreign powers. Moroccan society is heavily marked by
social and economic inequality between men and women.

Women are frequently unable to exercise human rights such as
the right to education, employment, property and the right to a life free
of violence and coercion. Until recently women were also largely
excluded from political decision-making processes. Assessed on
gender development, Morocco occupies the 149th place out of a total
of 158 countries.

During the Second World War Morocco supported the Vichy
government which ruled France after its capitulation to the Nazis in
1940. By 1942, American troops had landed and occupied Morocco, which was used as a supply base for the Allies during the remainder of the war. Heads of government from the Allies used Casablanca as an important meeting-place. In 1950, the sultan of Morocco requested self-government. This was rejected by the French and in 1953 the sultan was deposed, but allowed to resume the throne two years later. Moroccan independence was not recognised by the French until 1956 and Sultan Mohammed V became king in 1957. This opened the way for independence.

Woman are relatively free in Morocco, most walk around without veils and take part in all aspects of life. Non-Moroccan women should be sensitive to traditions concerning dress. In particular shorts and short skirts and low-cut dresses are considered provocative and should be avoided in towns or villages. When swimming a full bathing costume is strongly recommended for women except for private hotel pools or wild beaches. Men should also avoid bearing themselves too much except in the more informal desert surroundings. In towns shorts are acceptable for men except when visiting religious sites or if invited to visit an Arab family. When passing or receiving any item, in particular food, the right hand should be used.

2. Economic Aspect

Morocco's economy is considered a relatively liberal economy governed by the law of supply and demand. The Moroccan economy
has been characterized by macroeconomic stability, with generally low inflation and sustained, moderately high growth rates over the past several years. Recent governments have pursued reform, liberalization, and modernization aimed at stimulating growth and creating jobs. Morocco's primary economic challenge is to accelerate growth and sustain that improved performance in order to reduce high levels of unemployment and underemployment.

The economic system of the country presents several facets. It is characterized by a large opening towards the outside world. While economic growth has historically been hampered by volatility in the rainfall-dependent agriculture sector, diversification has made the economy more resilient. Through a foreign exchange rate pegged to a basket of important currencies and well-managed monetary policy, Morocco has held inflation rates to industrial country levels over the past decade.

The government is continuing a series of structural reforms begun under its predecessors. Promising reforms have occurred in the financial sector. Privatizations have reduced the size of the public sector. Morocco has liberalized rules for oil and gas exploration and has granted concessions for public services in major cities. The tender process in Morocco is becoming increasingly transparent.
3. Political Aspect

Morocco is a constitutional monarchy. Politics of Morocco take place in a framework of a parliamentary constitutional monarchy, whereby the Prime Minister of Morocco is the head of government, and of a multi-party system. The Kingdom of Morocco, which sits at a crossroads between Europe and Africa, has had to navigate many challenges since it became an independent country. The Moroccan constitution provides for a strong monarchy but a weak Parliament and judicial branch. Dominant authority rests with the king.

The king presides over the Council of Ministers; appoints the prime minister following legislative elections; appoints all members of the government taking into account the prime minister's recommendations; and may, at his discretion, terminate the tenure of any minister, dissolve the Parliament, call for new elections, or rule by decree. Executive power is exercised by the government. Legislative power is vested in both the government and the two chambers of parliament, the Assembly of Representatives of Morocco and the Assembly of Councillors.

The kingdom has enjoyed relative stability since gaining independence and though the state was characterized by a strong monarchy in the past, the current government has put in place anti-corruption measures among its civil servants and professionalized the military, in part by ending conscription in the near future to ensure
recruits are motivated and up to the task of learning the latest in military techniques.

The Moroccan Constitution provides for a monarchy with a Parliament and an independent judiciary. Another instance in which Morocco differs from many states in North Africa and the Middle East is that, rather than driving political Islamists underground where they are sure to radicalism, it has allowed them to enter the political realm and participate in parliament. All of these facts have allowed Morocco to play its position at a crossroads between Europe, Africa and the Middle East into one of strength. Religiously coherent, Morocco nevertheless faces the challenge of political Islam and Islamist parties are banned there.

4. Religious Aspect

A nation is nothing without its people, their lifestyles and their beliefs, and Morocco is not an exception. The Alawite Dynasty, the royalty of Morocco, has held the religion of Morocco from as early as the 17th Century. The Moroccans have highly respected the royal family, especially because of the fact that they originate from the lineage of the Prophet (http://www.asiarooms.co/en/travel-guide/morocco/culture-of-morocco/religion-in-morocco.html). Thus indicating how much the people are stirred by the religion in Morocco.

In fact, its rich culture and the strength of Moroccan faith are reflected in the overall beauty of the nation, making it even more
attractive to the tourists. The official Morocco religion is Islam and a majority of the Moroccan population comprises of Sunni Muslims of the ‘Maliki’ religious. Moroccans are religious people. Islamic influence began in Morocco in the seventh century A.D.

Arab conquerors converted the indigenous Berber population to Islam, but Berber tribes retained their customary laws. The Arabs abhorred the Berbers as barbarians, while the Berbers often saw the Arabs as only an arrogant and brutal soldiery bent on collecting taxes. Once established as Muslims, the Berbers shaped Islam in their own image and embraced schismatic Muslim sects, which, in many cases, were simply folk religion barely disguised as Islam, as their way of breaking from Arab control.

Islamic practices affect all aspects of life, especially in more remote communities. As in all Islamic communities the call to prayer will be heard several times a day. Muslims during the holy month of Ramadan (which takes place at a different time each year), Moslems fast from daybreak till sunset. This fast puts a great strain on them as they will often rise at 4am to have breakfast. In towns some shops in the Ramadan month are closed for long periods during daylight hours and also at dusk many shops close for an hour while the fasting population had their meal. Although freedom of religious faith is a permitted by the Moroccan law, there are very few non-Muslims dwelling in the country.
Apart from this the Moroccan religion also has a role to play in the law and order of the country. The Moroccans respect the ‘Koran’ as their religious book and all the descendents of the prophet. They also consider the ‘Mosque’ as their centre of worship and there are several exquisite Mosques all over the country. Apart from Islam, the other religious faiths in Morocco are Christianity and Judaism, but they are a minority. (http://www.asiarooms.com/en/travel-guide/morocco/culture-of-morocco/religion-in-morocco.html).

5. Cultural Aspect

Morocco is a country of multi-ethnic groups with a rich culture and civilization. Family matters in countries as diverse as Iran, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, and Saudi Arabia are governed by religion-based personal status codes. Many of these laws treat women essentially as legal minors under the eternal guardianship of their male family members.

Family decision-making is thought to be the exclusive domain of men, who enjoy by default the legal status of “head of household”. Through Moroccan history, Morocco hosted many people in addition to the indigenous Berbers, coming from both East (Phoenicians, Jews and Arabs), South (Sub-Saharan Africans) and North (Romans and Vandals) (http://marocco-ethnic/marocco/culture-of-marocco/html). All of which have had an impact on the social structure of Morocco.
It conceived many forms of beliefs Judaism, Christianity to Islam. Christianity was introduced in the second century and gained converts in the towns and among slaves and Berber farmers. By the end of the fourth century, the Romanized areas had been Christianized, and inroads had been made as well among the Berber tribes, who sometimes converted en masse. But schismatic and heretical movements also developed, usually as forms of political protest.

6. Science and Technology in Morocco

Science and technology in Morocco has significantly developed in recent years. The Moroccan government has been implementing reforms to encourage scientific research in the Kingdom. While research has yet to acquire the status of a national priority in Morocco, the country does have major assets that could transform its R&D sector into a key vehicle for development. Morocco’s own evaluation of its national research system revealed that the country has a good supply of well trained high quality human resources and that some laboratories are of very high quality. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Science_and_technology_in_Morocco).

The educational qualifications of Moroccan researchers have increased significantly since the early 1990s. The University of Al-Karaouine is considered the oldest continuously operating academic degree-granting university in the world, by the Guinness Book of Records.
The national system of scientific and technical research in Morocco is guided by different elements, such as the pronouncements of the king, reports of special commissions, five-year plans, and the creation of a special program for the support of research.

7. **Moroccan Women**

Many of these laws treat women essentially as legal minors under the eternal guardianship of their male family members. Family decision-making is thought to be the exclusive domain of men, who enjoy by default the legal status of “head of household.” These notions are supported by family courts in the region that often reinforce the primacy of male decision-making power. The situation of women in Morocco is somewhere between that of women in the West and those in conservative Islamic countries like Saudi Arabia.

Here in Casablanca, everything seems fine on the surface. Clothing varies in Morocco; women wear the entire range from the traditional conservative jelaba and foulard. A jelaba is an ankle-length, long-sleeved, loosely-fitting gown. A foulard is a scarf worn over the hair and fastened under the chin. A chadra is a veil which covers most of the face. When a foulard and chadra are worn together, only the woman's eyes are visible. (http://french.about.com/library/travel/bl-ma-women.html).
Rather than to Western suits, to skin-tight shirts and miniskirts. The choice of dress tends to depend on both age and occupation, in general, teenagers wear casual Western clothes professional women wear Western-style business clothing, and unemployed women wear jelabas. (http://french.about.com/library/travel/bl-ma-women.html). A married woman must get her husband's permission before seeking a job. Most working women are in textiles and light industry. The other are housekeepers.


Typically, these women are uneducated, illiterate, and unmarried, and earn room, board, and extremely low wages. They usually speak Arabic and possibly a few words of French. Their duties may include cooking, cleaning, and taking care of their employer's children, and those who don't live in usually go home to do the same thing for their families.

B. The Life of Fatima Mernissi

Fatima Mernissi was born into a middle-class family in Fez, Morocco in 1940. Considered a world-renowned Islamic feminist, she grew up in a harem, surrounded by the women in her family, grandmothers, mother, and sisters. The strict separation she experienced between men and women in Moroccan society and between women and the public sphere have profoundly influenced her thinking and her subsequent intellectual and activist endeavors.
She received her primary education in a school established by the nationalist movement, and secondary level education in an all-girls school funded by the French protectorate. She studied political sciences at the University of Rabat, the Sorbonne in Paris and Brandeis University (Massachusetts) (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fatema_Mernissi).

She obtained her doctorate in Brandeis University. She returned to work at the Mohammed V University (Professor of Sociology) and taught at the Faculté des Lettres between 1974 and 1981 on subjects such as methodology, family sociology and psychosociology. She has become noted internationally mainly as an Islamic feminist. As an Islamic feminist, Mernissi is largely concerned with Islam and women's roles in it, analyzing the historical development of Islamic thought and its modern manifestation.

Mernissi’s work explores the relationship between sexual ideology, gender identity, sociopolitical organization, and the status of women in Islam. Her special focus, however, is Moroccan society and culture. As a feminist, her work represents an attempt to undermine the ideological and political systems that silence and oppress Muslim women. She does this in two ways: first, by challenging the dominant Muslim male discourse concerning women and their sexuality, and second, by providing the silent women with a voice to tell her own story.

Besides an author, Fatima Mernissi also a feminist sociologist, she has done fieldwork mainly in Morocco. On several occasions in the late
1970s and early 1980s she conducted interviews in order to map prevailing attitudes to women and work. She has done sociological research for UNESCO and ILO as well as for the Moroccan authorities. In the late 1970s and in the 1980s Mernissi contributed articles to periodicals and other publications on women in Morocco and women and Islam from a contemporary as well as from a historical perspective. (http://www.africansuccess.org/visuFiche.php?id=619&lang=en).

She published several books on the position of women in the rapidly changing Muslim communities in Morocco. Mernissi’s first monograph, *Beyond the Veil*, was published in 1975. A revised edition was published in Britain in 1985 and in the US in 1987. *Beyond the Veil* has become a classic, especially in the fields of anthropology and sociology on women in the Arab World, the Mediterranean area or Muslim societies in general.

In her first books she expressly spoke for the emancipation of women. Since then most of her work was originally published in English or French. It has been translated in many languages and is widely read, also in Islamic countries. In the 80s of the last century she directed sociological research for UNESCO, ILO and UNFPA (Population Fund). This resulted in a book with selected interviews: Doing daily battle, 1988 (Le Maroc raconté par ses femmes, 1983) (http://www.africansuccess.org/visuFiche.php?id=619&lang=en).

In the mid 90s Fatema Mernissi stopped working on women's issues and switched to civil society as her major topic. She has served as a member in many national, pan-Arabic and international forums on women and development in the Islamic world. Presently she is Lecturer of Sociology at the Mohammed V University of Rabat, and Research Scholar at the University Institute of Scientific Research. In 2003, Mernissi was awarded the Prince of Asturias Award along with Susan Sontag. ([http://www.africansuccess.org/visuFiche.php?id=619&lang=en](http://www.africansuccess.org/visuFiche.php?id=619&lang=en)).