

Dardasha
testimonies of migration
by Moroccan women

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Edited and translated by Samantha Herron

In collaboration with Souad Talsi MBE
and Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Project Ltd



AL-HASANIYA
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Preface

From the Dardasha Project Leader

I am a great believer in stories, in our ability to see them, our desire to create them and their extraordinary power to heal both narrator and audience.

The oral tradition is inherent to all cultures in Africa and storytelling is at the very heart of Moroccan culture. Families gathering at lunchtime to share a tagine, strangers who find themselves sitting together in a bus or taxi, women at work weaving carpets or harvesting henna in the fields – whenever and wherever Moroccans come together, they will share stories.

Moroccan women enjoy telling stories and the women who tell their stories in Dardasha carried this ancient tradition with them in their migratory journey. Here in the West we seem sadly to be losing the art of storytelling, but we all have a story to tell. When we tell the story of the life we have lived so far, our sense of our individual identity comes from knowing and remembering: where we have come from and who we have been. Without this we cannot hope to move forward and onward to our future lives and future selves.

Within the context of migration the sharing of stories is a healing process. It serves both as an escape from the present - a salve to feelings of homesickness, a remembrance of the past and loved ones back home or no longer with us - and a connection with the present and with those listening, celebrating together both the good times and the bad and in so doing coming to terms with life's journey.

When I began work on this project I knew very little about the experiences and realities of Moroccan female migration to the UK. Having spent time in Morocco, I was familiar with Moroccan culture and the daily realities for Moroccan women in their home country; but despite having worked for two years at the Al Hasaniya Centre for Moroccan Women, I realised that I knew much less about the lives of Moroccan women living here in my home city of London.

It was thus that I embarked on what was to be a remarkable journey with these women. I felt truly privileged to gain their trust and bear witness as they shared their experiences with me. The stories they told revealed to me a world I had not previously known. I can only imagine what it is like to be forced, for economic reasons, to leave behind your loved ones and everything familiar; to arrive in a strange land, where you not only have to make a living and attend to practical matters, but you also have to shape for yourself a new emotional and spiritual life and build a future for your family. This is not a choice which is ever made lightly.

These testimonies are very moving and humbling. Each individual story stands alone and speaks for itself and together they tell a collective story. Most of the women who shared their stories in Dardasha are illiterate in both Arabic and English, having received little or no education in Morocco. Dardasha has given these women a voice for the very first time. As one of the women said to me during the course of our conversations, 'I never learned to read or write, so I have to speak my story. If I could write I would have written my story long ago. Thank you so much for giving me this opportunity.'

I would like to thank these wonderful women for their honesty, courage and generosity. Let the stories now speak for themselves.

Samantha Herron

Dardasha Project Leader

Introduction

Moroccan Women's Voice in the UK

The Arabic word *dardasha* means chat, but this project is about more than women chatting to each other. The gathering of women in a relaxed environment chatting, exchanging news, giving or receiving advice and so on is reminiscent of the oral tradition that lays the cultural foundations of African societies in particular and the Arab world in general.

The women on whom this project is centred are representative of the so-called first generation of Moroccan female migration to the UK (although some of the interviewees in this project pertain to the second generation). Statistics show that some Moroccan women arrived in the UK as early as the 1960s and throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Their presence in the UK was mainly due to the mere fact that most of them followed their husbands who preceded them here. This is often the case in the history of migration, where the man (as head of the family) leaves his homeland to seek a better life in Europe. Once settled he applies to the host country's authorities for his wife and children to join him. In such a scenario the woman hardly has (or is asked to have) an opinion as to whether she would consider uprooting herself and her offspring to join the main bread-winner that is man. However one of the main features of *Dardasha* is that it highlights another aspect of Moroccan women's migration to the UK.

Indeed not all the women interviewed for this project represent the example mentioned above, but a good number among them opted to leave their home country on the basis of a personal and individual decision and choice.

As the included interviews illustrate, crossing the border into a culture which is totally different in all aspects to Moroccan culture did not come without emotional and/or physical trauma to the women concerned. It is fundamental that one does not underestimate the extent of disorientation and confusion a woman, who never ventured outside her native town or village or country, encounters upon her arrival in a new surrounding, where everything appears strange and unfamiliar to her. Culture shock is inevitable when an individual moves from one culture to another and is met with cultural patterns that are completely alien to her/him. As a consequence the individual will find herself/himself in a state of confusion, loss and most importantly alienation.

The interviewees of this project are no exception and as they entered a country and culture previously unknown to them, their disorientation resulted in the inevitable retreat from the host culture. This is a natural human behaviour when one encounters the unknown. Retreating from a culture that seemed alien to these women could, in general terms, be defined as self-protection. Not only is this self-protection directed to the woman herself, but most generally to her family and her own culture that is an integrated part of her.

Culture is partly what defines a person's identity, so it is understandable that these women take it upon themselves to become the gate-keepers of their culture. Eager to maintain their cultural heritage, they would often display a strong sense of conservatism in relation to the customs of their origins, and in a number of cases this results in their isolation and loneliness. One of the major points that are common to most of the interviewees is their sense of dedication and self-sacrifice for the benefit of their children. While they endeavour to bring up children who will be well adjusted to the norms of the host country, this is often achieved at their own expense. Most of these women expressed a sense of seclusion and separation from the outside world, as often their daily routines were within the confines of their private sphere that is home.

In 1985 Souad Talsi took the initiative that would provide these women with an arena where they could meet and extract themselves from the closed space of their homes. Thus the Al Hasaniya Women's Centre was founded, to equip Moroccan women in the migrant community with a platform that caters for their needs and allows them to re-appropriate their voice. The help provided by the professional team of Al Hasaniya ranges from legal advice to matters related to personal life, such as domestic violence. Most of the older generation of Moroccan migrant women in the UK have very little or no literacy and consequently have no educational awareness of how to deal with personal issues from a legal angle for instance. The resources lent by Al Hasaniya go beyond helping to resolve some of these issues. While it is in Al Hasaniya's capacity to represent Moroccan women in the public sphere, the former realised that it would not accomplish its agenda if its relation to these women remained at the level of representation. Empowering women and providing them with the adequate means to voice themselves became an essential target Al Hasaniya aimed to reach. *Dardasha* stems directly from this concern.

Representing another is, in its very sense of the word, not void of controversies. The very idea that one can speak for someone else carries a fundamental problem suggesting that the former has no voice of his/her own. Speaking for others is contested as being unethical and politically illegitimate. *Dardasha* aims to address this debate by redressing the balance of the power of speech. Representation, as argued by Edward Said (*Orientalism* London: Routledge 1978) is an act of violence in itself; because it has the power to select, include, exclude, translate and interpret the needs of the other, denying the latter all chances of an authentic voice which expresses authentic views.

The testimonies in Dardasha are carefully presented so as to minimize any interference with the authentic voices that they carry. Moroccan migrant women, whose voices are by no means absent but rather silent, are in charge of voicing their own stories. Not only do they take the responsibility of expressing their thoughts in their own words, but they also find solace in speaking out loud what for the most part has been suppressed. Dardasha thus becomes the medium whereby these women can exorcise themselves from the consequences of the hardship that are closely linked to their life journey from Morocco to the UK. Heartache, loneliness, homesickness, poverty and sacrifice are but a few of the hurdles that most of the interviewees encountered throughout their migrant experience.

The poignant testimonies of these women invite the reader/listener to witness scenes of self-observation to self-discovery. The voices one hears while reading these testimonies tell stories of social injustice, discrimination, rape, domestic abuse and so on. Other voices remain mute however, for the stories they could tell are relegated to silence and imposed self-censorship. This is often the case when prostitution is at the centre of a woman's life experience. Female migration amongst various communities has resorted to prostitution as a means for survival. Where this is the case, the sense of shame that the cultural background of the women involved entails means that traumatic past experiences are kept silent.

What Dardasha has achieved is to empower women to regain their voices and speak for themselves. As Aicha L one of the interviewees eloquently put it: "I couldn't read and write but I could always speak". Dardasha is about the opportunity for Moroccan migrant women to seize the power of speech which, in essence, belongs to them alone.

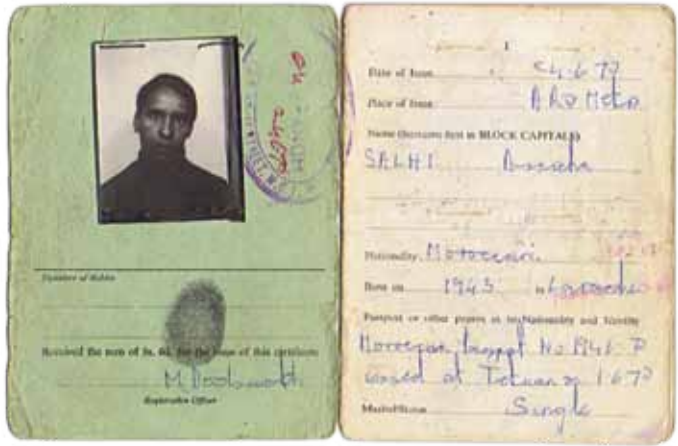
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Stories from Women
 who arrived in the 1960's



Yatou B Arrived in the UK 1968

I was born in 1938 in the Berber region of Sous in the south of Morocco. As the only daughter among five boys, I was quite spoiled by my parents. When I was sixteen a young local landowner asked my parents for my hand in marriage. Both myself and my parents accepted the proposal and my husband and I went on to have a very happy marriage.

In 1960 we moved to the town of Agadir and my husband opened up a shop there. Unfortunately God did not grant us any children, but we accepted our fate and were content with all that God had bestowed on us. We had good health and good fortune and lived very happily. We had grown to see our nephews and nieces as our own and enjoyed spoiling them and loving them.

Then in 1962 an earthquake struck the city, causing utter devastation. Many lives were lost that day, amongst them those of my husband and three of my brothers. My family took what they could salvage from the wreckage of our home and we moved north to Tetouan.

On arrival in Tetouan I looked around for work. I'd had some experience helping out in my late husband's shop, so I was more able than some women to find work. My brothers and I did any work we could find, so as to make a living and take care of one another. Compared to many others, we were very lucky indeed.

I continued working until 1967, when there was an exodus of Moroccans leaving for a place called England. I had no idea where this place was or what it was like there, but I knew that it offered opportunities to work and earn a decent living. So I paid a small fee and was given a work permit to come here to work as an auxiliary nurse.

In January 1968 I arrived at Heathrow, to be welcomed by bitterly cold and foggy weather. I travelled in a group of three women and two men. When we arrived we were met by another Moroccan, who was already working here and showed us what to do.

Three months later I was working at St Mary's hospital in Harrow Road and living in the nurses' home there. I wore a pink uniform and spent my days helping the patients and keeping the hospital wards clean. I had never done anything like it before. The job was hard, but we were looked after very well. We had two days off a week, but if we wanted to work these days we were paid double. So I worked as much as I possibly could.

I therefore spent most of my time working, but occasionally I would leave the hospital grounds for a day out. I look back on those days with affection and have some wonderful memories. We were all very happy, despite the little we had. I was working with women from Spain, Portugal, The Philippines and the West Indies. We spoke very little English, but nevertheless we all got on and worked well together. We felt very welcome in this country, no matter our race or religion. We never discussed our religious faiths, we were just human beings who respected one another.

A few years later my English had improved and I felt much more confident. I got a job working as a chambermaid at Claridges Hotel, where the pay was much better and the work felt more glamorous. Sometimes the tips were four or five times our weekly wage!

I had by now moved into a shared house in St. Ervans Road. I had my own room, which was quite spacious, but the kitchen and bathroom we shared were dirty and old. It was a good location, as the rent was cheap and it was close to work. Many other Moroccans settled here for the same reasons as I did, just as the Portuguese and Spanish had before us. In 1979 we were all moved out of our homes in the area, so they could knock down the old buildings to build the new Swinbrooke estate. When the work was finished I moved back into the area and have lived here ever since.

Although I was tempted at times, I never remarried. I kept on working and sending money home to my family. Every couple of years I would go home to visit my family in Morocco. I still have very fond memories of those visits. Months beforehand I would be preparing for the trip and buying presents for everyone. I could never afford to pay for my airline ticket all at once, so I would have to pay in instalments. The day of travelling to Morocco was always a happy one. I would arrive at the airport very early in the morning, regardless of what time my flight was, for I didn't want to risk missing it! I would always wear my best clothes and take extra care to style my hair. It was my reward for all the years of hard work.

I have now retired and no longer travel to Morocco as much as I would like, because of my age. My brothers have all passed away and so my family now is my nephews and nieces, who have become grandparents themselves. I have devoted my life to helping my siblings and their families. I have no regrets about that, but it would be nice if they asked after me and looked after me when I visit them in Morocco. I feel like they only want me for the little money I have left, which is very sad.

This country has given me the opportunity to work and be independent. I have met and got to know so many good people. For that I will always be grateful.



1960's

Rabia C Arrived in the UK 1969

Until the age of fourteen I lived with my parents in the countryside surrounding Meknes. My father worked as a farm labourer and my mother helped him in his work. My father earned enough to keep us all fed and clothed, but not enough for me to go to school.

In the summer of 1963 the landowners came for their annual break in the countryside. As was the custom every year, everyone in my family worked for the landowner's family. I helped out with domestic chores in their large house.

One day when the landowner's wife had gone out and I was alone in the house with the landowner, he raped me. He warned me not to say anything about it, but three months later my pregnancy showed. When my parents saw me they were horrified. They gave me a severe beating, saying I was bringing shame on the family. My father instinctively knew who the father was and went to confront him. The landowner raged at my father and threatened to sack him from his job. Without my father's work, we would have been homeless and living in the street. So my parents decided to keep quiet, until they could decide what to do.

Late one night a woman I hadn't met before came to our house and did something to me which made me abort the foetus. I bled heavily and can remember the pain to this day. For the next six months I was very ill, I couldn't go out as I was still bleeding and in pain.

Eventually an aunt took me to Meknes to live with her. When we arrived I found she had brought me to work as her maid. I spent six long years working for her, cleaning and cooking and doing anything which needed doing. In those days there were no washing machines and I had to wash in the courtyard with cold water.

Then a friend of my aunt returned from a trip to Tangiers and told me that a country called England was taking on young Moroccan men and women to work in their hospitals. I begged my aunt to try and help me get to England. I promised to look after her and send her money from my wages, if she could lend me the money to get me to this land of fortune.

She did just that and in 1969 I arrived in Dover. I was in a group of about twenty men and women from Morocco, Spain and Portugal. From Dover we were taken by bus to London and to an agency in Piccadilly. After a couple of weeks spent trying to familiarise myself with my new home, I was taken to St Mary's Hospital in Harrow and told what my duties would be.

The responsibilities of my new job seemed beyond me. I couldn't speak any English and had never learned to read and write in Arabic. The machines, the materials and all the instructions were impossible for me to understand and I just sat and cried.

But I was lucky to have been placed in the same team as another Moroccan woman, who had been working there for about a year. She was a godsend and showed me how to use all the machines and products. I quickly learned everything I needed to know - without needing to read or write!

I soon lost the fear of my new job and felt proud to be wearing my uniform. I looked like a proper nurse working in an English hospital! I had my own room in the nurses' home, I was earning my living and I had no one else to answer to.

Soon afterwards my aunt wrote to tell me that I had to pay back the money I owed her. So for the next three years I spent all the money I earned paying for my room, sending money to my family and paying back my aunt. At the end of the fourth year I was given indefinite leave to remain and felt ready to visit Morocco again. My family was no longer ashamed of me, as I was working and regularly sending them money.

The whole village celebrated my arrival! I handed out gifts to everyone in my family and gave a sum of money to my father. I felt so happy and was looking forward to making this my regular annual holiday.

Then my father told me that I would only be able to see them again if I did so as a married woman. He said he did not want any more shame brought on the family. I was devastated. I didn't want to upset my father, but I had grown used to the freedoms of my life in London. Of course the husband had already been found for me, he was a young man from the village whom I had known since childhood.

I eventually surrendered to my father and said yes. My husband and I didn't bother with a party, but simply went through the legal ceremony to get our wedding certificate. After which I hurried straight back to London. My husband eventually followed and I had to leave my room at the nurses' home because I was now a married woman. A friend of mine found a bedsit for us in Swinbrook Road.

When we started living together I found it very difficult to get used to my new lifestyle. We tried for a baby, but after two years we had had no luck. One day I confided in a nurse who worked at the hospital with me and she referred me to their gynaecology department for tests. There they told me that I had been damaged by the abortion and would never be able to have children.

1960's

On hearing this I felt my life had come to an end. I felt inadequate and incomplete, as though I was not like other women. But my husband did not seem to mind so much and he helped me to slowly accept that I would never have children. Our life settled back down and I was able to return to work.

Then my husband began to change towards me. Shortly after he got his indefinite leave to remain in the country, he insisted we go to Morocco for a holiday. As soon as we arrived in Morocco he went to the local magistrate and brought him to my parents' home, demanding that I be given my divorce papers. My father was furious and accused my husband of marrying me for the sole purpose of getting to England. My husband replied that I was a no-good woman, who lost her virginity before we were married and was unable to give him children.

The trauma of this made my father ill and he never recovered, God rest his soul. The humiliation was so great that my family had to leave the village. I rented a home for them in Meknes and promised to devote the rest of my life to my family. I worked very hard and eventually bought a house for them. I also helped my brother to come to this country.

A few years later I was on holiday in Morocco when my mother asked me to help one of the girls in the village. She had suffered a rape just like I did all those years ago. I went straight to see the poor girl and brought her to my parents' home. I asked them to let her stay with them until she had her baby.

She did just that and the son she gave birth to eventually became my son. I called him Abderahim. He joined me in London when he was a toddler and I was devoted to him. He was everything to me and for a while we lived a very happy life. But when he became a teenager he began to mix with some local boys who were involved with drugs and crime. It saddens me to say that my son ended up in prison on more than one occasion.

I suffered so much. Our home was continually ransacked, as Abderahim would take anything he could find and sell it to feed his habit. I felt desperate and had no one to turn to. At the time I was seeing a legal advisor at my local Citizens Advice Bureau, who was helping me with some housing and tax issues. One day I found myself telling her all about it. She immediately wrote a letter to my GP explaining the situation. Soon Abderahim got the help and support he needed and things slowly started to get better.

I have since become a grandmother and I thank God for the immense happiness my grandson has given me. Life has been very testing for me and the years of stress, the hard work and the trauma of the rape still live with me. I think it has probably affected my health and today I am living with cancer. I have no idea what the future holds for me. But I do know that I am very lucky to be in England. I have everything that I need here and I am very grateful for all that God has given me.



I think I must have been about six or seven years old when my father decided to migrate. My father left in 1968 and my mother and my two siblings and I stayed behind for a year.

My father made the decision to migrate because he was a man of little means. He earned very little working as a barber and odd job man and his decision was made because of poverty. He wanted us to have a better life. I went to school and I remember feeling very sad. I missed my father very much. I don't remember being happy, until he sent for us to join him in the UK.

We traveled by plane and I remember feeling overwhelmed by the idea of flying. All the family came to Tangiers airport to say goodbye. I remember the sound of the roaring engine and having to put the seatbelt on. My youngest sister was sitting on my mum's lap and we all held onto our seats in excitement. My sisters and I all wore the same outfit: a tartan skirt and pink cardigan with long white socks and black shoes with a bow, which my father had sent from the UK especially for the journey.

I remember landing and going through the arrival lounge. We were escorted by some airport officials and after a short wait we were reunited with my father. I remember a television screen in the airport and lots of green plants. It was wonderful to see my father again. He and a couple of his friends took us to a waiting car and we set off on what seemed like a very long journey. I remember it was snowing and it was freezing. I had never seen snow before. I must have fallen asleep, because the next thing I remember was being woken up by my mum. We had finally arrived at our new home in Trowbridge in Wiltshire.

I knew nothing about Britain or the British way of life. All I knew was that we would be living as a family again and I felt very happy to be living again with both my parents and my sisters.

My dad had worked very hard to save enough money so that he was able to buy a house for us. He worked in a frozen foods factory. I remember feeling that I was the luckiest person alive to be in such a lovely house. Although at the same time it felt strange, as I was not used to living in a house built with bricks or having glass in the windows.

We were already enrolled in the local primary school. I remember being treated very well by all the teachers and having lovely new clothes with warm coats and shoes. It was extremely cold but I loved it. Both myself and my sisters settled down and started to learn English.

I think the first few months were a magical time. But as time passed I started to realise that I was in a totally alien environment. I really wanted to learn the British way of life and the language, I was so impatient. I did make friends, but as I began to understand the language I also began to understand that I was different and that people treated me differently. I spent most of my formative years in that small village in Wiltshire trying to belong, because as far as I was concerned this was my home. But it was not easy and my siblings and I suffered racial abuse and hardship in our quest to belong. However I still recall wonderful memories of being in such a beautiful part of Britain. Those experiences have made me the person that I am today.

It was ten years before we went back to visit Morocco, because during that time we didn't have a home to go back to. My father had sold the wooden huts which had been our home, in order to pay off the debts that he had incurred financing our journey to the UK. So my father had to build us a new house to come home to.

Morocco was still the same and the people that we had left behind were still the same. I remember feeling very sad for my cousins who were still living in poor conditions, the same conditions that I had lived in before. I remember feeling guilty and at the same time relieved, that I no longer lived like that. I think being here in Britain had changed me, although I didn't yet feel that I belonged or understood everything here.

It took me some time to reconnect with Morocco as a teenager. At first I didn't like going back there and felt that I had nothing to go back to. I didn't understand the culture or the people and I think I had disconnected from that side of myself.

It wasn't until I had children of my own that I was able to reconnect and explore my Moroccan side. I made sure that I visited Morocco every year with them. I think my children consider themselves to be both British and Moroccan. I was very conscious of bringing my children up to feel that they belong to both cultures.

I now think of myself as both British and Moroccan, I can't separate the two. I do feel very British when I am in Morocco and recognize that I have developed many British habits. I'm still trying to understand what being a Moroccan is and I have started to feel a sense of longing for more of a connection with Morocco and wanting to spend more time there. I suppose it's an ongoing process of exploration. But I would say that the UK is where I feel most at home.



I married when I was very young and by the age of sixteen was working. I had two boys with my husband, Mohamed and Ahmed, and then we divorced. After that I took any job I could find to support my children and my mother. Over the years I worked in various factories and shops and as a farm labourer. I then married again and was the happiest woman in the world when we had our baby girl Rachida.

One day I went to the labour office to look for work and I found that contractors in Germany were looking for Moroccan labourers to work in their flower fields. At exactly the same time a friend of mine who was living in London sent me a contract to go to work in a London hotel! I had a decision to make and so I went home and prayed. I asked God to guide me and make the choice for me as to which country would be best for me and my children. London was the chosen place and so it was here that I came.

I left my three young children with my mother and arrived at the end of 1969. I came by boat via Spain and arrived at Victoria with my work permit and the address of where my friend was living. There were hardly any Moroccans in London at that time and I didn't speak a word of English. Arriving at the station I had no idea how to get to my friend's home. When I saw a Sikh man standing nearby, I thanked God that I had found another Arab Muslim and started speaking to him in Arabic! He was neither of course and didn't understand a word I was saying. So I took a taxi and showed the driver the address of where my friend was living.

My work contract was for six months. I was paid £10 a week and my rent was £2, so I saved every penny I could to send back home. As my visa was coming to an end I asked my manager if he could give me a letter to extend my visa. But he refused and told me I had to go back to Morocco.

I was very upset when he said this and went for a walk around London, walking down all the streets that I had come to know. As I was walking I saw the sign for Charing Cross Hospital and remembered that my friend Rhimo worked there. I walked up to the hospital entrance, where there was a man putting out the rubbish. I spoke to him in what I thought was simple English, but he replied to me in Spanish saying he didn't understand my Chinese!!

I jumped for joy when I heard him speak in Spanish. Though I had never been to school, I had picked up Spanish from our Spanish neighbours when I was young girl. In fact I learned to speak Spanish before I learned Arabic.

I told him that I was looking for my friend and he asked me if I wanted a job. Of course I said yes. So not only did I get to see my friend, but I also found myself a new job, which came with its own accommodation.

For the first few weeks I was terrified of being seen by my ex-employer, as I thought if he did so he would send me back to Morocco. Until one day I broke down at work and through an interpreter I was able to tell them my fear. I was so reassured to learn that as I was now working for the hospital, I couldn't be forced to go back home.

Although I was happy to be able to stay on in London, my mother and my children were never out of my mind. I loved them all very much. Especially my daughter, who was very special to me because she is a girl. It broke my heart to have to part from her. But I wanted to be able to work here so that I could help and support them.

I was very hard-working, which earned me respect at work. It took some time for me to get my papers, but eventually I managed it. I was now regularly sending money back home to my mother and also I started visiting my family every year for a two week holiday.

In December 1975 I received a letter from my mother telling me that she was very ill. She asked me to come to Morocco to collect my children and bring them back with me to London. My mother died soon after and I brought Rachida and her father - my ex-husband - back with me. Unfortunately at first I couldn't bring my boys here, as I didn't have enough room for them. But I got help from a social worker and in time I was able to move into bigger accommodation and bring my boys to live with me.

My life then started to settle down. My children were in school and my ex-husband was working. For myself I was working three jobs and learning English at Wornington College. When I was then able to speak English and Spanish, I started to help out interpreting for my local housing advice centre. The work was unpaid, but it was a great help to the many Moroccans who were living in bad housing at that time.

It was then that I came across an advert for a toilet attendant in Westminster. I applied and got the job and worked there until all the public services were privatised eighteen years later. The job was less gruelling than many I had done and I enjoyed working with the public. I worked at several different sites from Queensway to Duke Street, staying at each site for fourteen weeks at a time.

My happiness did not last however, as my ex-husband started to drink and beat me. I could take the abuse no more and went to see a solicitor. While he was dealing with my case, the firm he worked for asked me whether I could help them interpreting for their Arabic and Spanish speaking clients. I told my solicitor that I couldn't read and write, but I could always speak! And so the factory girl ended up working as an interpreter. The work empowered me and I felt encouraged, as I did not want others to have to suffer as I had done.

My boys have since done well. Mohamed was very clever and became an architect. Ahmed was naughty and often played truant from school, but he managed to turn things around and he now has his own business and four grown up children of his own. Rachida studied hairdressing with Tony and Guy and is now a grandmother herself.

I am so very proud of my and my children's achievements. We are now four generations living here. I am a Moroccan and a Muslim, but this is also my country. I cannot separate this country from Morocco.

London has changed a great deal during the time I have lived here. Life here was much easier when I first arrived, a few pounds went a long way back then. Today the city is overcrowded and it seems to me that people do not respect each other so much. I feel sorry because I don't feel the city is safe any longer.

I wonder what the future holds for my great-grand-daughter. Her parents are very strict observers of Islam, they have their own life and will make their own choices. Just as I made mine. I am very lucky that my grand-daughter is good to me and takes care of me. She says I was always there for her when she was young, so she is here for me now in my old age.



Stories from Women
who arrived in the 1970's



Fatima S Arrived in the UK 1970

I arrived at Victoria Station on Thursday 23rd November 1970. I have never forgotten the date. I thought I would only be here for one year, perhaps two at the very most. But forty years later and I am still here!

I came to the UK with my husband, God rest his soul. At home in Meknes we found a letter in our post office box. It was an invitation to apply to come to work in the UK. We both applied and five days later we each received a contract. We took the contracts to Rabat to get them stamped at the British Embassy and twenty eight days later we were sent our passports.

We travelled here with several other married couples just like ourselves, who came from various towns in northern Morocco. We travelled by boat and train and were met at Victoria Station by the manager of the factory which had employed us all. He took us to the city of Bath, where our accommodation had already been arranged for us. There we started our work in a chicken factory.

Bath was a beautiful city, with handsome buildings and parks filled with flowers. But from the beginning I wasn't happy working in the factory. I didn't like the work we had to do and the stench in the factory was horrible. I only managed to stay there four months.

My husband and I both found work at Newlands, a private school in Maidenhead. I worked as an assistant cook and my husband worked as the gardener and caretaker. But we felt very isolated there. There were no other Moroccans and we felt lonely. So we returned to Bath. My husband returned to work in the chicken factory and I found work in a tennis ball factory on the outskirts of the city.

Then I managed to get a job working as a chambermaid in the Francis Hotel in Bath. I much preferred hotel work to factory work and stayed working there for the next nine years. We were paid by the room, so I would work as hard and fast as I could, to complete as many rooms as possible.

My husband and I were very happy and had a good life. We enjoyed living in Bath. By now we were renting a beautiful apartment and had furnished it ourselves. We had bought a car and at weekends we would drive to the coast. There we would have a picnic and laugh together and sing songs.

We enjoyed our life. We had made good friends, both Moroccan and English. This country was very different then. We had been asked to come here to work and were made very welcome by the English. I realised as soon as I arrived here that we women were all the same, whatever our cultural or religious backgrounds. We all had the same concerns in life and we all got on with one another.

During this time my husband had left the chicken factory and gone to work in the tennis ball factory where I had previously worked. But after a while he was made redundant. So we decided to follow the other Moroccans and head for London.

Coming to London from Bath was like coming from the light and stepping into darkness. But we all have to go where the work is. We came to Kensal Rise and rented a flat, which we filled with all our furniture. We both immediately found work in the Lancaster Gate Hotel, I worked again as a chambermaid and my husband worked in the restaurant.

I spent the rest of my working life working in hotels in London. Over the years I worked at the London Hilton, the Savoy, White's Hotel, Hyde Park Court Hotel, Hospitality Inn and the London Metropole Hotel. I would work at each hotel a couple of years or so, until I became unhappy with the working conditions or my wage. Sometimes friends would tell me of better work or pay at another hotel and so I would go there to ask for work.

I always carried with me the written reference they had given me from my first job working as a chambermaid at the Francis Hotel in Bath. As soon as any manager read it, they immediately gave me work! I always worked very hard and wherever I worked, they were always very pleased with me. My managers would tell me that they didn't need to check my rooms, as they knew that they would be perfect.

My husband's last job was in the Cafe Royal at Piccadilly. He died a few years ago, God rest his soul, and I feel as though my life stopped when he died. We never had children and so I have been left here all alone. I come from a large family in Meknes and I am the only person from my family to have left Morocco. I feel very lonely these days.

Since my husband died my health has also become very poor. It always improves whenever I go to Morocco, as though being in Morocco lightens my heart. But then after a little while I start to miss London and my home here. I have lived in London a long time and know England much better than I know my home country. But then as soon as I am back in my flat in London, I start to miss Morocco again!

1970's

All the time I have been living in this country I have been thinking about returning to live in Morocco. I think the building of mosques in this country helped us to stay and make our home here, for we no longer needed to return home if we wanted to practice and celebrate Islam. But now I would like to die in Morocco if I can, God willing. I thank God for the good life I enjoyed with my husband, for so long we were blessed with our health and we were very lucky to have the marriage we had. I thank God just the same for my life today, for we can't be young again! But I miss Morocco much more now that I am alone and want very much to return there. Here I spend most of my days on my own, but in Morocco there is no such thing as a house which is empty of people.

My future is in God's hands, it all depends on what God has planned for me. If I am meant to go back to Morocco I need only to pack my suitcase. I would like to die there if I can, but I can only wait and see.



1970's

Fatna K
Arrived in the UK 1972

I came to this country with my two young daughters. My husband was already working here and we came to join him. Our intention at the time was to stay here working for a few years to save up some money and then return to Morocco.

I was very lucky, for after only ten days I found work in the Hotel Britannia working as a chambermaid. I worked there for a year until I became pregnant. I left work and thanks to God I gave birth to my third daughter. I didn't have to wait long before I found some similar work in the Kensington High Street Hotel. Once again I worked there until I found myself pregnant. I left work and thanks to God I gave birth to a healthy son.

I was blessed again and found work quickly and without difficulty, working as a chambermaid in the Selfridges Hotel. I loved working in that hotel and ended up working there for twenty years. I felt completely at home there. My manager was a lovely woman and we got on very well. She appreciated how hard I worked and was always praising the high standard of my work.

Thanks to God I was very happy in my new life. From the very first day here I loved this country and it wasn't long before I knew that I wanted to stay. I instantly felt at home and comfortable. I found in this country a freedom and rights which I had never known before. When I first arrived I only knew my husband, but I soon met a lot of Moroccan women through my work and I got on with women from all different nationalities.

I worked hard for the sake of my family, both at the hotel and at home bringing up my children. Every day I would take the bus to work and back home again. One day I was travelling along in the bus coming home from work. As we neared my stop I got up and stood by the doors waiting to get off. But the bus didn't stop and so I rang the bell. As I was getting off, the doors almost shut against me. I tripped and fell from the step and banged my head against a metal post.

I passed out. When I came round my head was bleeding heavily and there was blood all around me. The bus driver called for an ambulance and I was taken to hospital. There they stitched the wound in my head and kept me in overnight. I rested another day at home and then I returned to work. I didn't say anything to my manager about the accident, until she noticed some dried blood on my head and asked me about it. When I told her what had happened she immediately sent me home to rest for a few days. I did rest until I felt better and only then returned to work. But I always felt that from the day of the accident there was something wrong with my blood.

A short while later I went to Mecca with my husband to do Hajj. It was a deeply moving experience and the memories will always stay with me. Thanks to God we returned home safely. But I came back feeling very tired and started to suffer from headaches. I decided to rest for a short while and took a year off work.

When I went back to work I worked for another couple of years, but I was finding it increasingly difficult. Every day I was suffering from very bad headaches and I kept feeling dizzy. I tried to keep working but the pain grew much worse and I became very ill. In the end I went to the hospital, where they did blood tests and examined my head. They found that I had a brain tumour and said they would have to operate.

It was a very frightening time. I didn't know if I was going to survive the operation, I didn't know if I was ever going to see my children again. I had to say goodbye to my son and daughters, which was heart-breaking.

Thanks to God the staff in the hospital were wonderful people. They gave me the best treatment and worked so hard to reassure me and ease my worries and fears. Thanks to God the operation was a success and they managed to remove the tumour. I was in the operating theatre for seven hours and afterwards I was unconscious for three days. When I came round I was very ill indeed. I remember the nurses and my daughters washing my face for me and combing my hair. I had to stay in hospital for quite a while, until I was able to stand and walk and take care of myself a little. When I left hospital I rested at home for about a year, but I still didn't feel that I had the strength to go back to work. So I decided to retire. Thanks to God they rewarded me for all my years of work and gave me a good pension.

I really and truly love this country. I have never encountered any problems here. This country has fed me and my family and provided us with work and a home. With the passing of time I feel it has become my country. It has taken good care of me and my family and for that I will always be grateful. I have been very blessed. When I was ill I received the best treatment and didn't have to pay for it. Whenever I have a problem I know I only need to pick up the telephone and there will be help for me at the other end. The people of this country are such good people. I have wonderful neighbours who always ask after me and my family and wherever I go I feel a sense of community. I thank God and I thank them all. May God reward them.



Hajja R Arrived in the UK 1972

I was born in Algeria in 1940 to Moroccan parents. At the time Algeria was known as French Algeria. I grew up amongst the French and the Algerians, but I knew somehow that I was Moroccan. It is one of those things that you cannot explain, how your cultural identity is always a part of you and follows you wherever you go.

I grew up in a modest family and my father worked for a French company. This gave us the opportunity to go to school and receive an elementary education. It was of course in French and so sadly I never got to learn to read or write Arabic. I am nonetheless grateful for my education, for I have since learned that most women of my age born in Morocco had no education at all.

However my education came to an abrupt halt when my father became ill with throat cancer. His health rapidly deteriorated and he died. My siblings and I were left without a guardian to help and support us, for my late mother never worked and did not know how to. I was the second eldest of my siblings and so at the young age of twelve my sister and I had to work to support the family. Most of the work available at the time was working as a domestic in private French homes, but my mother would not let us do that. So a job was found for me as a child minder in an affluent French family.

My job entailed looking after a one year old boy. I was very aware that I was being employed to take care of him and keep him safe, when of course I still needed someone to take care of me. It was hard to accept and I have never forgotten the feeling. My whole life was turned upside down and so suddenly too. I was never able to grieve for my late father as a child, because the responsibility to feed my family was thrust upon me. It caused me to become withdrawn and bitter. I realised I did not like the coloniser!

A couple of years later my father's cousin came from Morocco and joined us in Algeria. Life became somewhat easier, as my uncle had boys who could now support us. My working life came to an end and it was a good feeling. One of my cousins was at least seven years older than me and he appeared to me to be very angry and agitated. As I got to know him I learned that it was because he did not like living under occupation. He wanted freedom for Algeria and more importantly he wanted the French out of his home country Morocco. At the time I didn't know much about the French occupation and certainly was not aware of the situation in Morocco. I had been told that Morocco was my country of origin, but I had yet to visit the country.

In 1955 I was duly married to this cousin. He gave me a different perspective on my identity and instilled in me a feeling of wellbeing and pride. Later he passed this on to our children and I pray to God to offer him His blessings in Heaven.

We had to wait a year to receive our official marriage certificate from the French-run administration in Algeria. But once we had secured this my late husband refused to spend another night in Algeria! And it was thus that I made my first journey to Morocco. Morocco was and is my country; but when I arrived there I felt like a stranger. I was far away from everything and everyone I had known. Despite what my late father and late husband had told me, Morocco was a foreign land to me.

In September 1957 I gave birth to my first child Yahya. My late husband was very politically active against the French occupation of our country, and whilst he was busy with his political campaigns I relished being a mother. My son brought solace and comfort into my life and was everything to me. Three years later his sister followed and she was an instant hit with her father, he was totally devoted to her.

When a job offer came our way, we moved back to Algeria. Algeria was by now changing and it was changing for the worse for the Moroccans who lived there. The Algerians had regained power and did not want anything to do with foreigners, not even the Moroccans who had suffered and fought with them for their independence. Things went from bad to worse and in 1965 we returned to Morocco.

On our return my late husband opened up a shop. Business was good and I thought we were going to settle down at last, bring up and educate our children and live a quiet life. But it was wishful thinking. My late husband was not happy with the way the new powers in Morocco were dealing with the Moroccan citizens. He was often angry and felt as if he had taken on the country's problems single handedly.

One day in 1968 he told me that he was going to Tangiers for the weekend to see some of his friends and then he would return home. One month later I received a letter from him with a foreign stamp on the envelope! He was in England, the land of fog. My fourth child was thus born in 1969 while his father was in England. In 1970 I eventually agreed to join him in his journey into the unknown.

Our first home in England was not as comfortable as the one we had left behind in Morocco, but it was much better than those occupied by many others who later became our friends. We were living in North Kensington and the area in those days was grim. The houses were old and dilapidated Victorian buildings and many had outside toilets. Landlords took advantage of the workers arriving from Morocco, Portugal and Spain and divided up their old houses into multiple bedsits, in which they would house large families. They were living in dreadful conditions. Yet the landlords who were doing this were themselves migrants who had once come here from Italy and Greece.

There was so much for me to see and learn that I didn't have time to be homesick; and I wonder now which country I would have been homesick for, as I am of Moroccan origin but was born and brought up in Algeria. I quickly became accustomed to the English way of life. My children were enrolled in the local schools and they just got on with their lives.

We found out shortly after my arrival that my youngest boy had poor eyesight and so he was transferred to a specialist school for the partially sighted in Shepherds Bush. My youngest daughter was then born prematurely and I was in hospital for several months.

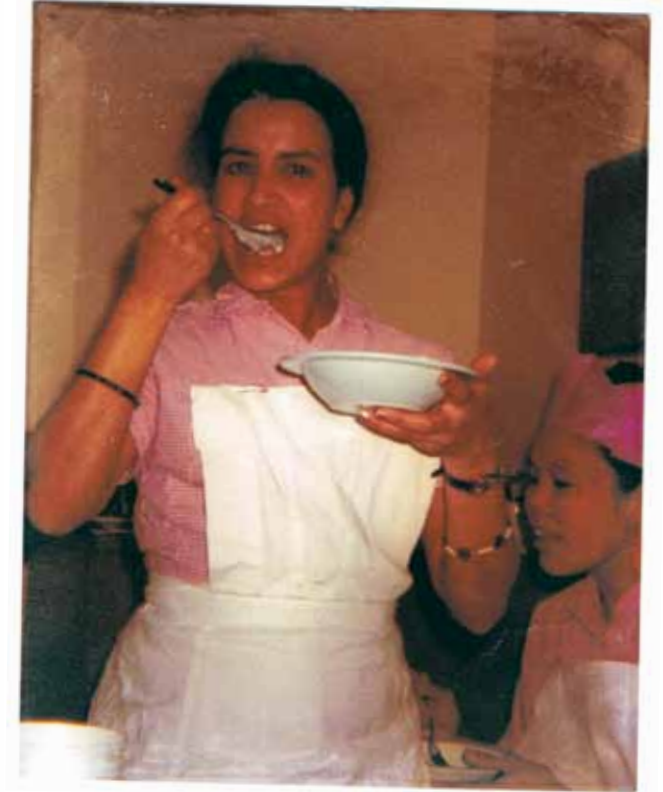
My husband always encouraged me to seek work and be independent. So I was able to learn English and communicate with the outside world. At no time have I ever felt homesick. This is my home. My children have done quite well in their lives and I'm privileged to be a grandmother to the eleven grandchildren of my five children. They are, quite simply, my life. The one thing we have held onto very strongly over the years are the traditional family values and ties.

The UK is a wonderful place to live and we are indeed privileged to be here. It is a society that is welcoming and makes you feel comfortable whoever you are. I just hope that the recent events in the world and their impact on our lives as Muslims can soon pass. It would be wonderful if during my lifetime I could once again see a tolerant society, where everyone can live alongside one other without hatred, racism and prejudice.

I am blessed nonetheless for what I have, the family that supports me and the country that accommodates me. This is my home just as much as Morocco, the country that gave me my identity.



Stories from Women
who arrived in the 1980's



Fatima A Arrived in the UK 1980

I came to this country when I was quite young. I came here to look for work after the death of my husband, may he rest in peace. At the time I was living in Casablanca with my three sons and I didn't have any work or money. I don't have any qualifications, so it was very unlikely that I would have been able to find work in Morocco.

I came to this country alone and when I arrived I didn't know anyone here. A friend of my late husband met me at the airport and brought me to London. When I asked around I found that there were some girls here who I'd known in Casablanca. I moved in with them and began to look around for some work. But it was incredibly difficult. I looked everywhere, but there was nothing I could do.

I had no family to help me out and I soon found myself in a very desperate situation. I had to accept the position I was in. I knew how the girls were earning their living and so I followed them down 'the bad path' in order to survive.

I had left my children with my mother in Casablanca and I missed them terribly. I wanted to bring them to this country so we could all be together, but I didn't know how the legal system worked here. Then the friend of my late husband introduced me to a Moroccan woman who worked as a legal advisor. She explained to me that I would have to find some legitimate work before I could apply to bring my sons into the country.

I thank God for the day that I met this woman. She supported me through everything from that moment and helped me to move away from the life I was living. It wasn't at all easy. I lived through a very difficult, very painful time. I had to change every single thing about my life. Eventually the strain of it all caused me to become depressed.

I thank God that my religion saved me. During the time I was walking 'the bad path', I never thought about religion at all. Of course I was born and brought up a Muslim and used to pray and fast Ramadan with my late husband. But after I came to this country I was no longer living a religious life. Until it came about by the grace of God that I started to pray again.

Through prayer my heart was changed. It took a long time, but slowly I was able to leave behind my old way of life and distance myself from the girls. Then the Moroccan advisor helped me get a job working as a chambermaid in a hotel. There I found myself working with Moroccan women who knew God and prayed. I enjoyed the company of these women and I was happy in my new work.

I was working in a hotel when the war between Iraq and Kuwait broke out. Most of the clients who stayed in the hotel came from the Middle East and they stopped travelling abroad because of the war. So the manager of the hotel had to lay off some of the staff and unfortunately I lost my job. But I thank God because once again the advisor helped me and found me a job in a hospital.

It was when I was working in the hospital that I started to feel unwell. I kept feeling dizzy for no reason and sometimes I found that I couldn't move my neck. When my legs became paralysed I went to see the doctor and he sent me for tests at the hospital. When I returned to see the doctor he told me that they had found a brain tumour.

I was in a state of shock at what he had told me. I came out of the surgery feeling scared and dizzy. I was clutching in my hands some papers about my treatment which the doctor had given me and I went straight round to see the women who work at Al Hasaniya. I thank God, for those women helped me and supported me through a very difficult time. They went with me whenever I had a hospital appointment, for it was another seven months before they operated to remove the tumour. When I came out of hospital, they took me back home and looked after me until I regained my health.

Thanks to God a couple of months after my operation I was able to go to Hajj. I have a sister who lives in Saudi Arabia and she arranged everything for me. My friends here were all worried about me. They thought I was taking a great risk, because Hajj is hard even for a person who is in good health. But by the grace of God it all went well. I asked God simply for my health and faith and I returned home safe and well.

Today I thank God for I have everything I need and I am alive. Each year I go for a scan on my brain and I thank God that so far the cancer hasn't returned. The struggles and hardships I lived through have taken their toll on my health, but I don't look back on those days. I thank God that when I left behind 'the bad path' I said goodbye to my darkest days. I managed to get permission to bring my sons to this country and we were given a place to live. Thanks to God my sons now have children of their own. Today I spend my time with women who are living a good life, we go to the mosque together to pray and study the Quran. I live now for my children and my grandchildren and their future.



1980's

Zubida O Arrived in the UK 1980

I was born in the city of Kenitra. Then at the age of seven my eldest brother's work took him to Tangiers and my family moved there. We have lived there ever since and so I consider Tangiers to be my home town.

I was educated from primary level right up to Bacalaureat, where I majored in literature. I completed my first year, but then I started to think about the circumstances of my family. I had one brother and he was supporting the whole family, as our parents were both old and our sister was still young. I felt that I wanted to help out too and so I decided to leave my studies and look for work. I was nineteen at the time.

I found a job in administration, working for an agricultural organisation based in the town of Laraache. I worked there until I got married. After I married my department moved to Tangiers, which is where I gave birth to my children.

My husband died not long after, when I was twenty five years old and two years later I married again. My second husband was a cousin of my first husband and he was working abroad in London. Even though I was married, I continued to work. I lived and worked in Tangiers, while my husband lived and worked in London.

But as time passed our children were growing up and they needed their father as well as their mother. I too needed help with the responsibility of bringing up our children, as I was also responsible for looking after my mother and my sister. It was a heavy burden and it was growing. My mother was old and ill and I was on my own trying to take care of everyone. I began to feel a great pressure weighing down on me. I was working both inside and outside the home and assuming the role of both mother and father for my children.

So I decided to move to London to be with my husband and lighten my load a little. I brought my children and my mother with me. But the move was too much for her and she couldn't cope with the life here. She said she was too old for change. This was during the 1980s and London was very different then. There was no Islamic culture or religious life here at that time.

So my mother went back to Morocco to live and I gave birth to my youngest son a few years later. I then brought my other children here so we could all be together and enrolled them in Holland Park School.

I fully intended to continue to work here in London just as I had in Morocco. But when I arrived my husband and I talked at length about the Moroccan families we observed around us and the problems we could see them experiencing. I saw that the migrant Moroccan families already here seemed splintered and fractured. There did not seem to be a focus on the children's upbringing. Their goal in life was to visit Morocco and save money so they could build a home there. We all thought we would be here in London only for a short while and for this reason many families had focused on their life in Morocco, ignoring their life in London.

I heard the gossip about the community's problems, children ending up in prison or having problems with drugs. At that time we didn't have the mosque, where we could meet and our children could get together. The women, God forgive them, were influenced by European customs and were forgetting our Moroccan traditions. The majority of Moroccan women who were here at that time were uneducated and had come from rural villages. They suddenly found themselves in one of the largest capital cities in Europe and there was no help or support for them. Many found they had problems in their married and family lives, myself included.

When I saw this it scared me. My husband was very aware of this, as he had been living here for longer. He felt that here in London I would have to choose between working outside of the home or taking care of the children. If I chose to work professionally then he feared that our children would suffer and we wouldn't be able to guide or control them. I felt that I wanted to be able to educate my children and make a home for them. I wanted my children to find me at home when they came home from school.

So I thank God that I decided to stay at home with them. For I did encounter problems with my eldest son during his teenage years. But we got through these difficult times and things were easier with my other children. I thank God that all my children studied hard and my eldest daughter helped her siblings with their work.

I was also lucky that I had good neighbours. The Moroccan families here have all come from different parts of Morocco and when I first came here I didn't know anyone apart from my husband. I felt scared. Like everyone else I thought I might be returning to Morocco to live. But gradually I came to know my neighbours and began to go out and see people. One woman in particular became like a sister to me. We helped each other bringing up each other's children and we learned from each other's experiences.

Thanks to God in later years the mosque and cultural centre was built. I go there to meet with other women, study the Quran and Hadith and help others in their studies. I also do sports and attend my local gym. This last year I wasn't able to go out, as I spent my time looking after my late husband when he was sick. I devoted all my time to taking care of him and making his last days as pleasant as they could be, God rest his soul. But I thank God for all the advice you can find at the mosque, they will help you with any problem you take to them.

1980's

I thank God for my life has gone well. Morocco is my mother country and my roots lie there, I couldn't live here in London and never see my home country. But we must look after this country which has been so good to us. We must endeavour to bring up our children to look after this country and to respect its laws and customs. This has become our second home. It is where we live, where we have settled and made our home, where we live out our lives.

We thank God that we live a good life here. When I visit my families in Belgium, Holland or Spain, I thank God for the freedoms we have in this country. We live our lives freely and in peace here, we are allowed to practice our different religions. I am now sixty years old and have never encountered a problem or insult for wearing hijab.

It was very hard when my husband passed away and it has of course changed my life greatly. Today I help my grand children learn the Quran and Arabic and I thank God that I have a role with them and a new life. I must now think about how I move on from here, how to complete my life's journey.



1980's

Rachida S
Arrived in the UK 1981

I was born in 1954. My father was a grocer and my mother helped out doing odd jobs in private households. In 1959 my father was killed by French soldiers who mistook him for an independence fighter. After his death my mother was suddenly responsible for all of us. What little money she had she spent on educating my two brothers. Education wasn't considered to be important for girls, so instead I started working to help out my mother. But it wasn't enough and my mother felt she had no choice but to give me away to a middle class family. She thought they would be better able to take care of me.

However as soon as I arrived at the new family I realised that I was in fact here to work. My day began at six in the morning and I would never finish working until all the family went to bed. I ate and slept little. When the family had visitors I wouldn't get to sleep until two or three in the morning. Yet I would still have to wake at six to start work again the next day.

The next time I saw my mother I was eleven years old. I never understood the arrangement which had been made between my mother and the family, but I never received any money for the work I did. When my mother turned up at the house one day, I was sent back home with her.

Back at home I continued to work as a domestic worker. When I was sixteen a friend found a job for me working for a family in Casablanca. I didn't realise it at the time, but my mum was ill with cancer and she died not long after I started my new job. I thanked God for giving me the opportunity to make some money to help my siblings. My brother would come once a month to the back garden and I would hand over my wage.

One day Madame's brother came to live with the family. He was tall and handsome and I found myself attracted to him. I enjoyed working for him and he gave me a reason for getting up in the morning. Until one night when the family threw a large party. Everyone drank until the early hours of the morning and when they finally left I went to my room to get ready for bed. Suddenly Madame's brother came into my room. I had no idea what he was doing and asked if he needed something bringing to his room. His intentions were very different. I struggled as he came towards me, but he was too strong for me. He said that if I resisted, he would tell Madame to sack me. I had no choice but to give in to him.

A few months later I realised I was pregnant. When I told the family what had happened they denied everything and kicked me out of the house. I knew that I couldn't return home unmarried and pregnant. No one would believe I had been raped and I would have been considered shameful.

So I slept on the street that night. I spent most of the night crying and praying. I was about to become a mother and had no idea how was I going to support my child. Eventually I fell asleep and was woken in the morning by an old woman. Her name was Lalla Rqiya and she was a beggar. I told her everything and she took me back home with her. Six months later my baby girl was born.

I worked cleaning shop fronts while Lalla Rqiya stayed at home with my daughter. Then I found work as a chambermaid in one of the city's hotels. There I met a guest from Saudi Arabia who was looking for a Moroccan cook. I jumped at the opportunity. I planned to leave my daughter with Lalla Rqiya and send her money so that she could look after herself and my little girl.

I left for Saudi Arabia excited and full of hope that finally I would be able to make enough money to look after myself and my daughter. But I was also scared at the thought of working in a household again.

The house was very grand and had a lot of servants. My work was confined to Moroccan cooking. Sir worked for the Saudi government and Madame did nothing all day except shout at her employees. One of the nannies told me that the husband was also married to a Moroccan woman and so Madame held a grudge towards Moroccan women.

I kept my head down and got on with the job of cooking. Then one day Madame accused me of spying for the Moroccan wife. She said that I was casting magic spells when I prepared the food, so that her husband wouldn't go near her. She began to watch over me while I worked. Then she took to shouting at me for no reason and pulling my hair and beating me. I began to feel suicidal. It was only the thought of my daughter that kept me going.

Then Sir was sent to work at the Saudi embassy in Germany and I went with him and Madame. We arrived in winter and the cold and snow that greeted us seemed bleak. On arrival Sir told me that in addition to doing all the cooking, I would also be the household cleaner. He increased my wage and I sent all my savings back to Lalla Rqiya and my daughter.

But I missed my daughter very much and slowly a depression descended over me. I started smoking and drinking. I would steal alcohol from the house. Fortunately I was never caught, but in time I became addicted to the drink. It felt like my best friend. I had no way out of this life, I was doing this for the sake of my daughter, so that she could have a better future. It was thus that I resigned myself to my existence.

Then Sir announced that we were all going to London. He had become ill with heart problems and was going there for treatment. London felt like a breath of fresh air. We lived in a large flat close to Cromwell Hospital, where Sir was being treated. Madame was kept busy visiting the hospital and shopping at Harrods, so I didn't see too much of her.

One day Sir asked one of the embassy chauffeurs to take me to the Regents Park mosque. I hadn't left the house since we'd arrived and was excited to meet so many Moroccan women. I asked Madame to let me attend Friday prayers every week and she agreed to let me go every fortnight.

I looked forward to those days very much, as there I could speak my native dialect and talk about home. Gradually I began to drink less and stopped smoking. I made friends and got to know some of the community of Moroccans living in London. My culture and people helped me to cope with the life I was living.

Until the day came when I could take no more. Madame began accusing me of using witchcraft again and one day she rushed me to the bathroom, yelling at me that I had to scrub all the Moroccan filth out of the bathroom. She pulled out every bottle of detergent and ordered me to pour all of them into the bath tub. When I did as she demanded I choked with coughing, my eyes streaming, as the chemical mix of all the detergents was toxic. The fumes burned my face and my eye lashes disappeared.

Eventually I could no longer breathe and I collapsed. The next I knew I woke up in hospital with my eyes bandaged. The doctors had been told by Madame that I was an obsessive cleaner and had mixed all the detergents in a bid to improve my cleaning. I couldn't tell them the truth, as I couldn't speak English.

After two weeks the bandages were removed. I had lost a significant amount of sight in both eyes and it took a long time for my eyesight to improve. My eyelashes never grew back.

My eventual escape from this hell came very suddenly. I was in my room when I remembered that a friend from the mosque had given me the telephone number of a Moroccan woman who had helped her. I waited until the next day when I was alone in the house and rang the number. When the woman answered I poured my heart out to her. She told me to leave the house immediately and get in a taxi. She gave me the address of her office and told me to bring any papers that I had with me.

I did exactly as she said. It was a difficult thing to do, but this woman was indeed my saviour. She found a family to take me in and immediately told the police about the abuse I had suffered. The police returned my passport and eventually I managed to obtain permission to remain in the UK. I was also given compensation from the Saudi Embassy.

Today my eyesight is slightly better and I can speak English and write a few words. Lalla Rqiya passed away, God rest her soul. But with time and help I was able to bring my daughter here to be with me. My daughter graduated and is now working as a social worker.

I have no doubt that my daughter shares her story with many others, whose mothers suffered abuse just like I did, simply because they too were poor and at the mercy of others. My hope for her is that one day her father will make amends by recognising her as his daughter, to give her some peace of mind.



Fatima R Arrived in the UK 1981

The day that I left Morocco I had no idea that I was going to stay on in this country. I came to spend my Summer holiday with my cousin's family in London. I was working at the time teaching tailoring and dress making in the town of Kenitra in Morocco. But it was my destiny that I should spend my future here and so I found myself captivated by the country in those first few days. I wasn't yet thinking of staying here indefinitely, but I decided I would stay on a little while to learn English. My cousin's family took care of me and helped me to get an extension to my visa. I kept deciding to stay on a little longer and the more time that I spent here, the more I got used to the culture here. I slowly started to feel at home. So I applied for British citizenship and with God's grace and the help of my family, I was granted it very quickly.

I had always worked in Morocco. Before I learnt tailoring, I volunteered for the Red Cross, taking care of the sick in hospitals and helping the victims of floods. Later on I taught dress making to girls and women in prison. Here in London I went to work as a hospital cleaner in Saint Mary's hospital. I was very lucky, as my accommodation in the hospital grounds came with the job. I worked shifts in the hospital and in my spare time I continued to study English in college. But it became too much for me, working and studying at the same time. Eventually I decided to abandon my studies and concentrate all my efforts on work.

I continued to work in the hospital until the Department of Health closed the hospital down. They found me a new post working for a private company and this too came with its own accommodation, which is where I still live today. I continued working there until I became ill and had to go into hospital for a stomach operation. When I'd fully recovered from the operation I looked for another job and found one in an old people's home in Baker Street. I worked there as a nursing assistant every morning, looking after the patients who came from all different parts of the world. After a little while I also got a second job, doing similar work in a private hospital in Harley Street. I worked there in the afternoon, after I'd finished my shift in the old people's home.

Once I felt settled in my new life, I decided to bring my younger sister over from Morocco to live with me. But shortly after she arrived my father fell ill. So I had to leave my sister in the care of a friend, while I went back to Morocco to see how my father was.

I found him very ill indeed and I had to take him to the hospital. I had hoped that I would be able to bring him back with me to London, so that I could take care of him myself. But his health was just too poor and I had to return to London alone to resume my work. My father died not long after, God rest his soul.

My father's death affected me very deeply. I had lost the person most dear to me in this life. They were very difficult days for me. I lost interest in everything and was unable to continue working. Eventually I became physically ill and had to see a doctor. It took me a long time to get well again and work through my grief. But thanks to God I was patient and slowly started to feel better. Eventually I was ready to return to work and face my future.

Once again I looked around for a job and found one in the Regent's Park Hotel working as a housekeeper. I worked very hard, because I was now financially responsible for my sister who was living with me and at the same time I was also sending money back home to Morocco every month to help out my brothers there.

Before my father died he had said to me: 'You must never abandon your younger brother, he needs always to be close by your side. You and your brother and sister must never be parted.' So I brought my younger brother over here to join us and enrolled him on an English course at college. But the very same day that he arrived, I suffered a nasty accident in my home. Some council workers were working on the central heating and that particular day they had left the house in a terrible mess. I was only calling in at home before going on to meet up with my brother. When I opened the front door I slipped and fell straight through a hole in the ground. I fell from the first floor of the building to the ground floor.

I was very badly hurt and my whole body was in pain. I went straight to the hospital, but when I arrived there I was told that there would be a four to five hour wait before I would be able to see a doctor. I couldn't leave my brother on his own, so I left the hospital and bought some painkillers from a chemist. I met up with my brother and brought him back home, where he helped me to clean and tidy the place.

I kept taking salt baths and painkillers, but time passed and I still wasn't recovering from the fall. Instead the pain in my back and legs had grown worse. I was no longer able to work in the hotel, as I couldn't walk up the stairs. When I went to see the manager of the hotel he told me that I should consult a doctor, as my condition was serious. So I went back to the hospital where the doctor treated me. He explained that the council were responsible for my accident, as they been at fault. He advised me to see a solicitor and I thank God that I did, for eventually I received compensation.

I was very sorry that I'd had to leave my work, for I had been happy there. However my health slowly got better and after a while I was strong enough to return to work. I began to look for something part-time.

But it was then that my brother became unwell and started to suffer from mental health problems. I had to stay at home with him and couldn't return to work, as I was too scared to leave him alone. I was responsible for him and have never forgotten the words of my father.

1980's

Unfortunately my brother's health has not yet improved and over the years his problems have had an effect on my health too. I have taken care of and looked after my siblings for a long time. I have supported them and worked hard for them and I thank God, for I was happy to do that. But perhaps I haven't taken such good care of myself and the strain has weakened my health.

The important thing is that we thank God every day. Whether we come across a blessing or a difficulty in life, we always thank God. Everything is in God's hands. This earthly world is nothing, it is simply the path to the hereafter. We try to do good and help others whenever we can.

Whenever anyone asks me what has kept me in this country and why I have never thought of returning home to Morocco, I always answer 'because of the people I have come to know here.' Any and every country has good people in it. We are all of God and from God and in the end we all return to Him. Thanks be to God.



1980's

Khadija K
Arrived in the UK 1981

I came to London from Casablanca on a one month visa with a friend. We only came to celebrate the New Year holiday, but straightaway I knew I liked it here. I wanted to stay on and learn the language, so I enrolled on a language course and got an extension on my visa to study.

Initially I only intended to stay here six months or so. I continued to study and kept getting extensions on my visa whenever it ran out. But eventually I needed to make some money, as my studying was expensive. I found work as a cleaner in a restaurant kitchen and then as a housekeeper in the private houses of various Arab families living in West London.

I realized that I liked living in London and did not want to return to Morocco to live. But the studying was becoming too expensive, so I had to stop it. I continued to work, but I no longer had a valid visa. Like many Moroccan women at the time I had been issued with an Irish passport that later proved to be invalid, and so had not bothered to renew the visa in my Moroccan passport¹.

But before I could even start to sort this problem, my Moroccan passport was stolen from my bank safety box. Everything that I possessed of any value I had stored in that box - both my Moroccan and Irish passports, my gold, a watch and most precious of all, the last photo ever taken of my dead sister God rest her soul - and they were all stolen.

Life was very hard for me for a long time. The Moroccan consulate refused to renew my visa or issue me with another passport. For twelve years I didn't have any papers or anywhere to live. I had to sleep on friends' floors and keep moving on from one friend to another. I could only take work that paid me cash in hand.

Eventually I managed to get legal aid and with the help of my lawyer was able to get another Moroccan passport issued by the Moroccan consulate. I went on to marry an Algerian living here in London. I would dearly love to have had children with him, but it wasn't to be. I suffered several miscarriages and spent a lot of time in hospital after each one. One time I came very close to death and my friends thought they would never see me again.

Eventually we separated and divorced and I was left with no money and nowhere to go. I became very depressed and had to leave my job. I was subletting the flat where I was living and when I stopped working the landlord kicked me out. I felt alone and desperate and didn't know where to turn. I honestly don't know how I would have survived had I not come across the Al Hasaniya Centre for Moroccan Women. They helped me to declare myself homeless so that I could be housed in a hotel and they helped me sort out some benefits.

During all this time, for a period of twenty five years, I wasn't allowed to go back to Morocco to visit my family. To this day I do not know the true facts, but someone had falsely entered into the airport computer system that I was a convicted criminal. This meant that if I entered the country I would be arrested on arrival. It took a long time and a lot of help and support from legal advisors to finally sort the problem. When I eventually landed once more on Moroccan soil, I was still arrested at the airport and briefly detained, while they received final confirmation that I was in fact allowed entry into the country.

But despite all these problems, I had been looking forward to that day for so very long and felt such happiness to be in Morocco again. As I walked out of the airport I literally felt like I was being born again. But my happiness was short lived. For when I went home to be with my family, I was shocked to find that I felt like a stranger. I felt such love in my heart for them, but my parents and siblings treated me like a guest in their home. I had expected to feel so happy to be with my family again, but instead I regretted that I had gone back to see them. Since that day I no longer feel that they are my family and I have never seen them again.

¹ Many Moroccan women who had enjoyed total freedom of movement in the UK as Irish nationals, suddenly found themselves in serious breach of UK immigration laws and facing deportation. This is because the Irish authorities declared such marriages unlawful and their acquisition of Irish nationality was withdrawn. The passport officer at the Irish Consulate involved was subsequently jailed for 21 months for his part in the scam.

It is very sad. All these years I have been living in London, I have been sending money back to my family. I still do, even though I no longer feel to be a part of the family. I could never afford to pay for my own education and yet I have financed the education of my sisters back in Morocco. My family is still poor, but I managed to buy a house for them. It is very sad to think that it is my house and yet if I were to return to Casablanca I would have to stay in a hotel.

But I like this country very much and have no intention of returning to live in Morocco. Even though I consider myself to be one hundred percent Moroccan, this country has changed me and I have become used to life here. I greatly value the freedom of the West. Here a woman can go out alone without people staring at her and gossiping about her. She can walk down the street without covering herself. It isn't like that in Morocco. There are of course girls in Casablanca who live such a free life, but it wasn't so in my family. Even in the height of summer I couldn't walk down the street with my arms showing.

Even Islam isn't the same here as it is in Morocco. In Morocco it is ever present and all pervasive, with everyone seeming to pray five times a day. Eid is celebrated by everyone and you can feel it when you walk down the street during that time. I do feel myself to be a Muslim and thoroughly so, but sometimes I don't pray. I always fast Ramadan, but sometimes Eid passes and I don't even know about it.

It is difficult to be a Moroccan woman without children. Moroccan society very much revolves around the family and children. All the Moroccan women I know have children and they are focused on their families now. When I opened my eyes to the world and saw it for what it is, I realized that I hadn't known how things were. I never had anyone to tell me right from wrong and so never knew if I was living a good life or living my life correctly. But I can't help thinking that if I had lived my life well, I wouldn't find myself alone today.



An open letter to a Moroccan mother

.....

*El Hajja*¹. If you happen to see *um maghrebiya*² who travelled to England for a better life a whole lifetime ago, please tell her from me that she raised a good, independent daughter, mother and wife and that she has nothing to apologise for. Please tell her that although I spent my childhood without her, I have a few happy memories which keep me grounded and which I often used to ease myself during troubled times.

I remember the day she left me as though it was yesterday. Although I was too young to walk or talk, I remember you carrying me on your back as the rain was falling like ropes from the sky. I can see her tortured face, a face which only a mother leaving behind her young child could have. I can see it even now, so many decades later.

When you talk to *um maghrebiya* please make sure that you sit her down, as she needs to be sitting down when you read this letter to her. Don't let her appearance deceive you, for she is not as young or strong as she once was.

.....

¹ a woman who has undertaken the pilgrimage (Hajj) to Mecca

² a Moroccan mother

.....

Tell her that I know she worked from dawn till dusk to provide for me after she had gone. She left me with her nearest and dearest and thought that she left me in good hands; but they could not love me as one of their own.

This is a tale that can only be shared by two people and she and I will share it when we sit together in that still hour of dawn, as we have done so often before. Please tell her that from the very first moment that we were reunited, no one could have felt more love from a mother.

If she happens to ask you whether I am happy, tell her that I am happiest when I am challenged and am working to help save a soul. I may be talking to the lonely old lady who lives down the road or driving a mother a hundred miles to see her forgotten son (the son who has long disconnected from her in his quest to find the answers to his life and does not realise that the answer to life lies in his mother).

Tell her how I love her wild psychedelic colours and the unconventional style she has, which I have learnt to love as part of her personality. If the truth be told, she and I are so alike. How sweet it is when I remember how alike we are and know that her genes will live through me and my own daughter for generations to come. Her quiet intelligence sustained me through my early years, when I came to live with her as a ten year old and had to learn how to live a new life in a new country.

I had many heroes to sustain me in my troubled early childhood. I remember when my father complained because I had a picture of a man on the wall of my room. 'A boyfriend?' he asked. You eased the misunderstanding between us, as you had done so many times in those early years, and protected me from the onslaught of his harmful words. You understood the importance of the picture and we compromised by moving it to a place where my father could not see it.

If I have never told her before, I am telling her now that I am grateful to her for allowing me those childhood heroes. I wanted to understand the great words written and spoken by my heroes. The boyfriend my father suspected was in fact Mr Martin Luther King. His speech about his dream formed the basis of my own dream and inspired me in my determination. Mr Kipling also saw me through some difficult times, whilst in my most sombre moods it was Lord Tennyson who sat with me long into the dark hours of the night. These heroes were the reason I toiled such long hours to pay for my education (tell her that it was not my father's harsh methods which spurred my determination).

Above all please tell her that when she walks down the road, she must hold her head up high, because she is the mother of a Moroccan woman who bears her scars and heritage proudly. This is very important, so explain it to her in her words which she can understand. Her life's sacrifice for her children has not been wasted. There is a word *al murdiya*, which encompasses the purest unconditional love and utter pride and satisfaction in one's child. I have often heard her say this word to me. I am not sure that I have earned its use, but I have always strived to do so. Please tell her that she is my *al murdiya*.

I have many pictures of such richness and colour stored in my mind's eye. Sharing them as mere photographs would not do them justice. Instead I hope that my words have shown her the colours and images of my mind and the remembrances which are important to us both. Our memories span the distances of time and remain unchanged. Like the church which sits along the road from our home, they have stood for over a century and will doubtless stand for another. I think of the road which I used to take to my uncle's farm as a child and the long solitary walks I enjoyed down country lanes. These were some of my happiest times.

So please tell her that her journey to leave her home and her own beloved mother has not been in vain. Tell her not to regret the choice that she made, for she has two generations that are indebted to her sacrifice.

Last of all, don't forget to give her flowers. Be sure to make them look like they have been picked from every field across the world, so they truly represent all of nature's pride and joy.

Fatima Mourad

Chair of Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre

Arrived in the UK 1979

Epilogue

Moroccan women have throughout the centuries stood alongside their male counterparts and worked for their country. They fought in Morocco's wars and played an equal part in the struggle for its independence in 1956. Yet they always remain the silent breadwinners, their voice traditionally muffled.

These women have historically and traditionally maintained their financial independence, working both inside and outside the home as weavers, couturiers and cooks. In the last 50 or so years this tradition has been changing and we have witnessed an increasing number of female migrants from Morocco. These women are no longer content to only work within the confines of their homeland, but indeed have braved the waves as it were and ventured out into the unknown. Such courage is seen in their migration to Britain, where they have come in equal number as their male counterparts and many of them as sole breadwinners.

As we have seen in these stories, the early migration was far from smooth or free from obstacles and difficulties. Most of the women were illiterate, they couldn't speak English and they weren't familiar with the customs and traditions of the UK, which meant they had a huge amount of difficulty in settling (just as their male counterparts did). Bringing their families to join them later on added to their burden and difficulties; and yet they remained focused in their determination to bring up successful generations and make a home in the UK, whilst always maintaining their close ties with their homeland Morocco.

I am thrilled that the voices of these women can finally be heard. I am deeply grateful to each and every woman who has taken the time to give her story and tell her journey. In some cases we have found the journey to be a blissful one and for others it has been quite distressing and heart rending. Yet they all show unique courage and a selfless determination to do well by those they love and cherish. Each story is poignant in its own unique way. These women are true heroines and it has been an honour to know them. Thank you for sharing your stories with us before you left us and trusting us to do justice to your struggle. We hope we have managed to do just that.

And finally one last thank you to a special lady, whose relentless endeavours, perseverance and meticulous and diligent eye to detail have made the dream become a reality: our very own Samantha Herron. She never failed to amaze me with her energy and enthusiasm and love for the all that Al Hasaniya does. Thank you Samantha.

Souad Talsi MBE

Founder of Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre

The media's continuing assumptions about who I am and how I think, because I am a Muslim woman, never fails to astound me. If I am outspoken and independent then I must be Westernised. If I adhere to a strict Muslim dress code then I must be oppressed. This is an assumption that completely ignores a heritage wherein the first university in the world was not only built in a Muslim country - namely Morocco - but was founded by a woman - Fatima Al Fihria.

We all need to learn more about each other in order that we can connect better. The world is increasingly becoming a smaller place, with everyone and everything interconnected and interdependent. This is seen nowhere more clearly than in the increasing number of journeys of migration across the globe.

Men and women have now become equal partners in moving around the globe for economic reasons, to work to improve their lives and those of their loved ones. Neither tradition nor religion has ever prevented women from making such courageous journeys. Moroccan Muslim women are no different from any other women migrants who leave their loved ones in search of a better life for the very families they left behind.

Biographies

Samantha Herron

Samantha Herron studied English literature, theatre and dance before working as an independent visual artist. She went on to study Arabic and spend time in Morocco, before joining the Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre.

Dr Laïla Ibnlfassi

Dr. Laïla Ibnlfassi is Senior Lecturer in Postcolonial Studies and Applied Translation at the London Metropolitan University. She has published extensively on North African literature and culture, with a particular focus on women's issues and the notion of the voice.

Souad Talsi MBE

Souad Talsi studied law at Birkbeck college and worked as an immigration specialist at the Kensington and Chelsea Citizens Advice Bureau. In 1985 she founded the Al Hasaniya Moroccan Women's Centre. She currently represents the UK for the CCME, a national council for the Moroccan community abroad which was established in 2007 by King Mohamed VI of Morocco.

THE WOMEN'S LIBRARY

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A celebration at The Women's Library
8 October 2009 - 31 March 2011
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الاحيرة ديال أختي العزيزة رحمها الله - و سرق لي كل شي .

دازو عليّ المحاين بزاف و طالت الأيام صعبة. ما بغتش القنصلية المغربية تصلح لي الفيسا أولا تعطيني شي بسبور مغربي جديد. اتناشر عام و ما كان عندي لا أوراق أولا فاين نسكن. كنت كنبات عند شي صحباتي مفرشة غيرعل الأرض و ديما على قدام . ما قدرتش نخدم غير بالفلوس فاليد.

حتى شديت المعاونة د واحد المحامي ديال باطل و عاوتني هو حتى عطنتي القنصلية المغربية واحد البسبور مغربي. انا من بعد تزوجت بواحد الرجل جزائري اللي كان ساكن هنايا في <لندن> . حبيت و تمنيت نولد معه, لكن ما كتب عليّ هدا. كتر من مرة سقطت و بقيت فالمستشفى. حتى علاين نموت و بان لهم صحباتي ما غاد يشوفوني عاود.

من بعد تفرقنا انا و رجلي و طلقنا و انا ما كان عندي لا فلوس ولا فاين نمشي. نزلت عليّ الكآبة حتى وليت مريضة و خرجت من الخدمة. كنت كارية الدار مخبيئة و كيف خرجت من الخدمة خرّجني مول الدار. حسيت براسي بوحدي بالكل. قطعت الإياس و ما عرفت آش ندير. كون ما طحت فالمركز الحسنية كون ما بقيت حيّة. تما عاونوني نتسجل بالبلديّة للسكنة باش يشوف لي شي بيت فواحد الأوطيل و عاونوني نشدّ التعويضات. دوزت هاد الوقت كلّو و هو خمسة و عشرين عام و ما قدرت نرجع للمغرب نزور العائلة. حتى لدابا ما عارفاش آشنو وقع بضبط. شي واحد وسخ لي الاوراق مع الحكومة المغربية و كون دخلت للبلد كون قبطني عند الوصول. ضيع الوقت بزاف و عاونوني مستشرين قانونيين باش نفكّ من المشكلة. و وخا هكداك قبطني عند النزول على الأرض المغربي علما تأكدو بان كانت عندي رخصة لدخل البلد.

شحال تسنيت لهداك اليوم و فرحت من كل قلبي باش نعاود نكون فالمغرب. ملي خرجت من المطار حسيت راسي خلقت من دا و جديد. ولايني ما دامت السعادة. مشيت عند العائلة و جاتني ضربة كبيرة. حسيت بحال شي برانية قدام الوالدين و الخواتات. كانوا المحبوبين دياي عزيزين عندي بزاف و عملوني بحال شي ضيفة. نويت راسي نموت من السعادة و بالعكس ندمت بان جيت عندهم. من هداك النهار ما بقتش كتحسبهم العائلة دياي و ما شفتهم عاود.

الله يسطر كيكون الأمر حزين بزاف. الوقت كلو اللي ساكنة ف < لندن > وانا كنصيفط الفلوس للعائلة و ما زال. وخا ما بقيت كتحسب راسي واحدة من العائلة. ما كان فإمكاني نخلص للقراية دياي انا, لكن خلصت للقراية ديال الخواتات فالمغرب. كانت العائلة درويشة و شريت لهم انا الدار. كتكون هد الدار دياي انا و كون مشيت عند العائلة كون خصني نبات فشني الأوطيل.

ولايني كييجيني هاد البلد بزّاف و ما نويت نعاود نسكون فالمغرب. كتحسب راسي مغربيّة مائه فالمائه, لكن بدّلني هاد البلد و وليت تكيفت مع الثقافة. عطيت قيمة كبيرة للحرية اللي كاين فالغرب. يمكن للمرأة تخرج من الدار بوحدها و هدا بلا ما يشوفو فيها ولا يهضرو فيها الناس خرين . يمكن لها كتدور فالزنقة ما مغطياش قدام لناس. ما كاينش هكدا فالبلد. كاينين البنات البيضاويات اللي كيعيشو واحد الحيات الحرّة, لكن ماشي هكّا فوسط العائلة دياي انا. حتّى في الصيف ما قدرت نخرج و يدّي عارية.

حتّى الدين ماشي كيف كيف. كيكون الدين فالمغرب باين فاينمّا كان. كل واحد كيصلّي خمس مرّات فالنهار و كيصوم الرمضان. كل واحد كيعيّد و كتحس بالجوء د العيد كيبان فالزناقي. بنسبة ليّ انا كتحس براسي مسلمة مائة فالمائة, بالحق انا بعد المرات ما كنعليش. انا ديما كنصوم رمصان ولكن بعد المرات كيفوت العيد بلا ما نعرف.

كيكون صعيب على المرأة مغربية إبلا ما عندهاش الأولاد. فالمغرب كتكون العائلة و الأولاد فوسط الحيات و المجتمع. العيالات المغريبات اللي كنعرفهم كل واحدة فهم عندها أولاد و ما كتفكر غير فالعائلة ديالها. ملي فتحت عينايّ و شفت العالم كيف كان, عرفت راسي ما كنت كنعرف والا قبل. ما كان عندي حتى واحد يقول لي هادي صح و هادي غالط و ما عرفت واش انا كنعيش الحيات الصحيحة ولا لا. بالحق بان ليّ انا, كون عشت حياتي صحيحة كون ما جبرت راسي بوحدي اليوم.

المهمّ حمدنا الله كل يوم . سواء لقينا الخير سواء لقينا شي صعوبة حمدنا الله ديما و للأبد. حيث يكون كلّ شيء بيد الله سبحانه و تعالى. هادي الدنيا ما فيها والو. ما كتكون غير الطريق للأخيرة. وهاكدا كتحاولو باش نعملو الخير و نساعدو الناس الآخرين فوقمّا كتكون عندنا الفرصة.
كلّمّا كيسوّلني شي واحد فاش قبطني فهاد البلد و علاش ما عمّرني كنفكّر فالرجوع للوطن ديالي أنا ديما كنجابهم >على سبب الناس اللي تعرّفتم بهم <. حيث البلد كيفمّا كان فيه ناس طيبين. كلّ واحد ممّا ديال الله سبحانه و تعالى و فالأخير كلّ واحد ممّا يرجع له. حمدنا الله.



خديجة ك

دخلت للمملكة المتحدة في عام 1984

انا جيت ل <لندن> من مدينة الدار البيضاء مع واحد صحبتي. جينا بفيسا د واحد شهر باش ندوزو العطلة ديال راس السنة. انا من الأول عجيتي هنايا و عرفت راسي باغية نكلس شوية باش نتعلم اللغة. سجلت بواحد البرنامج لغوي و عطوني أجل آخر دالفيسا باش نقرا.

فديك الساعة كنت كنفكّر باش نكلس واحد ست شهر. بقيت كنفقرو و كلّمّا توفي الأجر د الفيسا ديالي عاود عطوني أجل آخر. حتى وليت محتاجة للفلوس باش نخلص للقراية. جبرت الخدمة بواحد المطعم كّضف الكويزينة و من بعد خدمت خدامة ديال الدار عند شي عرب اللي كانو ساكنين بغرب <لندن>.

عرفت راسي فرحانة بهاد المدينة و بالحيات هنايا و ما حبيت نرجع نسكرن في المغرب. بالحق كانت القراية غالية بزاف عليّ و وليت قطعتها. بقيت كندخدم ولايني ما بقاش كان عندي شي فيسا قانوني¹. فديك الوقت عطونا شي بسبورات إيرلانديين وانا خليت الفيسا فالبسبور المغربي يتوفى. لكن من بعد لقاولوك البسبورات الإيرلانديين غير قانونية و بقيت بلا فيسا.

ولايني كيف بديت نقوم بهاد المشكل هدا و سرق لي البسبور المغربي من الخزانة ديالي فالبنكة. كلما كان عندي له قيمة خليتو فهداك الخزانة – البسبور المغربي و البسبور الإيرلاندي و الذهب ديالي و واحد الساعة و التسوية

النهار اللي خويت المغرب ما كنت كنوي نكعد فهاد البلد. انا ما جيت غير باش ندوز العطلة الصيفيّة عند أهل ولد عمي هنايا ف <لندن>. حيث فديك الساعة كنت كنتشغل معلّمة الخياطة فالمدينة د قنيطرة. ولايتي كان كتب عليّ ندوز المستقبل ديالي هنايا و هكداك شديني البلاد فدوك الإيامات الأولى. ما زال ما كان فبالي نبقي نهايتا، ولكن عزمتم باش نكلس شي شويّة كندرس اللغة الإنجليزيّة. كان الأهل ديالي مكلف بيّ و ساعدني باش نشدّ شي أجل آخر د <الفيصة> ديالي. بقيت كنزيد نكعد واحد شويّة و ما حدني كلست و تكيفت مع الثقافة الجديدة و أنا حسّيت براسي فمحلي فهاد البلد. حتّى طلبت الجنسيّة و الحمد لله بفضل المساعدة د العائلة عملت باش نشدّ الأوراق دغية دغية.

فالمغرب أنا ديما كنت كنتشغل. قبل ما تعلّمت الخياطة شتغلّت متطوّعة للهلال الأحمر معونة المرضى فالمستشفيات و ضحيات الفيضانات. من بعد علّمت الخياطة للبنات و العيالات فالسجن. هنايا ف <لندن> رحتم كنتشغل كتنظف فالمستشفى د <سانت مايريز> و الحمد لله عطاوني مع الشغل واحد البيت فاش نسكن. كنت كنتشغل بالتناوب فالمستشفى و فالوقت الفارغ ديالي بقيت كندرس اللغة بالكلية. بالحقّ كان بزّاف عليّ الشغل و الدراسة فوقت واحد، إذن سمحت فالدراسة و ركّزت الجهود ديالي كلها فالشغل.

بقيت كنتشغل فالمستشفى حتّى سدّتها وزارة الصحّة. ولايتي عطاوني شغل جديد فواجد الشركة جديدة و خاصة و الحمد لله عطاوني السكنة فاش ما زال كنسكن فها اليوم. بقيت هناك حتّى رجعت مريضة و كان لازم ندخل للمستشفى باش يفتح لي البطن. بعد ما رتحت من العملية تماما قلبت على شي شغل جديد و شديتو فواحد الدار للعجائز فشارع <بايكر>. شتغلّت مساعدة للفرمليات تمّاك كلّ صباح مقابلة المرضى اللي جاو من كلّ جهة د العالم. و بعد شي شويّة شديت شغل ثاني كيف كيف فواحد المستشفى الخاصة فشارع <هارلي>. شتغلّت تمّا فالعشيّة بعد ما كملت فدار العجائز.

مناين حسّيت بين لقيت الراحة فهاد الحياة الجديدة ديالي جيبت أختي الصغيرة باش تخلط عليّ فهاد البلد. ولكن بعد ما دخلتها طاح أبويّ مريض. خلّيت أختي عند واحد صحبتي هنايا و سفرت للمغرب باش نشوف حالو كيف كانت. لقيتو مريض بزّاف و كان خصّني ندخلو للمستشفى فالمغرب.

تمّيت نجيبو لهاد البلد باش نتهلّي فيه أنا، ولايتي كانت الصحّة ديالو باقي عيّانة. وأنا كان لازم عليّ نرجع لهاد البلد باش نشغل. بعد شويّة توفّي لي أبويّ الله يرحمه وأنا رجعت مضطربة. حيث ضاع منّي عزّ واحد فحياتي. كانت الإيامات صعبة بزّاف عليّ. ما همّيتش حتّى حاجة و وليت ما بقاش عندي المزاج للشغل. مع الوقت مرضت فصحتي و كان خصّني نشوف الطبيب.

طال لي الشيفاء مدة كبيرة على ما يخفّف عليّ الحزن. ولكن الحمد لله أنا صبرت و فالأخير بدت كنحسّ براسي لاباس و صحيح. وليت قدرت نعاود نواجه المستقبل ديالي. إذن نوبة أخرى قلبت على شي شغل جديد. لقيتو فالأوطيل <ريجننتس بارك>. شتغلّت خدامة فالأوطيل و شتغلّت مزيان. حيث كنت فديك الساعة مكلفة بأختي اللي كانت كتسكن معي. و فنفس الوقت كنت كنصفت كلّ شهر شي فلوس للخوت ديالي فالمغرب.

قبل ما توفّي أبويّ الله يرحمه قال لي: <أخوك الصغير ما عمرك ما تبعدي متو. خصّو يكون حداك على الدوام، هو و أختك ما تفرقيش معهم.> و هكدا جيبت أخويّ الصغير للبلد حتّى هو و دخلتو يدرس اللغة الإنجليزيّة. ولايتي النهار اللي وصل أخويّ للبلد طرت لي واحد الكسيده فالدار. كانو كيخدمو بصوبو الشوفاج شي خدامة د الحكومة و داك النهار خرجو خلّو الدار تكرفست. كنت كنمشي للدار قبل ما نلقى أخويّ. حلّيت الباب البرّاني و كيف دخلت عتريت و طحت فواحد النقبة فالأرض. طحت من الطبقة الأولى د العمارة للسفلي. كنت معروحة بزّاف عاد و كان كيحرقني الجسد ديالي كلو. مشيت نبشان للمستشفى بالحقّ قالو لي كايته شي أربع خمس سواياح د المساينة قبل ما يكون يمكن ليّ نشوف شي طبيب. أنا ما قدّيت نخليّ أخويّ، إذن مشيت فحالي و شريت شي فائيدة من الفارمسيان. شديت أخويّ و جيبتو للدار و كان هو اللي ساعدني باش نخمّل و نظّف الدار.

تحمّمت فالماء مالح و شربت الدواء لكن داز الإيامات و ما برت من الطيحة. بالعكس زاد فيّ المرض فالظهر و رجليّ و ما بقاش كان يمكن ليّ نشغل فالأوطيل. ما قدّيت حتّى نطلع الدروج. مشيت تكلمت مول الأوطيل و قال ليّ <خصّك تشوفي طبيب> حيث كانت حالتي خطيرة. رحتم للمستشفى و قبلوني الطباء و بعدين قال ليّ الطبيب بين كانت الحكومة اللي غلطت و كانت مسؤولة على الكسيده ديالي. وصّاني نشوف شي محامي و الحمد لله شديت التعويض.

بالحقّ تأشفت لواحد الحدّ الكبير باش نطلق من الشغل ديالي، على ودّ حسيت براسي فرحانة و مرتاحة بهادك الشغل. على كليّ حال زيانتم صحتي دريجة بدريجة الحمد لله. من بعد واحد المدة وليت كانت عندي القوّة البدنيّة باش نعاود نشغل و بدت كنقلب على شي شغل جزئيّ. ولكن تمّا نيت طح أخويّ مريض و بدت المشاكل النفسانية معه. و كان لازمني نبقي فالدار بلا شغل حيث كان فيّ الخوف ما قدرتش نخليّ أخويّ بوحدو. كنت مكلفة به أنا و ما عمّرني نسيتم كلام أبويّ الله يرحمه.

مع الأسف ما زال ما حسّنت حالو ومع السنين تأتّر المشاكل ديالو على صحتي أنا. حيث شحال هادي وأنا تهلّيت فالخواتات و الخوت ديالي و تهلّيت فيهم واحد التهلية مزيانة. عوّنتهم و شتغلّت عليهم و الحمد لله. لكن وقيلًا ما تهلّيت فراسي مزيان و على هاد الشيء ضعفت صحتي من كثرة الهموم.

السيدة زوييدة ع

دخلت للمملكة المتحدة في عام 1980

ولكن مع الوقت بداو الأولاد يكبرو و كانوا محتاجين لرجل يكون معهم فالبيت. وحتى انا كنت محتاجة للإنسان يعاوتي. كانوا عيشين معي أُمي وأختي الصغيرة و كنت مسؤولة عليهم انا. و الأم ديالي انا كانت مرا فسن كبير و كانت مريضة. بقت المسؤولة تقالت اكثر و ولبت كنجس بضغط كثير علي من الحياة. كان في رجل و كان في مرا و كنت كنشغل على برّة و فالبيت.

إذن قررنا باش نشملو بعضنا باش يكون زوجي معي يفرق معي المسؤولية. فانتقلت ل <لندن>. جيبت الأولاد معي و الأم ديالي. ولكن ما تحملتش هي المعيشة ف <لندن>. كانت مرا كبيرة و فذاك الوقت زعما التامينات ما كانتش الثقافة و الدين الإسلامية منتشرة كيف الآن. كان يزّاف عليها و فضلت ترجع للمغرب.

من بعد سنين قليلة زاد عندي ولدي الصغير. عاد جيبت أولادي الآخرين هنا باش تشمل العائلة و سجلتهم فالمدرسة <هولاند بارك>. انا فكرت نشغل هنايا ف <لندن> كيف كنت كنشغل فالمغرب. ولكن تحدثنا انا و زوجي على الأسر المغربية المهاجرة و المشاكل المتواجدة. شفت انا الأسر مشته و الأولاد مشته و لحضت فقدان التربية الواعي. لأن المرا و الرجل فذاك الوقت ما كانوا عندهم غير هدف واحد و هو توفير الفلوس و بناء البيت فالمغرب. كنا كنفكرنا كل واحدة متا بانّ كنا هنايا غير فواحد المرحلة المؤقتة. على هاد الشئ ما كانوا كيفكروش الناس غير فالمغرب.

كنت كنسمع انا الأخبار ديال الجالية و المشاكل ديال أولادنا اللي كانوا فسجن أولًا مدمنين المخدرات.

فذاك الوقت ما كان عندنا المسجد باش نتلقاو فيه و يجتمعو الأولاد مع بعضهم. و السلوك ديال النساء الله يسمحنا ما كاينش فالمستوى و كانوا كينساو التقاليد المغربية ديالنا. حيث أغلبية النساء اللي جاو فذاك الوقت ما كانوا متقافات لأنهم كبرو فالبادية ديال المغرب. جاو من القرية و وصلو لأكبر عاصمة أوروبا و ما لقواو شي مساعدة. ما عرفوش كيفاش يتصرفو لا مع الأولاد أولًا فالحياة الزوجية. حتى انا كانت عندي مشاكل كثيرة ديال الزواج.

تخلعت انا. كان زوجي عارف بذاك الشئ حيث سبقني هنايا. تبّهني هو بانّ كان عليّ الإختيار ما بين الوظيفة و الأولاد. إيلا اخترت الوظيفة يقدر يجي واحد الوقت ما تقدروش نسيطرو على الأولاد. وديت انا نقرّيهم و نجيب الإستقرار لهم. وديت أولادي يلقاوني موجودة فالبيت بعد المدرسة.

الحمد لله اللي بقيت فالبيت. حيث لقيت شي صعوبات مع ابني في سن المراهقة. ولكن الحمد لله حيندا المرحلة هدا و ما كانتش عندي صعوبات اكثر مع الأولاد الآخرين. الحمد لله قرا كل واحد فهم و عاونت خوتها بنتي الكبيرة.

مع الوقت عملت صديقات و الحمد لله عندي جيران طيبين. ملي وصلت فالأول كنت خايقة حيث ما كنتش كنعرف الناس. كل واحد متا جا من ناحية من المغرب و كتنا مختلفين فالأفكار. فالأول ما قدرتش نساجم معهم. ولكن الحمد لله تعرفت بتدريج بالجيران و بديت نخرج و نشوف الناس. عندي صديقة واحدة هي جارتني و ولت هي بحال الأخت. ساعدتها انا بتربية أولادها و ساعدتني هي بتربية أولادي كنتبادلو نصائح و جريية عليهم.

الحمد لله فالسنين الاخيرة عملو الجامع و المركز الاسلامية. تما كنتلقاوا انا و النساء و كنمشيو للدروس القرآنية و كنسمعو الاحاديث. وانا كنساعد النساء اللي ما كيعرفوش يقرأو فالدراسة ديالهم. و عندنا أنشطة رياضية كيشاركو فيها الناس الكبار. هادي السنة الفايته ملي كان زوجي مريض ما كنت كنخرج. الوقت كلو كنت بجانبو اهتم به. ولكن الحمد لله اللي كيطلب من الجامع شي مساعدة ولا نصائح كيساعدو فيها.

غادي الحياة و الحمد لله. هاد البلد هو الوطن ديالنا الثاني. المغرب هو بلدنا الحقيقي و أصلنا و ما تقدروش ما نشوفوه. ولكن خصنا نعلمو أولادنا بانّ هاد البلد حتى هو الوطن ديالنا و لا بدّة نحافظو عليه و نحافظو على الأمن ديالو. خصنا نعلموهم يحترموا هاد البلد و القوانين ديالو. حيث كيكون هاد البلد اللي كينكونو مستقين فيه و كنعيشو فيه. و الحمد لله عائشين ميزانيين. بانسبة للدول الأوروبية انا كنتلقى فالصيف مع العائلة ديالي في هولندا و بلجيكا و اسبانيا. و الحمد لله و نشكرو عائشين هنايا ميزانيين و فامن. هاد البلد مخلينا بحريتنا. من ناحية الدين ديالنا كنمشي بالحجاب و ما عمّرني ما تعرض لي شي واحد.

ملي توفي زوجي غير لي حياتي. الآن كنساعد حفايدي مع القرآن و اللغة العربية. الحمد لله لقيت فالحياة الجديدة ديالي دور. ولكن عليّ الآن نفكر كيفاش غاد نمشي من بعد باش نكمّل الطريق. نطلب الله التوفيق.

انا تزديت فمدينة <القنيطرة>, ولكن فسن ديال سبع سنين توّصّف الأخ ديالي الكبيرو نتقلنا لمدينة <طنجة>. من السن ديال سبع سنين حتى الآن وانا عايشة ف <طنجة>, حيث رجعت المدينة ديالي هي المدينة <طنجة>. لو انني الأسل مشي من <طنجة> ولكن اصبحت كائني هي المدينة ديالي. قريت مرحلة الإبتدائي و من بعد الثانوي و الحققت حتى السنة الدراسية الأدبية ديال <البكالوريا>. <البكالوريا> حصلت عليها فالسنى الأولى ولكن من بعد انا توّصفت بسبب الظروف ديال العائلة. الأخ ديالي كان هو الواحد اللي ممول للعائلة و انا كانت عندي الفكرة و الحسّ باش نساعدو. لأن الأب ديالي كان رجل كبير و الأم ديالي كدالك. عندي أختي و فذاك الوقت كانت هي صغيرة فانا توّصفت. توّصفت وانا فسن ديال تسعتاشر سنة.

توّصفت ادارة عند واحد المؤسسة الفلاحية اللي كانت فمدينة <العرائش>. بقيت تما فالمدينة حتى زوجت. حيث بعد ما زوجت انتقلت الادارة لمدينة <طنجة>. كان تما فاين زادو عندي أولادي. من بعد توّفي زوجي الأول و انا عمري خمسة و عشرين سنة و بعد سنتين زوجت للمرة الثانية. كان زوجي الثاني ابن العم ديال زوجي الأول و كان كيشغل فالخارج بمدينة <لندن>. و لو انني زوجت بقيت انا كنشغل ف <طنجة> و بقي هو ف <لندن>.

أنا جيت لهاد البلد وأنا كنت صغيرة فالسنّ. جيت باش نشوف شي خدمة بعد ما مات لي رجلي الله يرحمه. كنت كنسكن فذاك الوقت فالمدينة الدار البيضاء مع أولادي بتلاتة و ما كانت عندي لا خدمة و لا فلوس. أنا ما قارياش و كان محال نلقى شي خدمة فالمغرب.

جيت لهاد البلد بوحدي، فاش وصلت ما عرفت حتّي واحد هنايا. واحد سيّد اللي كان صاحب رجلي الله يرحمه لقاني فالمطار و وصلني للمدينة. تما صقصيت شي ناس و تلاقيت مع شي بنات اللي عرفت من الدار البيضاء. مشيت نسكن معهم و بديت كتنقلب على شي خدمة. ولكن جاتني صعوبة بزّاف. ما خليت فاين قلبت ولكن ما كان ما ندير. ما كانت عندي لا عائلة تعاوّنّي و وصلت لواحد الحالة يائسة بزّاف. كان لازمني نقابل الحالة ديالي كيف كانت. عرفتهم البنات كيفاش كانوا كيربحو المعيشة و شدّيت معهم الطريق الخيبة باش نأكل الخبز.

كنت خليت أولادي عند أمّي فالدار البيضاء و كنت كنتوحشهم بلا قياس. تمنّيت نجيبهم لهاد البلد باش يعيشو معي بالحقّ ما عرفت القانون. هادك السيّد اللي كان كييعرف رجلي الله يرحمه عرفني بواحد المرا مغربيّة كانت كتخدم مستشارة فواحد البيورو. فهّمّتي المرا بأنّ كان ضروري لي نشدّ شي خدمة صحيحة و قانونيّة. قبل ما نطلب للأولاد الإقامة بهاد البلد.

الحمد لله كان النهار اللي تعرّفت بهديك المرا واحد النهار أبيض. وقفت معي فذاك الوقت كلّو و ساعدتني باش نبعد من الطريق الخيبة. بالحقّ ما كانت القضية بسيطة و دوزت واحد الوقت مكرفسة بزّاف. كان لازمني نبذل كل شيء فالحيات اليومية ديالي و بقوة الهموم و الضغوط اللي كنت كنواجه وليت مصابة بالكآبة. الحمد لله كان الدين المنقذ ديالي. فالوقت اللي كنت كنتتبع الطريق الخيبة ما فكّرت فالدين نيهائيّا. من طبيعة الحال أنا خلّقت مسلمة و كنت كنصلي و كنصوم الرمضان مع رجلي الله يرحمه. بالحقّ بعد ما وصلت لهاد البلد ما بقتش كنت كنعيش الحاية المتدينة. حتّي بفضل الله وليت نعاود نصلي و مع الصلاة تبدّل القلب ديالي. دات الوقت بزّاف بالحقّ شوّيّ بشوّيّ بعدت من الطريق الخيبة و من البنات. من بعد عاونتني المستشارة المغربية حتّي لقيت شي خدمة فواحد الأوطيل. خدمت خدامّة د البيوت د النعس و كنت كنخدم مع عيالات مغربيّات اللي عرفو الله و الدين و الصلاة. الحمد لله كنت فرحانة مع العيالات و كنت مرتاحة فالخدمة. كنت كنخدم فواحد الأوطيل فاش بدت الحرب بين العراق والكويت. الأكثرية د الناس اللي كانوا كينزلو فذاك لأوطيل جاو من الشرق الأوسط، و ما بقاوش كانوا كيسفرو للخارج فوقت الحرب. هاكدا كان لازم للمدير د الأوطيل ينقص من الخادمين و مع الأسف طردني أنا. بالحقّ الحمد لله عاود تاني عاونتني المرا باش نلقى شي خدمة جديدة فواحد المستشفى.

كنت كنخدم فالمستشفى وأنا بديت كنحسّ براسي مشي هو هادك. كنت كندوخ بلا سبب و بعد المرّات ما قدرتش نحركّ العنق ديالي. فاش زحفو رجليّ مشيت نشوف الطبيب، وصيفتي باش ندوز شي فحوصات فالمستشفى. فاش عاودت شفت الطبيب قال ليّ بانّ لقاو واحد الوليسية في المَخّ و عطاني شي ورقات كيتعلّقو بالتشخيص.

والله شلطني الخبر وخرجت من عند الطبيب مخلوعة و داخعة. كنت كنشبرّ الورقات فيديّ و مشيت نيشان عند شي مغربيّات اللي عرفت شي شوّيّة. الحمد لله عاونوني و وقفو معي هدوك العيالات فواحد الوقت صعيب بزّاف. رافقوني للمواعد عند المستشفى، حيث تسنّيت شي سبع شهور قبل ما عملو لي العمليّة و زوّلو لي الوليسية. و بعد ما خرجت من المستشفى وصلوني للدار و تهلّو فيّ حتى رجعت لي الصّحة.

الحمد لله ما دازت شي جوج شهور مور العمليّة و أنا حجّيت. عندي واحد الأخت ساكنة فالسعودية وهي اللي تكلفّت بكل شيء و صيفطت لي الأوراق. كانوا الصحابات ديالي كينخافو عليّ و حسبوني كنت كنخطر براسي، حيث كيكون الحجّ واعر على البنادم اللي صحيح. بفضل لله داز كل شيء بخير، ما طلبت من الله تعالى غير الصّحة و الدين و الحمد لله وليت بجير و على خير.

الحمد لله اليوم ما عندي ما خصّني أنا معدّية و عايشة. كل عام كندوز واحد <سكأن> د المَخّ و الحمد لله حتّي لداها ما لقاو والو. بالحقّ ضعفت الصّحة ديالي على سبب الإيّمات الطوال اللي دوزت معدّية. المهمّ أنا ما بقتش كنفكر فهداك الوقت. الحمد لله النهار اللي بعدت من الطريق الخيبة خليت دوك الأيّمات الكحلين مراي. عطاوني رخصة باش نجيب الأولاد لهاد البلد و عطاوني سكنة. و الحمد لله أولادي دابا عندهم هما الأولاد. اليوم كنتخالط مع العيالات اللي كيعيشو الحيات المتديّنة، كنتشوفو و كنجمعو فالجامع للصلاة و القراية. ودابا كنعيش للأولاد و للحفايد وللمستقبل ديالهم هما.



انا جيت لهاد البلد مع جوج بنتيات دياالي . جينا باش نخلطو على رجلي اللي كان كيخدم هنايا بعدا . كانت البتية ديالنا فديك الساعة بنقاو فالبلد شي سنين قلال . فكرنا باش نخدمو نجمعو شي فلوس و من بعد نرجعو للمغرب . الحمد لله و الشكر لله ما دازت غير عشر يوم وأنا لقيت شي خدمة فالأوطيل <بريطانيا> . كنت كنخدم خدامة د البيوت ديال النعس . خدمت تماك مدة د واحد عام و حملت . على هاد الشيء تركت الخدمة و الحمد لله و الشكر لله ولدت بنيتي الثالثة . من بعد ما فات الوقت بزّاف و جبرت شي خدمة كيف كيف فالأوطيل <كانسينتون هاي ستريت> . عاود تاني خدمت تماك حتى رجعت حاملة . خرجت من الخدمة و الحمد لله و الشكر لله زاد عندي وليد .

أنا دغية و بلا صعوبة عاودت جبرت شي خدمة كيف كيف فالأوطيل <سيلفريدجيس> . عجبتني الخدمة بزّاف فهادك الأوطيل و سبحان الله وليت كنخدم تماك شي عشرين عام . حيث لقيت فالخدمة واحد الراحة كاملة . كانت المديرية دياالي واحد المرا ضريفة مسكينة و كانت كتبعيني بزّاف . كانت معترفة بالمستوى العالي د الخدمة دياالي و كانت ديما كتقدّر لي خدمتي .

الحمد لله و الشكر لله فرحت مع الحيات دياالي . من النهار الأوّل عجيني هاد البلد و ما فات الوقت بزّاف وعرفت راسي تمتيت نبقى هنايا . لقيت فهاد البلد واحد الحرية و واحد الحقّ اللي ما عرفتهمش من قبل . على هاد الشيء حسيت من الأوّل بالراحة . فاش وصلت هنايا ما عرفت غير رجلي بالحقّ كنت كنخدم فالأوطيلات مع واحد العدد د المغريّيات وأنا تعشرت مع العيالات من كل جنسية .

هاكدا جريت على العائلة دياالي خدامة فالأوطيل و مربية الأولاد فالدار . كنت كلّ نهار كنشدّ التوييس يوصلني للخدمة و عاود تاني للدار . واحد نهار كنت راكبة بالتوييس بعد ما سليت الخدمة . نضت و وقفت عند البيبان باش نزلّ بالحقّ ما وقف التوييس حتى سرسرت . فاش نزلت علاين تسدّت عليّ البيبان و أنا طحت من الدرجة . ضربت الراس دالي مع شي حديدة و غيبت على عقلي .

فاش فقت كان كيسيل من الراس دياالي دمّ و لقيت الدنيا عامرة بالدمّايات . عيطّ الشيفور على شي بولانسية و داوني للصبيطار . تماك خيطو لي الجرحه و بيتوني . من بعد رتحت نهار واحد فالدار و الغدا مشيت خدمت . ما قلت للمديرة حتى حاجة بالحقّ شافت على الراس دياالي شي دمّ ناشف و سؤلنتي فيه . فاس عودت لها آشنو وقع صيفطنتي نيشان باش نرتح شي إيامات فالدار . الحمد لله و الشكر لله رتحت و بريت و رجعت للخدمة . ولايني حسيت بشي حاجة الله عالم بالدمّ دياالي من هادك النهار .

الحمد لله و الشكر لله من بعد مشينا أنا و رجلي حجينا فالمدينة مكة المكرمة . أتّرنى الوقت بزّاف و بقت معيّ الذكريات . الحمد لله و الشكر لله رجعنا على خير . ولايني دخلت للبلد عيانة بزّاف و بدا كيضرّني الراس . عزمت باش نرتح شي شويّة و هكذا دوزت واحد عام بلا ما نخدم .

من بعد رجعت خدمت فالأوطيل شي عامين لكن كان كيصعب عليّ الحال . كنت مصابة كلّ نهار بواجدي الحريق كبير فالراس و بقت كتجيني الدوخة . حاولت باش نبقى نخدم ولايني تزداد عليّ الحريق و وليت مريضة بزّاف . فالتالي دوزت للصبيطار و قلبو لي الراس و الدمّ . لقاو واحد الولسياسة فالمنحّ دياالي و قال لي الطبيب كان لازم يفتح لي .

كان الوقت كيخلع بزّاف عاد . ما عرفت واش كنت غاد نعاود نفيق , واش كنت غاد نعاود نشوف الأولاد دياالي . تودعنا أنا و البنات و ولدي و هادك كان كيقطع القلب .

ولكن الحمد لله و الشكر لله كانوا الموضّفين د الصبيطار ناس مزياين . قابلوني و عملوني بكفّية معتبرة . عملو المجهود دياالهم باش يتمّوني و ينقسو لي القلق و الخوف . و الحمد لله و الشكر لله فتح لي المنحّ و حيّد لي الولسياسة . دوزت شي سبع سواياح فالعملية و من بعد بقيت تلت إيام غايبة على عقلي . مناين فقت كنت مريضة بزّاف . تنعقل على الفرمايلات و البنات دياالي كيغسلو لي الوجه و كيمشطو لي الشعر . تلزّمت نبقى فالصبيطار واحد الفترة على ما وليت قدرت نوقف و نتمشى و تنهلي فراسي شي شويّة . و بعد ما خرجت من الصبيطار رتحت فالدار شي عام هاكدا . من بعد حسيت راسي ما بقتش عندي الصحة للخدمة و شدّيت التقاعد . و الحمد لله و الشكر لله جازوني على خدمتي و عطاوني النصيب دياالي .

والله ما عندي ما عزّ من هاد البلد . ما عمّرني لقيت حتى مشكل هنايا . خدمني و فرّشني و وكلّني و شرّيني ومع السنين رجع كيف البلد دياالي . تهلي فيّ و تهلي فالعائلة دياالي و أنا ديما كنتفكر الخير . فاش كنت مريضة قابلني واحد المقابلة مختيرة و فابور . و فوقّما كيكون عندي شي مشكل ما خصّني غير نهزّ التيليفون باش نلقى شي معاونة . كيكونو الناس د هاد البلد ناس مزياين الله يكتّر خيرهم . عندي جيران ضراف مساكين اللي ديما كيسلمو عليّ و كيسؤلّو على العائلة . فوقّما كنمشي كنقلني الجورة و الخوة . الحمد لله و الشكر لله ما عندي ما نقول .



انا وصلت للمحطة د <فيكتوريا> نهار الخميس ثلاثة و عشرين نوفمبر عام 1970 . ما عمّرني نسيت هذك التاريخ. ما عوّلت نكلس كتر من عام اولاً عامين إيلا كترت. و هادي اربعين عام وأنا ما زلت هنايا!
 انا ترحلت للمملكة المتحدة مع رجلي الله يرحمه من المدينة د مكناس. القصة بدأت من لقينا واحد البرية فالبوط ديال البوسطة. كانت عراضة لقدم طلب لي شي خدمة بهاد البلد. عمّرنا انا و رجلي بجوج الورقات و ما فاتت غير خمس إيام و توصلنا بالكوتترات. ديناها معنا للسفارة البريطانية في الرباط باش يتطبعو و بعد ثمانية و عشرين يوم صيفطو لنا البسبورات.
 سافرنا مع ناس آخرين بحالنا، رجال و مراتهم، اللي جاو من مدن متنوعين في شمال المغرب. ركبنا بالسفينة وبالتران حتى وصلنا للمحطة د <فيكتوريا>. تمّا فالمحطة تعرّض لنا مول المعمل اللي خدمنا. وصلنا هو للمدينة ديال <بات> فاين لقينا السكنات واجدين و بدينا نخدمو في واحد المعمل ديال دجاج.
 جاتي المدينة ديال <بات> زوية بزّاف كانت فيها بنات قديمة و حدائق عامرة بالناور. ولايني من الأول ما كنتش فرحانة بخدمتي. ما عجبتنيش الخدمة بالكل و كان كيختر المعمل من الدجاج. ما قدرت نكلس تمّا انا و ما بقيتش غير اربع شهور.

خرجنا انا و رجلي من <بات> و شدنا بجوج شي خدمة فواحد المدرسة الداخلية بمدينة <مايدانهاد> سميتها <نيولاندس>. كنت كنخدم انا طبخة مساعدة و كان كيخدم رجلي عسّاس و جارديني متكلف بالمدرسة و الجاردن المحيط بها. بالحق كانت البلاصة خالية و حسينا بالعزلة و الوحداية. كنا بعاد من المغاربة صحابنا في <بات> و توحشناهم. بها باش رجعنا ل<بات> و عاود شدّ رجلي الخدمة فالمعمل ديال دجاج. انا لقيت شي خدمة جديدة فواحد المعمل بحاشية المدينة فاين صنعو كوارى ديال <تينيس>.
 من بعد عاودت شدّيت شي خدمة بالمدينة في واحد الأوطيل سميتها <فرانسييس>. خدمت تما خدامة ديال البيوت. لقيت الخدمة صلحت لي و كانت حسن بزّاف من الخدمة في المعمل. وليت بقيت معهم تمّا تسعود سنين. كنت كنخدم بزاف و بزربة، حيث خدمنا بالقطعة بمعنى تخلصنا على حسب البيوت اللي كملناهم كل نهار. الحمد لله كئنا انا و رجلي فرحانين بالحيات ديالنا، دوزنا الإيام مزيانين و عجبتنا المدينة ديال <بات>. كئنا ساكنين في واحد السكنة زوية و شرينا واحد التوموبيل. فأخر جمعة كئنا كئشدوا الطريق للبحر فاين كئنا كنخيّمو كنتنزهو و كندوزو النهار بالضحك و بغناء.

صطبنا راسنا و صاحبا بالمغاربة و بالانجليز. تختلف هاد البلد في داك الوقت. كئنا مطلوبين و محتياجين باش نخدمو هنايا و هكدا رحبونا الانجليز. كيف دخلت لهاد البلد و تعرفت بشي عيالات هنايا عرفتنا كل واحدة كيف كيف. مهما كانت الثقافة و الدين ديالنا، كانت عندنا نفس الهموم بالحيات و هكادا تعشرنا و تفاهمنا.
 مع الوقت خرج رجلي من المعمل ديال دجاج و شدّ الخدمة في المعمل ديال كوارى د <تينيس> فاين خدمت انا من قبل. حتى جلسوه من الخدمة و فكرنا باش تنبعو المغاربة اللي مشاو سكنو في <لندن>.
 الوصول للمدينة ديال <لندن> من <بات> كان بحال إيلا سفرنا من النور للضلام. ولايني لا بدّة للواحد يتبع الخدمة فاينمّا كانت. هكادا جينا ل<كانسل رايس> فاين كرينا واحد السكنة و عمّرناها بالحوايح ديالنا. لقينا فالحين شي خدمة فالأوطيل <لانكاستر كايت>، خدمت انا خدامة ديال البيوت و خدم رجلي في المطعم.
 بقيت انا كنخدم في الأوطيلات في <لندن> حتى شدّيت التقاعد. مع السنين خدمت في الأوطيلات <هيلتون> و <صافوي> و <وايطس> و <هايد بارك كورت> و <هوسبيتاليتي> و <لندن ماتروبول>.
 خدمت في كل بلاصة واحد جوج سنين حتى ملّيت من الحالة ولا الخلاص دال الخدمة. ساعة ساعة علمتني شي صاحبة على شي خدمة أفضل في شي الأوطيل آخر و مشيت طلبت الخدمة تمّا.
 حيث انا دايمًا كنت كندي معي الرسالة <ريفرانس> اللي عطاوني من الأوطيل <فرانسييس> في <بات>، فاين خدمت خدامة ديال البيوت لأول مرة. المديرية شكوتنا كانت كيف قرتها قدمت لي الخدمة! انا دايمًا خدمت مزيان و فاينما خدمت عجبوهم المديرات الحال و فرحو بزّاف عاد بخدمتي. كانوا كيقلولو لي بأن ما خصهم يشوفو البيوت ديالي انا، حيث عرفوهم يكونو نيميرو واحد.

خدم رجلي الله يرحمه في المطعم <كافي رويال> حتى مات. وانا كنحس بالحيات ديالي داغية وقفت. ما عندناش دراري و انا خلاني بوحدى. عندي واحد العائلة كبيرة في مكناس بالحق كنت انا بوحدى اللي خرجت من البلد. هاد الإيام كنحس بواحد اللوحداية واعرة.
 و من داك الوقت طحت لي صحتي. كنحس براسي حسن كلما كنكون في المغرب و كيخفّ لي القلب. بالحق كيدوز الوقت و كنتوْحش <لندن> و الحيات ديالي هنايا. شحال هدي و انا ساكنة هنايا، حتى وليت كنعرف هاد البلد كتر من الوطن ديالي. ولايني كندخل للدار بعد السفر للمغرب و كنتوْحش المغرب!
 الوقت كلّو اللي دوزتو ساكنة فهاد البلد كنت متفكرة بالتيّة في الرجوع للمغرب. بان ليّ انا بأن عاونّا هاد البلد باش نبقاو نجلسو هنايا منانين بنا لنا الجوامع، حيث ما بقاش كيخص الواحد يرجع للمغرب باش يكون مسلم ديني. بالحق وليت اليوم كنيغي نموت فالمغرب إن شاء الله. الحمد لله دوزت مع رجلي الله يرحمه واحد الحيات فيها الخيرات بزّاف، كانت عندنا الصحة و السعد في الزواج ديالنا. و حمدنا الله اليوم كيف كيف، حيث ما يمكن لنا نزهعو ناس صغرا! غير ما حدني كندوز الإيام بوحدى و انا كنزيد كنتوْحش المغرب. ما كايناش فالمغرب شي دار حاوية من الناس، بالحق هنايا كثير شي ما كنشوف حتى واحد النهار كلو. كيكون المستقبل ديالي في يد الله و تعالى. إيلا كتب علي نرجع للمغرب نجتمع الحوايج ديالي و مشيت. كنطلب الله نموت في الوطن و نصبر.

حكايات المرا المغربية في الغربية حكاية، لا قراية ولا لغة و لا حرفة. المرا المغربية جات لبلاد الانجليز في بداية الستينات، دخلت و خدمت و ساعدت عائيلتها وكافحات سنين طويلة.
 قصة المرة المغربية المهاجرة كانت طويلة وصعبة في البداية، لكن الطموح والرغبة في النجاح خلا اخر القصة فرحة ونجاح.
 أجر معانا تسمعو وتشوفو و نتوما تحكمو.

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حكايات المرا المغربية في الغربية

تحرير و ترجمة للسيدة سماتة هرون

بمساعدة سعاد الطالسي (م. ب. ء.)
و مركز الحسنية للنساء المغربيات

الحسنية
مركز النساء المغربيات



الجمهورية المغربية
ROYAUME DU MAROC
CCME
مجلس القيادة المغربية للمهاجر
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Marocaine Résidant à l'Étranger



Kensington
Housing Trust

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LOTTERY FUNDED

دردشة

حكايات المرا المغربية في الغربية
