Social and Spatial Constructions of European Migrants in Morocco

Timo Schmidt

This research explores how European migrants negotiate feelings of belonging in a multicultural setting in Morocco, namely the Kasbah des Oudayas, both as a place and socially as a neighbourhood. Using qualitative research methods, it studies belonging at the intersection of spatial belonging (attachment to a place) and social belonging (attachment to a group of people). In doing so, it focuses on (i) the role of migrants' perceptions of authenticity, (ii) modern repercussions of French colonial urban planning, and (iii) the role of gossip as a social instrument used in community building. It concludes that although Europeans have developed a sense of belonging with the Kasbah des Oudayas as a place, they do not share this sentiment with their neighbourhood at a social level. This phenomenon is largely rooted in the migrants' perception of the social order as being dualistic, with a general sense of community only existing, at best, in a state of mutual surveillance.

The Kasbah des Oudayas, located in the north of Morocco's capital Rabat, is both a space of continuity and transition. Unlike the modern urban structures in Salé, emerging on the opposite site of the adjacent Bou Regreg river, it retains a traditional outer appeal. Upon entering the Kasbah des Oudayas (KdO) one can only imagine the rich history saturating its narrow, blue-painted corridors. However, while residing inside the historic site, one also takes notice of the local-global nexus inside the KdO. Its approximately three thousand Moroccan residents saw the number of European residents quadruple to roughly 150 during the past decade, not to mention the increasing number of tourists passing through its gates every day.[1] In front of local stores and cafes, residents and visitors mingle – leading to a surging cultural exchange between people of various social backgrounds, nationalities, economic statuses, and ages. This spectacle is arguably more than a mere product of a residential area turned tourist attraction; it is also an exposition of continually shifting power relations, modern and urban influences, the interplay between the private and public sphere, and the ongoing exchange of cultural capital.

Inside the KdO, features of Almohad architecture – such as the Bab el-Kébir gate (Figure 1.2) – give memory to its initial purpose of protecting the Caliphate from hostile outsiders during the twelfth century, most prominently the Berghouata Berber tribe. However, with an increase in national diversity, spurred by the influx of European residents inside the KdO during modern times, the purpose and social structure of this historic site have grown vastly more complicated. It is precisely these phenomena that render the KdO fertile ground for research on how Europeans create a feeling of

---

[1] Although no official figures exist for the number of tourists passing through the Kasbah des Oudayas, it is clear that tourism is generally on the rise in Morocco, and in Rabat specifically. The share of overnight hotel stays in Rabat, for instance, has increased by twenty-one percent between 2000 and 2014. J. Steenbruggen, "Tourism Geography: Emerging Trends and Initiatives to Support Tourism in Morocco," *Tourism & Hospitality* (2016).

Figure 1.2. Bab el-Kébir (Edwin Lord Weeks 1878)

belonging with the KdO as both a place and socially as a neighbourhood. In doing so, it contributes to the broader literature on migration by shifting attention from studying the integration of third-country nationals in Europe – the primary focus in migration literature – to the integration of Europeans abroad. By comparison, the latter type of analysis has featured in only a select few studies, such as those exploring "lifestyle migration," Europeans in Morocco, and "postcolonial imagination" through migration.[2]

Based on fieldwork taking place over the course of five months, this paper demonstrates i) how the feeling of social belonging on the part of European residents is nurtured through the spatial features of the KdO; ii) how expressions of a dualistic social structure rooted in colonial urban planning continue to influence the social order of the KdO; and iii) how processes of community building and boundary maintenance are shaped by gossip[3] as an information-communication and social control instrument. Aside from advancing the literature that deals with belonging at the intersection of

[2] M. Benson and K. O'Reilly, "Migration and the Search for a Better Way of Life: A Critical Exploration of Lifestyle Migration," *Sociological Review* (2009); B. Le Bigot, "Les Migrations Hivernales des Européens vers le Maroc: Circulations et Constructions des Espaces de Vie," *Autrepart* (2016); M. Peraldi and L. Terrazzoni, "Anthropology of Europeans in Africa: Colonial Memoirs and New Migratory Adventures," *Cahiers d'études Africaines* (2016); and Mari Korpela, "A Postcolonial Imagination? Westerners Searching for Authenticity in India," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* (2010).

[3] Gossip, as explained later, is covered primarily because it emerged as an important issue during interviews with respondents. This is particularly the case among female respondents.

spatial belonging (attachment to a place) and social belonging (attachment to a group of people), this paper adds to the theoretical discussion of social order and integration, boundary maintenance, and post-colonial space.

A Brief History of the Kasbah Des Oudayas
To better capture the resourcefulness of the KdO as a research site in the present day, I will provide a brief review of its historical developments, particularly since colonial times, which will help inform the subsequent analysis. To begin with, in her book *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (1980), American sociologist Janet Abu-Lughod writes: "Natural segregation on economic and cultural grounds was buttressed by laws which, while they did not speak specifically of apartheid, guaranteed that, in the words of the French, 'the two races' would remain separate."[4] Indeed, much ink has been spilled about Moroccan urban planning under colonial administrator Louis H-G Lyautey (Figure 1.3) following the signing of the Treaty of Fez in 1912. Until the 1930s, with the help of various French architects, most notably Henri Prost, General Lyautey turned the city of Rabat into a spatially and socially fragmented topography, separating the new and modern *ville européenne* (European city) from the old and traditional *medina* (old city). As Wagner notes, this colonial practice, also called "association," allowed for the preservation of "le patrimoine marocain," which can be translated to Moroccan heritage.[5] By preserving the city's authentic appeal, Wagner writes, "the European was now able to gaze on 'traditions.'"[6] The KdO constitutes a key site of this Moroccan heritage, which serves as a "moiré de lieu" (place of memory) for the Almohad origins of Rabat. Fast-forward to 2016, the KdO continues to be subject to the European "gaze," as the many foreign visitors roam its corridors. However, the continuous influx of Europeans to the city of Rabat, along with the ongoing exchange of cultural capital with locals, has arguably reshuffled the social order of residents living inside the historical site.

Tracing the literature on the KdO as a locus in urban city planning leads to previous scholars who have identified various historical and cultural characteristics that give insight into the spatial and social makeup of present-day Rabat. The vast majority of this body of literature is concerned with the study of the city as a colonial and post-colonial space.[7] The aforementioned sociologist Abu-Lughod stands out with her historical account of the city, giving insight into both its origin and its development under the French Protectorate. In doing so, she captures the dynamic processes shaping the history of the Kasbah des Oudayas, starting with the site as a fortification of the Almohad caliphate, to being a "quasi-independent republic engaged in piracy and war" with Christian Spain in 1666, and its shift into a hub for trade and artisanry in 1900.[8]

---

[4] Janet L. Abu-Lughod, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1980), 151.
[5] L.Wagner and C. Minca, "Rabat Retrospective: Colonial Heritage in a Moroccan Urban Laboratory," *Urban Studies* (2014): 3012.
[6] Wagner and Minca, "Rabat Retrospective," 3014.
[7] Jacques Caillé, *La Ville De Rabat Jusqu'au Protectorat Français. Histoire Et Archelologie* (Vanoest: 1949); Allan M. Findlay and Ronan Paddison, *Planning the Arab City: The Cases of Tunis and Rabat* (Oxford, UK: Pergamon, 1986); Ali Sedjari, *La Revanche Des Territoires* (Rabat: L'Harmattan-Gret, 1997); and Wagner and Minca, "Rabat Retrospective."
[8] Abu-Lughod, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco*, 73.

Other scholars, such as Garbach, manage to further underline the historical dimension of the Kasbah by drawing attention to the city's original name: in the twelfth century, the territory of Ribat el-Fath (present-day Rabat), which symbolically stands for "protection from conquest," was limited to the outer walls of the Kasbah.[9] The original scale of Ribat el-Fath is therefore but a memory manifested in the Kasbah des Oudayas.

Over time, particularly during the French Protectorate, the city subsumed the Kasbah in its dualistic spatial order, placing French influence over the city's makeup against the background of its traditional appeal (Figure 1.4). In this vein, Abu-Lughod has used the term "urban apartheid" to capture the influence of the French Protectorate under which Rabat developed into a caste city, separating its residents into neighbourhoods based on ethnicity and class.[10] Her research, alongside other works,[11] views the fragmented neighbourhoods as largely homogeneous spaces that developed under Lyautey's notion of "association." This is a logical approach, considering the distinct environment of the *ville Européenne* with its wealthy European residents and that of the old *medina* with its local, often lower-class inhabitants. My research, however, will move beyond this approach and study the KdO from the perspective of a heterogeneous, socially mobile, and ethnically diverse neighbourhood. This relatively unexplored dimension adds a framework of mobility and change to existing scholarly works. A resourceful study relevant for this research is that undertaken by geographer Allan Findlay, who analysed social space in post-colonial Rabat taking into account the factor of mobility in the structuring of social order.[12] His conclusion is in line with that of other studies, noting that class dominates over ethnicity in the creation of a social structure in post-colonial Rabat: "The status quo has been maintained within the divided city centre of Rabat, although this is so for class rather than ethnic reasons."[13]

The rapid growth of Rabat throughout the Protectorate, coupled with the centralisation of administrative and commercial functions in the city, resulted in heightened in-migration after Morocco's independence in 1956. With most of the French and Spanish colonists having left the city after the end of the French Protectorate, the following three decades saw an increasing population share of native "Rabatois" and immigrants from other cities who were keen to take up work that was left vacant by the departing Europeans.[14] Several years after the French Protectorate, by the 1970s, a growing concentration of workers employed in the tertiary sector had transformed Rabat from an administrative city to a minor industrial centre.[15]

A common methodological pattern emerging from these scholarly works is the evidently strong relationship between spatial and social structures governing life in

[9] Jamila Garbach, "Rabat: From Capital to Global Metropolis," in *The Evolving Arab City: Tradition, Modernity and Urban Development* (London: Routledge, 2008): 100.

[10] Abu-Lughod, *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco*.

[11] Marcello Balbo and Francoise Navez-Bouchanine, "Urban Fragmentation as a Research Hypothesis: Rabat-Sale Case Study," *Habitat International* (1995); Wagner and Minca, "Rabat Retrospective."

[12] Allan Findlay, Anne Findlay, and Ronan Paddison, "Maintaining the Status Quo: An Analysis of Social Space in Post-Colonial Rabat," *Urban Studies* (1984).

[13] Findlay and Paddison, *Planning the Arab City*, 51; Garbach, "Capital."

[14] Findlay and Paddison, *Planning the Arab City*, 24.

[15] Findlay and Paddison, *Planning the Arab City*, 25.

Rabat. My research sets out to use the distinct topography and historical developments of the KdO within the city of Rabat to further analyse this relationship, with a particular view towards the feeling of belonging negotiated by the Kasbah's European residents.

Figure 1.3 General Louis H-G Lyautey in Morocco (1925)

Figure 1.4 Kasbah des Oudayas during the French Protectorate (1951)

Methodology

The primary sources used in this paper derive primarily from interviews and participant observation undertaken throughout early-November to mid-December 2016. This production of data took place exclusively inside the KdO, with residents of the site. All foreign interview respondents except one (Canadian) are Europeans from Spain, the Netherlands, Germany, Italy, and France who already lived in the KdO for between as little as four months to as much as seventeen years. In total, I conducted twelve interviews: nine with women (all foreign), three with men (one foreign, two local). The two interviews with locals helped to reflect on the meaning of social order from an insider's perspective and were sometimes more technical than the interviews with non-local residents. In all cases, the purpose of the research was explained and permission to interview and record was granted before the start of the interview. The names of all respondents have been changed for the purpose of ensuring their anonymity.

Interviews were semi-structured and undertaken in English with the help of an interview guide, which was adjusted throughout the research period in order to narrow down the scope of research. The interviews took typically between forty-five to sixty minutes, with three interviews going more in-depth taking roughly two hours each. The aim was to learn about the respondents' experiences living inside the Kasbah des Oudayas and in particular their perception of the site as a shared "home" with locals.

Another component that complements the primary sources is participant observation. This part of the research has taken place in the form of spending extensive time with locals as well as Europeans while living in the KdO for five months. In addition, I went to various locations inside the KdO that stimulated interaction between foreigners and locals given their popularity: this included a gated community near the

91

Café Maure, the shopping street (*Rue Jamaa*), the terrace facing the Bou Regreg river, as well as the upper and middle gate from which one can enter the site (see Figure 1.5). The observations made throughout each two-hour window complemented my general perceptions of living in the KdO, and fostered an understanding of how interactions between locals, non-local residents, and tourists take place.

Source: OpenStreetMaps 2016

Figure 1.5 Map of the Kasbah des Oudayas

Theoretical Discussion
Place-belongingness and Politics of Belonging

There have been avid discussions on the relationship between place-belongingness and the politics of belonging. Geographer Marco Antonsich highlights the difference between both these notions: "A personal, intimate, feeling of being 'at home' in a place (place-belongingness) [...] a discursive resource that constructs, claims, justifies, or resists forms of socio-spatial inclusion/exclusion (politics of belonging)."[16] John Crowley has provided a more concise definition, describing the politics of belonging as "the dirty work of boundary maintenance."[17] Other scholars have attempted to find a more holistic approach to the study of belonging: Probyn promotes an approach focused on affective community-making grounded in physical proximity instead of common identity;[18] Antonsich critically questions whether communities of belonging can feel at home and create emotional attachments to a place without creating a common identity with

---

[16] Marco Antonsich, "Searching for Belonging – An Analytical Framework," *Geography Compass* (2010): 644.
[17] J. Crowley, "The Politics of Belonging: Some Theoretical Considerations," in A. Geddes and A. Favell, eds., *The Politics of Belonging: Migrants and Minorities in Contemporary Europe* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1999), 30.
[18] E. Probyn, *Outside Belonging* (London: Routledge, 1996), 13.

their surrounding community;[19] Nira Yuval-Davis further analyses this post-identity community of belonging, suggesting that "the 'sociology of emotions' should come to terms with the 'sociology of power.'"[20] These approaches, used in social scientific inquiry, suggest that a central concept in the study of belonging is that of intersectionality, which analyses individuals' loci at the intersection of place-belongingness and the politics of belonging. Rather than focusing on one category of belonging, such as ethnicity or class, research in this area has developed toward accounting for the plural dimensions which place an individual in a wider socio-spatial setting. Pollini has set the groundwork to conceptualise this phenomenon in his work on "polycentric belonging," writing that "belonging cannot be treated like a 'zero-sum game.'"[21] Following this literature, my research will also study belonging at the intersection of different dimensions, placing emphasis on the interactions between belonging in spatial terms to a place (e.g. the Kasbah des Oudayas) and in social terms to a group of people (e.g.. its residents).

Likewise, it is important to highlight that scholars have explored various so-called "points of attachment" in the construction of a social order: these include ethnicity and class;[22] auto-biographical factors (memory), relational factors (personal and social ties), cultural factors (language);[23] social locations, emotional attachments, ethical and political value systems, meaning the ways in which others judge systems of "belonging,"[24] as well as everyday life situations that encourage the formation of identity collectives.[25] A discernible pattern in these works is what Cuba and Hummon sum up by noting, "social participation in the local community is essential for community identity."[26] While the body of literature introduced in this section provides a pool of analytic categories to work with, the challenge going forward is to account for this complexity, while at the same time not compounding the analysis of my respondents' social experiences with too many points of attachment in the context of belonging. Accordingly, research by Y. Yun-Kim proves resourceful for highlighting other – and for my study, more relevant – factors that foster social participation with local communities: these include the objective to mature through new relationships with others, to create functional or pragmatic relationships,

[19] Antonsich, "Searching," 658.
[20] N. Yuval-Davis, F. Anthias, et al., "Secure Borders and Safe Havens and the Gendered Politics of Belonging: Beyond Social Cohesion," in *Ethnic and Racial Studies* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2005), 528.
[21] Gabriele Pollini, "Socio-Territorial Belonging in a Changing Society," *International Review of Sociology* (2005): 510.
[22] Fredrik Barth, *Ethnic Groups and Boundaries: The Social Organization of Culture Difference* (Boston: Little Brown, 1969).
[23] Yuval‑Davis, Anthias, et al., "Secure Borders."
[24] N. Yuval-Davis, "Belonging and the Politics of Belonging," *Patterns of Prejudice* (Abingdon: Taylor & Francis, 2006).
[25] T. Fenster, "Gender and the City: The Different Formations of Belonging," in L. Nelson and J. Seager, eds., *A Companion to Feminist Geography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005); A. Amin, "Take the White Out of the Union Jack," paper delivered at the Conference on Politics and Ethnicity, Merton College, Oxford (2005); and G. Valentine, "Living with Difference: Reflections on Geographies of Encounter," *Human Geography* (2008).
[26] L. Cuba and D.M. Hummon, "A Place to Call Home: Identification with Dwelling, Community, and Region," *The Sociological Quarterly* (New Jersey: Blackwell Publishing, 1993): 122.

to learn about host cultural practices, and to help ease loneliness.[27]

In and Out Group Forming Within the Global-local Nexus

It is important to recognise that social participation in the KdO is restrained by its socially mobile climate, namely constant reshuffling of residents with various backgrounds coming in and out of the site. It is, therefore, a crucial step to consider how mobility and change affect this research when analysing the social fabric inside the KdO. Sociologists have already attempted to study such socio-spatial settings in culturally diverse societies.[28] A key question underlying these works is whether mobility hinders the development of a sense of belonging, partly due to the temporary nature of social participation. A review of the literature reveals several opposing arguments: Savage et al. introduce the concept of "elective belonging," where newcomers to a community may choose to develop different forms of belonging with a community (e.g. emotional belonging or functional belonging) based on their own needs and resources.[29] In turn, this concept "deliberately avoids polarising immobile locals against rootless cosmopolitans," as it provides a lens through which to study how either group of people create a sense of belonging on their terms.[30]

Similarly, Gustafson's monograph on immigrants in Berlin and Paris concludes that extensive travel as practiced by the cosmopolitan did not produce uprootedness, indicating that belonging can exist across different territories.[31] These views oppose those of other scholars, who argue that mobility is negatively associated with belonging to a place or a group of people.[32] These scholars commonly point towards the length of residency, which arguably dictates the strength of relational ties. Yet, principal to the works of the latter stream of scholars is the assumption that host communities are socially cohesive, making newcomers a threat to the existing social order and therefore difficult to accept. However, in a neighbourhood as diverse as the Kasbah des Oudayas, where residents are constantly being reshuffled, it is important to distance myself from such assumptions.

Also, research exploring belonging in the context of interculturality and mobility can hardly ignore the "contact hypothesis," which links increased interaction between individuals of various ethnic backgrounds to a narrowing of previous differences in their attitudes.[33] The theoretical framework proves relevant for this paper, as it provides the analytic tool to study the interaction between locals and foreigners as they become loaded with power relations that produce myriad outcomes of assimilation.[34] According to this strand of literature, cultural boundaries may recede throughout this process; however,

---

[27] Y.Y. Kim, *Becoming Intercultural: An Integrative Theory of Communication and Cross-Cultural Adaptation* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2001), 122.
[28] M. Savage, G. Bagnall, et al., *Globalization and Belonging* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2004); D. Morley, "Belongings: Place, Space and Identity in a Mediated World," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* (2001); and P. Gustafson, "Mobility and Territorial Belonging," *Environment and Behavior* (2009).
[29] Savage, et al., *Globalization*, 6
[30] Savage, et al., *Globalization*, 103.
[31] Gustafson, "Mobility."
[32] A. Buonfino and L. Thomson, *Belonging in Contemporary Britain* (London: Commission on Integration and Cohesion, Wetherby, 2007), 16; Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson, *The Established and the Outsiders: A Sociological Enquiry into Community Problems* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), 155.
[33] Norbert and Scotson, *Established*, 124.
[34] Yuval-Davis, "Belonging," 209.

some more ineradicable dimensions, such as ethnic boundaries, can solidify processes of in- and out-group forming. The seminal work by Norbert Elias and John L. Scotson in *The Established and the Outsiders* (1994) picks up on this point, demonstrating that outsiders are commonly subordinate to the established groups due to the aforementioned boundaries.[35] At the other end of the spectrum, the concept of "community-in-difference" describes a community wherein boundaries are seen as rather permeable, allowing for more porous communities to develop. To avoid confirmation bias of either one of the two outcomes of boundary maintenance, the intersection of both approaches will serve as a guiding line when exploring what separates the local host community from the European migrants in this research.

Gossip as an Information-Communication and Social Control Tool
This final part of the literature review is concerned with gossip as a communicative and social-control tool used by a community or an individual. As mentioned in the introduction, the choice to include gossip in this analysis comes from the information respondents provided during interviews and the high level of significance they attributed to the concept. Reifying the notion that gossip as an interactional genre is often gendered feminine, it was particularly female respondents who engaged in this discourse.[36] Here, it is important to point out the distinction between gossip used by a community *or* an individual, as it separates two different schools of thought in their approach to the study of gossip. On the one hand, M. Gluckman proposes a functionalist approach where gossip serves as a public opinion that, in effect, enforces conformity to community standards.[37] On the other hand, Paine sees gossip as a form of information-communication, rather than a group-binding and boundary-maintaining mechanism.[38] In short, as Gilmore writes: "for the functionalists it is the community that gossips; for the transactionalists it is the individual and not the community that gossips."[39] My research incorporates both approaches by (i) acknowledging that gossip is charged with power relations, a view that resonates with Gluckman's definition of gossip as a form of "privileged communication" and (ii) treating gossip as a "genre of informal communication [...] intended to forward and protect individual interests," a view that resonates with Paine.[40] As such, I move beyond similar definitions, such as "word-of-mouth" communication, which are typically used in marketing and behavioural

---

[35] Norbert and Scotson, *Established*, 157-158.
[36] N. Besnier, "Information Withholding as a Manipulative and Collusive Strategy in Nukulaelae Gossip," in *Language in Society* (London: Queen Mary University of London, 1989).
[37] M. Gluckman, "Gossip and Scandal," *Current Anthropology* (1963).
[38] Robert Paine, "What Is Gossip About? An Alternative Hypothesis," *Man* (1967).
[39] David Gilmore, "Varieties of Gossip in a Spanish Rural Community," *Ethnology* (1978): 89.
[40] Gluckman, "Gossip," 33; Paine, "What Is Gossip About?," 278.

economics to capture their impact on economic decision-making and social learning.[41]

Finally, the reviewed body of literature on gossip gives prominence to the role of trust. As sociologist Robert D. Putnam writes in *Bowling Alone* (2000), for instance, "dense social ties facilitate gossip and other valuable ways of cultivating reputation – an essential foundation for trust in a complex society."[42] Tying these findings together with the earlier discussion on belonging and boundaries, it can be discerned that gossip acts itself as a point of attachment facilitating dense social ties. This train of thought raises the question whether, vice versa, being on the outside of gossip generates a lack of trust and feeling of exclusion from a community. In both cases, the relationship between gossip and trust is rooted in the practice of boundary maintenance, which is closer to Gluckman's functionalist approach. With regard to the information-communication approach utilised by the transactionalists, such as Paine, gossip can also be used in an informative and benign manner in the form of surveillance and protection. Gilmore also calls this type of gossip "idle talk" or "recreational gossip."[43] Although gossip, trust, belonging, and attachment have been discussed in social scientific inquiry, these concepts have thus far attracted only limited attention about the nodes that link these together. Therefore, based on the theoretical discussion above, this paper aims to contribute to this literature by analysing these concepts through an integrated approach in the context of the social order governing the KdO.

Place-Belongingness
The European Gaze on Tradition
As suggested earlier, part of this research explores the points of attachment Europeans create with the KdO as a place, or, in other words, what motivates Europeans to live in the KdO. The focus here is on how perceptions of the KdO's spatial make-up nurture a feeling of belonging vis-a-vis European residents, and in particular, which factors facilitate or hinder this process. All respondents share a similar view that the attractiveness of the KdO is rooted in its authentic and traditional appeal. These perceptions link to the aesthetics of the site on the one hand, and the closeness it offers to local Moroccans on the other. Karin, an older resident who lived in the KdO on and off for fourteen years, stated in an interview that "everybody wants a house in the Oudayas [...] it's a hotspot for Europeans with old houses, close to the people." Other respondents see the KdO as a "symbol of the city" and a "not just white-only place,"providing the opportunity to stay in a traditional Moroccan neighbourhood. Some younger interviewees enjoy the liberal atmosphere in the KdO, where they can host the occasional party. These interview excerpts point towards the appeal of a hybrid lifestyle, whereby Europeans enjoy the virtues of a more liberal social order while being simultaneously able to exercise the aforementioned "European gaze" on tradition, a practice that was already fostered by

---

[41] Glenn Ellison and Drew Fudenberg, "Word-of-Mouth Communication and Social Learning," *Quarterly Journal of Economics* (1994).
[42] R. D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000).
[43] Gilmore, "Varieties," 98.

Lyautey's urban planning during colonial times.[44]

Drawing from these characteristics, Europeans can tailor their experiences living in the KdO according to their own needs: it provides Karin with the freedom to withdraw from her work life in the Netherlands within a visually aesthetic and traditional setting, it gives Paul the possibility to go to the beach in less than three minutes to meet other foreigners and enjoy surfing lessons, and it helps Fiona to practice her Darija language skills through interaction with Moroccan vendors on Rue Jamaa. This makes the KdO *as a place* a popular destination for Europeans who search for a (temporary) home abroad – it offers a little bit of everything. However, the perceived attractiveness of the KdO, and the associated influx of Europeans presents a double-edged sword for the Moroccan residents. While tourism has increased the influx of foreigners willing to spend money on souvenirs and refreshments inside its walls, residents from abroad have raised housing prices drastically over the past two decades, which has pressured Moroccans into finding housing elsewhere. According to Rachid, a tour guide who grew up in the KdO, this has caused conflict between locals and non-locals. These findings raise the question of whether the benefits enjoyed by European migrants – a calm and liberal atmosphere within a visually aesthetic and traditional setting – come at the cost of social tensions with local residents over time.

Place-belongingness and Feeling "at Home"

For Tara, a French-Algerian woman, the motivation to move to the KdO is less the traditional appeal of the site as a whole, but rather the house she visited when looking for a new apartment. During the interview she stated that she felt at home in her apartment, but not outside. She fell in love with the rich history of the building, which was built in 1423. It offers a panoramic view over the Bou Regreg river and an underground tunnel that was used by pirates throughout the seventeenth to nineteenth century. Her connection to the house resonates with Marco Antonsich's understanding of place-belongingness, namely the "personal, intimate, feeling of being 'at home' in a place."[45] A number of other respondents indicated this feeling, including Karin, who found her house to be "more quiet, more authentic, more natural"; Fiona, who feels at home in her apartment because she feels safe there; and Paul, who referred to living in his apartment as "living in a postal [*sic*] card." Creating these connections with a place is part of the home-making strategies that Europeans use to feel at ease in unfamiliar surroundings. However, as scholars have already pointed out, these strategies are not "an isolated and individual affair."[46] This view was also raised during my interview with Karin, who acknowledged that the presence of co-ethnics enriched her experience living in the KdO: "I miss Alexandra. She is living here but now she is gone. That is one of the nice aspects for me to go to Rabat." In this context, the presence of a "familiar face" prevents feelings of loneliness and isolation, which stand in stark contrast to the notion of place-belongingness.[47]

[44] Wagner and Minca, "Rabat Retrospective," 3104.

[45] Antonsich, "Searching."

[46] E. Probyn, *Outside Belonging* (London: Routledge, 1996), 13.

[47] D. Dorling, D. Vickers, et al., *Changing the UK. The Way We Live Now* (Sheffield: University of Sheffield, 2008), 23.

The experiences of Zoe and Lyn, two French women in their late twenties who lived in the KdO for two-and-a-half years each, highlight how the spatial setting of the KdO influences the feeling of being "at home." Both live in the lower part of the KdO, right below Café Maure and adjacent to the Andalusian garden (Figure 1.6). Their apartment is unique insofar that it is located in a gated part of the KdO, which is inhabited by no more than twenty-five people. According to the residents living inside this gated part, they can feel a shared sense of privacy despite the adjacent Café Maure being a public and highly visited space. During the interview, Zoe noted that this feeling has produced a "small community within a community," where people are connected through neighbourly ties. One such neighbour named Sara, who is a married Moroccan woman in her mid-thirties, quickly established a strong bond with Zoe and Lyn due to the geographic proximity of their homes. Other respondents who live elsewhere in the KdO also shared stories of neighbourly relations. However, most of them were broadly defined as what one respondent called "functional friendships," which centre on the principle of reciprocity. In the case of Zoe and Lyn, however, the nature of relations to Moroccan neighbours were friendly and not functional. At one point during the interview Zoe said, "I always feel a lot of solidarity in this district," a view that was not expressed by respondents outside the gated part of the KdO, suggesting that the enclosed spatial setting has eased the process of

Figure 1.6 Moroccans showing a camel to European tourists at the entrance of Café Maure (2016)

"creating a home" for the respondents. This phenomenon further demonstrates the need to pay greater attention to the interactions between place-belongingness (spatial) and politics of belonging (social), a link that will be closer analysed in the following part of this paper.

Politics of Belonging
European Perceptions of Social Order

> "There is an Oudaya mentality. But not a community. I thought it was very open. There are Moroccans, foreigners, young people, surfer. This is like an island where you can find everyone. And there is this mentality. Okay, we are in Morocco, we are in Rabat, but really we are actually in the Oudayas." – Michaela

The quote above represents a sentiment that is shared by other European residents living in the historic site, such as Fiona, who affirmed in her interview that "the Oudayas is particular [...] it is different from all other things." After having heard similar adjectives used to describe the social environment of the KdO, such as "special," "unique," and "different," I tried to trace the origins of this rationale. In particular, I focused on the question of whether European residents saw themselves as part of this "unique" social environment. In this vein, the interviews with my respondents revealed that Europeans had vastly different levels of engagement with their social surrounding, which had a significant impact on their perception of it.

Three discernible patterns emerged from my interviews. First, some respondents, including Karin, Fiona, and Paul, chose to keep their distance from locals and mainly engaged in interactions for pragmatic reasons. These ranged from buying gas bottles and running daily errands to sharing recipes for couscous with neighbours. While this allowed Karin to be on good terms with locals, she also admitted that she did not actually *know* any people, except her housekeeper Ajiba, with whom she kept a "functional friendship." Both Paul and Karin viewed the social order of the KdO as loose and incoherent, with a lack of clear social links between the residents. Secondly, other respondents, such as Zoe and Lyn, who live in the gated community of the Oudaya, make a strong effort to integrate with their social environment. Being able to create and maintain more meaningful relations with Moroccans on an ongoing basis, Zoe and Lyn reportedly felt a stronger sense of community. Thirdly, the last group of respondents, including Michaela and Tara, first made attempts to integrate themselves socially but soon gave up on their efforts. During interviews, it became clear that, after time, they came to view the social fabric structuring the KdO as impermeable, with little room for newcomers to integrate. Tara summarised this change in perception in simple terms: "At first, they act open [...] but then they *are* not open."

These different stories reflect that perceptions of the social environment are not only rooted in Europeans' aspirations to integrate socially but also in their individual capacities to do so. As pointed out earlier, some European residents chose to move to the KdO because of its aesthetics and a specific house they wanted to live in, rather than the KdO's social setting. However, for the second and third group of respondents (as categorised above), the distinction is not as clear given that all respondents pursued a similar interest to integrate, yet experienced different outcomes. The following analysis will elaborate on this phenomenon by looking at the politics of belonging that steer the motivation of residents towards one direction or the other – namely integration into or separation from the community.

Social Bonds and Boundaries

As pointed out in the preceding literature review, creating social ties is a multidimensional process that is facilitated by a variety of so-called "points of attachment." Previous scholars identified these points of attachment as largely based on the likeness between two people, such as autobiographical or cultural similarities.[48] However, some respondents suggested that the different behaviours and customs of locals could both motivate and hinder their engagement with the community. Respondents also viewed language as playing a significant role in deciding the success of integration or lack thereof. Michaela, for instance, tried to learn Darija through lengthy conversations with Said, an orange juice seller on Rue Jamaa. She turned her limited language competencies into a vehicle for engaging with local Moroccans. Other respondents, such as Paul, instead framed their lack of language competencies in Darija as an obstacle: "I don't speak Darija which is a pity. That makes it difficult for me to have encounters with the local people here."

In the same vein, Tara (being a Muslim herself) visited the local mosque during Ramadan since she hoped this practice would enable her to create meaningful relations with residents of the KdO through religion. However, despite her efforts, Tara concluded, "in the Oudaya you cannot integrate [...] the people here can't change that mentality." In the case of Tara, utilising shared traditions and practices, such as the prayer during Ramadan, did not ease her integration process. The story of Zoe and Lyn reflects how certain political projects can nevertheless achieve exactly that. They set up a cultural centre early on during their stay in the KdO, which offered several courses in French, the arts and maths to young children. By doing so, they provided a platform that created a sense of belonging for both themselves and the local residents of the KdO. This practice resonates with Yuval-Davis's work, which states, "the politics of belonging comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways."[49]

Finally, a decisive factor in the creation of ties between locals and Europeans is the prospect of gaining (mutual) benefits through a relationship. "If you want to have a good relationship here with people you need to do them favours," says Tara. This adds a highly functional dimension to the discussion on the politics of belonging. For some respondents, being part of the KdO ultimately meant being generous and hospitable when a local Moroccan came "knocking [on] the door" (Tara). In some cases, this even involved giving a small financial donation. Although respondents unanimously said they did not feel a sense of responsibility towards the KdO community, they still recognised the value of doing favours if someone knocked on their door. Kindness would, eventually, be met with kindness: for some respondents the practice of "knocking [on] the door" resulted in an exchange of stories and the occasional invitation for tea or a plate of couscous. Fiona, for instance, noted that she too started to knock on her neighbours' doors if she needed small favours. As suggested, these examples are nevertheless no overarching recipe for social integration and are often rooted in pragmatism. As Tara

---

[48] Dorling and Vickers, et al., *Changing the UK*, 23.
[49] Yuval-Davis, "Belonging," 197.

points out, "there are some people who will laugh with you only for 100 dirham [...] you have to draw clear borders."

Dualism in The Kasbah Des Oudayas

"The Oudaya is a very specific social environment. It is very unique I would say. It is normal if somebody wouldn't feel that much at ease here because there is this divide between Europeans and locals." - Paul

During the early phase of my research, I expected my findings to refute the idea that a dualistic social order, rooted in colonial urban planning – as outlined in the historical review of the city earlier in this paper – still found its repercussions in the present-day social setting of the KdO. My observations in Café Maure as well as in Rue Jamaa seem to support this argument, given the vastness of friendly interactions between local Moroccans and Europeans, many of whom resided in the KdO side by side. During my interview with Brahim, a soup chef who had grown up in the KdO, I was repeatedly reminded about the "openness" that Moroccans practised towards Europeans. According to him, locals not only enjoyed the company of Europeans but hosting Europeans for a couscous dish on a Friday would even elevate their (the locals) own status. I had a similar experience during my guided tour with Rachid: whilst guiding me through the historic site, he showed great enthusiasm about introducing me to his Moroccan friends. On several occasions, he pointed to me and said, "he lives here in the Oudaya [...] he is my friend." While it is unclear whether these expressions of appreciation were honest in nature, the socially diverse and highly mobile environment of the historic site seemed, at first, to have blurred the rigid lines between "us" and "them."

As introduced during the discussion of theoretical literature, the concept that describes the narrowing of differences through increased interaction between individuals of various ethnic backgrounds is called "contact hypothesis."[50] It is through interaction that socio-cultural boundaries recede and pave the way for a new, more diverse kind of community. Yet the evidence derived from interviews with European KdO residents hardly confirmed the premises underlying the contact hypothesis: Fiona noted, even if many foreigners reside in the KdO, people always retain their identity. She stated, "this neighbourhood stays the same," while according to Paul, "a Westerner will never truly know what these people feel. And I will never be one of them." Moreover, Michaela affirmed, "I think it's kind of [a] separation of two communities here," and Karin mentioned, "I don't want to get that close to them. There is us and there is the other." Strangely, these shared views stand in stark contrast to the "openness" that Brahim and my tour guide Rachid felt towards European residents, which raises the question as to why some European residents perceive a dualistic social order where others, including locals, do not.

The interviews revealed that one critical reason behind these two diverging views is the perceived sense of ownership locals claim over the KdO. European residents

---

[50] Elias and Scotson, *Established*, 124.

expressed that the "us versus them" mentality surfaced when locals aimed to claim authority over the KdO as a place, and ultimately over the people residing inside it. Asking how this ownership was expressed during daily encounters, I was told that locals who were born in the KdO often referred to themselves as "Oudaya people" – i.e. those who truly belonged to, and could, therefore, claim ownership over, the Oudaya. This mentality was expressed strategically: in other instances, particularly during the practice of knocking on the door and asking for money, foreigners were included in the social category comprising "Oudaya people." During these encounters, Paul told me, the locals express solidarity along the lines of "we are a family here, a community [...] you shouldn't do this [...] or you should give us money." According to my respondents, reasoning that there is a group of "Oudaya people" has two purposes, each concerned with the politics of belonging inside the KdO: first, it helps to legitimise one's own social standing in the wider social hierarchy of the community; secondly, it creates a chauvinistic sense of ownership over the foreign other. Several other quotes from the interviews mirror this mentality:

"People here think the Oudaya belongs to them." – Zoe

"I think it's a kind of separation of two communities here." – Fiona

"I understood I had to buy my place in the Oudaya if I want to stay here and have good relations with the people." - Tara

Gossip
Gossip as an Information-Communication Tool
During the previous part of this paper, I explored several social markers and boundaries, which are maintained and reproduced, but also contested and challenged by social agents inside the KdO. However, one unexpected factor that gave specific insight into the construction of the social setting in the KdO turned out to be *gossip*. Although a discussion on gossip was initially not meant to be part of this research, interviews with my respondents revealed that it was a significant aspect of their lives in the KdO. As pointed out in the literature review, theorising the relationship between gossip and community has produced differing views: on the one hand, scholars such as Paine argue that it serves as an information-communication tool;[51] on the other hand, a camp of scholars surrounding Gluckman view gossip as a group-binding and boundary maintenance mechanism.[52] My research in the KdO has produced examples concerned with both schools of thought, which are presented below and followed by a discussion on the impact gossip has on the construction of a community of belonging.

Both my own experiences living in the KdO as well as the interviews with European residents gave insight into the value gossip has as an information-communication tool.

---

[51] Paine, "What Is Gossip About?"
[52] Gluckman, "Gossip," 33, and Paine, "What Is Gossip About?"

The encompassing reach of gossip networks became, clear to me when half a dozen local Moroccans asked whether my family had enjoyed their stay *prior* to their arrival. "Does your family want to see the Oudaya? [...] I can show them and make a good price," promised Oudman, a local tour guide with whom I had not previously shared any information about my family's visit. This casual form of gossip is unlike the kind of gossip used to make a judgement, often accusatory, about some specific person or affair. Nor is it aimed at protecting the "values of a group," which, according to some scholars, are asserted in gossip.[53] In this case, the process of disseminating information instead serves the purpose of creating a personal benefit (i.e. making money through a guided tour with the family). In other words, this exchange of news is much closer to the "genre of informal communication [...] intended to forward and protect individual interests."[54]

Some European residents also reported stories where gossip brought people closer together. Michaela shared with me that news of her arrival to the KdO after extended stays abroad would quickly circulate among local residents: "they ask me how my stay in Italy went, which is nice [...] they are informed." Similarly, Karin explained that locals would share information about her: "they know me [...] they know I'm the Dutch who is living here." In these instances, gossip assumes the role of a social catalyst between Europeans and locals. It provides information to locals, which allows them to engage in the lives of other residents to the degree that, if not overstepped, is perceived as "caring." Although these examples point towards gossip being primarily used as an information-communication tool, European newcomers to the KdO quickly become aware of the power relations embedded in the practice of gossiping. The following section provides further insights that suggest the two differing schools of thought, as outlined above, may be treated as complementary rather than conflicting.

Gossip as a Social Control Tool
During my interviews respondents repeatedly expressed their awareness about the use of gossip as a social-control tool. They view the communication networks that facilitate the flow of information about them as a surveillance-type form of communication strategy. "They are like cameras. They don't need cameras because they have people," concludes Fiona after a discussion about the security inside the KdO. Some respondents choose to live with this lack of privacy; however, others feel subjugated by it to the extent that they leave the historic site. This type of social control reflects what M.J. Herskovits hypothesised when arguing that gossip can turn into "a 'wary' or informal and indirect sanction."[55] Tara, for instance, notes, "Some friends of mine who lived here left the KdO. There is no intimacy. You live *for* other people." This mode of "being watched and heard" has reportedly discouraged even local Moroccans to move to the KdO. Women, in particular, find it difficult to escape gossip, which they perceive as a limit to their personal freedom: in this regard, two respondents share a story with me about a female

---

[53] Gluckman, "Gossip," 33, and Paine, "What Is Gossip About?," 314.

[54] Paine "What Is Gossip About?"

[55] M.J. Herskovits, "The Significance of the Study of Acculturation for Anthropology," *American Anthropologist* (1937): 122.

Moroccan neighbour, who secretly attends parties hosted by Europeans, where she enjoys the occasional alcoholic beverage. For the Moroccan neighbour, preventing this information from permeating among the local residents is crucial. She is afraid it could reach her husband and relatives and, result in the aforementioned sanctions.[56]

However, gossip may also positively serve European residents living in the KdO, as the example of Tara shows. During interviews, the French-Algerian resident told me that early on during her stay she experienced racism against her Algerian heritage. It goes beyond the scope of this paper to provide a detailed analysis of the politics behind the strained relationship between Moroccans and Algerians, and I will, therefore, focus on the story of Tara itself. Upon her arrival, she made it known to locals that she was the daughter of a rich landlord, which elevated her social standing within the wider community. After several weeks, during which this piece of information circulated among residents of the KdO, Tara was soon met with a more civil and respectful form of interaction. In this case, she consciously used gossip as a social-control tool to control her own social location vis-à-vis that of local Moroccans: "People here think I'm the daughter of my rich Jewish landlord. Because of that, I can do whatever I want." After a brief pause, she adds, "people here are scared of strong characters."

Furthermore, gossip networks in the KdO serve the purpose of enforcing compliance with community standards. They may do so, as theorised by previous scholarship, in the form of assembling "basic information on peers […] a technique for summarising community opinions."[57] This construction of public opinion about an individual may affect his or her standing in the community and can, therefore, turn into a social-control instrument influencing behaviour. Concerned with this development is an example from Karin, who reports having lent her apartment/house/flat for half a year to a Dutch woman who invited "all kinds of guys," which in turn "led to a lot of gossip." This eventually forced Karin to re-establish her social standing within the community upon her return to the KdO. According to her, this sort of gossip "is very bad for my reputation […] for a week I had to chase away all the guys from the Oudayas." For both Tara and Karin, gossip was used as a form of influence over the opinion of other residents of the KdO. This suggests that Europeans too can play an active role in the bending of information-communication channels towards their own benefit, a practice that thus far has lacked theoretical consideration in social scientific inquiry.

Gossip and the Language of Inclusion and Exclusion
Previous examples from the KdO demonstrate European residents' awareness of their surrounding gossip channels and even indicate some degree of influence over these networks. However, it remains ambiguous as to whether Europeans can actively "perform gossip" as part of the community. It is worth noting here that scholarship has previously studied gossip as a language of inclusion and exclusion. In his influential work "Gossip and Scandal," Gluckman writes that gossip is primarily performed among close

---

[56] Herskovits, "Significance of the Study," 122.
[57] J.F. Szwed, "Gossip, Drinking, and Social Control: Consensus and Communication in a Newfoundland Parish," *Ethnology* (1966): 435.

friends within the community, demonstrating its status as "a privilege that demonstrates and reiterates belongingness to a certain group."[58] Gossip is, therefore, not only a social catalyst but an indicator of the power relations that constitute the social fabric of a given community. In light of this background, I restructured my interview questions in order to explore how Europeans participate in gossip networks, which revealed that the majority of respondents shared similar views: they expressed a strong awareness of gossip but admitted they were mostly unable to trace and participate in it.

Awareness of gossip as a language of inclusion and exclusion has encouraged Europeans to forge social ties with certain groups or families who enjoy a higher social standing within the community of the KdO. According to some respondents, being friends with these families means that "your life is calm." As sociologists Elias and Scotson showed in their study *The Established and the Outsiders*, being associated with the established groups of a community eases the integration process for outsiders.[59] Lyn and Zoe highlight that this phenomenon works both ways in the KdO: "If you have a problem with the people at the terrace, the people around my door know about this problem [...] and then you are not their friends anymore." Although my research produced insights that point towards the existence of a well-functioning and active gossip network among the local population, European residents do not view this network as an indicator for a strong sense of community. During my interview with Tara, for instance, she tells me: "Here is a network of people always seeing and speaking about everything. That is one thing that we as foreigners do not see [...] because we don't participate in it."

Conclusion

To conclude, this paper has advanced the approach of studying belonging at the intersection of spatial belonging (attachment to a place) and social belonging (attachment to a group of people). The main question, namely how Europeans create a feeling of belonging with the Kasbah des Oudayas as both a place and socially as a neighbourhood, has been answered through the three interrelated sections of this paper.

First, this paper revealed that European residents are attracted to the Kasbah des Oudayas due to its diverse blend as a neighbourhood with a liberal environment as well as its traditional and "authentic" appeal, which is largely based on the perceived "closeness to the people." European residents also indicated that their association with place-belongingness resonates more with their respective homes rather than the Kasbah des Oudayas at large. In other words, Europeans are indeed able to create a "personal, intimate, feeling of being 'at home' in a place"; however, this is mostly the case with enclosed spaces within the Kasbah des Oudayas (e.g. apartment, gated community). Hence different degrees of place-belongingness corresponded with varying awareness levels of social order in the Kasbah des Oudayas.

Adding to this, the second part of this research illustrated that Europeans perceive the social order of the Kasbah des Oudayas as dualistic based on the separation between themselves and local Moroccans. This perception resonates with two factors, namely

---

[58] Gluckman, "Gossip and Scandal," 33; Paine, "What Is Gossip About?," 313.

[59] Elias and Scotson, *Established*.

that i) the dualistic urban and social structure that governed Rabat during colonial times and that continues to have repercussions in modern times ii) Moroccan residents claim ownership over the Kasbah des Oudayas, which in turn creates a perceived chauvinistic sense of ownership over non-locals. This emphasises the need to study the interaction between place-belongingness and the politics of belonging more broadly in scholarly literature, rather than treating these concepts as two separate analytic components. Not least, it demonstrates that the success or failure of constructing social ties with the local community depends on social bonds and boundaries. Alongside language competencies and shared cultural practices, this includes the functional value of a relationship.

Third, as part of the process of community building and boundary maintenance, European residents of the KdO share an awareness of gossip being used both as an information-communication and social-control tool. On the one hand, gossip facilitates the flow of news about residents, both local and European, which in turn generates a feeling of "being heard and seen." On the other hand, this feeling serves as a social catalyst for local residents to engage more easily with the lives of Europeans. In addition, this research has highlighted that gossip can be used as a social-control tool, enforcing compliance with cultural or community standards. While it plays a significant role in the production of in-and out-groups inside the KdO, however, it should not be treated as a signifier for community identity; contrary to some of the literature reviewed here, respondents have expressed concerns over the suitability of this practice as an indicator for a strong sense of community.

As Marco Antonsich points out, one of the critical questions of the present debate around place-belongingness and the politics of belonging is whether a "community of belonging" can exist beyond a "community of identity."[60] In the case of the Kasbah des Oudayas, a tentative conclusion emerges: although European migrants have been able to develop a sense of belonging with the Kasbah des Oudayas as a place, they lack a similarly strong sentiment with their neighbourhood at a social level. As this research has revealed, this phenomenon is primarily rooted in their perception of the social order as being dualistic, with a general sense of community only existing, at best, in a state of mutual surveillance.

---

[60] Antonsich, "Searching," 13.