

## GEOGRAPHICAL RECORD

### CLARET AND COUSCOUS: THE SYMBOLIC TOWNSCAPE OF A MOROCCAN MOUNTAIN RESORT\*

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Ifrane, a small mountain resort in the Middle Atlas Mountains of Morocco, was constructed by the French colonial administration in the late 1920s. In summer, the surrounding open pastures are lush and green, and the landscape is dotted with stands of cypress. In winter, enough snow falls to give Ifrane the air of a small Alpine ski resort. Ifrane is no ordinary Moroccan town, however. The presence of royal palaces, Morocco's only private university, Al Akhawayn, and houses for the rich built in the style of Alpine chalets set it apart from the surrounding Berber villages. Ifrane symbolizes power, otherness and dominance that was typical of urban planning during the French Protectorate (1912–1956) and is still echoed today.

The little town of Ifrane, nestling high up in the mountains 60 kilometers from Fez, the historically significant center of Arab learning, is more than just pretty: It is an oddity. Visitors can be fooled into thinking they are somewhere in the foothills of the French Alps. The peaked, red-tiled roofs of the imposing villas look Alpine. Gardens are bedecked with flowering shrubs and ornamental trees reminiscent of Provence. But Ifrane is also a complex bundle of power relations, a window into the dynamics of colonial landscapes. Mediterranean cities in general have long formed a pastiche of Eastern and Western urbanity, blends of European and Islamic economies, values, and lifestyles (Ehlers 2001). Ifrane's intriguing townscape reflects the imprint of French colonial urban planning seventy years ago. The material and discursive inequalities erected then are still present.

The town's geography is further complicated by the gulf between Arabs and Berbers in contemporary Moroccan society: The elite are no longer French colonials, they are Moroccan Arabs. Berbers, who constitute one-third of Morocco's population, have a long history of subjugation and resistance. Their marginalized status complicates the cultural decoding of Ifrane's landscape, revealing that in this case the formerly colonized—the Arabs—have been only too happy to take over the roles abandoned by their French foreign masters.

In this essay we decode Ifrane's complex landscapes in light of contemporary postcolonial theory. We open with comments on the postcolonial turn, noting its Anglocentric bias, then turn to the historical context that underpins Ifrane's distinctive social segmentation, including Arab and French rule. Finally, we focus on

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the details of the town's landscape with an eye to the manner in which the Arab elite has perpetuated the dual city bequeathed to them by the French.

#### COLONIAL LANDSCAPES, POSTCOLONIAL PERSPECTIVES

In light of the enormously influential perspective launched by Edward Said (1978), geographers have focused on Orientalism as a discourse intimately intertwined with the European penetration of non-Western spaces. The postcolonial turn in geography has initiated a large and diverse body of work concerning the entanglements of spatial knowledge and practices with European domination of the planet (Godlewska and Smith 1994; Sidaway 2000), much of it concerned with the historical geographies of imperialism.

Geography as a way of knowing space—the active “geo-graphing” of various parts of the globe—was part and parcel of the Western administrative control of colonial regions, including the inventory of use values as well as the ideological legitimation of these relations. Jane Jacobs notes that this process took a variety of forms: “the speculative geographies of explorers, the making of maps, the scientific theories of climate and race, and the pragmatic spatialities of colonial governance and settlement” (2003, 347).

Colonial geographies sustained the naturalization of Western dominance and parallel implication of non-Western inferiority. Drawing on Foucauldian notions of how knowledge and power intersect in temporary, mutually interpenetrating constellations, several geographers (for example, Driver 1992; Gregory 1994, 1995) have articulated the ways in which Western notions of space were vital parts of the colonial imaginary: How space was demarcated and brought into Western frames of understanding drew critical boundaries between identities, self and other, and underpinned particular regimes of power and knowledge. Postcolonialism has revealed, among other things, the complexities inherent in colonial rule: the changing boundaries between Europeans and those whom they conquered, the uncertain status of women in colonial contexts, and acts of resistance and opposition that contested colonial rule, rendering it at times fragile and unstable. Colonialism was thus every bit as much a cultural and ideological project as an economic and political one, and geography has been deeply Eurocentric in ways that continue to shape the contemporary constitution of the discipline.

Judith Kenny offered a powerful postcolonial analysis of the colonial landscapes of British hill stations in India (1995). Constructed high above the teeming masses of impoverished Indian peasants, such locales constituted both a discourse and a power relation, both as nostalgic “bits of England” and as centers for the implementation of colonial policy. As vantage points from which the British could look down on their subjects literally and figuratively, hill stations comprised refuges from tropical fevers and cool, sanitary panopticons that naturalized the social and spatial divisions between rulers and the ruled.

Derek Gregory's postcolonial project (1994, 1995) concerned European and American representations of colonial Egypt in the late nineteenth and early twentieth

eth centuries. Egypt occupied an important geographical and ideological position in the evolving self-conception of the West: the ancient, stagnant, senile culture, simultaneously proximate and distant, that could be rendered sensible through the application of Western rationality, the “empire of the gaze.” Gregory unpacked the imaginative geographies that colonial travel and administrative writings revealed, tracing them to the patriarchal, sexualized, and often racist imagery that pervaded Western views of the Arabic other. Space, power, and identity were thus fused in an inseparable skein as Egypt was “geo-graphed” by a panopticonic foreign authority. Grounding Orientalism spatially reveals how textual and discursive practices can have profound material consequences, allowing as they do the appropriation of space by rendering it meaningful to those capable of exerting control.

However, although postcolonialism has certainly addressed the Arab world (see, for example, T. Mitchell 1988; Gregory 2004), to date this literature has been heavily Anglocentric in its orientation, focusing almost exclusively on the British Empire. We address this void by focusing on a rather different context, that of Ifrane and the French colonial influence. Although distinct similarities with the British experience can be found, Ifrane’s experience indicates that, just as the impacts of colonialism were spatially differentiated, so too must our analytical attempts to understand this phenomenon be tailored to the unique contexts of individual places.

#### THE PRECOLONIAL CONTEXT OF IFRANE

Over its long history Ifrane has been the home of many cultures, including Phoenicians, Romans, Vandals, and Byzantines. Upon the Arab Conquest of the Mahgreb in the seventh century, Ifrane was among the last locales in the region to convert to Islam. The Ifrane area abounds with caves dissolved from the limestone rocks. Indeed, in the regional Berber language, Tamazight, “*yfran*” translates as “caves.” The cave dwellings around Sidi Abd al-Salam’s *zawiya* (literally “a corner,” often a place where a holy man both lived and was buried) probably formed the site where the later village of houses developed aboveground. Today, many caves are used as mangers, and their cool summer temperatures make them ideal for food storage.

From the seventeenth through the nineteenth centuries Ifrane was a key transit point for the Saharan caravan trade in amber, incense, ostrich feathers, ivory, and gold. Under the protection of the Tazeroualt Dynasty, a Muslim family independent of the sultan, Jews from Ifrane sold commodities in regional markets and at the port of Mogador, although they were also the subjects of occasional pogroms. The town lost much of its strategic importance when the caravan trade declined in the face of expanding European maritime connections.

The Maghreb has a long and rich tradition of nomadism (Johnson 1969; Galaty and Johnson 1990), and its peoples have played an important role in the region’s politics and landscapes. In the sixteenth century the saintly sharif Sidi Abd al-Salam established his community in the Oued Tizguil (Figure 1). By the mid-seventeenth century this community was well enough established to receive a land grant from

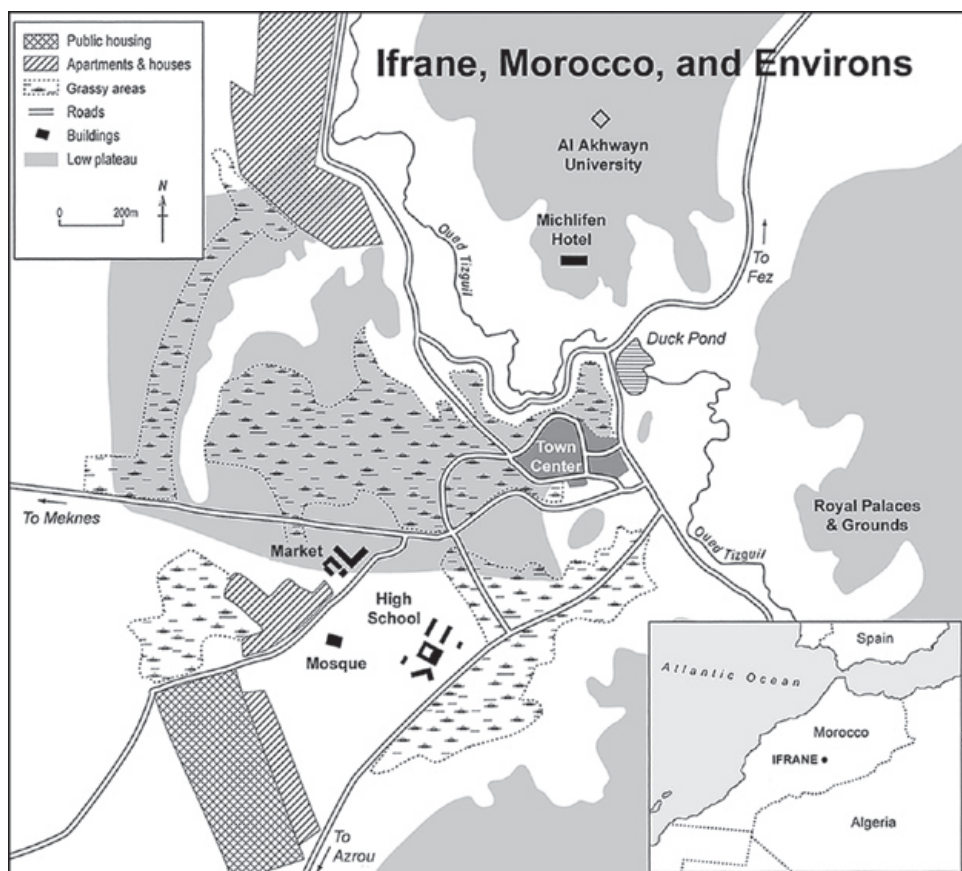


FIG. 1—Ifrane, Morocco: topographic setting and main settlement features. The geography of Ifrane exemplifies the separation between the colonial core, with its villas, and the marginal peripheries in which one finds the mosque, souk, and homes of low-income Berbers and Arabs. (Cartography by Simon Chew, Geography Department, Lancaster University)

Moulay Rachid bin Muhammad. The zawiya, 7 kilometers downstream from modern Ifrane, is still inhabited by Sidi Abd al-Salam's descendants. Late in the nineteenth century, agropastoral groups of the Beni M'tir tribe crossed the Middle Atlas from the upper Moulouya plain and began to use the pastures of the plateau above Zawiya Sidi Abd al-Salam.

The identity of Morocco's nomadic populations was significant to the unfolding political drama that accompanied the European occupation. As Marvin Mikesell pointed out (1985), Berber identity's focus on kinship was progressively marginalized over centuries of Arab and European marginalization. Timothy Cleaveland (1998) noted that traditional anthropological interpretations of this issue rested on orientalist stereotypes that recognized only the timeless centrality of heredity, when in fact such tribes often invoked shifting patterns of migration in their self-understanding (Kraus 1998).

## THE FRENCH CONNECTION

Modern Ifrane dates from the French Protectorate. Given its proximity and lengthy history with Iberia, including a colonial experience of its own, Morocco occupied a unique position in the expanding European world system; indeed, Morocco had long been Spain's other (Garcia-Ramon and others 1998; Nogué-Font 2001). The country offered abundant farmland and promised to be a fruitful source of grain (Swearingen 1985). Moreover, Morocco offered access to both the Mediterranean Sea and the Atlantic Ocean and lay at the nexus of an extensive series of Maghreb trading networks.

Throughout the nineteenth century, Moroccan sultans failed to obtain sufficient sources of revenue to finance the state, so they were increasingly forced to rely on French banks for loans, in exchange for concessions, consisting primarily of commercial privileges and immunity from Moroccan laws that were being granted to foreigners. Under the pretext of protecting French residents, General Hubert Lyautey, who became the first resident general of the Protectorate of Morocco (1912–1925), intervened with French troops from Algeria in 1908. Over the next four years France concluded secret agreements with Great Britain and Germany in preparation for the occupation of Morocco. On 30 March 1912, Lyautey surrounded the capital city, Fez, and forced Sultan Moulay Hafid to sign the Treaty of Fez (Cooke 1972), which awarded two-thirds of Morocco to the French as their last colony (Hoisington 1995). The treaty also guaranteed the small Spanish Protectorate in the north near Ceuta and Melilla and the Spanish Sahara in the south, which became havens for the Moroccan nationalist resistance (Amin 1970; Porch 1986).

In the mountains, Berber chiefs were allowed to remain semi-independent, part of a broader French divide-and-conquer strategy that pitted Arabs and Berbers against one another. However, the French often seized Berber winter pastures to grow winter wheat, motivating them to move to the towns and generate sedentary pools of cheap labor. These observations serve as a reminder that global forces telescope into local contexts and that understanding landscapes such as that of Ifrane necessitates a multiscalar analysis combining the various spatial levels at which political, cultural, and economic forces play out to produce unique local environments.

French colonial rule was naturalized under the discourse that Europeans were civilizing a primitive, barbaric space in dire need of modernization (Albet-Mas 2001). As Gwendolyn Wright put it, "For those who fell under its spell, colonial Morocco represented at once a modernist vision of formal order—smooth white planes of building facades aligned along broad straight boulevards—and the exotic dream of voluptuousness" (1991, 85). The ostensible philosophy guiding the protectorate was that of benign, paternalistic authoritarianism. A contemporary observer and lieutenant in Lyautey's army, Alfred de Tarde (1919), for example, optimistically celebrated the French role in education, medical care, urbanization, and agricultural management as only progressive and uplifting. Notably, in Morocco French attempts to differentiate spaces of Arabs, Berbers, and colonials—ostensibly out of respect for native rights—were not the usual policy of assimilative colonialism found in Alge-

ria. Thus, even within the French world system distinct differences in the form and nature of urban planning arose.

Will Swearingen (1987) demonstrated how French policies often rested on unrealistic stereotypes and how their efforts frequently amounted to little more than trial and error rather than a systematic, coherent strategy. Similarly, Diana Davis (2004, 2005) points out how French environmental policies were often handicapped by their reliance on obsolete stereotypes buttressed by ancient and inaccurate literary sources. She notes, for example, that “long before French colonial administration, North Africa held a special place in the imaginations of most Europeans as a region of legendary natural fertility” (2005, 213) Invoking ancient texts as old as those written by Ibn Khaldun, however, the French depicted Morocco as deforested, overgrazed, and desertified by nomads and their voracious livestock—and thus in dire need of “progressive” colonial management.

In Ifrane, the French established a hill station on land expropriated from the zawiya. In April 1914 Lyautey, who possessed a deep understanding of Moroccan culture, introduced the first urban-planning legislation. Morocco in effect became a laboratory for the implementation of new forms of urban policy as Lyautey sought to avoid the military engineering common in other colonies such as Algeria, which he despised. Lyautey’s plans dramatically restructured Moroccan cities, including Ifrane. In Morocco the French constructed a vast system of planning regulations, zoning codes, and architectural requirements designed to produce islands of technical modernity in what was perceived, and labeled, as a sea of Arab barbarism. Thus French-built cities such as Ifrane became the object of numerous, careful stipulations regarding the width of streets, building heights and appearance, and infrastructural layout (Rabinow 1977, 1989, 1992):

In Morocco, Lyautey was to provide the French administrators with what Edward Said has called a “structure of attitude and reference.” French soldiers, orientalist, explorers, archaeologists, ethnographers, historians, real estate speculators, and profiteers, all charted the country, each through a discourse that confirmed already known data or created new ones in order to incorporate the different aspects of Moroccan historical, social, economic, and cultural fields into the French colonial vision. The resulting scholarship created a discourse of both discovery and confirmation, a discourse and form of knowledge that was to become an authoritative form of reference on which the Protectorate Administration was to rely in order to manage Moroccan affairs. (Irbouh 2001, 4)

Central to this new order was a strict spatial separation between the new and the old, the French city and the Moroccan one. Lyautey chose Henri Prost to lead the urban-design initiative in Morocco, particularly the ambitious program for the construction of new towns to be built adjacent to the old Arab walled cities. The colonial gaze defined the old cities as embodiments of the primitive, in contrast to the modernity offered by Europeans. The justification for this dualism seems to have been twofold: It was argued that the habits of the indigenous “lower” classes, coupled with their Islamic fatalism, meant that they had little notion of public health.



FIG. 2—A typical Ifrane villa in the “Alpine” style. Although they appear to be located in the French Alps, houses such as this are typical of the central part of Ifrane and were once the homes of French colonists seeking to re-create a fragment of their homeland abroad. (Photograph by Peter Vincent, 2002)



FIG. 3—Avenue de la Poste in central Ifrane, lined with plane trees. French colonialism involved an ecological transformation of Ifrane, as with these plane trees imported from Europe. In so doing, the French transplanted not only species but also their own European identity. (Photograph by Peter Vincent, 2002)

This claim was linked to the suggestion that Moroccans refused to live alongside “impure” Christians. “To the Moroccans it seems to have been clear that the French were, for all practical purposes, usurpers and their resistance rested as much on religious as other motivations” (Ramsay 2000, 305).

The public health issue seems to have been particularly important to the French, who were worried about the spread of diseases such as cholera (Rabinow 1989) and syphilis, “the curse of the Arab race” (de Tarde 1919, 23). Their worries were obviously not so much about health of the indigenous population but more about what the bad publicity might do in stemming the flow of would-be French colonists to the protectorate.

French colonial planning gradually but decisively eroded the signatures of native Berbers in the landscape. As early as 1917 the intrepid novelist Edith Wharton, writing travel diaries while on a motor tour of Morocco during World War I, commented:

Within a few years more will be known of the past of Morocco, but the past will be far less visible to the traveler than it is today. . . . The strange survival of medieval life, of a life contemporary with the crusades, with Saladin, even the great days of Caliphate of Baghdad, which now greets the astonished traveler, will gradually disappear, till at last even the mysterious autochthones of the Atlas will have folded their tents and silently stolen away. (p. \_\_\_)

By the 1950s the French political system was increasingly complicated by mounting nationalist movements in Algeria and Morocco, and in 1956 Morocco achieved independence, ending the period of formal French occupation. The legacy of that period, however, was deeply etched into Ifrane’s landscape.

#### DECODING THE SYMBOLIC LANDSCAPE OF CONTEMPORARY IFRANE

Cultural geography has a long and rich history of analyzing symbolic landscapes (Meinig 1979), drawing upon the philosophical tradition of phenomenology, including the complex, multiple ways in which space and place are constructed discursively, laden with political meaning, and brought into human consciousness (Cosgrove 1984; Cosgrove and Daniels 1988). The many summaries of this literature are elegant and comprehensive (Groth and Bressi 1997; Flint and Morphy 2000; D. Mitchell 2000). Critical social theory, inspired by Gramscian notions of power and hegemony, has constructed a powerful and subtle means by which to embed landscape iconography in its political milieu, demonstrating that landscapes, in both their tangible and intangible forms, convey particular sets of meanings that typically naturalize the interpretations of socially hegemonic groups.

Central Ifrane is dominated by elegant, often large, detached villas lining wide, leafy, avenues (Figure 2). Many villas were built in the “Jurassic,” or Alpine, architectural style, with steeply pitched, attractively tiled roofs. The winding avenues are lined with ornamental trees, and gardens are planted with bougainvillea and hibiscus. In the town center, the Avenue de la Poste hosts beautiful plane trees (*Platanus orientalis*) that provide a shady place to linger during the heat of a summer’s day.

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Like the laburnum and the hibiscus, the plane tree is not native to Morocco but was imported from France during colonial times to complete the picture of Ifrane as a patch of France (Figure 3). Well-kept lawns and flower beds mark out large traffic islands, and in the park the large duck pond is surrounded by the tall, elegant poplars so reminiscent of European landscapes. Police officers prevent pedestrians from walking on the grass. The leafy center of Ifrane has five small shops, several good restaurants and bars, and even a nightclub.

One kilometer from the center of Ifrane is the campus of the exclusive Al Akhawayn University, Morocco's only private institution of higher education. Founded in 1993 by King Hassan II, its campus is also in the Alpine style. This institution, with 1,000 students, is clearly intended for students from well-to-do families in Rabat and Casablanca, who hope that its prestigious degrees, with courses taught solely in English, may unlock the doors to coveted civil-service positions in Moroccan society. Many students have automobiles, and the campus empties for the weekends when these privileged students go down to the coast to have fun. When they are not speaking English they converse in Arabic or French, not the local Berber.

Ifrane has also become an internal tourist mecca (Figures 4 and 5). At an elevation of 1,655 meters above sea level and surrounded virtually on all sides by forests of scrub oak, cedar, and pine, the town offers a cool refuge from the hot months of summer, when the town's population swells to 15,000 or more with visitors from Rabat and Casablanca and day-trippers from Fez and Meknes. On winter weekends the town can be crowded with skiers if the snow conditions are good. The draw of a delightful climate in summer and of the piste in winter was one reason why Ifrane was also chosen as the location for royal palaces.

Beyond the wealthy, Arab resort town, is another Ifrane, the Ifrane of the souk, the mosque, the rather run-down bus station, the Ifrane of potholed streets and poor housing tucked away from the tourist gaze southwest of the town center (Figure 6). Children play in the dusty streets and neighbors chat with each other in Tamazight. These row houses are for the Berber workers, the poor, and the disadvantaged. A strong sense of otherness pervades this quarter, and the contrast between this poorly kept area and the built environment of central Ifrane could not be more dramatic. As Michel Foucault (1972) and Henri Lefebvre (1991) noted, space is fundamental to any exercise of power, and the French colonists escaping from the heat of the plains to the fresh mountain air of Ifrane did not want to be near their Berber servants.

#### ULTERIOR MOTIVES—EXPLOITATION AND CONTROL?

Although the official French attitude toward Morocco was supposedly protectionist and paternalistic and, as Abel Albet-Mas suggests, "was tasked with civilising a virgin space" (2001, 291), this view actually masked an intention to exploit and control. The real strategy of French urban planning in Morocco was to provide mechanisms for its occupation, control, transformation, and exploitation (Rabinow 1989; Wright

FIG. 4 (*right*)—Holidaying in Ifrane is popular for well-off Moroccans escaping the summer heat on the coastal plains. In a good skiing season these holiday apartments in central Ifrane are also heavily booked by those who wish to enjoy Morocco's nearby winter sports region, Michlifen. (Photograph by Peter Vincent, 2002)



FIG. 5 (*below*)—This exclusive, upscale development in central Ifrane will have a pub, Internet access, and a bowling alley. The local Berber population in Ifrane seems to live in a parallel universe. (Photograph by Peter Vincent, 2002)


**PROJET DE CONSTRUCTION D'UN CENTRE RESIDENTIEL ET DE LOISIRS**

## Ifrane Bowling Center

39 Appartement  
Studios

Haut Standing  
Sol en parquet  
Vitrage Emraude  
Menuiserie en bois massif  
Menuiserie  
Aluminium  
Chauffage Central  
Reseau E-mail

PROMOTEURS  
Mr OUCHNI ET  
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Entreprise: FILS  
ALHABIB  
Sale 01.15.8010

Bowling 6 pistes  
Pub  
Fitness Center  
Tabacs et Journaux  
Cafeteria  
Agence Bancaire  
Music Shop  
Pressing

AUTORISATION  
N°119 Du 22/11/99



FIG. 6—Typical row houses in Ifrane's Berber quarter. Small, poorly maintained houses and roads testify to the lower incomes of Ifrane's Berbers, in contrast to the Alpine villas owned first by French colonists and now by a wealthy Arab elite, whose main homes are located in cities such as Rabat and Casablanca. (Photograph by Peter Vincent, 2002)

1991). It is through this lens that we should view the symbolic meanings of Ifrane and how it was realized and maintained.

The housing for the Berber quarter was constructed at the same time as that for the French elite. The French built a new quarter for themselves to avoid living in or near an Arab city with supposed unhealthy and unsanitary conditions. The French planners who designed Ifrane deliberately separated the indigenous Berbers from the colonialists. Although not the maze of little alleyways of a typical Arab city found elsewhere in Morocco, the Berber housing is, by Ifrane's standards, densely built and of very poor quality: no front gardens, no trees, no shady spots on curved sidewalks—in fact, no sidewalks. The roads are potholed and unswept. The general feeling is that of neglect.

In decoding the symbolic landscape of Ifrane, power relations are writ large and are represented in many ways. The architectural schism is obvious, not only in morphology but also in terms of purchasing power and status. Only the rich can purchase the villas being built in central Ifrane, and the rich are outsiders who can reach their holiday homes within a few hours on the new highway that links the coastal strip with Meknes and Fez.

The delightful public spaces in the center of the town where tourists and rich students promenade are rarely used by those who live in the Berber quarter. The physical distance between the two spaces is not great, but the social distance is. Al-

though the controls are unwritten, it is significant that many of the large villas have a “dangerous dog” sign at their entrance, as if the owners are threatened by any poor Berber who may walk by. Perhaps the signs stir memories of Berber uprisings against the Moroccan royal family.

Ifrane is thus a prime exemplar of Lefebvre’s view (1991) that space is simultaneously material, social, and existential. Nearly fifty years have passed since the French left Morocco, yet the physical and social divide they deliberately created in Ifrane still exists. Inequality in Ifrane has assumed new forms with the end of formal colonialism, however, and the city is thus a palimpsest of precolonial, colonial, and postcolonial social relations. According to the Moroccan constitution, the country is Arab and Islam is its religion. But official discourse ignores the Berbers, who represent a sizable minority. Economically marginalized, politically disempowered, and culturally invisible, the Berbers inhabit the margins of Ifrane that surround the elite core of a European-style resort town and American-style university. The power relations between the colonists and the colonized are mimicked today in the relationships between Berbers and the urbanized upper classes of Rabat and Casablanca.

Cases such as this serve to remind us how daunting are the challenges that confront postcolonial practice and theory. Postcolonial theory has had surprisingly little to say about the complex ways in which indigenous elites take the place of former European rulers, let alone the manner in which places are enveloped by shifting currents of politics and culture that accompany such transformations. If we are to be sensitive to the heterogeneity inherent with colonial societies—the colonizers and the diverse groups they subjugate—then we must be equally attuned to the manners in which the various schisms created and perpetuated under colonialism are being reproduced long afterward.

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