

Questions for Oral History Interviews

Ben M'Sik Community Museum

1. When did you move to Ben M'Sik?
2. Where did you live before coming to Ben M'Sik?
3. How have you seen the neighborhood change?
4. How have the buildings in the neighborhood changes?
5. How has the housing changed?
6. In the years you have lived here, how has the transportation in the neighborhood changed?
7. How would you describe this neighborhood?
8. How is it different from other neighborhoods in Casablanca?
9. How would someone who did not live hear describe Ben M'Sik?
10. Who would you describe as neighborhood leaders?
11. Are there famous people in Casablanca who have lived or live in Ben M'Sik?
12. Are there any neighborhood traditions? Festivals or public gatherings that are just held in Ben M'Sik?
13. Food is such an important part of Moroccan culture. If you had to describe the Moroccan cuisine to someone who has never visited the country, what would you tell them?
14. Which languages do you speak?
15. Which languages do you hear spoken in the neighborhood?
16. Do you regularly hear Berber spoken?
17. What do you like best about Ben M'Sik?
18. What would you liked to see changed about Ben M'Sik?
19. What are the most important holidays and traditions for you?
20. Certain holidays or traditions, such as weddings, require special costumes. Can you describe those to me?
21. What is religious life like in Ben M'Sik?
22. Are most of the residents Muslims? Are there other religions represented?
23. If you met a tourist in Ben M'Sik, what would you want to show them in the neighborhood so they would understand what life was like here?
24. What is the most important thing you would like to say about this neighborhood?

Translations provided by Professor Samir El-Azhar

I- Laarbi Jabrane: (a forty five year-old man)

(1)I have been living in Ben M'sik since 1985. (2) I had lived in the slums of Ben Msik before. (3) There has been noticeable change especially in the public transport. In the past, there were only donkey and horse-carts and only one bus-line (number 13). (4)There have also been noticeable changes concerning buildings. There used to be only ground-floor buildings. (5)Today, there is security compared to the past. (6)There is much change in public transport. (7) For us, it is a good neighbourhood because it is simple and the cost of living is lower compared to the other areas of Casa. (8) Ben Msik is different from the other blocks of Casa in many aspects: housing and ways of life. However, Ben Msik has a bad reputation. Its inhabitants are often referred to as 04 (zero quatre) people (*it is a local expression*). They are bad-mannered and not well- educated people. (9) Someone who did not live in Ben Msik would say that its inhabitants are a group of outlaws, homeless and alcohol-addicts. (10) There are no leaders in the neighbourhood. We are all leaders. (11) There are some famous people from this area such as the singer Zina Daoudia who lives in Hay Tacharouk and the singer Sif who lives in Al Massira and Mustahpa Oukacha, Chairman of the Moroccan Senate. (12) People celebrate "Achoura" (*a religious occasion*). (13) Like all Moroccans, Ben Msik people like the "couscous" and "tjin". (14) I speak only "darija", (*Moroccan colloquial Arabic*). (15) I regularly hear "darija". Berber is spoken by the shopkeeper at the corner shop and it is also spoken by some of our Berber neighbours. (18) We would like to have more hospitals, schools and sports facilities in the neighbourhood. (20) Because of lack of space in the house, most families organize weddings outside under a big tent and almost all neighbours are invited. (24) Despite prejudice and lack of infrastructure, I cannot live away from Ben M'sik because it is the neighbourhood where I was brought up.

II- Amine Bouchaib (57 years old):

(1)I have been living in Ben M'sik since the 60's. (2) I had lived in Settat (a town 60 km away from Casa). (3) Since the 60's, there have been great changes in the roads, buildings, transport etc...In the past, there were only slums but the situation have changed thanks to the efforts of the government. (4)Most buildings were ground-floor-buildings. But now, there are one, two, three, four and sometimes you see even five -floor –buildings. (5) As the population increased, the number of houses increased, too. This is largely due to the industrial zone (or area) in Ben M'sik which has attracted thousands of migrants. (6) Public transport was rare and of bad quality in the 60's. Today, the situation has completely changed. There are more bus-lines and taxis. In general, public transport has improved a

lot. (7) I can say that our neighbourhood can improve and the situation can be much better. (8) Our block is different from the other blocks of Casa in that it is a new and popular block compared to the old ones like Medina (*the traditional town*), Hay Mohammadi or Derb Ghalef. (9) We can say that the surface area of our neighbourhood is very big. (10) The festivals that are held in Ben Msik, take place in the Cultural Centre which is very big and can host a large crowd. (11) Concerning the kitchen, I can tell you about the dishes which all Moroccans share, including the Ben M'sik people. I can mention "the meshoui" (*roast meat*), the famous Moroccan "tadjin" and also the Moroccan "couscous" which most Moroccan families prepare especially every Friday, in addition to "rfissa" which is prepared in the seventh day of the birth of a baby. On this occasion, a celebration is organized for the family members to welcome the new-born. I speak Arabic and French. I hear people speaking Arabic and French. These days, you can hear even English spoken by the younger generation. Also, Berber or 'Shalha', as we say here, is spoken by some people who live in our neighbourhood (14) I like Ben M'sik because it is a neighbourhood full with young people who are full of life. They play sport especially football. I am also proud of my neighbourhood because it has the biggest stock vegetable market in Morocco. Trucks and lorries from all over Morocco bring fresh vegetables to be sold in Casablanca. I am also proud of my area because it has the most modern and biggest butcher house in Morocco. (15) We want more parks. We need also things that add beauty to our neighbourhood such as trees, electricity poles and rubbish boxes. We want that the local authorities and parliament members take much care of our neighbourhood. (15) There are two kinds of holidays. First, national holidays like Independence Day (18 Nov) and the day when Mohammed VI became King after the death of his father late Hassan II (31 July) and another national day is the Green March (6 Nov). Second, there are religious holidays such as the end of Ramadan (Eid Al-fitr) and the Sacrifice Celebration. On both occasions, families, friends and relatives meet to celebrate these religious events. (16) Wedding ceremonies are characterized by special traditions and costumes. Women wear the Moroccan "Kaftan" and men wear the "Djellaba", "tarbouch" (*a hat*) and "belgha" (*babouche*). (18) In Ben Msik, there are only Muslims (Arabs and Berbers). If I met a tourist in Ben M'sik, I would show him the Cultural Centre, the two faculties (humanities and sciences). (20) Our neighbourhood is improving. We want to have more youth houses, libraries and parks.

III- Abderrahim: (a fifty-year-old man)

I have been living in Ben M'sik since 1976. (2) I had lived in the slums of Ben M'sik and in the Lahraouiin (*a very poor area*) and in Massira 3. (3) Frankly speaking, we expected change to be from good to better but unfortunately it is from bad to worse. I am speaking here about human relationships. In the past, there used to be strong relationships between

neighbours who used to live like one single family. (4) I have noticed great change in buildings. When we first settled down here, much of the Ben M'sik land was agricultural. In 1978, a portion of land was given to each family to build a house. Now, there are many new modern administrative buildings like the 'Prefecture'. (5) The majority of people in Ben M'sik don't own but just rent a house. (6) There is a great change concerning transport. In the past, there were only horse and donkey carts. There was also only one bus-line number 13 (and one-bus company, 'tac'). Now thanks God, there are white taxis and red taxis. And there are several bus-companies. (7) I think this neighbourhood is the worst in Casa because the rate of crime and delinquency is very high. (8) Compared with other places in Casa, this neighbourhood is notorious for quarrels and crime. People of this area are referred to as "zero quatre" (04) people. When you tell somebody that you are a (04), he immediately goes away because he knows that he is in danger. People of Casa are afraid from 04 people. (9) As I have already told you, people of the other blocks look down upon us. (10) Like all neighbourhoods, there are some rivalries between groups of young people. Each group has his own leader. There is a traditional enmity between our block, known as "Sons of the Lake" and block 3 who did not accept that other people came to settle down near them. (11) There are famous people like the comic dual "Lahbal" and the singer Sif and there are also less famous people. You know, there are doctors, teachers and other important people who were born and brought up in this area. I personally know someone who has become a captain in the harbour of Casa. (13) Our cooking is very delicious. We use too much spices. The famous dish is "couscous" and "tajin". (14) I speak Arabic and little French. There is Arabic of course, French and Berber (Chalha). Although I am not Berber, I have learnt some Berber because my neighbours are Berbers and the owner of the shop next door is Berber. (17) I like Ben M'sik because it is popular. Despite many bad things in this place, I cannot live in another place because I was brought up here. (18) We need clean environment and people's mentality should change. (21) All Moroccans are Muslims but recently we witness the arrival of Christian African people who choose to settle down in this area because of its low cost of living. (23) We don't have monuments or bazaars which tourists like but I will take him to the new Prefecture, Acima (*a supermarket*) and the new park.

IV- Jbili Khaddouj: (a thirty five-year-old woman)

(1) I have been living in Ben'Msik since 1986. (2) I had lived in the slums of Ben M'sik before. (3) the neighbourhood of Ben M'sik was lacking in basic infrastructure like primary and high schools, hospitals etc... (4) the architecture of buildings changed for the best. In the past, there were only ground-floor buildings. Now, there are buildings of several floors. (5) In the past, most houses had only one room, a kitchen and a small open space. But today, things have changed. (6) Public transport was very rare and in very bad

conditions. (7) The neighbourhood of Ben'Msik is a nice place but lacking in security. People are simple, modest and humble but poverty and adverse social conditions have made them tough and aggressive people. (8) The inhabitants of Ben M'sik behave like the people of the countryside because most of them have come from rural areas and have lived in the slums for some time. (9) Anyone not from the area would say that this area is a socially-poor neighbourhood.(10) There is no leader who speaks on behalf of the poor people of the neighbourhood. (11) Honestly, I don't know anyone. (12) There are many customs and traditions. For example, when someone dies, all the neighbours (teenagers and adults) help with the funeral. Neighbours open their houses to receive the family of the dead. Women prepare "couscous" to feed people who come to attend the funeral. In religious celebrations, people exchange visits and gather around tea and Moroccan cakes. (13) I believe that the most delicious cuisine is the Moroccan one. The most famous dish is "couscous" and "tajin" which are known all over the world. (14) I speak Arabic and French. (16) Sometimes, we hear people speak Berber. (18) We need to create better opportunities of employment for young people. (19)The most important holidays are Eid Al-fitr at the end of Ramadan and Eid Al-Kebir (Sacrifice). (20) There are many ceremonies like weddings and circumcisions. In the ceremony of circumcision, the child rides a beautiful horse. He is followed by people who sing different Moroccan songs. In some cases, he is followed by people from Zaouia Issaouia who chant religious songs. They take the child to the mosque for prayer before the circumcision takes place. Women wear their best traditional costumes: "katans" and "takchita". (22) All are Muslims with some exception; recently some Christian African people have started to settle down in our block. (23) I would advise tourists to visit the traditional souk of El Massira. This would give them an idea how people live in this neighbourhood. (24) I would like to say that our neighbourhood has been marginalized and wherever we go, people avoid us because they think we are not good.

V- Mohammed: (a forty year-old man)

I have been living in Ben M'sik for more than 30 years. (2) I had lived in Fez before. (3) This neighbourhood knew important social, economic and intellectual changes. Economically, migration played an important role in the making and development of this neighbourhood. Intellectually, in the 80's, illiteracy was rampant and the rate children going to school was small. Socially, human relationships were strong as there was good solidarity between people. Although there are still some aspects of this solidarity among people, we witness a decline in human relationships. Moreover, there were few crimes and little drug-addiction in the past, but today these two social phenomena are increasing and reaching an alarming rate. (4)At first, there were few houses and many shanties but now there are a lot of buildings. (5) Assalama block is characterized by a special phenomenon:

most houses are rented, not owned. Many families are leading difficult social situations. I still remember that in the past there were only horse-carts and carriages which take people downtown. There were also few “tac” buses. There were only two bus-lines, number 13 and 10. Now, thanks God, public transport is available but there is still the problem of crowdedness especially in the rush hours. (7) In my opinion, this block is the worst block in the neighbourhood because the rate of crime is high but I believe that these criminals do not live in our block. They come from other blocks. The true and original people of this area are nice and kind. (8) There are many differences: in this popular block, a neighbour looks after his neighbour as there are strong human relationships but in other areas, especially in the modern buildings of several floors, every person lives in his own flat and doesn't care about the person who lives next door.(9) Someone who does not live in the block will be choked. He will discover that the block is full of shops of mechanics, carpenters, and plumbers etc. It looks like an industrial zone. I believe that the visitor will be bewildered when he sees that despite these deplorable social situations, people are happy and cheerful.(10) In reality, I don't see any leader in the neighbourhood.(11) Even if it is a marginalized neighbourhood, this part of Casa has given birth to engineers, medical doctors, lawyers, singers etc.... In fact, the famous singer Hamid Al Merdi was one of my brother's friends. Concerning traditions and customs, our block does not differ much from all popular blocks of the neighbourhood. In a celebration called “Achoura”, boys collect tree branches and build a big fire. Girls beat “taaraj” (*traditional musical instrument made of sheep or goat leather*). They knock at doors so that people will give them some money to buy sweets. There are other festivals or ceremonies like weddings and the seventh day of a new-born baby (*it is on the 7th day that parents choose a name for their baby. They organize a feast so as everybody knows the name of the new-born*). (13) One of the things Morocco is famous for is its kitchen. Morocco occupies the third place in the world in cooking. Our dishes are delicious and we are most famous for our “couscous” and “tajin”. What people should know is that people of the neighbourhood consume essentially three kinds of vegetables: potatoes, tomatoes and carrots and of course some bread. (14) I speak classical Arabic, French, English, Spanish, Italian and little Riffi (in Berber, there are three different dialects and languages). (15) At home, people speak colloquial Moroccan Arabic and Berber (Chalha) if they are Berber. Outside, they speak Arabic, French, English and Spanish. Young people learn these foreign languages because they want to immigrate abroad. We call them “cyber” languages (*most young people go to cyber cafés to chat hoping to make friends abroad to help them with immigration*). (16) I hear Berber spoken by our shopkeeper and by our Berber neighbours. (17) What I like most about our neighbourhood is congeniality, friendship and solidarity between people. For example, in Eid Al-kebir (Sacrifice Celebration) neighbours collect money and buy sheep for the needy ones who cannot afford buying sheep. Also, if someone dies, all the neighbours collect money to help with the funeral. I also like to sit with old people. They speak “des paroles en or” (*it is not my translation but words as they are actually spoken by the interviewee, which means they speak wisdom*).

(18) Personally, I would like to see my neighbourhood clean, with many green spaces, cultural institutions for the youth and other facilities like hospitals...(9) I like Eid Al Kebir. (20) Like all over Morocco, people gather in religious festivals and ceremonies such as weddings. It is an occasion to be together and to strengthen family ties. (21) We are all Muslims. On Fridays, we go to the mosque to pray and on religious festivals we go to “msallah” (*open space where people gather to pray*). There are also some Christian Africans who come from Mali and Sub-saharian countries. If a tourist visited the place, I would take him along the main avenue to see the different shops and the new Prefecture. I would also take him to “Al- hraouine” to contemplate nature. (24) In all cases, this neighbourhood is an integral part of our being. We cannot live in another place but we would like to see it improved.

VI- Jabrane M'barka: (a seventy five-year-old woman)

I came to Casa in 1940 but I did not live in Ben Msik because at that time there were only some shanties and agricultural land. I was obliged to live in Hay Mohammadi until 1962. When I heard about a new block “Sebatta” in Ben M’sik, I moved there and bought a house where I have lived the best moments of my life. (2) Before coming to Casa , I had lived Zaouia Sidi Smail in the region of Doukkala. (3) The population of the neighbourhood has greatly increased and so has the number of houses. (4) In the past, houses were constructed without any architectural plan in addition to shanty-towns. The boundary between the rural space and the urban was not well-defined. (5) In the past, people used to live in vey spacious houses. When children got married, they didn’t leave their parents’ houses because there was room for them and even for their children. Parents, children and grand-children lived in the same house. Today, houses are getting smaller and smaller.(6) We didn’t have as many buses as today, there were very old buses but the fares were very cheap.(7) As you can see, my block is popular where there are the souk, the public oven, the public bath. And there are of course my dear neighbours.(8) In my block, I meet my neighbours everyday. We exchange visits in happy and sad occasions. You can’t feel loneliness in this block or in any other popular block of this neighbourhood. It is not like the other rich blocks of Casa where live snob and selfish people.(9) I don’t really know, what I can say is that because Ben M’sik is a suburban neighbourhood, some people think that it is inhabited only by thieves and outlaws. What these people don’t know is the fact that judges, teachers and doctors were born, bred and brought up in Ben M’sik. (11) Yes, I know some personalities who lived in this block. The father of Maati bou Abid who was the Justice State Secretary and then Prime Minister was my neighbour. Also, Joudar, who has become a parliament member and perhaps is now vice-Mayor of Casa, was also my neighbour.(13) The Moroccan kitchen is known by its

great variety. When a guest visits us, we prepare the “couscous” with seven different vegetables, which is our specialty. (14) I speak only “darija” (*colloquial Moroccan Arabic*). (15) I hear also “darija”. Some of my neighbours are Berber and also is the owner of the shop next door. (17) What I like best about Ben M’sik are my dear neighbours, the souks, and the popular aspects of the place.(18) I would like to see my block clean.(19) I like summer holidays because my sister who lives in France comes to visit us. I also like Friday because most of the people go to the mosque. (20) On special occasion like weddings women wear the traditional costumes “kaftan” and “takchita” and they also wear their jewels. (21) All the people that I know are Muslims. (22) In the past Muslims, Jews and Christians lived side by side. But now, there are only Muslims in Ben M’sik. (22) As you know, there are no historical monuments here. I can take them to the souk and to the mosque where I go every day to pray. (24) Even if I were given a palace, I wouldn’t move away from my block and my neighbours. I have been here for many years and I will die here.