

NORTH AFRICA AND THE FRENCH IMAGINARY

“They seemed perfectly calm and almost content. Our coming changed nothing.”

- Albert Camus, *The Stranger*

2018 Spring Travel Course

Brittany Utting

Cities:

Casablanca, Marrakech,
Fes, Agadir, Algiers, Oran,
Marseille, Paris

Dates:

May 8-28, 2018 - Travel

(21 days, 20 nights)

May 2-4, 2018 - Preparatory Seminar



Climat de France, Algiers, Fernand Pouillon, 1954-1957

North Africa And The French Imaginary will investigate legacies of the Modernist project in North Africa, traveling to the former French colonies of Morocco and Algeria and ending in France, to examine the confrontation between the agendas of Modernism and the Casbah. The relationship between French aesthetic agendas and its colonized territories stems back to Napoleon’s invasion of Egypt and was canonized through the visual catalogs Delacroix and Matisse. Shaping a popular fascination with the Orient, France’s art, architecture, and literature endowed the Near East and Africa with an aura of eroticism, myth, and mystique. Simultaneous to this aestheticization of the Oriental Other was a desire to overlay these African protectorates with visionary Modernist utopias. French architects and urbanists—participants in the administrative bureaucracies of colonial rule—were confronted with the task of housing populations they saw as living under conditions antithetical to Modernism. This research travel course will explore a spectrum of housing prototypes bracketed by Le Corbusier’s vision of Algiers, the 1933-1942 *Plan Obus*, and the dissolution of CIAM in 1959, an event concurrent with the successful movements for independence of Morocco in 1956 and Algeria in 1962.

The travel course will investigate how the Modernist project transformed to adapt to the aesthetic, ideological, and formal terrains of colonial North Africa, visiting and analyzing housing prototypes of colonial Modernism. In Morocco, we will travel through Casablanca, Marrakech, Fes, and Agadir to see projects such as *Cité Verticale*, *New Medina*, *Carrières Centrales*, and *Aïn Chock*. We will then travel to Algeria to understand the urban legacies of the unrealized *Plan Obus* while also visiting projects by August Perret and Fernand Pouillon, including the 1954 *Climat de France*, the monumental housing project west of the Casbah. Although conceived by Pouillon as “an architecture without contempt,” it was commissioned by the French authorities to house and pacify impoverished colonial subjects, yet has been continuously re-appropriated by its occupants, illegally enlarging it to house 30,000 people while also staging important protests of the Arab Spring. The *Climat* is paradigmatic of how Modernism’s legacy can be re-adapted to new forms of life, new forms of protest, and new typologies of living within the contemporary city. To understand these North African projects through the lineage of their French counterparts, we will conclude the travel with visits to Marseilles and Paris, seeing work by Le Corbusier and Pouillon as well as contemporary housing projects by the French practices Lacaton & Vassal, Studio Muoto, and Bruther. In an era where the increasing stresses of neocolonialism are re-politicizing territorial enclaves and urban spaces, it is critical to understand these ideological legacies of architecture and urbanism to support new modes of occupation, inhabitation, and engagement.

Course Deliverables: GAMMA GRID 2.0 In the 1953 CIAM IX conference, delegations from Morocco and Algeria presented the bidonvilles (North African shantytowns) in the traditional CIAM grid as a series of social spaces that could inform urban design. By legitimizing these vernacular architectures, the GAMMA group undermined the ideological authority of CIAM, suggesting that European Modernism could learn from these informal architectures. As a collective, we will produce a new GAMMA Grid, analytically mapping how the Modernist Project has been re-appropriated and re-inhabited in North Africa and their French counterparts. Only by documenting these forms of life can we understand the social, spatial, and political implications of these new modes of occupation.