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Paul Jobling Advertising Menswear
decides this night who will make the holy pilgrimage to Mecca (Buitelaar 1993: 24-5). During Ramadan, Muslims do not eat, drink, smoke or have sexual intercourse between sunrise and sunset. It is a time of spiritual and physical discipline, when people are more conscious of their spirituality and God. The fasting is also a way to show solidarity with the poor, who often do not have enough to eat to quell their hunger. According to Marjo Buitelaar (1993: 12), there are three values that play a central role during Ramadan in Morocco: t'umaa, tahaara and ajr. The first one refers to the unification of all Muslims around the world during the holy month of fasting. The second refers to the importance Moroccans attribute to purity: the purification of both the body and the soul is believed to be beneficial for society as such. Finally, fasting does not only accumulate religious merits but it is also the occasion to accomplish other acts that will give you religious merits. Even though this goes against the principle of fasting, which needs to be voluntary, King Hassan II introduced a law in Morocco that prohibits eating in public, and bars and restaurants are closed. People usually work reduced hours and the most important moment of the day is the breaking of the fast, ftur. This meal is taken with family and friends and often people wear Moroccan fashion for this occasion.

In recent years, under the influence of the Moroccan fashion industry, it has become fashionable to wear informal Moroccan fashion to go to the office as well during Ramadan (see Chapter 6). During the months before Ramadan, there is a large range of fashion events presenting the latest fashion trends, fashion magazines feature special Ramadan editions, and even the supermarkets offer Moroccan fashion for this occasion. The end of Ramadan is a reason for celebration and is called ‘id š-ṣgîr or ‘id al-fitr. On the morning of the first day, men assemble early for Morning Prayer. The end of Ramadan is the occasion to donate zakat l-fitr to the poor (Buitelaar 1993: 63-4). On the first day, it is men especially who go to visit family and friends, wearing Moroccan fashion. For this occasion, fathers often take their sons along, who are dressed likewise. The women, who stay at home to receive guests, also generally wear Moroccan fashion. It is on the second day that women go visit their relatives and friends and for this occasion they again wear Moroccan fashion. It is still the custom to wear new clothes for ‘id š-ṣgîr and so many people have a new outfit prepared for this occasion.
THREE GENERATIONS OF MOROCCAN FASHION DESIGNERS

This chapter analyses what I have come to categorize as three generations of Moroccan fashion designers. Although they can be, to a certain extent, differentiated chronologically, they are especially differentiated according to fundamental style changes introduced in Moroccan fashion following significant changes in Moroccan society. As John Flügel (1950 [1930]: 153) explains, very big changes in fashion can only be accepted if at the same time there is a corresponding change in ideal. As such, a first generation of Moroccan fashion designers in the 1960s found itself confronted with the consequences of the French Protectorate, the nationalist movement and a remarkable change in lifestyle. The first fashion designers consisted of women of the Moroccan élite, the schoolgirls of the independence movement who had grown up with new ideals. Some of them had gone to France to finish their education, adopting European ideas and lifestyle. Also, Casablanca, where they had moved with their husbands, represented a more cosmopolitan and free environment than the imperial cities with their high social control. Nevertheless, they inherited the decadence of fasi fashion, consisting of layers of heavy velvet and brocade, which made it substantial and impractical. Cuts were wide and long, combined with large brocade belts, which severely limited women in their movement. Therefore, these ladies no longer considered their vestimentary heritage suitable and re-invented Moroccan fashion to fit their cosmopolitan and active lifestyle by incorporating European fashion aesthetics and comfort based on notions of freedom.

However, it is only with the introduction of fashion schools in Morocco in the mid-1980s, Moroccan fashion magazines in the mid-1990s, and European fashion brands on a large scale at the turn of the twenty-first century that fashion was democratized in Morocco (see Chapters 4 and 5). This democratization process was crucial for the rise of a second generation of Moroccan fashion designers, which no longer consisted of members of the Moroccan élite and
received a formal training in fashion design in Morocco. This generation owes its success to a large extent to the Moroccan fashion magazines and their widely mediatized fashion events. The fact that they featured in glamorous fashion spreads and broadcast on national television not only elevated them to 'star status', but also enabled them to reach a much larger audience. Also, this second generation of designers benefited from a re-evaluation of Moroccan cultural heritage and a general longing for a Moroccan modernity materialized through modern Moroccan fashion.

A third generation of Moroccan fashion designers, which started to develop at the turn of the twenty-first century, finds itself analysing its cultural heritage against a global background and re-inventing Moroccan fashion far from folkloric stereotypes. For the turn of the century has not only been met by a growing impact of globalization on Moroccan society, but also by important local developments such as increasing urbanization, growing religious extremism, and mounting social segregation. This new generation uses fashion to challenge essentialist notions of Moroccanness by re-inventing and conceptualizing Moroccan cultural heritage in their own personal styles.

The power of the 1960s

The first generation of Moroccan fashion designers consisted of women of the Moroccan élite with no formal training in fashion design. They merely had the advantage of growing up with the luxury of high-quality craftsmanship and learned to sew and embroider at a young age, since this was considered an important part of their privileged education. They were ‘products’ of the nationalist movement in that they had gone to school, wore European fashion, enjoyed a Euromodern education and had moved to Casablanca with their husbands where they were introduced to a cosmopolitan and active lifestyle.

But for socio-religious occasions, they had inherited a Moroccan fashion that consisted of multiple layers of heavy fabrics, which made it substantial and uncomfortable. Cuts were wide and long, combined with large belts, which severely limited women in their movement. They therefore no longer considered Moroccan fashion suitable and, in a way, they did for Moroccan women’s fashion what Coco Chanel did for European women’s fashion; they ‘liberated’ women by making comfortable and elegant garments with a modern look, suitable for an active lifestyle. Although they initially designed for an international clientele whereby their designs were extremely avant-garde for Moroccan women, their international success uncontestably contributed to a national success. They revolutionized Moroccan fashion by introducing light and fluid (European haute couture) fabrics, by reducing the amount of layers and by reducing the width of the garments. Through shopping in Europe, they had become familiar with
European haute couture, which uncontestably influenced their re-invention of Moroccan fashion. What defined them as designers was that they proposed their own creations in luxurious boutiques – as opposed to ordering from anonymous tailors (see Chapter 5) – and signed their designs with their brand name.

Through their extensive networks, they were able to present their collections abroad, where they met a remarkable success due to the hippie movement. Being turbulent political and cultural times, a fascination for ethnic fashion in 1960s North America and Europe reflected a reaction to the establishment and a way to question mainstream fashion (English 2007: 155). Photographs from this period testify to international movie stars, musicians, fashion icons and even royalty wearing Moroccan fashion, like the mythic musician Jim Morrison, lead singer of the music group The Doors, the Dutch princess Beatrix, later to become the queen of the Netherlands, and the French fashion icon Catherine Deneuve. This international success uncontestably contributed to the national success of this first generation of Moroccan fashion designers, giving them the credibility to revolutionize Moroccan fashion. According to the Moroccan fashion designer Zhor Sebti, it was the first time that Moroccan women felt the possibility to express their modern identity through Moroccan fashion.²

Very little was documented of this first generation of Moroccan fashion designers and only little is left of their heritage. That is why, while the pioneers have already passed away, it may be that others will remain unknown forever. The four designers described below are the only ones we know of so far.

Zina Guessous

Born in Rabat in 1925 as Zineb Salah Rachid, Zina Guessous had an avant-garde upbringing for her time. Because her mother Lalla Kenza, who was a member of the royal family, frequently accompanied her husband abroad, she was among the first Moroccan élite women to adopt European fashion and to appear in public without a face veil.³ Also, her father, who was a close friend of Sultan Mohamed V, supported the nationalist movement and gave his daughters a Euromodern education. Therefore, Zina was a perfect example of the new Moroccan woman who spoke fluently in French, Arabic, Spanish and English and excelled in arts and sports. After graduation, she worked as a librarian at the American Library in Tangier for a few years until she got married to Hassan Guessous, a businessman from Fez, in 1956 (Boushaba and Joundy 2000: 93). The couple settled down in Casablanca, where again Zina took up a job as a librarian at the American Centre until 1960, when her only daughter Karima (Kouki) was born. She stopped working for a few years to take care of her child, but in 1964 she eventually opened a small boutique named Kenz in the prestigious Hotel Royal Mansour in downtown Casablanca (2000: 93).
Here she offered modern Moroccan fashion and jewellery, which she initially designed for the fashionable international clientèle of the Hotel, but in no time became popular among the Moroccan jet-set of Casablanca. She modernized the qeftan and the jellaba by redefining their shapes and decorations. What made her so successful was that she managed to combine elegance and comfort, which was new for Moroccan fashion at the time. Her trademarks became the mini qef-tan and the gendura for women – a garment that was until then only worn by men – turning it into a comfortable and elegant outfit. Although she never received a formal training in fashion design and did not have her own atelier, she commissioned Moroccan seamstresses and craftsmen to produce her designs.³

In 1965 she became acquainted with the Fashion editor of American Vogue, Diana Vreeland, whose son was a diplomat at that time in Morocco. Diana encouraged her to show her work in the United States and in 1966 the New York department store Lord and Taylor organized a fashion show around the theme of the Mediterranean, and Zina was invited to present her collection next to the Italian designer Emilio Pucci (Boushaba and Jouandy 2000: 93). At the after-party, she met the Moroccan ambassador in Washington who in 1968 invited her to organize a fashion show during a luxurious gala-dinner where she met influential politicians and celebrities. The event was covered by the Washington Post and American Vogue published pictures of the show.³

The list of international (fashion) icons Zina would come to dress during her career included Lady Sukarno, the Empress Farah Diba and Princess Beatrice (Boushaba and Jouandy 2000: 94). Her international success incontestably contributed to her success in Morocco, where she opened two more boutiques, one in the Hotel Tour Hassan in Rabat and one in the famous Hotel Mamounia in Marrakech, which remained until the 1980s. Zina Guessous passed away in 1998.

Naima Bennis

Naima Bennis was born in 1940 in Casablanca as the last of seven children of a trading family from Fez. Her father was a textile merchant who had moved to Casablanca at a young age and who was widely travelled due to his trade. As part of her privileged education, Naima learned to sew and embroider as a child but, unlike her four elder sisters who enjoyed a more traditional upbringing and lived secluded lives, she had a strong personality and managed to persuade her father to allow her to go to school. She attended the Lycée des Jeunes Filles in Casablanca, which was run by French Catholic nuns. This is where, besides reading and writing, she learned how to confection clothes and for the rest of her life she would make her own dresses as well as those of her sisters.⁴
In 1958 she got married and the couple moved to Rabat. In the true spirit of the nationalist movement, she was determined to be (financially) independent and she started working for the Exchange Office (Office d’Échange) in Rabat. In 1961, her first daughter Sofia was born, while Mouna followed in 1963 and Layla in 1970. It is in 1966 that she got the opportunity to open a small boutique in the newly opened Hilton Hotel in Rabat. Here she started creating her own designs of modern Moroccan fashion, including qaṭen, ḥalab and gendurat. She had her own atelier behind the boutique where she did all of her own cutting while she employed a number of craftsmen and seamstresses to carry out the sewing and decoration techniques.4

Initially, she too targeted the international clientèle of the Hotel as well as foreign diplomats stationed in Rabat. This is how she became close friends with the Egyptian diva Oum Kalthoum, who was invited by Hassan II to perform in Rabat and stayed at the hotel. Her designs testified to a remarkable balance between innovation and tradition. For example, she would take antique passementerie decorations from old qef-tan and apply them to new garments. Also, besides French haute couture fabrics, she would use characteristic Moroccan materials such as the fine woollen weave biwi used in male outer garments and apply it to create elegant female garments. She also became renowned for her designing of capes as an elegant outer garment for women to be worn over the qaftan instead of the jellaba.

Thanks to her growing success, she opened three more shops in the same Hilton Hotel selling garments, jewellery, crafts and perfume. According to her daughters, at some point she had up to ten employees and she even exported her designs to North America and Europe. She was also invited on several occasions to show her collections abroad, including Tunisia and the Arabian Peninsula. Because of her international success, she consequently gathered a national clientèle from Rabat and Casablanca. Eventually, circumstances made her close all four boutiques at the Hilton Hotel in 1987 and Naima Bennis passed away in 2008 in Casablanca.4

Zhor Sebti

Zhor Sebti was born in the old mdina of Fez in 1928 as the daughter of a well-established élite family. Her father was a successful fabric merchant who conducted business as far away as Japan. When she was eight, the family moved to the French ville nouvelle and she was allowed to attend the French school, which was exceptional because it was mixed and she was the first Moroccan girl to attend.5 When she left primary school, however, family pressure was too high and she was not allowed to enter secondary school. She got married at age fifteen, moved to Casablanca with her husband and had her first
child a year later. Like the majority of the women of her status, she became politically and socially active in support of the nationalist movement. She created a school for girls in 1953 in order to stimulate the education of young girls and, besides reading and writing, she insisted on teaching them embroidery, which would allow them to support themselves later on.

At around the same time, a French lady named Madame Achille opened Maison Joste in Casablanca, which held the exclusive rights for Christian Dior and Yves Saint Laurent. Janine Halary, who had studied fashion design at the French Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture in Paris, was working for Christian Dior at the time and was sent to Casablanca to work in the atelier. A few years later she met her husband and decided to stay in Morocco and to open up her own atelier. The two women met and it was circumstances that caused them to associate and start Maison Fadéla in 1967. On the one hand, Zhur Sebti’s husband had died, leaving her with four small children and she was determined to work and support herself. On the other hand, Janine Halary lost most of her Jewish seamstresses overnight due to the exodus to Israel. With Janine’s talent in design and Zhur’s knowledge of Moroccan handicraft, they worked together for twelve years and ran an atelier with thirty seamstresses and ten tailors that produced about thirty exclusively hand-made pieces each month.5

Their designs were made of luxurious, fluid and elegant French haute couture fabrics, decorated with high-quality Moroccan embroidery, and they became renowned for their elegant bead-decorations. Although they initially designed for the European market, they instantly became successful in Morocco. According to Zhur Sebti, ‘as soon as my sisters and cousins saw our designs, they wanted to wear them too and soon the news spread all over Casablanca’.6 Their success among Moroccan women was due to the fact that they offered well-designed and modern Moroccan fashion, which could be worn for a wide range of occasions. According to Zhur, ‘women who had never worn a jellaba before, considering them unfashionable, would come and order one at our boutique’.6

Zhur Sebti, who in the meantime had remarried with a high-ranked Moroccan Colonel, generated an international network and was invited to participate in fashion shows in Tunis, Jeddah, London, Teheran and Washington. Influential public figures, including the Empress of Iran and the First Ladies Kennedy and Reagan, became their clients, which contributed to their success in Morocco. After eighteen years of success, Zhur Sebti left the boutique to her daughter-in-law – who changed the brand name to Féline – and retired. But she continues to be involved in her girls’ schools in Casablanca and Marrakech.
Tamy Tazi

Born Tamy Mezzian, Tamy Tazi grew up in the northern territories of Morocco where her father was a Governor at the time. Another example of the nationalist movement, she received a Euromodern education speaking fluent Arabic, Spanish, French and English and practised theatre, painting and horse-back riding. After graduation she went to Spain to study philosophy and literature at the University of Granada. Once back in Morocco, she married a young engineer from Fez, Jalil Tazi, and the couple settled in Casablanca, where she became the president of the Club Etrier (Stirrup Club) (Clarke 1965, 118).

Although Tamy never had a particular ambition to become a fashion designer, it was circumstances that led her to it. While she had no formal training in fashion design, she learned to sew and embroider as a child like any young girl of her social background. She would enjoy designing clothes for herself and her sisters and people would respond positively to her personal style and remarkable good taste. In particular, her foreign friends from Marbella, where the family had a summer residence, kept asking her to create garments for them. In 1965, American Vogue published an article on her by Henry Clarke, which only added to Tamy’s notoriety as a fashion icon. An important reason why she was so reluctant to go into fashion was that ‘at that time it was not very well accepted to become a seamstress. Girls of respectable families either became doctors, pharmacists or artists’.

The concept of fashion designer was not yet well-known in Morocco, and it was not until the 1990s, with the success of the Moroccan lifestyle press, that this would change (see Chapter 4).

However, by 1975 she had so many orders from friends and family, that she hired a small villa behind her house in Casablanca, where she designed and produced on a small scale with the help of her Spanish seamstress. A few years later, when Madame Achille was ready to retire, Tamy Tazi took over Maison Joste as well as the rights to represent Dior and Yves Saint Laurent in Morocco. This enabled her to become better acquainted with the world of French haute couture (as an insider rather than as a consumer) and to become a professional fashion designer. It was also around this time that she developed a close friendship with Yves Saint Laurent and his partner Pierre Berge, which would come to influence her work considerably.

At first she would design prêt-a-porter, mixing European and Moroccan fashion in comfortable materials like jersey, but soon her passion for classic Moroccan garments took the upper hand. Already as a young girl she was fascinated by the beautiful embroideries decorating the houses in the northern territories and later she started collecting them. Originally executed on household linen, she experimented with ways to rework their composition and motifs and introduced them into her designs. Soon these embroideries became characteristic for her designs, especially the distinct needle lace patterns (šebka)
that she would design in harmony with the patterns of the fabric. Because of her many travels, she also incorporated fabrics and decoration techniques from other regions, such as Ottoman embroidery, Japanese silk and Indian saris.

Just like her peers, Tamy Tazi initially designed for a foreign clientèle, organizing and participating in shows abroad and assembling celebrity clients and fashion icons from all over the world. But she too became successful in Morocco and today she is the longest working Moroccan fashion designer with a career that spans almost forty years. Although she formally retired in 2013, she still has some clients who have ordered a qaftan, which can take up to six months to produce.6

Generation Caftan

The Morocco of the 1990s, in which a second generation of Moroccan fashion designers emerged, was considerably different from that of the 1960s and 1970s of the first generation. Due to significant economic, political and cultural developments from the mid-1980s onwards, Moroccan fashion underwent the processes of professionalization, industrialization and commodification, rendering it more accessible to a larger public.

First, due to the establishment of fashion schools in Morocco in the mid-1980s, a new generation of Moroccan fashion designers not only received a formal training in fashion design, but also the profession became accessible to a larger public since it no longer required studying abroad. However, because these schools were established to train people for the Moroccan confection industry based on subcontracting for the European market, students were initially exclusively trained in European fashion design (see Chapter 5). As a result, these designers seriously altered the look of Moroccan fashion by incorporating European fashion components like pants, skirts, corsets and revealing necklines while simultaneously, due to a general longing for a Moroccan modernity, (re-)introducing so-called traditional Moroccan materials, patterns and decoration techniques. They increasingly mixed their know-how of European fashion design with the production and decoration techniques carried out by Moroccan craftsmen.

Second, due to the success of Moroccan lifestyle magazines in the mid-1990s as well as fashion events like Caftan (see Chapter 4), Moroccan fashion was democratized and fashion designers were turned into national celebrities. The fact that their collections were featuring in national magazines and on television, not only allowed them to reach a much larger audience than the first generation, but also contributed to the ‘glitter and glamour’ surrounding the profession. Also, by taking Moroccan fashion out of its original contexts of social
and religious ceremonies and putting it on magazine covers and catwalks – the icons of the fashion industry – the Moroccan lifestyle press contributed to an important image change for Moroccan fashion.

Third, with the increasing liberalization of the Moroccan market by the end of the twentieth century and a steadily growing economy, Morocco started to attract foreign fashion brands in the form of franchises (see Chapter 5). Although it is estimated that only 10 per cent of the Moroccan population can afford to buy products offered by foreign fashion brands (Valleé 2006: 33), their introduction on the Moroccan market has had a significant impact on consumption patterns. Not only is European fashion no longer exclusively assessable to the higher social classes by shopping abroad, but also, under the influence of European fashion brands, Moroccan fashion has become commoditized with a shift from consumption based on demand to consumption based on offer (see Chapter 5).

Contrary to the first generation, this second generation of Moroccan fashion designers has risen to an explosive amount in the past decade. But due to a lack of space I have to limit myself to a brief description of only four as a means of example. It goes without saying, however, that there are many more significant and influential designers who are part of this second generation.

Zineb Jouandy

Although Zineb Jouandy is still a member of a well-established Moroccan elite family from Fez, she was born in the late sixties and her style coheres more with the second generation of Moroccan fashion designers in that she combines her formal training in European fashion design with Moroccan decoration and production techniques. Born and raised in Casablanca, she grew up with uncles and a grandmother who were writers, architects and painters and always felt attracted by Moroccan art, architecture and handicrafts. After graduating from a French School in Casablanca, she went to Paris to study French fashion design at the Chambre Syndicale de la haute couture and got to work in the studio with Karl Lagerfeld and in the haute couture atelier of Lanvin.7

In 1989, however, she left Paris to establish her own label in Casablanca, even though it was difficult to find people who were qualified to make haute couture in Morocco. It took her two years to train her team and to create her first collection, which she presented in March 1992 in a luxurious hotel in Casablanca in the presence of the Italian designer Francesco Smalto. For the show, she had to fly in a friend from New York to select and train the models, for there were no model agencies in Morocco.7 Due to her background in French haute couture, she initially designed European fashion, but being back in Casablanca, she started redefining her design identity by incorporating Moroccan handicrafts and
decoration techniques into her work. Although the first qfathan she designed were for herself to be worn during socio-cultural events, one of her designs was selected for the cover of the first issue of the Moroccan fashion magazine Femmes du Maroc in November 1996. The next year she was asked by the same magazine to participate in the first edition of what would become Morocco’s most influential fashion event Caftan (see chapter 4).

From that moment, Zineb Jouindy started designing collections based on local garments and was frequently invited to represent Morocco all over the world, including New York, Paris and London. In 1998, she presented her collection at the first Festival International de la Mode Africaine (FIMA) in Tiguidit, organized by the Nigerian fashion designer Alphadi. That same year she was nominated Moroccan fashion ambassador and as such, she was in charge of the fashion event Temps du Maroc in 1999 at the Carrousel du Louvre in Paris, where she presented her work together with other Moroccan designers like Tamy Tazi and Karim Tassi in the presence of influential French fashion designers including Yves Saint Laurent, Jean Paul Gaultier and Jean Louis Scherrer. The collection she presented for this event featured juxtapositions of open qfathan over closed ones, which set a trend back home. In 2001, she participated for the third time to the Moroccan fashion event Caftan as well as to the Souq Ukkaz in Aman, Jordan. Since then, she has been presenting her work at numerous occasions as well as putting her collections at the disposal of several charities, like the Ethiopian Children’s Fund (Bruballa 1999), the World Bank and the Bahrain Cancer Society.

Today, Zineb has taken a certain distance from the national fashion industry and their mass mediatized fashion events. Although she still designs modern Moroccan fashion collections, she prefers to present them in selective circles. Her work has become strongly influenced by her passion for Ottoman and Mughal cultural heritage and craftsmanship and has become characterized by Moroccan decoration patterns but executed in fine sequence work on muslin fabric executed by Indian craftsmen. Therefore, she has come to spend much of her time in India.

Karim Tassi

The Moroccan fashion designer Karim Tassi was born in 1966 in Casablanca, where he studied fashion at the ISM (Institut de Stylisme et Modélisme) before leaving for France in 1989 to complete his training at the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture in Paris. After graduation he stayed in Paris as a freelance designer for the confection industry, while simultaneously designing unique pieces for a selective private clientèle. In 1994, he was given the opportunity to create a fashion department at the University of Quito in Ecuador, which took him to South America for a few years.
It was in 1999, during the Morocco year in Paris, that he presented his first collection at the Institut du Monde Arabe under his own name Karim Tassi, which consisted of European fashion with some Moroccan details. That is why in 2004 he opened an atelier in Marrakech for the manufacture of Moroccan hand-work, while keeping his atelier in Paris. It was also in 2004 that he presented his work for the first time in Morocco on the occasion of the fashion event Caftan in Marrakech. The collection consisted of designs based on a black jersey dress with Moroccan decorations and symbols such as the hand of Fatima.

Furthermore, in April 2006, Karim Tassi was invited to participate in a fashion show at the Jardin d’Acclimatation in Paris to celebrate fifty years of Moroccan Independence. That same year, he also participated in the special edition Caftan du Maroc au Carrousel du Louvre in Paris with a collection based on a circle called Kamar, meaning the moon, and produced in grey muslin. This approach to creating an entire collection on a single shape, he explains, is strongly influenced by European fashion design and he believes this may be the reason why he was refused for the tenth edition of Caftan in Marrakech (while invited for the special edition in Paris). In 2007 he was part of the Moroccan delegation to represent Morocco at Maison et Objet in Paris, and in 2008 he was invited to present his work for the national fashion event Mode Made in Morocco. Karim Tassi moved back to Morocco in 2009 where he has participated in a number of national fashion events, including the Casablanca Fashion Week in 2011.

With his experience gained in Paris, he explains, he is determined to commercialize and export his collections all over the world. Besides his haute couture line, he has been designing prêt-a-porter in which he incorporates Moroccan hand-work, a jeans line, a furniture line and a line of accessories including jewellery. As he formulates it, his style is a mixture of European cuts and characteristic Moroccan decoration techniques. He describes his work as ‘a bridge between the West and the East’, whereby Morocco represents an unlimited source of inspiration while Paris keeps him informed on the latest fashion trends.

Albert Oiknine

Born in 1970, the Jewish-Moroccan fashion designer Albert Oiknine discovered the world of fashion in the atelier of his mother who was a seamstress. After high school, it was clear that he wanted to design fashion and he started studying at the Moroccan department of ESMOD in Casablanca. When the Canadian College Lasalle opened a franchise in Casablanca a few years later, he also attended classes there because according to him, ‘the first one was more focused on the creative process and the second one on technique, so I figured it would be good to have both’. In 1991, he graduated and started working for a
denim company, but since it did not allow him sufficiently to express his creativity, he began organizing and decorating weddings. Through these activities he managed to obtain some private clients for whom he designed evening gowns.

In 1992, he began to work in his mother's atelier Chaba Couture, and between 1994 and 1999 he designed costumes for film and theatre. The way he explains it, he had a preference for designing European fashion over Moroccan fashion because he did not want to be dependent on Moroccan craftsmen for the production and decoration techniques required for Moroccan fashion. At the same time, he was aware of the impact the Moroccan fashion magazines and their widely mediatized fashion events had on a large audience and, therefore, in 2000 he decided to design his first Moroccan fashion collection in order to be able to participate in the fifth edition of the annual fashion event Caftan. 'Although it was a large investment to make a collection, it was paid back in publicity. (...) The collection itself [however] was hard to sell for it was designed for the catwalk.'

Drawing from his training and experience in European fashion design, he incorporated European cuts into his qfatan. The following year he was already considered an established designer by the organizers of Caftan, which contributed to his fame and success. In February 2006, he had the opportunity to present his collection in Milan during Maroc Excellence, held on the same day as the opening of the Milano Fashion Week, and in April of that same year he participated in Tendance Caftan at the Jardin d'Acclimatation in Paris as part of a larger cultural event featuring Moroccan handicraft. One month later he participated in the tenth anniversary of Caftan in Marrakech, and in October his collection appeared in the special edition of Caftan du Maroc au Carrousel du Louvre in Paris.

Albert Oiknine does not explicitly consider himself as a fashion designer, but rather as a tailor. 'I am here to dress and satisfy my clients. The collections I design for fashion events like Caftan are more an investment and good publicity.' His collections are 'wearable' and can be considered classic compared to some of his peers. He believes that change is good, but that the qfétan should keep its characteristic features, even though it is hard to say what these are exactly. He likes to make women dream and therefore likes to make them feel like princesses, he explains. His designer signature is his characteristic beaded corset in combination with wide skirts, richly decorated with lace, beads and spangles. His clients include both Moroccans and foreigners and his creations are sold at the famous Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré in Paris.

Simohamed Lakhdar

Although aged only 31, Simohamed Lakhdar (born 1974) was considered the most talented Moroccan fashion designer when he was awarded Best Designer
during the tenth edition of Caftan in 2006. After studying geology for a year at university in his hometown of Fez to please his parents, Simohamed dropped out and persuaded his parents to let him go to Casablanca and study fashion at ESMOD. At first, he explains, they did not agree because they argued it was not a ‘real’ profession and that only women could be couturieres (this is before the media glamorized the profession) (Dulat 2005, 2).

After graduating in 1996, Simohamed Lakhdar started working for a prêt-a-porter company, but in 2002 he managed to gather the funding necessary to prepare his first collection and he was selected as a Young Talent to participate in Caftan. His first collection was inspired by the characteristic zellig from Fez and it was an instant success. The next year, therefore, he was invited to return as an established designer and this time he presented a collection inspired by the Moroccan brocade of Fez. This type of weaving was on its way to disappearing but, by reworking old motifs and creating new ones, Simohamed Lakhdar gave new vitality to this old craft, which had been reduced to the production of the fasi bridal attire. The following year he claimed the rural cultural heritage of Morocco as his source of inspiration, introducing ‘amaziq figures and motifs into his creations. In 2005, he re-invented his own style by turning to black Africa for inspiration, switching from ancient Fez brocade to leopard skin and Maasai beadwork. That same year he launched his prêt-a-porter collection, which included hand-embroidered jeans-pants and decorated tunics. However, for several reasons it did not work out and he had to close the showroom again (Chaffangeon 2005).

In February 2006, he was invited to present his collection in Milan as part of the Maroc Excellence project, which was launched to promote the image of the country through its icons of excellence. Together with his colleagues Albert Oiknine and Karim Tassi, he presented his work at a fashion event in the Jardin d’Acclimatisation in April 2006 in Paris. In May of that same year, he was invited to participate for the fifth time in Caftan, which was already at its tenth edition and this time his collection was inspired by his gothic period in high school (Maroc Fashion 2006). In October 2006 he also participated in the special edition Caftan du Maroc au Carrousel du Louvre in Paris. Five years after his first participation in Caftan as a young talent, Simohamed Lakhdar (in Berniahi 2006) said,

Caftan allowed me to show my savoir-faire to a large public. I owe many things to this event. It is a beautiful occasion to put myself out there and to express my creativity. For me, it stays an annual challenge which I must take up.

The strength of Simohamed Lakhdar as a designer is on the one hand the diversity of his collections, and on the other hand his loyalty to his particular personal style based on an ‘acceptable balance’ of characteristic Moroccan decoration techniques and contemporary European fashion trends.
The misfits of the Moroccan fashion industry

At the turn of the twenty-first century, a third generation of Moroccan fashion designers started to develop, of which the pioneers can be considered the misfits of the second generation. Although they cannot be explicitly differentiated based on chronology, social class or training, they can be clearly differentiated based on a radical style change. The best way to define them is to consider them in the context of a larger artistic movement that started around the turn of the twenty-first century across disciplines (music, dance, cinema, theatre, applied arts).

Referred to as *nayda*, meaning ‘to move’ in Moroccan Arabic as a reference to the Spanish *movida*, this artistic movement is still relatively new and largely unorganized (Amar 2012). Also contemporary artists rarely auto-identify with the movement, but they all have certain characteristics in common. First, unlike previous generations, this new generation of Moroccan artists did not consciously live under severe political censorship and seizes a growing freedom – although not absolute – to express critical ideas through their art. Second, these artists are part of a generation that is increasingly confronted with the consequences of both local developments, like increasing urbanization, growing religious extremism and mounting social segregation, and the effects of globalization on Moroccan society.

Third, this is a generation that clearly wants to break with self-Orientalism in Moroccan art. Moroccan artists, like many non-European artists, have felt the pressure to explicitly incorporate elements of their cultural heritage such as tapestry, mosaic (*zellij*), woodcarving, tattooing, embroidery, etc. into their work to justify its ‘Moroccanness’ and to meet exotic expectations, particularly of a western audience. Self-Orientalism, as Martijn Huisman (2011: 25) formulates it, is the practice of adopting and absorbing a western hegemony to turn oneself into the Other. Koichi Iwabuchi (1994: 14) explains that ‘while Orientalism enjoys the mysterious exoticism of the Other, self-Orientalism exploits the Orientalist gaze to turn itself into an Other’. In this perspective, he adds, the Orient is not a defenceless and innocent victim of western Orientalism but actively uses the ‘Orientalist gaze’ to create, maintain and strengthen its own national cultural identity by performing self-Orientalism (1994: 14). But while self-Orientalism is clearly a successful marketing tool for the second generation of Moroccan fashion designers, both nationally and internationally (see Chapter 5), this third generation rather opts for an artistic freedom to question, criticize, define and conceptualize Moroccanness (based on Moroccan cultural heritage) in a personal way. The main result, so far, is that they are frequently accused by the Moroccan public of ‘not being Moroccan’.

This third generation of fashion designers has found its audience through a new fashion event created in 2006 called FestiMode Casablanca Fashion Week (FCFW) (see Chapter 4). This event turned out to be a welcome alternative
to the fashion event Caftan, which due to its success involuntarily monopolized the Moroccan fashion scene, forcing young designers to limit themselves to the design of this characteristic garment in order to get exposure (see Chapter 4). Again, although this generation includes many more designers, due to a lack of space I have limited myself to a brief description of four designers to represent this generation.

Noureddine Amir

Although chronologically belonging to the second generation of Moroccan fashion designers, Noureddine Amir clearly distinguished himself right from the beginning with collections that differed significantly from his peers. Born in Rabat as the son of a middle-class family, there was no particular reason why Noureddine Amir would become a fashion designer. After the lycée, he began studying at the ISM, the only fashion institute in Casablanca at that time and as soon as the French school ESMOD opened a franchise in Casablanca, he continued his training there.\(^{11}\)

After graduation in 1996, he started working for the film and theatre industry and made his début with the Iranian film director Shirin Neshat. Together they won several prizes and Noureddine Amir followed her to New York, where he designed the costumes for several plays. The artistic experience during this period had a profound impact on the rest of his career, he explains, because this period enabled him to distance himself from everything he had known before – his cultural baggage – and to redefine it. However, he felt too alienated and after only a few months he returned to Morocco to settle down in Marrakech, a city he considered to be closer to his artistic inspirations than Rabat.\(^{12}\) The way he formulates it,

The Northern cities are too representative of the Moroccan kitsch from my childhood, like the overwhelming decorations of Moroccan mosaic, woodwork, plasterwork, the heaviness of Moroccan living rooms, embroideries, etc. In Marrakech I felt closer to my sources of inspiration, with its simple beauty of argil and tadelaq\(t\) in earthy colours.\(^{12}\)

In 2000, he designed his first collection and two years later he felt ready to face a large audience by participating in the fashion event Caftan as a new talent. His collection was made of two ‘indigenous’ Moroccan but unusual materials for feminine Moroccan fashion, namely bziwi, which is a fine hand-woven woollen fabric produced in the small High Atlas village of Bzou and used for the fine male jellaba and selham, and felt, which is used in northern Morocco to produce the characteristic red male headdress \(\text{ṭerbuš}\). Although both materials are commonly
used in Moroccan male fashion, he gave them an innovative look and meaning, dying them with henna, as practised in the rural areas of Morocco. He also incorporated henna tattooing into his creations, but re-interpreting it and introducing his own motifs.

A year later, he participated again in Caftan, but this time as an established designer and once more his collection was unique through his ‘unusual’ choice of materials like raffia, sabra (vegetable silk) and wool, which he reworked in his own personal style and gave them new meanings. His collection stood out for its ‘beauty of simplicity’, featuring earthy colours and rough materials, against the bright and richly coloured silky qafarı of the other participants.

Noureddine Amir explains his collections as personal reflections of what is going on in Moroccan society in particular and in the Muslim world in general. His 2006 collection, for example, was his vision of the increasing threat of religious extremism, the suffering of Muslim women and the uncertainties of Morocco's future as a tolerant Muslim country. The entire collection was in black and in strong contrast to the bright vivid colours of the other collections. Rather than a fashion designer, Noureddine Amir considers himself an artist who uses dress as a medium to express himself. ‘I do not wish to make wearable clothing and do not follow any fashion trends. I just follow my inner need to express myself, not even sure if dress is the right medium for me to do so.’ He does not claim to make traditional Moroccan fashion – that is, suitable for social and religious events – and believes that ‘these ancient garments should keep their ancestral characteristics’. But he is Moroccan, he says, and draws his inspiration both from the world around him and from his cultural heritage. This is the main reason why, he says, he would not consider living abroad. His creations have been presented in several museums, such as the Musée des Beaux-Arts in Lille, the Fashion Museum in Antwerp and the World Museum in Rotterdam.

Amina Agueznay

Amina Agueznay was born in Casablanca in 1963 as the daughter of a famous Moroccan painter, Malika Agueznay, and studied architecture in the United States, where she lived and worked for fifteen years. She explains that it was during this time that she started experimenting with jewellery; first purely as a hobby and later as a more serious artistic expression. But it is only after her return to Morocco in 1997 that she decided to fully invest in this medium of design and two years later, during the Morocco year in Paris, she presented her first collection for which she deconstructed and re-invented old pieces of amaziɣ jewellery. For her second collection the following year she made use of Moroccan hand-made couched plaited cord buttons ‘aqād of the qeṭṭan and again gave them a new meaning, which became an instant fashion and is still being copied today.
In 2003, she designed a collection that was inspired by nature, introducing unorthodox materials for Moroccan jewellery such as rose petals, pieces of wood and cinnamon sticks. This was the first collection she presented in Morocco during the annual fashion event Caftan together with the work of Noureddine Amir, with whom she has a close artistic relationship as well as a friendship. The next year, she was invited by the Museum of Fine Arts in Lille (France) to present her collection during a fashion show and exhibition together with Noureddine Amir. In 2005, she presented a collection of installations for the first time as part of the exhibition Art & Design in the World Museum in Rotterdam (The Netherlands). A year later, for the tenth anniversary of the fashion event Caftan, she developed a collection entirely made of paper, which reminded her of her time as an architect in the United States. In 2007, she participated in the second edition of the fashion event FestiMode Casablanca Fashion Week with her first solo-collection, featuring ‘installations coming to life on the runway’. That same year she was invited by the prestigious French expo Maison et Objet to present her work together with five other Moroccan designers.

She too uses her art to express her opinions on contemporary Moroccan society, like her 2012 collection, which was entirely made of burned plastic bags to contest their pollution of the Moroccan landscape. Just like Noureddine, due to her innovative/unusual choices of materials and shapes for Moroccan jewellery, she is regularly misunderstood by the Moroccan fashion media and ‘accused’ of not being Moroccan. But the way Amina sees it, the fact that she was born and raised in Morocco makes her who she is today. Since she considers her creations to be very personal, they are Moroccan. But, she argues, why would she need to incorporate signs or symbols into her work to justify their Moroccan identity?

I could say for example that the red stones remind me of Marrakech and the white ones of Casablanca. But even if so, it is an unconscious process and should not be used to justify the Moroccanness of my work. 

Salima Abdel Wahab

Salima Abdel Wahab was born in Tangier with a mixture of Spanish, German and Moroccan origins. After high school, she studied fashion in Malaga (Spain) for four years, where she was trained in design, make-up, choreography and modelling. Back in Morocco, she created her own atelier and in 2005 she opened her first shop in downtown Tangier called Excentrica. With a distinguished personal style, inspired by both Moroccan and European fashion, and especially by subcultures and human personalities, she has had difficulties finding her place in the mainstream Moroccan fashion industry.
That is why she initially organized her own shows, which stayed far from the spotlights and therefore from the mainstream Moroccan fashion media. In 2007 she participated for the first time in two collective national fashion events, FestiMode Casablanca Fashion Week and Made in Morocco. Her collections, however, do not follow any (inter)national fashion trends and the way she explains it, her creations are a materialization of her encounters and a mixture of influences. "I have always felt attracted by the sinister, dark side of the city. As a child I used to love hanging out with the people of the street and emerge in all sorts of social, ethnic and religious groups." Later in Europe, she explains, she also felt attracted to the alternative subcultures like punks and squatters and their alternative lifestyle.¹⁵

A personal characteristic that keeps coming back in her collections is that her creations are transformable. According to the ‘mood’ of the wearer, the garment can feel comforting, protective or liberating. The way she explains it, clothes should be ‘the perfect translation of the wearer’s being’.¹⁵ One and the same garment can be worn in several ways and for different occasions, because not only circumstances can change, she explains, but also a person’s mood can differ. ‘When you feel down, you want your clothes to comfort and protect you, but when you are happy you want your clothes to accentuate that feeling.’ Therefore, she considers herself more of a clothing sociologist than a fashion designer.¹⁵

Just like her peers, Salima Abdel Wahab is frequently criticized for not being Moroccan, but she describes her collections as direct reflections of the city she grew up in, Tangier. She never aspired to make ‘traditional’ Moroccan garments although they are part of her inspiration. Her clients are as diverse as her creations and include Muslim women who wear the veil. Since her creations are in most cases loose and concealing, she finds it logical that they can identify with her work.¹⁵

Fadila El Gadi

Born in 1969 in Salé, Fadila El Gadi developed a true passion for Moroccan hand-work as a child while spending time in embroidery ateliers during her school holidays (Iraqi 2010: 46). Since she has always had a love for fashion, after high school she followed on with training at a local fashion institute in Rabat. After graduation she opened up a boutique in Rabat in 1991 with mainly European fashion, while simultaneously developing her own small collections on the side in her atelier in Salé. In 1999, she had an unexpected meeting with Yves Saint Laurent in Tangier, who encouraged her to continue designing. A few years later, she had the opportunity to develop a collection with Bernard Sanz that was sold at the Jardins Majorelle in Marrakech.¹⁶ A few years later, during a trip to Italy she met the photographer Paul Thorel, who invited her to participate in an exposition in Naples in 2003. It is following this exhibition that she managed to establish an international clientèle and to fully devote her time to her own
collections.\textsuperscript{16} It was in 2007 that she was introduced to a large Moroccan audience by participating in the second edition of the newly established fashion event Festimode Casablanca Fashion Week, by publishing her work in several national fashion magazines, and by opening a boutique in Tangier. In 2009 she represented Morocco during a side event in the context of the Amsterdam Fashion Week and in 2013 she organised a solo fashion show at the Sofitel in Casablanca.

The strength of Fadila El Gadi’s collections lies in the high quality and innovative use of Moroccan decoration techniques as well as her choice of fabrics from all parts of the world, which she successfully blends with European fashion trends. As she formulates it,

our strength lies in the richness of our savoir-faire that is still present in Morocco and which should be exploited to a maximum. Moroccan fashion designers should focus on luxurious hand-made fashion if they want to secure a spot on the international fashion scene.\textsuperscript{16}

Her talents lie in her ability to re-invent and introduce new patterns and uses for characteristic Moroccan decoration techniques. As she puts it, ‘only innovation and creativity can take Moroccan handicraft to a next level’.\textsuperscript{16} Nevertheless, being a fashion designer in Morocco is not always easy. One of the main reasons, she explains, is that Moroccan fashion for a long time has been produced by traditional tailors following the instructions of clients. ‘Clients are used to having their say in terms of fabrics, colours, cuts and decorations,’ she explains and that is why ‘often Moroccan clients will bring their own material or will want to change all sorts of things in my designs’.\textsuperscript{16} The problem, she argues, is that there is no clear differentiation either in Moroccan mentality or the structure of the industry between a tailor and a designer. Another problem particular to the Moroccan context is the wish to have copies.

Moroccan women still have the reflex of having garments they see in a magazine copied by their tailors instead of buying the original. (\ldots) As long as the Moroccan public does not valorize the artistic value of Moroccan design, it will be very hard for Moroccan fashion designers to succeed in their own country.\textsuperscript{16}

Moroccan women are used to spending high amounts of money for European haute couture/brands, but are not (yet) used to paying high amounts of money for Moroccan haute couture/brands. Today, Fadila El Gadi continues to run her atelier in Salé, while having a showroom in Marrakech and Paris as well as high class hotel boutiques representing her. In May 2013, she opened her own boutique in Rabat, which she entirely designed herself..