Morocco: a place where women want to study

A big percentage of Moroccan women older than 40 years never had the opportunity to study. But things are changing now, and quickly. Each day, more and more women want to study. In our centre in Asilah, the motto is: “never is late to start”. Cecilia O’Dywer has talked to some of these women. We share their ideas.

The women that every day came to our Formation Centre in Asilah are trying to get the Certificate of Primary Studies. In order to get that, they learn to read and write, focusing specially in Arabic grammar. Also, they learn mathematics, Islamic education and French. They are women from 18 to 70 years old and they are a good reflection of the situation of women in the country.

During my stay in Asilah, I’ve had long conversations with them. Little by little, the have answered to my questions and they have told me their problems and expectations. These are their answers:

¿Why did you decide to start studying?

A: I am married and I have a family, but I realised I couldn’t read my receipts. It was a neighbour that was already studying who encouraged me to start. I asked my husband and he gave me permission.

B: When I was a child, I couldn’t go to school even thought the school was next to my home. But I wanted to study and now I’ve finally made truth my dream of been able to read the Koran.

C: I prefer not to think whom is the fault. I’m just happy because now I’m able to study.

D: I went to school until Third Grade, but then I forgot everything. Once, in Ramadan, I heard a woman saying she had red the Koran twice. I was sad because I wasn’t able to read it by myself. So, I started going to study to the Mosque. But also I saw women coming to this centre and I decided to come. Now, I’m preparing for the official exam and last Ramadan I was able to read the whole Koran.

¿What has changed in your life since you are able to write and read?

Pupils and religious enjoying the garden in Asilah
A: Before, I felt bad because I couldn’t help my children with their homework. I was so anxious to learn that I started coming to class when my baby was only two months old. Now, nobody can lie or cheat on me.

B: I was an orphan, so I could never go to school. But when my daughter started coming to the Formation Course, I was very interested in what she was learning, so I started coming also. Before, I was very shy because I felt I didn’t know anything. Now, I can talk to everybody and I feel more confident.

In general, their husband support them, but some of the woman have had difficulties. One of them said to me: My husband doesn’t know I’m coming to study. Even when I go with my daughter in law to the Koranic school, he doesn’t like it.

Cecilia O’Dwyer

The teachers are the other side of the story. They did study in the University and now they make the most of it in order to help other women. They are Fatima and Ihsen, and they are very proud of their pupils. Fatima teaches them Arabic, Mathematics and Islamic Studies. She know how hard it it to study, so she appreciates a lot the work of their pupils: some of them have to walk for an hour to arrive to our Formation Centre in Asilah. Ihsen teaches them French. She know that the exam is very hard to pass and probably the pupils are not ready yet. But anyway, the will go to the exam, because it’s important to try to make their best and get used to the hard world of the official exams!

They make it possible

Mary Burkhart, Macarena Fernández de Bobadilla, Cecilia O’Dwyer and Ana Gimeno (from left to right) have been in charge of this Formation Centre for Women in Asilah.

Now, Cecilia (IBVM) and Ana (CJ) are heading to new destinies, but the projects will keep on and women from Asilah will have a place to study.
The weekly magazine *Vida Nueva*, dedicated to Church and social issues, wrote an article about the work of Renate and the meeting in Croatia. We translate it:

“María del Rosario Echarri, religious and responsible of Social Action in Confer (Conference of Religious in Spain) and Aurora Moreno, Communications Officer in the Spanish province of IBVM, took part in the annual meeting of RENATE in Croatia, an initiative that includes 18 countries.

The objective is to build a network or organizations working against trafficking not only in the countries of destiny but also those of origin in Europe”, explains Rosario. After having celebrated two important meetings – Poland (2011) and Croatia (2013), Renate has established her priorities for next years: “Rising awareness, widening the network, intern and external communication and care of the members”. There will also be formation courses about Trafficking and a new meeting in France next year.

Aurora explains that “Renate works not only against trafficking for sexual exploitation, but also for organ trafficking, slave work...”. And Both of them recognize the importance of awareness, specially in young people, because this reality is still invisible.

The work against Trafficking is not new in the Institute. As you know, different provinces are working on this issue. For example, in *Canada* they organized a workshop on Trafficking in 2012. In *Albania*, the IBVM is working with victims of trafficking since the arrival of Imelda Poole, one of the promoters of Renate.

In *United Nations*: this year (2013), the IBVM has collaborated with the workshop untitled: *What Works? Best Practices to prevent Human Trafficking*. In *Australia*, the IBVM belongs to ACRATH, the Australian Catholic Religious Against Trafficking in Humans, an organization representing 180 congregations in the region. In *India*, in areas like Darjeeling, trafficking is a very big problem, due to its situation in the border with Nepal, China, Bhutan and Bangladesh. For that reason the Indian Province has started the programme *Safe Migration*, with the collaboration of Fundación Mary Ward – in order to reduce the risk of trafficking when people emigrate from one country to another of from villages to big cities. The biggest risk is to end up working as domestic servants in slavery conditions or in prostitution networks. In order to prevent this, the programme tries to strengthen the community, raise awareness into the youngers and work with the Police and the governmental agencies.
I’d like to share something of this corner of the world where I’ve been living for 11 years of my nearly three decades in Peru. I can’t talk about the beauty of the place, because it really isn’t: the place is dry, arid and without Green spaces. With 25,000 inhabitants, very few houses are in a good condition.

Most of the adults speak Quechua, -the language from Ayacucho, the place where they came from 20 years ago due to the terrorism. But the youngest ones speak only Spanish, so they are losing their roots. They don’t know anything about their story or their language, and this is hard for Peruvians. Living here is difficult for everybody, but even more for the farmers, because they were used to have a kitchen garden and some animals, and here it’s not possible due to the lack of water.

No light, no water.

It’s difficult to imagine places without light or water in the 21st Century, but this is the situation in Jicamarca. The water comes in a truck and it’s delivered to the houses only if the family pays for it. Water is one of the most important expenses of the families. In my 27 years in Peru, I’ve realised that it’s more important ‘to be’ than ‘to do’. In a place like this, I have too many opportunities to ‘be’ with the people: to listen, smile and be kind to them, something they don’t always have. And that is very positive because the most beautiful of Jicamarca ARE PEOPLE! I thank God everyday for being in Jicamarca (Peru).

Mercedes Ocháran

Intercultural experience in Peru

For this summer, Fundación Mary Ward organizes a Work Camp in Peru. An opportunity to live an intercultural experience focused on solidarity in which the participants will see the projects that are being carried out in the country.
A festive day but also an awareness rising event, dedicated to the Sukumbasi (landless people in Nepal) in BVM- Loreto.

Sports and lots of activities to enjoy with family and friends in BVM-El Soto. Including a handmade cake competition with pies like this one of Mary Ward.

Handmade Bracelets

The ibvm sisters living in El Soto wanted to participate in The Sports and decided to produce –by hand– this nice bracelets that they sold in the Sports Day. All the collected money was donated to Fundación Mary Ward. In the picture, you can see Ana Garrigues and Piedad González Cano selling their manufactures.

Sportmanship and gratitude in Cullera: The captains of Loyola, Avila and Javier decided a draw in the relay race. And the pupils did this banner for their teachers saying: “Thank you, your teaching is our future.”
A LITTLE BIT OF INDIA IN SPAIN

Last February, we had the opportunity to know more about India and the projects that Mary Ward International is carrying out there, thanks to the visit of Sabrina Edwards, Sushila Kerketta and Maloty Thakur, all of them ibvm sisters, that came to Spain and visited all of our schools and communities.

Calcuta– Dubai– Barajas. Nearly 9,000 kilometers and 13 hours to get to Madrid. They arrived at the capital city very tired but ready for a tight schedule starting the very next day.

At 9.30 in the morning, they were in one of our schools, El Soto, sharing their experience with pupils of different ages. Sabrina Edwards started talking, explaining what is it Mary Ward International, what do the Loreto Sisters do in India, Nepal and Bangladesh, which are the main problems in the region and the projects they carry out over there.

At break time, just a few minutes for a quick coffee and a very special ‘press conference’: the pupils of Corazones Abiertos (Open Hearts) had a lot of questions for them. It was a very interesting interview that we have recorded and we will soon share with all of you.

The conferences kept on during the afternoon and at six o’clock we had the first one of our ‘social gathering’ with members and volunteers from Mary Ward Foundation.

Children dressed up in nepali customs during the Welcome ceremony to the Indian sisters in Loreto school, in Seville.
Last 16th February, I attended the round table organised for the celebration or the 25th anniversary of the Africa-Europe Faith and Justice Network.

Religious congregations have always worked in order to create a better world, but we must adapt to the new times. Nowadays, lobby and political pressure must be one of our main tools to change the world.

Quoting Begoña Iñara, I want to remember that “most of the injustices in Africa have their roots in the economic politics decided in Washington, Paris or Brussels, so it’s there where we have to act, because the AEFJN has chosen the economical justice as the objet of its work”.

The antennae of Madrid, where I participate, works in three aspects: arms trade, access to quality medicines, and food sovereignty.

But it takes a while until you realise how the injustices – past and present – have made of Africa what it is today. And it’s hard to understand how so much disgrace has been possible.

During the conference, I realised something. Without even being aware of it, my mind was counting how many Europeans and Africans were in the public; how
many blacks and whites on the round table...

And I was happy because one of our objectives was to offer the vision of the Africans by themselves... But then, I also realised about my own prejudices: only when I will not make the difference between black and white people, I will be able to look in equality, without prejudices.

Until them, without realising, my mind will continue projecting all those prejudices that History, racism and colonialism have put in my mind.

Elena Cerdeiras, ibvm

Experience in Manresa

Mª Paz Herrera and María López, both ibvm, tell us how they are living their stay in the Spirituality Centre of Manresa, where they are realising a ‘refresher course’. An experience that they recommend to everybody.

We are nearly finishing our refresher course in Manresa, eight weeks of Spiritual Exercises. It has been a very interesting experience, not only in an spiritual way, but also from an human point of view.

The group is formed by 34 people from 17 different countries and curiously there are more men than women. In between the women, there are four lay persons, two of them widows and grandmothers, and nine sisters. There are also three lays married and with children, nine Jesuits, another two religious and seven priests. We are a very heterogeneous and diverse group, very dynamic and happy, so we are living our stay very intensely.

¿What have we been doing? We have had very different teachers and classes about different topics. San Ignacio’s Autobiography, Experience of God, Keys to understand the conflicts in a globalized world, interreligious dialogue, and a Spirituality for our time have been some of them.

Liturgies and oration moments have been very enriching and useful to join the group. After dinner, we had time to share our experiences, to watch a film and talk about it... Besides, on the weekends we have travelled around to Montserrat, Barcelona, Gerona, some monasteries... we have even had time to go to Pirineos, where we enjoyed the sun and the snow!