a conclusion that sits at odds with the rest of the film, it appears that it is not in his family nor himself but in the nation state of Israel that Nissim and his son ultimately find fulfilment.

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Arabic with English subs. 2007.

Each March, a group of Moroccan pilgrims known as the Regragas set off on a sacred journey. Over 39 days, they pass through some of the most remote corners of their native Essaouira region, in the north-east of the country. Known as the Daour, this pilgrimage retraces the steps of early devotees of Muhammad: those who brought Islam to Morocco. The Daour is a symbolic show of respect for these pioneering Muslims, as well as an annual tradition in which the region’s spiritual representatives visit the faithful and renew their connection with God.

Even today, the pilgrims dress in traditional attire, carry their supplies in packs on the backs of Arabian camels and travel on small, nimble horses, their leader riding a revered white mare. As they pass through mountainous villages and towns, they meet with locals and bestow upon them an intangible and yet invaluable gift: baraka, which translates roughly as God’s blessing and good will.

An understated and contemplative film, the 2007 documentary Baraka Paths reveals the deeply ritualistic practice of the Daour. Directors Manoël Pénicaud and Khamis Mesbah show a little-known side of Moroccan Islamic culture, exploring its origins in the region, and the legacy these origins continue to exert over Essaouira Muslims today.

The camera captures the landscape’s grassy hills and meandering paths, contrasting vast wilderness shots with close ups of worshippers. In this way, the film shows that while the Essaouira may be isolated, it is far from devoid of life. As we travel with this solemn group of men, we arrive at farms, schools and even a vibrant, if rickety, local carnival. As children whirl about on makeshift carousels, adults pray, sing and dance as they receive baraka from the Regragas. Their reasons for requesting baraka are varied and at times amusing: mothers wish for their children to thrive, families ask for those they have lost to find peace in the afterlife. One man even wishes for his enemy to lose his job, to which he receives the unforgettable response: ‘May your enemy work hard in a trench.’

Though we never hear the filmmakers’ voices, some worshippers face the camera and explain the fulfilment the Daour and baraka bring them. In the more frenzied celebrations that take place along the way, some enter a trancelike state known as hadra, swaying and biting down on thorny pieces of cactus in a violent and unsettling dance. At almost every community meeting, group song reigns supreme.
No matter what the gathering, as the Regragas bring *baraka* to the people, the atmosphere is convivial and celebratory.

*Baraka Paths* has a modest aim; to educate viewers about, and immerse them in, this historic local tradition. The film succeeds in conveying the passion, excitement and community-mindedness inherent in the Daour. The circulation of the so-called *baraka* feels almost palpable as hundreds of people surrender themselves to the vibrant festivities. Pénicaud and Mesbah also foreground the Regragas’ own experience, and the sense of responsibility, even destiny, they feel in relation to the custom.

Yet *Baraka Paths* chooses not to question the almost disturbing reliance of the Essaouira inhabitants on the concept of *baraka* in their everyday lives, and the frequency of their requests for increased wealth, or the marriage of daughters or nieces. As an outside viewer, the preoccupation with financial ‘luck’ and the perpetuation of static gender roles, mixed with spiritual practice, can be difficult to watch. Yet *Baraka Paths*’ aim is not to moralize, but to observe: to bring to light a custom limited to a remote region rarely captured on film.

A meditative and graceful documentary, *Baraka Paths* offers a rare glimpse into Essaouira culture, the lived reality of regional Islamic life in Morocco and the cultural and socio-historical value of studying Islamic tradition in a little-explored corner of the world.

_Gemma King_

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**Behind the Wheel.** Dir. Elise Laker. 20 mns. Uzbek with English and Czech subs. The University of Manchester, 2013.

*Behind the Wheel* tells the story of a nameless single mother of three, who works at a tyre workshop in Tajikistan. The film’s narrative is structured so as to address two aspects of the main character’s life. On one level, there is the issue that, within this specific social context, the kind of work that she does is associated with men. As such, the character is transgressing social norms. On a second level the film-maker attempts to address the emotional anxiety of the character as she struggles with her past decisions and her uncertain future. The film represents a good attempt at creating a complex narrative and of engaging with the main character on numerous levels. However, I am not sure if the film-maker had enough material to engage in a satisfactory manner with the different levels of content that she sought in the edit suite. The film feels like an outstanding student exercise, whereby a complex narrative was fashioned out of footage that was collected in a relatively short amount of time, with mixed results.

At the beginning of the film, the viewers are informed by title cards that her husband migrated to Russia as migrant labourer with the presumed intention that