Amazigh Textiles and Dress in Morocco

Metaphors of Motherhood

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Berber women are artists. They weave brightly colored carpets, and they adorn their faces, hands, and ankles with tattoos, dye their hands and feet with henna, and paint their faces with saffron (Fig. 2). They embroider brightly colored motifs on their indigo head coverings and on special occasions wear elaborate silver and amber jewelry (Fig. 1). Women both create and wear the artistic symbols of Berber identity, making the decorated female body itself a symbol of that identity.[1]

Issues of identity are of crucial importance to Berbers, who consider themselves the indigenous inhabitants of northern Africa and believe themselves to be distinct ethnically, culturally, and linguistically from Arabs. In contemporary North Africa, pockets of Berber settlements can be found from Egypt to Morocco and throughout the Sahara. The largest number of Berbers is found in Morocco, accounting for 40–60% of its population of 31 million (Chaker 1998:14). Although Arabs arrived in northern Africa as early as the seventh century, it was not until the thirteenth century, when large waves of Arabs arrived from the Middle East, that the majority of Berbers accepted Islam; some learned the Arabic language and were assimilated into the Arab culture. Yet many Berber groups, such as those living in inaccessible areas the mountainous regions of Morocco or its desert fringes, continued to speak their own languages—referred to collectively as Tamazight in Morocco—and maintained their cultural autonomy.

When France declared Morocco a French Protectorate in 1912, colonial policies simplified and exaggerated Berber-Arab relations and created the *Dahir berbère* in 1930. This legal system separated Berbers and Arabs, the former following their customary laws and being removed from the jurisdiction of the Moroccan sultan. During this time, French anthropological studies in Morocco commonly promoted the notion that Berbers were superficially Muslim, more open-minded, and closer biologically and socially to Europeans than were the Arabs. The goal was to draw Berbers into French culture and have them rally against the Arabs (Irbouh 2005:6). The divide-and-rule policies of the French protectorate government contributed to the rise of an Arab-Islamic sentiment in Morocco after independence in 1956. The Moroccan postcolonial government emphasized the nation's common Islamic faith and Arabic language, serving to legitimize and strengthen the rule of the Moroccan monarch, a descendent of the Prophet Mohammed. Since independence, Berber political activists have been fighting for governmental recognition of Morocco's Berber heritage. They have rejected the name "Berber" as a pejorative term deriving from the Latin word *barbarus* or "barbarian." Instead they use the overarching Tamazight term *Imazighen*, defined as "the free people." *Amazigh* is the adjectival form of the word.

The failure of Morocco's postcolonial national government to officially acknowledge its Amazigh heritage has meant that the survival of Amazigh cultural and linguistic heritage is largely due to its association with women. In contemporary Morocco, Amazigh artistic production continues to be associated with rural villages rather than bustling urban centers. This is largely due to the fact that women often remain in the villages while their husbands, sons, and brothers work in Morocco's largest cities. Motherhood is highly esteemed and the status of a woman increases when she has children. Women are more likely than men to be monolingual and speak Tamazight in their homes, teaching it to their children. The Moroccan scholar Fatima Sadiqi describes the status of Tamazight and writes that "as a language of cultural identity, home, the family, village affiliation, intimacy, traditions, orality, and nostalgia to a remote past, [Tamazight] perpetuates attributes that are considered female in the Moroccan culture" (Sadiqi 2003:225). Sadiqi's comments demonstrate the important role women play in the propagation and preservation of the Imazighen as a people. Mothers also pass the skills of weaving, embroidering, tattooing, and pottery making to their daughters. Amazigh women demonstrate the esteem, respect, and status accorded to motherhood by incorporating fertility symbolism into their woven carpets, clothing, tattoos, and hairstyles. Amazigh arts, therefore, are metaphors of motherhood, demonstrating the crucial role women play in propagating and preserving Amazigh identity.

Weaving Metaphors of Motherhood

Textiles hold a predominant place in Amazigh art all across Morocco. Amazigh women are renowned for their brightly colored carpets, blankets, and clothing

1. A fully dressed bride paints her face with saffron on the final day of the wedding ceremony. Photo by Cynthia Becker, 1996.

made from goat, sheep, and camel wool (Fig. 3). Women dominate the weaving process, metaphorically giving life to textiles. In rural areas they comb, spin, and dye wool for the blankets, shawls, and carpets that they weave on upright vertical looms. Wool has considerable *baraka*, or "blessing," and some of this *baraka* is transferred to the weavers. Amazigh women who work wool are highly respected, and it is said that a woman who makes forty carpets during her lifetime is guaranteed passage into heaven after she dies.

The loom and the act of weaving are also believed to have *baraka* and, like the wool itself, are related to fertility and ultimately to motherhood. When the warp threads are attached to the vertical loom, the textile is said to be born and have a "soul" or *ruh*, echoing women's role in human reproduction. In some areas of Morocco, weavers physically straddle the warp threads and beams of the loom before they are raised, symbolizing the birth of the textile (Messick 1987:213). The textile then moves through youth, maturity, and old age as it is woven.[2] Women have the power of life over a textile, and when a weaver finishes it, she cuts it from the loom and the textile is said to die. This personification of the textile underlines women's reproductive and creative powers and, by equating textiles with humans passing through the life cycle, reinforces women's roles in the propagation of Amazigh identity.

The prevalence of fertility symbolism in Amazigh aesthetics is also revealed in the motifs, colors, and composition of the textiles. Weavers organize the composition of a textile so that a single design is repeated within a horizontal band (Figs. 3–4). The names of individual motifs differ from region to region and, within a particular region, even from weaver to weaver. However, certain motifs are repeated throughout Morocco, suggesting that they have deep cultural and historical significance. For example, the triangle form serves as the building block for most textile motifs. It is the basis for the commonly seen zigzag and diamond designs, which are often modified with the addition of lines radiating from their edges (Fig. 4). In my discussions with weavers, each woman had a different name for the same motif. Women refer to the zigzag pattern (Fig. 3) as a sickle, scissors, saw, or eyebrow, while the diamond and triangle (Fig. 4) are said to be mirrors or eyes. Various geometric motifs consisting of stylized diamonds are often called spiders, chameleons, frogs, or even chessboards by weavers (Reinisch and Stanzer 1991:60–63; Westermarck 1926, 1:65–6).

Scholars often interpret the triangle as an abstract hand motif. The hand, known as *khamsa* in Arabic or *afous* in Tamazight, is auspicious, as the five fingers are seen to represent the five pillars or obligations of Islam and Muslims pray five times a day. The benevolent connotations of the hand motif make it an effective deterrent for the Evil Eye, referred to as *tit* in Tamazight or *el âin* in Arabic—the dangerous glance or look that accompanies compliments, which are believed to be connected with envy and covetousness (Westermarck 1926; Bynon 1984).[3] The Arabic expression *khamsa fi einek*, or "Five in your eye," is a response to compliments used by both Arabs and Imazighen in Morocco to figuratively poke the eye as protection. People may also respond by holding up their hands to block the negative gaze of the Evil Eye. Scholars have also compared the triangle motif to the triangular fibulae or silver brooches that Amazigh women once commonly wore at their shoulders to hold their wrap-around garments closed (Fig. 5). The fibulae are protective because their sharp pins are thought to be capable of popping and bursting the Evil Eye (Bynon 1984). According to scholars, eye-catching motifs are woven into textiles to distract the harmful first glance of the Evil Eye and thus protect both the weaver and the user.

ADDI OUADDERROU

Opposite page:

Top: 2. This woman in Khemisset, a town in central Morocco, had her ankles tattooed when she was young. The soles of her feet are dyed with henna. She requested that her face not be published. Photo by Cynthia Becker, 2002.

Bottom: 3. The loom of an Amazigh woman in Khemisset (central Morocco). Photo by Cynthia Becker, 2002.

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4. Woven pillow from the Middle Atlas region of Morocco. Collection of Addi Ouadderrou.

In order to fully understand Amazigh textile motifs, one must consider the importance of riddles and visual metaphors to the Imazighen (Bynon 1966). I frequently heard women tell riddles based on things that share visual qualities, creating metaphoric associations between everyday objects and things found in the natural environment. The word *tikselt* in Tamazight, literally "a similarity," is derived from the verb *siksel*, which means "to be the same" or "to look alike" and is related to the concept of a metaphor. One example of a riddle that relies on metaphor is:

> Question: A plate of almonds with a walnut in the middle. (*Zreɣ-awentnit. Ticict n walluzen mi ylla wadduj ammas.*)
>
> Answer: The sky, the stars, and the moon. (*Igenna d yitran d wayur;* Becker 2006:33).[4]

An analogy can be made between metaphors (*tikselt*) and weaving. The repertoire of patterns available to a woman

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Top: 5. An Amazigh woman from the Anti-Atlas region wears an indigo dyed wrap-around garment held together by fibulae at her shoulders. Photo courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, 1930–1959. Smithsonian Institution/04066400.

Bottom: 6. A group of Amazigh men and women at a wedding in southern Morocco perform *aḥidous* in front of the bridal tent. Photo by Cynthia Becker, 2000.

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7. A woman in southern Morocco stands near a textile she wove. Photo by Cynthia Becker, 1995.

depends on the artistic vocabulary of her group, since patterns are passed from mother to daughter; however, a woman may notice that a motif shares stylistic features with an object present in her contemporary surroundings and name the motif after the object. Hence, names given to motifs often vary from weaver to weaver. Jeannette Harries and Mohamed Raamouch (1971), in their study of oral poetry in the Middle Atlas region of Morocco, suggest a correlation between Amazigh verbal and visual arts. They argue that Amazigh oral poetry draws from a set of preexisting poetic verses that are typically passed down from generation to generation. Both poets and weavers draw from older, well-known material, but how they put it together differs from performance to performance (if we regard weaving as a "performance"), making each one unique.

There does appear to be a correlation between poetry and textiles, especially when one considers the formation the dancers make during *aḥidous*, a public poetry and dance performance from the Middle Atlas and southern regions of Morocco. During *aḥidous*, men and women stand facing each other in parallel lines (Fig. 6). Men and women dance by swaying back and forth; men perform verses of oral poetry and women repeat them. Both the dance formation and its accompanying songs share a quality of symmetry and balance that, according to Labelle Prussin, are characteristics of African nomadic art. Since nomadic peoples own few material possessions, artistic forms tend to concentrate on the physical adornment of the human body. Body adornment—such as tattoos, henna designs, and hairstyles—and jewelry—such as fibulae—draw attention to the human form, playing off the balance of the body's bilateral symmetry (Prussin 1995:189). The symmetry found in both *aḥidous* performances and textiles may be a historical remnant of a group's formerly nomadic lifestyle.

The colors used in Amazigh textiles also correspond to the aesthetic of symmetry. For example, they are organized according to Amazigh conceptions of light and dark hues. This color balance can be seen in the most common type of textile woven in southeastern Morocco, called the *taberraknut* or "flat-woven textile" (Fig. 7). This textile can be used as a blanket or a floor covering. Its overall composition consists of repeating horizontal bands of solid color that proceed across its surface in a steady, rhythmic progression.[5]

Light colors, said to resemble sunlight, include any hue of red and yellow, while hues of green and black (often replaced by the colors blue or purple) are considered dark colors. Light and dark colors are typically placed near each other to balance a textile and a solid band of white wool separates the balanced colors. For example, a bright neon green band placed next to a deep maroon one would be seen as "dark" followed by "light." Although variation exists from region to region, the various hues of the colors red, green, yellow, and black are common to Amazigh textiles throughout Morocco. In southern Morocco, these colors are also used in beaded necklaces and red, green, and yellow pigments are used to paint designs on leather bags (Fig. 8). In conversation, Amazigh women associated the colors red, green, yellow, and black with the life cycle of familiar things in their natural environment. Several women likened them to ripening dates, which turn from green to yellow, then red and an almost black dark brown, and an analogy can be made between ripening dates and the blossoming of a girl's body into that of a woman.

Women also referred to these four colors as the hues of henna. Green is the color of henna leaves and of henna paste when it is first applied to the skin, and good henna will stain the skin nearly black and fade to red and then to a yellow-orange color. The association of these colors with the natural life cycle also extends to the fertility of women and their ability to give life, as demonstrated by the fact that Amazigh brides are commonly dressed in red, green, yellow, and black textiles (Fig. 9).

Women also told me that the rainbow inspired their use of the red, green, yellow, and black palette. While these are only a sample of the actual colors in the rainbow, the rainbow is an important metaphor of female fertility. The name of the rainbow in Tamazight is *tislit n unzar*, meaning "bride of the rain." Until the 1980s, once or twice a year Amazigh women commonly held "Bride of the Rain" ceremonies using a doll called *telɣunja*, singing songs asking God to send rain and connecting women even further to the fertility of the land (Fig. 10). Some scholars interpret the "Bride of the Rain" as a pre-Islamic practice. In Algeria, Imazighen recount that Anzar, the king of the rain (*anzar*, "rain," is a masculine noun), wished to marry a beautiful girl whom he saw bathing nude in a river. She refused him, infuriating Anzar, who retaliated by drying up all the rivers, streams, and wells. In order to save her people from disaster, she yielded to Anzar's blackmail and water flowed again (Haddadou 2000:59–61).

In southern Morocco, a large wooden cooking ladle, called *aɣunja*, was used as the base of the *telɣunja* doll, a household item associated with nourishment and fertility. Amazigh women constructed a "Bride of the Rain" doll and carried it from house to house, accompanied by their children, collecting wheat, tea, sugar, meat, vegetables, and everything else needed to make a festive meal. Everyone sang songs as they walked carrying their "bride." Songs varied from region to region; Amazigh women in southern Morocco sang:

> *Telɣunja* raise your hands to the sky;
> ask God to give a lot of rain.
> I went until the other side of the

river, and the rain made me
come back.
Oh God, the bride looks like the
moon taking water to the
community where she is going.
Oh God, the soil is dry; bring rain.
*(Telɣunja asey urawn s-igenna; ɣer i
Rebbi ad-dik anzar s-kigan.
Diɣ ar agmadin xes anzar ayd-id iruran.
Tislit a Rebbi d-am wayur awa tiwey
aman s-widda stedda awa.
Iqqur wattub a mulana, ɣit-tid a
Rebbi.)*

(Becker 2006:37).

Women walked to a dried-up riverbed, turning the "bride" upside down and putting her, head first, into the riverbed. At the end of the ceremony, a meal was made from the donated food in a festive atmosphere similar to a wedding, with much singing and dancing. The entire process suggested a connection between the fertility of the land and the fertility of women.

Wearing Metaphors of Motherhood

The role women play in shaping Amazigh identity is conveyed by more than just the color and design of their woven textiles. Women also convey their gender identity through dress, which includes body painting, tattooing, jewelry, hairstyles, and headgear, both in the way it is worn and in its design.[6] It is through the objects and materials that adorn the body that gender is first inscribed; thus, the process of dressing the body further illustrates the gendered discourse around Amazigh identity.

Sometime between the age of one and two years, rural Amazigh and Arab children alike are given gender-specific hairstyles, which vary slightly in each region of Morocco.[7] The hairstyles of both boys and girls include an *azag*, a thin, vertical band of hair that runs from the front or middle of the head to the nape of the neck, although the *azag* worn by girls is longer and thicker. Boys sometimes grow a single lock of hair on the right side of the head called a *takiot* in Tamazight, while girls wear longer, thicker locks on both sides of the head and grow *tawenza*, "a fringe of bangs" (Fig. 11). Bangs are connected to fertility, as illustrated in a song praising the bride during Amazigh weddings in southern Morocco that says, "The line of rams arrived at the water before the ewes and looked like bangs" *(Zwarn-id izamarn ulli gan tawenza ddan s-aman)*. This line, comparing bangs to plentiful and abundant sheep, lining up near a stream and drinking, serves as a wish that the bride will have many children.

Although it was once common to see women wearing short bangs, such as the woman in Figure 11, in recent years young women are abandoning this hairstyle. The dress and body art of rural Amazigh women has also changed in recent years. Women rarely wear silver bracelets, fibulae, and hair pendants and most have sold their amber necklaces to tourist shops. Nowhere are these changes seen more dramatically than in the case of tattooing. Although tattooing is no longer practiced by most Amazigh women, in the recent past, when a girl reached puberty, sometime between the ages of eleven and fourteen (a time that generally coincided with her first menstrual cycle), her mother, aunts, or family friends would tattoo her face and wrists. Tattooing was a rite of passage, marking a girl's transition into womanhood. Usually small groups of girls were tattooed at the same time, making it a very social activity, shared and passed on among women.[8]

Today, however, tattooing is believed to be in violation of Islamic beliefs, as it permanently alters the body. Islamic tradition prohibits anything that permanently changes God's perfect creation, and therefore, according to the Hadith, the Prophet prohibited tattooing, cursing women who tattoo and those who get themselves tattooed.[9] Furthermore, people told me that because tattoos stop water from penetrating into the skin, they render ineffective the ritual ablutions prescribed before daily prayers.[10] As a result, few women younger than thirty years old today have tattoos.

Nonetheless, tattooing was an important art form practiced by women since at least the nineteenth century. As described by various writers, the techniques used appear to have been basically the same all over Morocco. Women would draw the tattoo design on the skin with charcoal or pot-black, the soot that is deposited on the bottom of a cooking pot, then

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8. Women in southern Morocco paint these small leather bags and use them to hold sweet-smelling herbs. Photo by Cynthia Becker, 1997.

Opposite page:

9. An Amazigh bride in southeastern Morocco is dressed by her female relatives. Photo by Cynthia Becker, 1997.

prick the design onto the skin with a pointed object, such as a prickly pear spike, knife, or needle,[11] and apply alfalfa to the wound to give the design a green color. Amazigh women consciously chose green vegetation to achieve the color because of its *baraka*. People often told me that the color green was the Prophet Mohammed's favorite color, and even today people who claim ancestry from the Prophet Mohammed's family line often dress in green to assert this connection. Mosques in Morocco typically have green-tiled roofs and minarets. The color green also has *baraka* because of its association with vegetation and fertility and the color of wet henna.

Throughout Morocco, substances containing *baraka*, such as saffron or henna, are believed to infuse the body with positive healing energy and are applied during rite-of-passage ceremonies that typically include blood flow, such as male circumcision or the loss of female virginity during a wedding ceremony, as on the saffron-painted bride in Figure 1.[12] Pollution categories in Islam are based on the idea that the inner and outer bodies are separated into discrete, mutually exclusive elements that must be kept apart. Something that crosses from the inner to the outer body, such as blood or semen, is polluting. Ritual washing is crucial to the concepts of purity and pollution, since it both removes dirt from the outer physical body and cleanses the sacred body. However, certain substances can cross from the outer physical body to the inner spiritual body and purify the inner body, especially those substances containing *baraka* (Marcus 1992:74).

I believe it is not coincidental that Moroccan women chose to tattoo their bodies with substances containing *baraka* to symbolically enhance their bodies after first menstruation, a crucial moment in the life cycle. Tattoos can be seen as a means of both augmenting women's bodies and of publicly marking their transition from childhood to womanhood, as a physical and ever-present symbol of their prestige as useful members of the society, who ensure the survival of the group through their ability to give birth.

Particular tattoo motifs, including a variety of geometric designs, generally varied from group to group in Morocco; however, tattoo designs also reflected personal style preferences. For example, two sisters may share similar forehead tattoos while only one has tattoos on her nose and chin. Although tattoo styles sometimes varied from generation to generation and from individual to individual, women felt their tattoos represented a connection to the past. They justified their tattoos by evoking the proverb *Sker mayd skern imezwura*, or "Do what the first ones did." As with textiles, Amazigh women I talked with typically did not have specific names for the patterns they used but compared their tattoos to things found in their natural environment. For example, the design in the center of the woman's ankles in Figure 2 was called "palm tree," "snake vertebrae," and "shaft of wheat" by different women. The central motif at the top of her ankle was called both "the little mountain" and "the fingers." The large X design tattooed on the back of the woman's ankle also appears in textiles seen in Figures 3 and 4. Nomadic women in southern Morocco told me the X resembled wooden

This page:

Top: 10. Women in southern Morocco walk away from the camera, carrying their "Bride of the Rain" to a dried river bed. Photo by Cynthia Becker, 1997.

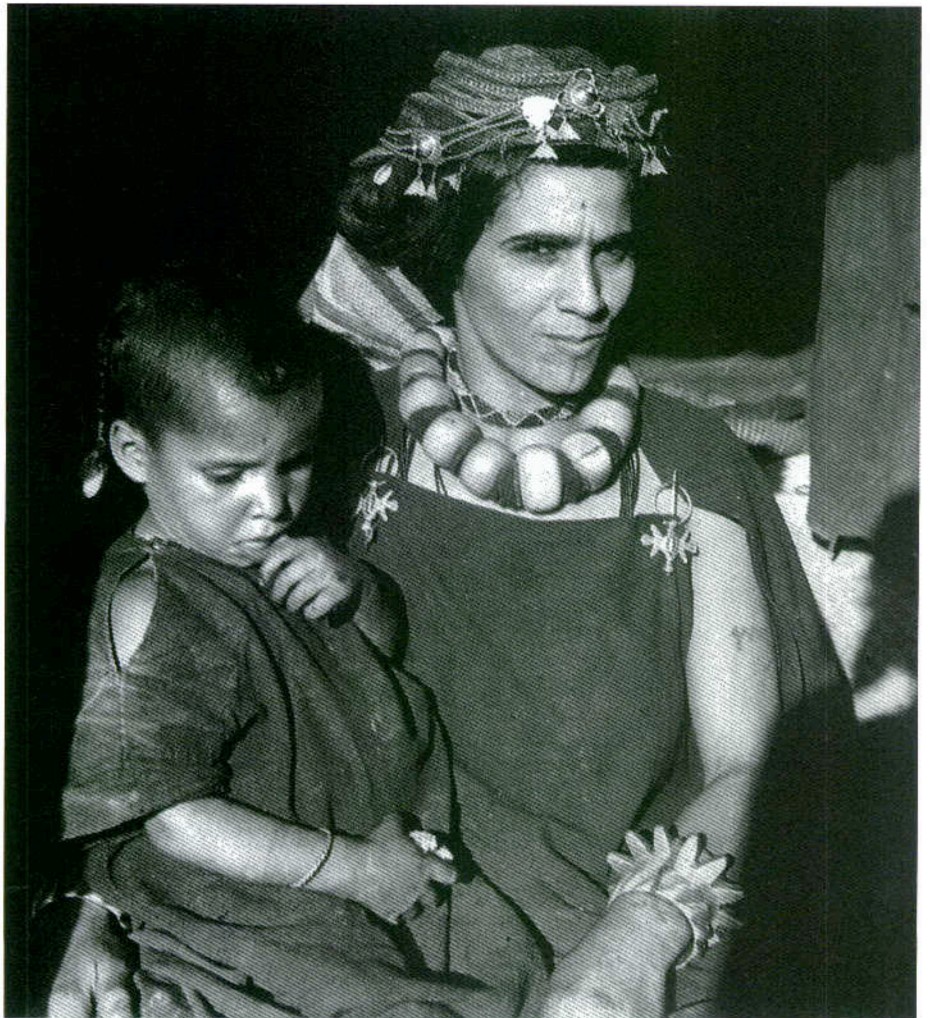
Bottom: 11. Photo of an Amazigh woman from southern Morocco wearing short bangs (*tawenza*). Her daughter wears a single lock on the right side of her head called a *takiot* and has a short tuft of bangs. Photo by Mireille Morin-Barde, 1950–1952 © Édisud.

Opposite page, clockwise from top left:

12. Interior of an Amazigh tent. Photo by Cynthia Becker, 1999.

13. An Amazigh woman from the High Atlas region of Morocco wears a woven wool shawl. Photo courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, 1968. Smithsonian Institution/04072500.

14. Interior of a Tuareg tent on the outskirts of Timbuktu, Mali. Photo by Cynthia Becker, 2004.



supports, called *tirsal*, used in tent construction (Fig. 12). These women have an intimate connection to the materials and forms used in the construction of tents, as women are responsible for weaving a tent's horizontal panels and constructing the tent when a group moves. In addition, the tent poles, like women's tattoos, divide the interior space of a tent into two equal, symmetrical halves that are mirror images of each other.

Women often tattooed a single line, sometimes bordered with small dots, from the bottom of their lips to the bottom of their chins (Fig. 5). Some women compared the design to the tracks a beetle or lizard makes in the sand. Amazigh motifs typically divide a canvas, whether a woman's face or ankles or a woven textile, into two equal halves, reflecting the nomadic aesthetic of bilateral symmetry already discussed (Prussin 1995:189). Tattoo and textile motifs resemble each other, and the act of humanizing textiles with motifs similar to those tattooed on their own bodies equates women's physical reproductive powers as mothers with their artistic reproductive powers as conservers of tradition. Hence, tattoos are gendered symbols of women's creative powers, and in this way, tattoos create a correlation between women's bodies and Amazigh identity.

With the decline of tattooing as a means of conveying expressive and social functions, its artistic forms and symbolism have been transferred to the embroidered "veils"[13] or head coverings, called *taḥruyt*, worn by Amazigh women in some areas of southern Morocco. In the early and middle twentieth century, these long, sparsely decorated, indigo-dyed cotton cloth head coverings were worn simply as modesty garments. Indigo is today primarily imported into the region, but it was cultivated in southern Morocco from as early as the sixteen century until as late as the 1960s (Balfour-Paul 1997:205). The use

of indigo head coverings distinguishes Amazigh women in southern Morocco from many other Amazigh groups in the Middle Atlas and High Atlas Mountains of Morocco, who once commonly wore wool shawls rather than any type of "veil" or head covering (Fig. 13). South of the Atlas Mountains the climate becomes drastically hotter and drier, making it practical for women to wear some type of covering to protect them against harsh sun and sandstorms. Indigo-dyed cotton coverings are ubiquitous throughout the Saharan regions of Africa, as the use of indigo was thought to have cosmetic and medicinal benefits, conditioning women's skin and improving their complexions. The Kel Tamacheq women, popularly referred to as Tuareg, an Amazigh group living in the desert regions of Niger, Algeria, Burkina Faso, and Mali, commonly wear indigo-dyed head coverings and clothing (Fig. 14). Hassaniya Arab women living throughout Mauritania and northern Senegal also cover themselves with indigo head coverings (Du Puigaudeau 1970:13).

In the 1970s, coinciding with the disappearance of tattoos, Amazigh women began to embroider elaborate vegetal motifs on their *taḥruyt*, demonstrating the living and dynamic nature of their arts (Fig. 15). Women begin by embroidering a central band, called a *tanammast*, which forms a ground line for the other embroidered motifs that appear to rise up or grow out of it. The *tanammast* divides the cloth of the *taḥruyt* into two equal halves and women align their patterns symmetrically so that the motifs are always balanced bilaterally, the designs on both the top and bottom of the *tanammast* serving as mirror images of each other (Cover).

As with those used in weaving, these embroidered motifs associate women with the natural world. The women I spoke with consistently described the motifs adorning their head coverings as "flowers," "bird tracks," "shafts of wheat," "trees," or other natural objects associated with fertility, plenty, and prosperity. For instance, the neon green zig-zag designs embroidered on the border hanging over the woman's left shoulder in the Cover picture was said to resemble pigeon prints. In southern Morocco, oral poetry and songs often compare women to pigeons.[14] The Cover shows the most common motif found on embroidered head coverings, a small triangle that is called *takhbasht*, which means "claws" and which women told me looks like the marks animal claws make on the ground—another example of a *tikselt* or "metaphor." The triangle motif is also omnipresent, as in other Amazigh textiles, jewelry, and tattoo designs. Flower motifs, clear references to fertility, are also embroidered with curvilinear stitches (Fig. 15). In sum, the embroidered motifs on the *taḥruyt* often appear to create a large, fertile landscape covered with vegetation.

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15. A group of Amazigh women attending a wedding in southeastern Morocco, 2000.

Opposite page:

Top: 16. Rear view of Amazigh women's embroidered head coverings in southern Morocco. Photo by Cynthia Becker, 2000.

Bottom: 17. An Amazigh man and young boy with the *azag* hairstyle in a rural market. Photo courtesy of the National Anthropological Archives, 1930-1959. Smithsonian Institution/04072400.

Colors used in the decoration of the *taḥruyt* also suggest a connection between the fertility of the land and the fertility of women. Women purchase previously dyed wool yarn in the market for use in their embroidery and colors are categorized into light and dark hues. Although purple, bright blue, pink, neon green, and other colors are embroidered on the dark cloth, these colors fall within the basic color palette of red, green, yellow, and black. In the Cover picture, circular motifs in pink and red, colors categorized as light, resembling the sunlight, are embroidered above the other motifs. They hover like the sun above the other designs, creating a composition that resembles the natural world and its plentifulness, connecting women to fertility.

Giving the *taḥruyt* an additional dynamic energy are the metallic sequins women attach to the entire surface of the head covering with short wool threads. Since the sequins are not flush with the textile, they move when the wearer walks, making the head covering shimmer in the bright North African sunlight. Women recognize that their embroidered head coverings attract attention and sometimes embroider *khamsa* motifs on them to protect against the Evil Eye (Cover). By covering the form of the body underneath, the head covering fulfills Islamic modesty requirements, while its brightly colored embroidery and metallic sequins simultaneously attract attention to the role of women as the creators and conservers of Amazigh identity. That this connection between women, group identity, and fertility is a conscious one is supported by the fact that when a woman's children begin to get married and have their own children, she marks her perceived loss of sexuality and fertility by wearing head coverings embroidered with only minimal amounts of decoration, as in Figure 16, where the meagerly decorated head covering of the woman on the right indicates her status as an elder.

Color symbolism is gender specific and this becomes especially evident when a women's *taḥruyt* is compared to the equivalent outer garment woven for men, the hooded wool gown called *tajellabiyt* and wool cloak called *asilham* (Fig. 17). It is increasingly rare for men to wear them, but women once commonly wove both garments from undyed sheep's wool. For Moroccans, white represents moral qualities and good fortune, believing that a good-natured, agreeable person has a "white heart." White foods, such as milk and eggs, are prestigious, and during a wedding, a bride sprinkles her wedding guests with milk for good luck called *fal amellal* in Tamazight, literally meaning "white luck." Men throughout the Muslim world typically wear white clothing while performing their Friday prayers in the mosque; hence white connects them with pious behavior and prayer.

Men would also wrap an *arezziy*, "turban," around their heads (Fig. 17). According to the men I spoke with, turbans carry important social meanings, symbolizing honor and respect. The Tamazight phrase *tbedda tarzziyt-nnek*, used to describe an honorable person, means "your turban is standing up." If a man has been dishonored, Amazigh men will say that his turban has fallen. Although fewer and fewer men wear the turban on a daily basis, it continues to be worn during important ceremonial occasions such as weddings. Thus, such elements of male dress as the hooded gown, the cloak, and the turban, embrace imagery that associates men with Islam and the qualities of modesty, honor, and dignity. This contrasts with the symbols of

fertility and metaphors of motherhood associated with women's dress.

Images of Motherhood in Contemporary Amazigh Art

Amazigh women's woven textiles and dress are metaphors of motherhood that serve as symbols of Amazigh identity and the propagation of the Imazighen into the future. This centrality of women to the survival of the Imazighen is also seen in the contemporary artistic expression of Amazigh political activists both in Morocco and abroad. Amazigh activists fighting for the official recognition of Morocco's Amazigh heritage are a largely male-dominated group run by college-educated intellectuals, living far different lives from the rural Amazigh who have greatly contributed to the survival of Amazigh heritage (Crawford 2002). These male poets, writers, and painters recognize the important roles women play in propagating Amazigh culture and use female imagery to promote their Amazigh identity. For example, the male poet Omar Taws, a poet and political activist from southeastern Morocco, valorizes women in his poetry. In the following excerpt of his poem titled *Mma* or "Mother," Tawz pays homage to the intimate connection between women and Amazigh identity:

> Courageously we advance
> For our Amazigh heritage we work tirelessly
> Mother, you are our knee [support]
> Mother, you are our light
> Our word is like our mother
> Our land is like our mother
> Mother, we are your children
> Our love for you is not small!
>
> *(T-tirrugza neddu s afella*
> *Xef tmazirt a-nili tawuri*
> *Afud nneγ ayd tgid a yemma*
> *Asidd nneγ ayd tgid a yemma*
> *Awal nneγ am mma ayd gan*
> *Akal nneγ am mma ayd gan*
> *Tarwa nnem ayd nga a yemma*
> *Tayri nne γ ur tedrus, a yemma!)*
>
> (Taws 1996:6; trans. Addi Ouadderrou).

Here Taws not only valorizes women, especially mothers, as the keepers of the Amazigh culture, he also demonstrates the primacy of language in the construction of Amazigh identity, reflecting the preservation and recognition of Amazigh languages that is an important goal of the Amazigh movement in Morocco.

Taws is from southeastern Morocco, an area that has been home to many Amazigh activists. When Taws wrote this Tamazight-language poem in 1992, the social climate in Morocco would have given the poem a political charge. He raised the

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funds necessary to self-publish his collection of poems, another political action. In 1994 southeastern Morocco became infamous as the site of a public protest and the subsequent arrest of seven members of an Amazigh cultural association called *Tilelli*, meaning "Freedom" in Tamazight. These men, all of them teachers, were arrested after publicly protesting on a national holiday celebrating King Hassan II's ascension to the throne. They marched in the streets of the province's capital, Errachidia, carrying banners with political slogans, written in an ancient Amazigh script called Tifinagh, that promoted the recognition of Morocco's Imazighen. Three of the seven men were sentenced to prison for terms of one to two years. Widespread publicity and public outrage led to a reduction of their sentences by the Moroccan king and the three were released two months after their arrest. Male Amazigh activists continued to make demands on the government, and after the death of Hassan II in 1999, his son King Muhammad VI established a Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) for the academic study the Amazigh language and culture.[15] The government introduced Amazigh languages into a limited number of Moroccan primary schools in 2004.

Tamazight is currently taught in Morocco using the Tifinagh script, a controversial choice since many activists prefer to use the Roman alphabet and feel that Tifinagh will only serve to isolate the Tamazight language. Tifinagh is an ancient Amazigh writing form believed to be related to the ancient Punic script. Although the script has not been used for hundreds of years in Morocco, the script is still in use by Tuareg women and Tuareg blacksmiths to write short, intimate messages on household objects and jewelry. Tifinagh letters consist of circles and geometric forms reminiscent of Amazigh women's textile and tattoo motifs. Amazigh activists in Morocco and Algeria often use Tifinagh to write poetry, songs, and political slogans promoting their Amazigh heritage.

Opposite page:

18. Hamid Kachmar
Imi n war imi (2005)
Mixed media on canvas, 58cm x 45cm
(23" x 18")
Collection of Addi Ouadderrou

This page:

19. A concert attendant at a Berber music festival in Paris wears the Amazigh flag draped over his shoulders. Photo by Cynthia Becker, 2003.

Hamid Kachmar, an Amazigh artist from southeastern Morocco currently studying art at Howard University, provocatively uses the Tifinagh script to write political messages as well as to create decorative surface patterns reminiscent of woven textiles. In his mixed media work *Mouth of the Mouthless* (Fig. 18), a wooden panel has been added to one side of the canvas, transforming it into the door of a *qsar* (mudbrick village typical of southeastern Morocco, called *ighrem* in Tamazight). According to Kachmar, the image of the door itself has multiple meanings. The door can represent both a literal and metaphoric passage or opening and suggests the important role mothers play in guiding their children throughout the passage of their lives. A door is often referred to metaphorically as the opening or "mouth" of a house. Kachmar added a metal panel at the bottom left with the words *tagurt n tilelli* ("door of freedom") engraved in Tifinagh. The title of the artwork and the engraved metal panel suggest that the painting's subject represents the current situation of the Amazigh people, who have been rendered voiceless by political and social discrimination but who are on the threshold of a cultural renaissance.[16]

Written in white, the Tifinagh letter "Z" is repeated on the top left of the canvas. "Z" is the central character in the word "Amazigh" and its stem MZG, meaning "free person." This letter has been adopted by the Amazigh movement to symbolize liberty and is also found on the Amazigh flag first presented at the Amazigh World Congress in the Canary Islands in 1997. The Amazigh flag, seen in Figure 19, features the Amazigh colors green, yellow, and blue (used in the place of black) with a large, stylized red "Z" written in Tifinagh.

Kachmar covered this canvas with pieces of African barkcloth that he sewed together with exaggeratedly large stitches to create the sense of an aged and restituted surface, suggesting the antiquity of the Amazigh culture and its struggle to survive. He dyed the barkcloth with natural pigments made from henna, madder, and ground walnut root to create warm red and ochre hues reminiscent of the earth tones found in southern Morocco.

The center of the painting features a large oval face. The face, which has one large elliptical eye and one small circular eye, pays tribute to his much-loved mother, who was blind in one eye. The two sets of three parallel dots running vertically at the bottom of the face (where her chin would be) further indicate that this figure represents a tattooed Amazigh woman. Her face is covered with various Amazigh symbols inspired by both Tifinagh and the textiles that Kachmar watched his mother weave when, as a small boy, he rested his head on his mother's lap. His use of balance and symmetry in the visual composition suggests the anthropometry of the human body. The surface texture of the canvas also creates the impression that his mother's face was marked by a life of hard work and the harsh climate of southeastern Morocco. His mother's difficult life is a metaphor for the situation of the Amazigh people, who are struggling to preserve their heritage and identity. In this work, Kachmar visually creates a correlation between women's bodies and Amazigh identity, reinforcing the idea that women shape Amazigh identity and honoring their creative power.

By appropriating the visual vocabulary of Amazigh women, especially mothers, artists give material form to their own conceptions of Morocco's distinct Amazigh heritage. Contemporary Amazigh political activists use aesthetic expressions, such as poetry and painting, in their struggle to have their Amazigh heritage officially recognized and given political legitimacy by Morocco's national government. For these activists, women, especially mothers, symbolize what it means to be Imazighen, demonstrating the artistic legacy of Amazigh women to Morocco's history and contemporary identity. ■

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BECKER: *Notes,* *from page 55*

[This article was accepted for publication in April 2006.]

This article is based on a paper titled "Berber Textiles: Weaving Metaphors of Motherhood," delivered at the African Studies Association annual conference in November 2003. It also includes revised and much-expanded versions of selected portions of my book Amazigh Arts in Morocco: Women Shaping Berber Identity *(University of Texas Press, 2006). A Fulbright grant and grants from the American Institute of Maghreb Studies allowed me to travel and live in Morocco, supporting my study of Amazigh arts. Addi Ouadderrou did the transcription of the songs and assisted with translations.*

1. In most instances, women requested that their identities not be revealed in publication; hence, I intentionally refrain from using individual names in the photo captions to respect this request for anonymity.

2. For similar beliefs, see Reswick's (1981:60) discussion of weaving in Tunisia.

3. It is commonly thought that a person's good fortune, health, or looks may cause jealous people to *wten-ten s-tit*, "hit them with the Evil Eye," causing bad luck, illness, and even death. When I asked people to explain the powers of the Evil Eye to me, they typically responded by saying that one-third of people die by the sword, one-third from illness, and the other third from the Evil Eye. Because the first glance of a person is considered the most dangerous, it must be distracted by some visually compelling object or element that prevents the glance from falling directly on the person being complimented. See Westermarck (1926, 1:441–78) for a thorough description of the Evil Eye.

4. Addi Ouadderrou transcribed the Tamazight songs and phrases, basing his work on the system created by Salem Chaker (1984). Addi Ouadderrou and Cynthia Becker did the translation from Tamazight into English.

5. Bert Flint argues that the patterns, colors, and forms of the textiles of nomads and settled peoples reflect the differing ways of organizing time and space. He claims nomadic textiles, unlike those of settled people, do not have a precise center and are not framed by borders. Instead they demonstrate a repeating succession of horizontal patterns that reflect "an evenly sustained succession of equal parts. This can perhaps be related to a non-hierarchic society and a nomad life style" (Flint 1980:58).

6. My definition of dress follows the designations established by Joanne Eicher and other scholars (Barnes and Eicher 1992; Eicher 1995).

7. These hairstyles are rarely seen in urban Morocco today. For an overview of hairstyles in different regions of Morocco, see Laoust 1920:142–5, Jarrot 1935:267, Langel and Marcais 1954:8, Morin-Barde 1990, and Westermarck 1926, 2:409.

8. In some areas of Morocco, elderly women may serve as tattoo specialists, and they consecrate their status by performing a pilgrimage to a local shrine (Herber 1948:290).

9. The following, from *Sahih al-Bukhari*, condemn tattooing: 3:242; 7:533; 7:535; 7:536 (Khan 1983).

10. Herber (1921) provides a thorough review of tattoos and their prohibition in Islam.

11. Basset 1963, Herber 1948, Laoust 1920:138–42, and Searight 1984 also discuss the tattooing process in Morocco.

12. See Kapchan 1993 and Vonderheyden 1934 for more information about the use of henna in Morocco.

13. Because of the controversy and misappropriation of the term "veil," this study chooses not to use it to refer to women's head coverings.

14. Janice Boddy similarly argues that there is a strong metaphorical association between unmarried women and pigeons in the Sudan where both are associated with purity, cleanliness, and beauty (1989:62–4).

15. Some Amazigh activists are not happy with IRCAM because they feel it is an organization controlled by the monarchy to neutralize the Amazigh Cultural Movement.

16. Hamid Kachmar, interview by author, Portland, Oregon, May 14, 2005.

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McGEE: *Notes,* *from page 91*

1. The statement is credited to Sekoto from an August 1949 *Time* magazine article (p. 69).

2. Gerard Sekoto Foundation http://www.art.co.za/gerard-sekoto/default.htm

3. For example, Sekoto is said to have met artist Peter Clarke in Cape Town in 1942–1943. But Clarke, who would have been thirteen and fourteen then, remembers otherwise. Clarke says he first met Sekoto in Paris in 1962–1963 at a New Year's Eve party at the house of Es'kia Mphahlele (p. 40, see also Lindop 1988:24). In both places Peter Clarke's name is misspelled, as Peter Clark.

4. Rorke's Drift and Mbatha's work there (including several photographs of him) is discussed in Hobbs and Rankin 2003.

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