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Politics, Gender and the Art of Religious Authority in North Africa:  
Moroccan Women's Henna Practice

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Doctor of Philosophy

Art History

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B.F.A., University of Kansas, 2005

Advisor: Sidney L. Kasfir, Ph.D.

An abstract of  
A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the  
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## Abstract

### Politics, Gender and the Art of Religious Authority in North Africa: Moroccan Women's Henna Practice

By Amanda E. Rogers

Henna, a decorative dye, is applied to women's hands and feet at religiously significant occasions throughout North Africa—yet only in Morocco does this feminine art symbolize a nationalized, tolerant Islam. How and why does a body adornment dismissed by scholars as merely “cosmetic” function, instead, as a powerful emblem uniquely within Morocco's territorial boundaries? I argue that the adornment's significance is related to localized interpretations of Islam, anchored in understandings of the material's blessed nature through its association with the Prophet Muhammad. Equally rooted in canonical text and popular tradition, Moroccan henna serves as a potent local signifier for normative gender roles, female spirituality and monarchical legitimacy. Involving comparative fieldwork and archival research across Morocco, France, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, this project ultimately yields a broader understanding of art practice, gender, religious and political authority, and art in North African society.

Chapter 1 contextualizes the study's primary setting, introducing the historical, governmental and geographical specificities that render Morocco distinctive from its neighbors. Chapter 2 evaluates predominant Moroccan body adornment traditions in conjunction with local conceptions of the art forms' respective importance. I argue that despite a shared iconography, only henna retains its position of prominence in contemporary society, due to commonly accepted religious ideas that define it as a material blessed by association with the Prophet. Chapter 3 examines the intersection of henna's religious value with cultural codes of appropriate gender behavior. Here, I analyze the ways in which henna inscribes normative values of gendered spiritual behavior on the flesh of men and women, and functions as a religious practice outside the space of the mosque. Chapter 4 traces the history of henna's politicization in post-colonial history and discusses its appropriation as an icon of cultural memory for nationalist artists in the search for a uniquely Moroccan identity. Chapter 5 analyzes the State's conscientious appropriation of henna in times of political crisis to signify a monarchically-promoted “Moroccan Islamic” brand, from the 2003 Casablanca bombings through demonstrations of the 2011 Arab Spring.



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## Introduction

The best-laid research plans are often driven off course by the hand of fate. In the case of this dissertation project, fate intervened in the form of another hand-shaped emblem: the hennaed palm of Fatima (beloved daughter of the Prophet Muḥammad). As Tunisia's January 14<sup>th</sup> Uprising sparked a wave of North African revolutions in 2011, I was in Morocco to research disputed conceptions of artistic and religious orthodoxy in relation to the female-dominated body adornment of henna painting. As democratic unrest spread to the North African Kingdom, I noticed localized emblems of female Hands prominently displayed at each demonstration—hennaed hands figured among the most visible signs of political dissidence. What implications does the choice of such an image have for understanding the local metaphors in which religious and political legitimacy are contested and reaffirmed? How had a profoundly significant image of female spirituality come to serve as a populist terrain on which to symbolically dispute a governmental system? Through an emphasis on the localized contextualization of a resonant visual culture, my dissertation troubles predominant explanatory models of artistic production's role in religious authority and political change.

This project, *Women's Henna Adornment: Politics, Gender and The Art of Religious Authority in North Africa*, was initially motivated by an unexpected query: can a temporary tattoo save lives or bolster a government in crisis? Yes, suggests Moroccan public reaction to the

2003 Casablanca bombings (and later, the 2011 Arab Spring) demonstrations utilized women's hennaed hands as focal imagery. Henna, a decorative dye, is applied to women's hands and feet at religiously significant occasions throughout North Africa, yet only in Morocco does the art symbolize a nationalized vision of tolerant Islam. My research focuses on the intersection of "popular" arts, gender, and spiritual and political authority, examining the profound religious and social symbolism of a temporary body adornment, and the ways in which a predominately female art has been utilized to promote legitimizing images of a paternalistic and monarchical State.

Part One of this project contends that henna embodies a religious significance particular to the interpretative context of Moroccan Islam. Part Two examines henna's political value by exploring the mobilization of the adornment as an emblem of social protest and governmental propaganda both for and against a regime facing political crisis and calls for democratization (from the 2003 Casablanca bombings to the 2011 Arab Spring). My dissertation, involving comparative fieldwork and archival research across Morocco, France, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Egypt, ultimately yields a broader understanding of gender, religious authority, political legitimacy, and art practice in North African society.

In May 2003, a series of bombs tore across Casablanca, Morocco, destroying hotels, restaurants and a Jewish community center. The public responded immediately, by pouring onto the streets in anti-terror demonstrations. A red hand of Fatima inscribed with the phrase "*Ma Tkich Bledi*" (Don't touch my country), emblazoned on posters, billboards, and shirts, provided the rallies' focal point. The hand of Fatima, a protective emblem, bears a close relationship to the henna painting decorating women's palms at Moroccan celebratory occasions. The image is

common throughout North Africa and the Mediterranean as a prophylactic measure against the evil eye.

“Henna” refers to a method of temporary body painting, the substance of which is manufactured from the flowering shrub *Lawsonia inermis*. Although used throughout North Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, the adornment enjoys a particular prominence in Morocco, where it is used in significant ritual occasions ranging from weddings and celebrations of the Prophet’s birthday to pilgrimages. Henna’s leaves produce a reddish pigment which temporarily stains the skin, lasting from two to four weeks. Although the geographic origin of henna decoration cannot be determined, I was told in Morocco that during the Prophet Muḥammad’s visitation to heaven (the *mi’rāj*), God opened up the heavens and sent down henna plants to blessed certain areas of the earth—those which presently contain Muslim-majority populations. Henna’s symbolic potency lies in the substance’s materiality itself and its inherent connection to the divine. Although the specificities of context vary, the medium’s metaphysical connection to the spiritual realm serves as a physical site in which to manifest divine blessing. Henna acts performatively to create additional and multivalent systems of meaning that cannot be understood without ultimately referring back to the substance of the medium itself and in turn, the central figure of the Prophet Muḥammad.

Previous studies have accorded Moroccan henna the significance of a cosmetic, acknowledging its role in ritual while relegating it to the nebulous realm of popular culture. Yet as the reactions to the 2003 Casablanca bombings and the 2011 Arab Spring demonstrate, henna’s significance is far more than skin deep. Moroccans invoked the resonant symbol to counter the version of Islam represented by the bombers and also used it as an emblem of tolerance and pluralism in staking claims for democratic reform. This dissertation responds to

contested definitions of authority and legitimacy in the political, religious and social realms by exploring how henna, as an art form, is used to enact both spiritual rituals and to inculcate territorially-bounded nationalist sentiments, bolstering a deeply-entrenched governmental system.

### **Fundamental Questions**

This dissertation explores henna adornment as a religious practice beyond the courtyard of the mosque by regarding it as a highly symbolic medium of nationalistic spirituality preserved through female cultural production. Although often characterized as merely a popular art form or cosmetic, I argue that the significance of henna as a form of Moroccan body adornment is rooted in localized interpretations of Islam.<sup>1</sup> I address three primary questions. First, how can one explain the prominence of henna in relation to other available forms of body adornment? Only henna enjoys widespread popularity across linguistic and class divisions in both urban and rural settings. While tattooing permanently alters the body, and thus is routinely condemned as un-Islamic, henna's impermanence is not the only attribute rendering it permissible. *Ḥarqūs*, another decorative practice, is also temporary, and is formed through a mixture of ash, bark and ink. I contend that henna's symbolic importance resides in the specific materiality of this medium, the significance of which derives from Islamic literature.<sup>2</sup>

Nearly all Moroccans are Sunnī Muslims. As such, local cultural and ritual practices cannot be understood without extensive recourse to Islam. In addition to the Qur'an, a body of

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<sup>1</sup> "Localized" refers here to specifically Moroccan understandings of Islam. As with most textually-based religious traditions, practices differ regionally.

<sup>2</sup> I use "materiality" here to denote the substance matter itself. Unlike *ḥarqūs*, the henna plant has a rich history in Islamic source which relates its permissibility to the favoritism of the Prophet.

recorded Prophetic traditions known as *Ḥadīth* provides spiritual guidance. A Moroccan name for the henna plant, said to be Muḥammad’s favorite flower, explicitly renders its Islamic sanction: *Nūr al-nabī*, or “the light of the Prophet.” *Ḥadīth* records the use of the plant in early Islam as a method of demonstrating association with and affection for the Messenger of God. ‘Abdullah bin’Umar, the son of the Caliph ‘Umar, stated “And about the dyeing of hair with Henna; no doubt I saw Allah's Apostle dyeing his hair with it and that is why I like to dye (my hair with it).”<sup>3</sup> Because of this Prophetic association, henna is considered to be charged with an intangible quality known as *baraka*, charismatic grace or blessing emanating from God. *Baraka* may be transmitted through the bloodline (i.e., direct lineage from Muḥammad) or through physical contact with material objects. The symbolic value of henna in Morocco cannot be detached from its *baraka*; in other words, in its local interpretative context, the medium *is* the message.

The second question this dissertation asks is: what is the gendered significance of henna painting in religious ritual? Although Muslim men sometimes use the plant to stain their hair and beards, it is more commonly associated with the highly intricate designs covering the hands and feet of women. Women utilize henna in rituals where blood is shed, specifically when it is of an “impure” feminine nature. The blood of women carries an ambiguous status in Moroccan society. Although menstruation is necessary for socially-sanctioned procreation, it is also cited as a pollutant and the justification for women’s exclusion from certain religious duties.<sup>4</sup> Does the *baraka* inherent in henna function as a purifying substance or somehow mitigate the taboos surrounding the blood of female sexuality? Could its blessed status afford women a measure of

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<sup>3</sup> Sahih al Bukhari, Volume 1, Book 4, Number 167.

<sup>4</sup> It must be noted that the localized conceptions of Islam in Morocco often differ from the religious rulings of *fiqh*; for example, the pollution attributed to menstruation does not differ substantially from the blood of an open wound. The divergence between the level of the scriptural and that of popular practice and folk belief will be elaborated upon more fully in the body of the dissertation itself.

spiritual access otherwise unobtainable, given the restrictions placed on female physiology?

How does ritual activate the medium's potential to transmit blessings? Do the iconography and rituals associated with henna differ contextually? Could these highly significant occasions, in fact, occur without the adornment, or does it fulfill an integral aspect of ritual?

Finally, this dissertation explores the question of politicized popular culture. How does the contemporary Moroccan monarchy draw upon gendered religious art and practice to establish claims to legitimate paternalistic governance? As the monarchy's reliance on tourist revenue necessarily involves participation in a global economy, how is henna utilized to market the state as tolerant and welcoming to international tourists and local citizens? Has the commodification of henna served to undercut its primacy in religio-cultural ritual? Moreover, do the strategies of the Moroccan Kingdom in championing heritage culture find correspondence in neighboring North African nations? Ultimately, the answers to these questions will suggest that cultural production and artistic expression plays a much more critical role in creating, shaping and maintaining state legitimacy than previously acknowledged.

### **Methodology and Source Material**

To answer these questions, I combine visual analysis, oral ethnographic research and textual study through the use of four primary methods of data acquisition: (1) participant observation, (2) semi-structured interviews with diverse informants,<sup>5</sup> (3) digital photography and (4) archival research. Fieldwork activity consisted of participant observation at public events where henna is used, including political demonstrations, weddings, celebrations to mark the end of Ramadan,

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<sup>5</sup> I deliberately selected a "lived approach" to ethnographic research, in which all of my associates were viewed as potential informants in the interest of constructing a broad cultural framework in which to interpret henna's local reception.

and visitations to saint shrines. Semi-structured interviews with market proprietors, consumers, henna artists, and members of the religious establishment yielded an array of opinions on local aesthetic systems, iconographic meaning and the religious permissibility of the art form. I selected four henna artists of various ages for life history interviews. I elicited information concerning training, perceptions of meaning, as well as critical evaluations of technique and quality—a crucial component for evaluating local perceptions of henna's effectiveness. I asked about the role of innovation in iconography, and the role of abstraction. Do the geometric forms mask representational elements? Is efficacy visually apparent? I also inquired about education, level of religiosity, changing technology and the growing tourist market.

I supplemented the methods discussed above with archival research to historicize this art form. Written on the skin, henna is temporal and portable. Colonial documents, such as photography, post cards and travel narratives document foreign perceptions of a dynamic artistic tradition, and provide an invaluable addition to the study. Oral traditions were similarly collected from local cultural producers. Print-media, compilations of religious rulings, magical spell-books, botanical treatises and the iconography displayed at local political demonstrations account for a further, layered compilation of source material. Field research involved the same methods of data acquisition described above, and was undertaken in three primary phases: two years in Morocco (2005-2006, 2010-2011), four months in France (2011, 2012), and three months respectively in Algeria, Egypt and Tunisia (2012).

### **Literature Review and Theoretical Interventions**



Previous studies of African Islamic art have concentrated on the familiar forms associated with “orthodox” religion, such as the material culture of literacy (Adahl and Sahlstrom 1995; Hassan 1992). The work of Rene Bravmann remains one of the few attempts to expand the category of Muslim material culture in Africa, including masking traditions not commonly associated with Islamic practice (1974; 1977; see also Mark 1992; Weil 1971, 1988, 2005). More recently, Ferdinand de Jong has argued that Mandinko masquerades and Jola initiation rituals constitute a distinctly Senegalese cultural heritage which incorporates Islamic belief and material culture, including costume (2007). Abdullah Hammoudi’s ethnographic analysis of the Bilmawn masquerade in Morocco, although not an art historical assessment, presents a useful contribution to the study of visual culture in Islamic North Africa (1993). These works, while useful in their challenges to conceptions of Islam and “tradition,” nonetheless focus predominantly on male-dominated art forms.

The majority of studies on North African visual culture are devoted to “traditional” Berber crafts, particularly textiles (Courtney-Clarke 1996; Jereb 1995; Teraisse and Hainaut 2001; d’Ucel 1932).<sup>6</sup> The few that take henna into account share significant limitations, treating the art form as a surface decoration in texts dealing with the social history of gender (Becker 2007; Combs-Schilling 1989; Kapchan 1993, 1996; Messina 1991; Searight 1984), or as a commodity on the rapidly growing tourist market (Spurles 2004). The most extensive study to

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<sup>6</sup> The umbrella term “Berber” refers to the indigenous population which inhabited North Africa prior to the Arab conquest. More than a millennium of cultural mixing between Arabs and Berbers has occurred, resulting in considerable confusion between racial, cultural and linguistic categorizations. While distinctly Berber practices do exist, the choice of terminology is a political one, and this study deliberately focuses on Islamic ritual practices which cut across ethnic and cultural lines.

date of henna's iconographic and spiritual significance remains the colonial-era scholarship of Finnish ethnographer Edward Westermarck (1921; 1926).<sup>7</sup>

My research fills significant gaps in this body of work by offering new approaches to the study of Islamic art and Muslim women's religious practices. My central questions depart from the dominant focus on canonical Islamic art, such as architecture and calligraphy (Akkach 2005; Bloom and Blair 1996; Hillenbrand 1998) by including a previously overlooked expression of spirituality.<sup>8</sup> I also depart from the previous anthropological focus on Moroccan women by using art historical methods to interrogate the fundamental importance of medium for conceptions of sexuality and gender roles (Kapchan 1996; Maher 1974). While my analysis builds on the previous studies, I embed my consideration of henna within the broader context of Islamic discourse and religious practice.

Three fields of study frame this project more generally. Art historical approaches provide models for contextualizing the social significance of body adornment, ranging from political stratification and religious practice to historical memory (Gengenbach 2003; Kasfir 2007; Rubin 1988). The growing focus on embodiment in Islamic studies is useful for considering bodily practices such as henna application within the framework of Muslim metaphysics (Bouhdiba 1975; Chebel 1984; Guessous 2005; Kugle 2007; Messina 1991; Rausch 2000; Thurfjell 2006; Al-Zahi 1999). My contextualization of henna within Islamic interpretative contexts is informed by debates in Islamic studies over the terminological accuracy of a universal "Islam" versus multi-faceted and local "islam(s)" (El Fadl 2007; Ramadan 2009; Wadud 2006), and hence

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<sup>7</sup> Westermarck remains a useful source, albeit a dated one. However, as a male ethnographer whose concern was not primarily body adornment but rather Moroccan customs, he was not in a position to investigate henna with the necessary depth, nor was it the focus of his inquiry.

<sup>8</sup> These art forms share with "orthodox" religion (as characterized in the literature) the qualities of public space and literacy, characteristics often accounting for the exclusion of women in a region where public space is gendered (Dialmy 1995; Mernissi 1987, 1996, 1997).

addresses the similarly hotly-contested terrain of claims to “orthodoxy” (Asad 2007; Cornell 1998; Musa 2008; Stewart 2007), particularly the position of women vis-à-vis interpretative religious authority (El Fadl 2001; Barlas 2002; Wadud 1999, 2006). In doing so, I draw upon the anthropology of religion, to interrogate and further deconstruct the divide often posited between “official” (textual) and “popular” (experiential) religious practices (Asad 1993, 2003; Bowie 2006; Marranci 2008; Varisco 2005). The position of women as active agents in patriarchal culture, investigated by feminist anthropology and gender studies, further informs my research (Abu-Lughod 2000; Ali 2006; Mahmood 2005).

I anchor my research within accepted art historical methodologies but crucially interweave the diametrically-opposed approaches of Euro-American/contemporary art (i.e., formalist visual analysis, archival investigation and an emphasis on the specificity of the object’s physical context) with conventional strategies of non-Western art historiography (participant observation, anthropological fieldwork and semi-structured oral interviews). Blending these generally opposed methodological frames is critical for understanding feminine artistic practice and the mobilization of Islamic symbolism in battles over religious authority. Art historians, by maintaining this internal methodological divide, silence women in Islamic society (as Muslim women are generally absent from, but by no means ignorant of, textual traditions) and effectively cede the rich terrain of contemporary visual issues with traditional roots and political import to critical cultural theorists (Butler 2009; Zizek 2009). I enrich dominant art historical approaches by combining previously-separated methodological trajectories; also drawing upon theoretical insights from diverse fields, I break offer new approaches to the multi-faceted uses of visual culture as analytical mechanism.

My project invigorates art historical methodology with critical insights culled from debates and concepts across a variety of disciplines. The unique theoretical implications of my study are anchored in an interface between Islamic studies and critical theory that centers on debates concerning trans-national secularism, the possibility of religious coexistence, and assimilation (An-Na'im 2010; Bowen 2007, 2009; Ramadan 2005), as well as the failure of liberalism and the modern nation state (Asad 2007; Butler 2009; Zizek 2008, 2009). Finally, this project intervenes in the rapidly growing field of Arab Spring studies. Although the 2011 wave of revolutionary uprisings has provided fertile terrain for theorists of authoritarianism, political Islam and democratization (Adler 2012; Bishara 2011; Al-Khawildi 2011; Noueihed and Warren 2012; Owen 2012; Stacher 2011; Stora 2011; Vermeren 2011), scholars have ignored the crucial contributions of aesthetic performance and visual culture used in social movements to galvanize political reform.

### **Chapter Outline**

**Chapter One** sets the stage for consideration of henna adornment's multivalent significance as gender performance, sacred substance and resonant icon of national identity. This present chapter explores the thesis of Moroccan exceptionalism often found in scholarly and media accounts of the Kingdom. Here, I suggest that the uniqueness attributed to Morocco results from its location as a historic contact zone for various ethnic groups, geographies, trading networks and religious influences—a convergence that, as we will see in subsequent chapters, enables the Kingdom to claim a foundational narrative of pluralism and tolerance which, in turn, bolsters monarchical legitimacy at both the local and international levels.

**Chapter Two** contends that the resonant cultural charge of henna is rooted in local interpretations of Islamic tradition. Canonical Islamic texts accord the henna plant (and its coloring matter) a level of spiritual prominence due to its connection with the Prophet Muḥammad, who highly recommended its use. Henna’s potency as an art form lies in its simultaneous valuation as a significant substance and ritual performance. I first present a theorization of the relationship between meaning and medium in localized contexts, before advancing a typology of predominant female body adornment techniques in Morocco. I comparatively assess *ḥarqūṣ*, tattooing and henna in terms of substance matter, social function, design specificity and cultural prominence—and argue for consideration of these body adornments through the primary lens of significant materiality and localized meaning-making. Only henna, the “light of the Prophet” crosses class, region and ethnicity to serve as a lasting culturally-specific art form and spiritual medium for Moroccan women.

**Chapter Three** transitions from the geography of hybridity discussed in Chapter One, and the spiritual ink of henna described in Chapter Two, to focus on the embodied terrain of Moroccan Islam through the activation of henna’s religious importance in critical rituals. Part One constructs a theoretical framework for the consideration of henna’s critical role in the rituals of Moroccan Islam: I examine the concept of definitional authority in Islamic tradition, the emphasis placed on ritual purity in textual tradition, and the gendered implications of pollution for spiritual practice. The second component of this chapter anchors henna practice within a uniquely Moroccan Islamic understanding of sexual and religious maturation as processual. I discuss the ritualized importance accorded to the processing and application of henna, the art’s bodily placement, and gendered iconography. Finally, I focus on the role of henna in the gendered experience of marriage ceremonies, before an assessment of the adornment’s role in

other critical rituals. In each case, henna functions as a didactic tool and agent of purification by virtue of its Prophetic connection; despite social change and technological innovations, the adornment continues to inscribe gendered religiosity in an embodied calligraphic script.

**Part One** of this dissertation established the profoundly localized spiritual significance of henna adornment in Morocco. **Part Two** turns to the economic and political implications of commodifying traditional cultural production, by analyzing tourist industries and political movements in Morocco and beyond. **Chapter Four** examines the female-dominated Moroccan henna adornment practice within a broader globalized political economy. I examine henna's critical value as a nationalist signifier in post-colonial fine arts, and argue that the French Protectorate's construction of "art" versus "craft" created a situation in which female adornment provided artists an ideal locus for resistance of cultural occupation. I then present the Moroccan State's adroit manipulation of henna as a marketing mechanism for "tolerance" and exceptionalism. By capitalizing on the localized spiritual resonance of an intimate adornment, the ephemerality of which escaped French colonial classification of both art and craft, I argue that women's henna adornment began to serve not only as religious devotion—but an emblem for, and performance of, citizenship. **Chapter Five** follows the mobilization of expressive culture—in the form of henna—as a powerful vector for social cohesion and political disputation. I first discuss the symbiotic relationship between henna and the Hand of Fatima and briefly revisit nationalist fine art's appropriation of female-dominated arts, before analyzing the response to the 2003 Casablanca bombings and the 2011 Arab Spring demonstrations (where both the State and reformist actors utilized henna and the Hand of Fatima as a politically-charged image). I argue that the endurance of the Moroccan monarchy—in governance and symbolic

nationalism—is due, in no small part to the careful use of resonant tropes from the localized visual culture of popular Islam.

## Chapter 1

### Territorial Settings: “Exceptional” Morocco as Historical Contact Zone

Morocco, tourist brochures tell us, is exceptional: a land of Mediterranean and Atlantic beaches, stunning desert sandscapes, religious tolerance, well preserved medieval architecture—an open-minded paradise for the adventurous traveler. In the wake of a disastrous decline in tourist revenue following the events of September 11, 2001, an official embrace and promotion of the Kingdom’s “exceptionality” and pluralistic heritage—product of Jew and Muslim, Arab and Berber—surged dramatically.<sup>9</sup> State patronage of Amazigh heritage foundations proliferated, and cultural initiatives increased in visibility.<sup>10</sup> Moreover, the government demonstrated a newfound willingness to negotiate over the status of Amazighiyya as an officially-recognized Moroccan language.<sup>11</sup> As the Arab Spring’s 2011 winds of unrest reached the “Land of the West,” the discourse of Moroccan exceptionalism reemerged as paramount in media and academic accounts. Eager to explain the Kingdom’s abstention from the domino effect of regional regime change, many pundits and scholars attribute the North African nation’s stability

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<sup>9</sup> “Berber” refers to the indigenous population of North Africa; many activists consider the term pejorative and prefer “Imazighen” (singular: “Amazigh”). In the interests of clarity, I use “Amazigh” as an adjectival form, in accordance with accepted contemporary usage.

<sup>10</sup> King Muhammad VI founded the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM), known in French as “l’Institut royal de la culture amazighe,” by royal decree 1-01-299 on October 17, 2011. The research institute claims legal and financial autonomy from governmental authority—as of yet, however, the tangible implications of its work are yet to be fully realized. Policy recommendations presented to the government are not legally binding.

<sup>11</sup> “Amazighiyya” is a term encompassing the various Berber dialects which comprise the Afro-Asiatic language set commonly identified as “Berber.” “Imazighen” (literally “free men” or “nobles”), by contrast, denotes Berbers (plural) as a people; “Amazigh” serves as an adjectival form for cultural designations, and as a nominal referent for individual members of the Imazighen. In 2003, the Moroccan government first allowed the teaching of Amazighiyya in state schools, followed by the publication of Berber-language textbooks the following year.



to the institution of monarchy, pointing to apparent similarities with seemingly unshakeable regimes Jordan, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia.<sup>12</sup>

This comparative thesis is problematic. For example, Morocco's closest North African neighbor, staunchly Republican Algeria, also sat out the "Arab Awakening." Protests appeared (although unsuccessful) across Morocco, Jordan and Bahrain in 2011—to say nothing of underreported demonstrations in the Arabian Peninsula itself. Additionally, at least one of these supposedly strong monarchies was forced to rely on the military forces of outside powers to quell popular dissent—hardly the hallmark of an internationally stable regime.<sup>13</sup> This essentialist comparative thesis glosses critical variances in regional political, ethnic and cultural histories. Michael J. Willis highlights the dangerously reductive nature of this avenue of inquiry: "Reference to history is doubly important in the case of the Maghreb since the precise nature and impact of the historical heritage remains an important part of contemporary political debate in the region and frequently goes a long way to explaining current political alignments, disputes or practices" (2012: 9).

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<sup>12</sup> Ahmed Charai. "Egypt Crisis: The Moroccan Exception to Unrest in the Middle East." <http://www.foxnews.com/opinion/2011/02/04/moroccan-exception/> 05 February 2011; Mohamed Daadaoui, "A Moroccan Monarchical Exception." *Foreign Policy*. [http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/12/13/a\\_moroccan\\_monarchical\\_exception](http://mideast.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2012/12/13/a_moroccan_monarchical_exception) 14 December 2012; Ambassador Marc Ginsberg, "The Moroccan Exception," *Diplomatic Courier*. <http://www.diplomaticcourier.com/news/regions/middle-east/580> 11 November 2011; Laila Lalami, "The Moroccan 'Exception'". *The Nation*. <http://www.thenation.com/article/162967/moroccan-exception#> 24 August 2011; Anouar Majid, "Four Reasons Why Morocco is an Exception." *Morocco World News*. <http://www.moroccoworldnews.com/2012/01/21260/four-reasons-why-morocco-is-an-exception/> January 1 January 2012; Jennifer Rubin, "A Model for the Middle East or an Exception to the Rule?" *Washington Post*. [http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/post/a-model-for-the-middle-east-or-an-exception-to-the-rule/2012/09/14/6ced4730-fe6f-11e1-8adc-499661afe377\\_blog.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/right-turn/post/a-model-for-the-middle-east-or-an-exception-to-the-rule/2012/09/14/6ced4730-fe6f-11e1-8adc-499661afe377_blog.html) 14 September 2012. For academic investigations of Moroccan exceptionalism, refer to Susan Gilson Miller. 2013. *A History of Modern Morocco*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; Bruce Maddy-Weitzman and Daniel Zisenwine, Eds. 2011. *Contemporary Morocco: State, Politics and Society under Muhammad VI*. NY: Routledge; Gareth Mark Winrow. 2000. *Dialogue with the Mediterranean: The Role of NATO's Mediterranean Initiative*. NY: Routledge.

<sup>13</sup> Karen Leigh. "Bahrain: Caught Between Saudi Arabia and Iran." *TIME*. <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,2058992,00.html> 15 March 2011.

The Kingdom of Morocco is certainly exceptional, with features that render it unique not merely among North African or Middle Eastern nations but also globally. That the historically-entrenched Moroccan monarchy plays a critical role in such uniqueness is undeniable; what necessitates further examination, however, is: on which foundational narratives does the modern nation-state successfully draw to ensure continued local and international legitimacy?<sup>14</sup>

This chapter sets the stage for our consideration of henna adornment's multivalent significance as gender performance, sacred substance, and resonant icon of national identity. The present chapter explores the thesis of Moroccan exceptionalism. Here, I will argue that the uniqueness attributed to the country results from its historic position as a contact zone for multiple ethnic groups, geographies, trading networks and religious influences—a complex convergence that enables the modern day Kingdom to lay claim to a foundational narrative of pluralism and tolerance. In turn, the tangible factors which underpin the rhetoric of exceptionalism lend credence to the presence of a uniquely “Moroccan Islam,” in which the local significance of women's henna adornment operates.

Morocco constitutes no mere exception but an anomaly—a Sunnī monarchy in a regional sea of Republican regimes, with a Head of State whose descent from the Prophet Muḥammad ensures divine right to the throne and endows the monarch with considerable religious authority.<sup>15</sup> Simultaneously *Amīr al-Mu'minīn* (“Commander of the Faithful”) and Commander in Chief of the Royal Armed Forces, the King's legitimacy is vested in a nexus of symbolism

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<sup>14</sup> The Moroccan monarchy is one of the oldest extant Kingdoms in the world; the current Alaouite Dynasty dates to the seventeenth century. For a review of the debates on the King's designation as “sacred,” see: Ahmed Benchemsi, “Moroccan Monarchy's Sacredness: An Obstacle to Democracy” (Translated from French), *Le Monde*. <http://cddrl.stanford.edu/news/2846> 16 March 2011.

<sup>15</sup> The title “Amīr al-Mu'minīn” denotes authority over both religious and political spheres; predominant Shī'a and Sunnī opinions differ as to the legitimacy of the term for a terrestrial leader, as the epithet was first claimed by the Prophet's son-in-law Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. In contemporary usage, Saudi Arabia's monarch presents the only other example of the title's use in an official context.

regionally unique in its amalgamation of Sunnī, Shī'a, and Sufi tropes.<sup>16</sup> “*Ṣāhib al-Jalāla al-Malik Muḥammad al-Sādis, Amīr al-Mu'minīn, Naṣṣarahu-Allāh*” (His Majesty King Muḥammad the Sixth, Commander of the Faithful, May God grant him victory) provides the King's official title of respect. The monarchy has profited from Morocco's inheritance of variegated ethnicities, multilingualism, natural territorial boundaries and religious pluralism—a uniqueness upon which it will likely continue to capitalize for the foreseeable future. Unlike the case most often advanced for comparative analysis, that of Jordan's Hashemite Kingdom (established in 1921), Morocco's current Alaouite Dynasty dates to the mid seventeenth century—an ideological extension of previous *Sharīfī* dynastic claims over monarchical legitimacy throughout the kingdom's precolonial history.<sup>17</sup> Rather than making a chronological assessment of Moroccan history along dynastic lines, I will focus instead on the critical themes of geography, territorial integrity, ethnic diversity and religiosity that grant to the paternalistic monarchical State a critical foundational narrative of cultural identity necessary to perpetuate affinitive loyalties in citizen-subjects.

### **Geographies of an Intercontinental Contact Zone**

Morocco is, paradoxically, a landmass in flux—straddling oceans, continents and seas. Michael J. Willis notes, “Geography alone has placed the Maghreb in the corner of the African continent

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<sup>16</sup> In the Moroccan context, as we will subsequently see, these tropes are not mutually exclusive but point to a historical process of cultural and religious hybridization.

<sup>17</sup> In the Sunnī Arab world, *sharīf* refers to descendants of the Prophet Muḥammad through his grandson Al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (Hasan); the term *sayyed*, conversely, refers to descendants through Al-Ḥussein ibn 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib (Husayn). Moroccan kingship has based its spiritual legitimacy through this concept of Prophetic inheritance through the Ḥasanid line, since the establishment of the Idrisid Dynasty in 789 AD. Although the Idrissid Dynasty adhered to Zaydi Shī'a Islam, later dynasties (such as the current Alaouite ruling family) preserved this aspect of divine right, albeit in a Sunnī context (Combs-Schilling 1989; Cornell 1998; al-Fasi 1326; Julian 1994; Laroui 1970, 2008 Shatzmiller 2000).

that is closest to Europe, thus making it a ready bridge for the exchange of influences in both directions. It is similarly not too far removed from the part of the continent that is linked to the Asian landmass, specifically the Middle East” (2012: 9). Present-day Morocco occupies the most northwesterly extreme of the African continent, separated by the Mediterranean Sea from Europe, the Atlantic Ocean from North America, by the vast desert from sub-Saharan Africa, and by mountainous terrain from its immediate Maghreb neighbor Algeria [Fig. 1]. This crossroads geography facilitated considerable diversity within “natural demarcation lines” and provides contemporary Moroccan Studies a unique situation that poses specific difficulties for singular disciplinary analysis. Scholars wrestling with area studies models find themselves at a loss when it comes to cultural classification (Combs-Schilling 1989: 103). Morocco has generally been analyzed through a series of shifting lenses: predominantly European, Middle Eastern/Islamic and (to a lesser extent) African. Methodologies which highlight a contact zone approach are far better placed to establish the nation’s inherent uniqueness.

Although largely marginalized by the fields of African history and Islamic studies, Morocco’s spatial gift unites disparate geographies and cultures, giving rise to an exceptionally cosmopolitan yet localized Islamic society on the African continent.<sup>18</sup> Islam would ultimately provide a binding force for considerable national diversity—and give birth to an extraordinarily complex Muslim culture. In the early phase of Islamic expansion, Morocco did indeed constitute “the western limit [and] outer boundary of imperial Muslim power” (Combs-Schilling 1989: 103); this by no means indicates, however, that Morocco’s status as an outpost rendered it marginal. The North African territory constituted the launching pad for the predominately Berber-led conquest and construction of Andalusian Spain, a highly regarded classical Islamic

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<sup>18</sup> The allegedly peripheral nature of Morocco can be seen in romanticized English translations of *al-Maghreb* as “the land where the sun sets.”

civilization located in Southern Europe, yet rooted in the African continent. Prior to European colonial interventions, which restructured established, pre-modern trade networks, Morocco's access to intercontinental exchange was paradoxically assured by the spaces of ocean, sea and desert—stimuli for, rather than barriers to, cultural and economic linkages.

Although, on one hand, it is an essentialist argument to claim that Morocco has boasted a cohesive national identity based on the monarchical governance and territorial integrity, natural geographical borders have undeniably assisted in the formation of a nationalistic affiliation which precedes the foundation of the modern nation state.<sup>19</sup> Similar to the Egyptian Arab Republic's exploitation of an ancient civilizational heritage mapped onto contemporary, “natural” borders, the theme of territorial integrity continues to play a critical role in the inculcation of nationalist sentiment in present-day Morocco. Nowhere is this rendered more visible than in State claims to the Western Sahara, technically classified as disputed territory by the United Nations [Fig. 2].<sup>20</sup> Morocco's internationally-recognized boundaries constitute some 446,550 kilometers; by the Kingdom's own account, which takes into account the Western Sahara, this number approaches 710,850 kilometers [Fig. 3]. “Territorial integrity,” in fact, constitutes a discursive red-line for Moroccan academic and press freedom—mapped along the boundaries of the Sahara desert.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Colonial scholars describe a pre-colonial Morocco divided between the *bled es-siba* (the land of social chaos), typically referring to rural, mountainous areas where the sultan was considered to exert weak influence, and the territory under his authority, the *bled al-makhzan* (the realm of taxes) (Hoffman 1967).

<sup>20</sup> An additional feature of Moroccan exceptionalism—albeit rarely invoked by scholarly literature—is the Kingdom's noteworthy non-participation in the African Union. Morocco withdrew from the African Union in 1984 when a majority of member states extended official recognition to the Polisario, a body seeking autonomy for the desert territory. The Kingdom remains the only African state which abstains from participation in the AU (See: Damis 1983; Jensen 2005; Kamil 1987; Hodges 1983, 1984; Martin 2010; Rezette 1975; Shelley 2004; Zoubir and Volman 1993).

<sup>21</sup> We return to the importance of nationalist discourse on the Saharan question, and its relationship to henna as a signifier of religious nationalism, in Chapter Five.

“Geography dictates destiny:” in the case of Morocco, the maxim proves apt. The happy accident of location, in this context, has global implications from political alliances to economic participation. Under the Roman Empire, Moroccan territory provided ample resources and opportunities to sustain Rome’s widespread power. Far before the establishment of Arab settlements or European imperialism, the location of Morocco rendered it a valuable target for conquest and regional contestation. Considerable bio-diversity and ecological factors provided large swaths of fertile agricultural terrain—so much so that Roman incursions into North Africa exploited the landmass as Antiquity’s bread-basket (Combs-Schilling 1989: 104).

Even in the contemporary world’s constantly shifting chessboard of international political alliances, Moroccan geography accounts for its unique role as an intimate ally of the United States. As the Tangier Legation Museum reminds us (this institution, in fact, was founded specifically to commemorate this special relationship), the Kingdom of Morocco was the first international state to officially recognize the United States of America as an independent country in 1777. This diplomatic friendship continued through the World War period—as any viewer of the film *Casablanca* can attest. Morocco and the United States retain a tight-knit alliance over a variety of shared interests, from official recognition as a non-NATO ally to open cooperation on issues of free trade and the War on Terror. The game change provided by the 2011 Arab Spring, which cost the United States longtime partners in Egypt’s Hosni Mubarak and Ben Ali of Tunisia (not to mention its newfound friend in Libya’s Muammar Gaddafi), has only solidified the Moroccan-American partnership.

Morocco’s strategic value is not merely recognized across the Atlantic Ocean, but across the Mediterranean Sea as well. The Kingdom’s eagerness to participate in the European Union first manifested itself in an (ultimately unsuccessful) application for membership in 1987. Since

then, Morocco has been granted the special distinction of “advanced status” and works closely in cooperation with the EU on shared interests, such as combatting illegal immigration. Most recently, Morocco has turned towards the Arabian Gulf. In the wake of the Arab Spring turmoil, the increasingly powerful Gulf Cooperation Council moved to include fellow monarchies Jordan and Morocco within its ranks.<sup>22</sup> Despite the lack of oil resources in Jordan and Morocco, the alliance’s invitation appears to hinge instead on shared strategies among these Western-allied states with strong militaries and non-republican, monarchical governance.

From this brief assessment of contemporary political alliances, one grasps the multiple cultural contact points which enable Morocco to carve out overlapping spheres of regional affiliation; unfortunately, the approach of academic literature has not been so catholic. These complex geographies further render the nation exceptional in area studies: to which continent should (or, indeed *can*) one look to best situate “Moroccanity?” The complexity of Morocco as a contact zone similarly engenders considerable difficulty for academics constrained by recourse to single-disciplinary methodological approaches.

Although Morocco’s diversity eludes tidy classification, certain fields of study have obfuscated—rather than illuminated—important aspects of local context through an uncritical adoption of colonial-era knowledge production. Canonical art historical inquiry, for example, situates North African art production in either a general “postcolonial, contemporary” space (Adraï 2001; Benqassem 2010; Ben Zidan 2010; Chebbak 2010; Fathi 2002; Khatibi 2001; Zahi 2006) or alternatively, examines “classical” art and architecture by dynastic eras in conjunction with contemporaneous Middle Eastern artistic developments (Abid 2008; Cortese and Calderini 2006; Leaman 2004; al-Sa’ih 2002; Shaqrun 2009; Wadi 2011). The treatment of Andalusian

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<sup>22</sup> Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the Federation of the United Arab Emirates comprise the primary states which comprise the GCC.

Morocco, as a peripheral offshoot of Islamic Spain, provides merely one case in point (Alaoui 2002; Hillenbrand 1999). By and large, these studies draw from what sociologist Ernest Gellner terms “High Culture” cultural products related to sacred texts, urbanity, and public (masculine) space typically accorded the elusive “authentic” Islam (1981).<sup>23</sup>

Art historical studies of Moroccan craft industries are heavily influenced by the adoption of anthropological methodologies commonly used for non-literate, pre-modern and small-scale societies (Becker 2006; Bernasek 2008; Courtney-Clarke 1996; Jereb 1995; Micaud 1970; Ramirez and Rolot 1995; Samama 2000; Saulnies and Saulnies 2003; Sijelmassi 1974; Spring and Hudson 1993). These methodologies perpetuate an artificially clear distinction between Gellner’s “Great” and “Little” traditions, the latter nebulously identified with rural folk and oral practices—hence, so-called “popular Islam.” The broader field of anthropology has long dominated Moroccan Studies; part of this disciplinary overrepresentation owes much to predominant Orientalist thought paradigms that locate the Maghreb broadly, and Morocco specifically, as backwater peripheries to the supposedly “classical” world of the Islamic Middle East (Cornell 1998: ix-x, 155-156). In addition to Gellner’s reductive sociological account, anthropologist Clifford Geertz has further contributed to an unintentional marginalization of Moroccan religious practice as “popular,” through disproportionately emphasizing orality in comparison with sacred texts.<sup>24</sup>

Art history and anthropological assessments of Moroccan visual culture continue to lag behind similar studies in other regions as a result of the persistence of colonial-era scholarship which, largely unchallenged in the case of Morocco, continues to inform the modern-day disciplines. Nowhere is this problem more acute than in the so-called “Berber Question” in

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<sup>23</sup> For excellent critiques of Gellner’s typological model, refer to Zubaida (2011: 31-76) and Cornell (1998: 106-7).

<sup>24</sup> On the problems posed by disproportionate emphasis on textual and/or oral sources, see: Clark 2004; Vansina 1985; White 1984.



relation to artistic production. To resolve the problems engendered by these models of inquiry, we will consider the disciplinary confusion surrounding categories “Berber” and “Arab” in the inheritance of colonial scholarship, and finally demonstrate the contribution a contact zone approach might enable for the study of Moroccan art and culture.

### **Ethnic Plurality and the Disciplinary Inheritance: Complicating Race, Language and Culture**

The complex ethnic composition of North Africa proves a challenge even to specialists of the region. As an undergraduate conducting field research for a senior thesis, I puzzled over the distinction between “Berber” and “Arab.” My knowledge arose from two primary categories: colonial ethnographers and contemporary scholarship that uncritically drew upon the former. I initially assumed that the terms referred to separate and identifiable ethnic groups, yet the longer I spent in the region, the more confused I became. The binary division finally imploded in an informal discussion with a friend during pre-doctoral research in 2005. Driss mentioned his Berber mother, and I interjected: “Do you consider yourself half Berber?” An invaluable and patient teacher, Driss gently noted, “It doesn’t work like that here. North Africans don’t share the American ‘identity crisis.’”

I have since heard countless others echo this sentiment, yet many scholars continue to theorize an unnecessarily rigid divide between “Berber” and “Arab,” forcing a rigid distinction. Such confusion is understandable, in part due to a scarcity of in-depth scholarship, as well as a continued reliance on politically motivated colonial studies, and reticence towards Arabic textual source material, in favor of the predominantly oral. Area studies, anthropology, art history and Islamic studies have each—to variant degrees—inherited thought paradigms rendering ‘Arab’

and “Berber” artificially discrete cultural categories.<sup>25</sup> As we will see, the “unavoidable truth of the historical experience and legacy of the Maghreb is that it is highly mixed. No one experience or influence can be seen as eclipsing all others” (Willis 2012: 10).

The Imazighen (singular: Amazigh), or Berbers, have inhabited Northern Africa since recorded history—and indeed, well before. Gabriel Camps posits the existence of a proto-Berber civilization dating to the Neolithic era. Michael Brett and Elisabeth Fentress concur based on Saharan archeological evidence (2006: 12).<sup>26</sup> The distribution of Berber communities varies considerably across Northern Africa; Tunisia’s population of native Berber speakers is negligible (al-Mukhtār 2011), and small communities in Egypt are confined to the regions of the Western Desert and Siwa Oasis regions (Fakhry 1973); official statistics from post-revolutionary Libya have yet to be ascertained, due in part to widespread repression under the Gaddafi regime. Algeria and Morocco account for the heaviest concentration of Berber-speakers. The most reliable statistics estimate the number of Berber speakers in Morocco as around forty percent of the total population, and twenty percent in neighboring Algeria (Brett and Fentress 2006: 3; Silverstein and Crawford 2004: 44). It must be noted, however, that these statistics refer to predominant linguistic affiliation (i.e., “mother tongue”) rather than ethnicity or culture [**Fig. 4**].

The term “Berber” itself is a misnomer, suggesting an underlying unity rather than its function as an umbrella adjective and nominal designation for speakers of this Afro-Asiatic language’s dialects. Yet even this distinction proves highly problematic. Algeria’s largest Berber speaking minorities include the Mozabites of the northern Sahara, the Tuareg of the central Sahara (also present in Mali, Libya and Niger), as well as the Chaouia located in the southeastern

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<sup>25</sup> In many regions of Morocco, Berber speaking groups living in close proximity to Arabic speakers share a greater set of similar cultural practice than do Berber groups located in different regions of the country; language alone does not prove as distinctive a cultural demarcation as is often believed.

<sup>26</sup> The landmark collaborative study by historian Brett and archeologist Fentress remains to date the only comprehensive study of Berber culture in English.

Aurès Mountains—and the largest group, the Kabyle (Tamazight-speaking) population of the Kabylia region (Lorcin 1995: 4). To further complicate matters, the groups often speak mutually unintelligible dialects. Simply within the borders of Morocco, although speakers of the Tashilhit and Tamazight dialects are able to understand each other, Tashilhit and Tarifit speakers cannot communicate. This has led some scholars to critique “Berber” as an unproductive label for a linguistic “tower of babble” (Kratochwil 1999: 156). Rather than culture, linguistic difference offers the most precise distinction between the groups (Combs-Schilling 1989: 105).

The word “Berber” is, moreover, of exterior origin, and was originally utilized to denote the “barking” nature of indigenous North African languages (Latin: *barbarus*; Greek: *barbaroi*) (Goodman 2005: 6).<sup>27</sup> Beginning in the late 1980s, Algerian and Moroccan activists began to embrace *Imazighen* or “free men.”<sup>28</sup> Among apolitical Berber speakers, self-identification is typically linked to regional affinity, such as the Inhabitants of the Rif (*Ifriyan*), the Inhabitants of Kabyle (*Taqbaylit*) or ancestral affiliation, such as the Children of Atta (*Ait Atta*) and the Children of Khabbash (*Ait Khabbash*). This phenomenon of affiliation and naming based on kinship and regional affiliation, moreover, is similar to the manner by which urban and/or Arab Moroccans self-identify, such as *Fāsī* to denote a resident of Fez.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> On a semantic level, uncritical references to “Berber” as a cohesive and singular ethnicity or culture risks further marginalization of Morocco and its categorization by scholars as a conquered land—rather than an active, hybrid society productive of multi-directional exchange.

<sup>28</sup> The story of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century rise of Berber identity politics began on March 10, 1980 at Hasanoua University in Algeria’s Tizi Ouzou (the unofficial capital of the predominately Berber-speaking Kabyle region). A crowd of over a thousand gathered to hear a lecture by Mouloud Mammeri on the role of oral poetry in Kabylia society. The scholar never materialized. Unbeknownst to the waiting audience, the governor had arranged a police checkpoint to intercept him. Police informed Mammeri that his presentation was cancelled, for fear it would “disturb [...] the public order” (Goodman 2005: 30). This political calculus backfired; a cancelled poetry reading ignited Kabylia for a two month period of violent riots and police repression in the predominately Berber region. Although the violence was eventually resolved, its “memory mushroomed” (Goodman 2005: 30). These events, known today as “the Berber Spring” sparked the creation of the Berber Cultural Movement. This term denotes a political movement with diverse goals, ranging from official recognition of Berber groups as part of national heritage, the institution of Berber languages as a mandatory component of state-run curriculum, and at the extreme—secession from the Algerian state in pursuit of a Berber “homeland” (Silverstein 1998: 3).

<sup>29</sup> This type of designation is known in Arabic grammar as the *nisba* adjective.

Colonial efforts at racial classifications posited a foreign point of origin for North Africa's indigenous populations, ranging from Celtic Ireland to Greece, ancient Palestine, East Asia and the lost Etruscan culture. In these models, "Berber" culture ultimately originates "elsewhere." The contentious nature of origins is also implicated in debates on the depth of Arabization and the diffusion of Islam in pre-modern North Africa. Contrary to popular belief, the adoption of Arabic as a *lingua franca* would not occur until long after the initial waves of Arab migration.

According to Brett and Fentress, "At best we can define Berbers as Mediterranean. In terms of their physical anthropology they are more closely related to Sicilians, Spaniards and Egyptians than to Nigerians, Saudi Arabians or Ethiopians: more precise characteristics are conspicuous by their absence" (2006: 4). This new population of Arabs, arriving in the seventh century AD, intermarried with the indigenous population for more than a millennium—rendering distinct ethnic categorization impossible. The dynamic nature of Islamic expansion and intercontinental trade precludes neat cultural geographical boundaries. Deborah Kapchan offers a cogent description of the nation's inherent hybridity: "Given its diverse population as well as the historical permeability of its borders, it is not hard to understand why Moroccan sociologist and essayist Abdelkebir Khatibi encourages transgression against any force that would reduce Morocco's diversity to a single sphere of identity" (1995: 7). Additionally, the Roman introduction of the camel enabled the Muslim population to open up the Sahara, "harnessing the technological potential of the camel and combining it with the overarching unity and the network of connections provided by an expanding faith (Combs-Schilling 1989: 107)."

Forging a distinction between Berber and Arab, however, proved necessary to European colonialism's imperial justification; France dispatched embedded ethnographers across the North

African colonies, whose work proved pivotal in the confused racial categorization that informs much contemporary scholarship. Paul McDougall states, “[In Algeria] an elaborate system of oppositions was contrived between ‘Arabs’ and ‘Kabyles,’ with the former generally denigrated as civilizationally unimprovable, the latter as ‘closer to Europe’ in race, culture and temperament” (2003: 67). French self-association with Berber speaking groups arose, in fact, from the convergence of pre-Islamic North Africa and prevalent racial ideology influential in Europe.

Rome served as a tripartite “cultural idiom for French domination: justification, admiration, and emulation” (Lorcin 2002: 295). This memory proved unforgettable as settlement began elsewhere, particularly given the remnants of classical Roman architecture at Timgad and other sites in northeastern Algeria.<sup>30</sup> The Roman legacy impacted French education, heavily influencing the ideological outlook of colonial officers and ethnographers. Arabs such as Ibn Battuta and Ibn Khaldun recorded extensive material on indigenous North Africa, yet the French military eschewed these works in favor of classical Greek and Roman sources (Lorcin 2002: 296). Secondary education on the continent emphasized the classics as part and parcel of European heritage, distinctly separate from and superior to Islamic culture. Professor Emile Gautier tellingly stated in 1930, “For all his genius [Ibn Khaldun] had an oriental brain which did not function like ours. He cannot be read like Titus-Livius or Polybius, or even Procopius. He has to be interpreted” (Lorcin 2002: 298).

Interpret the French did, viewing themselves as “the true masters” of North Africa and, thus, heirs to the glory of Rome: “The Arab conquerors had added nothing to the Roman heritage; rather, they had tried to destroy it. The Roman ruins demonstrated that the seal of

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<sup>30</sup> Similar ideology informed colonial scholarship elsewhere in North Africa. For an account of Italian Fascist discourse on colonial Libya, see: Krystyna Von Henneberg. 1996. “Imperial Uncertainties: Architectural Syncretism and Improvisation in Fascist Colonial Libya.” *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 31, No. 2., pp. 373-395.

Rome was indelible” (Lorcin 2002: 319). Racial ideology played a vital role in the perception that Roman North Africa crumbled as a result of “poverty, endemic warfare and barbarism” engendered by Arab settlement (Lorcin 2002: 320). Lucien Baudens, the army’s primary surgeon, popularized a theory of the “Muslim castes,” in which he vilified the Arab-speaking population for “cupidity, cruelty and fanaticism...there was nothing to compete with the ugliness of Arab traits or their lack of personal cleanliness” (Lorcin 1999: 662). Works published in France comparing Arabs and Europeans regurgitated this scholarship as proof of French superiority—justifying the civilizing mission. As Patricia M.E. Lorcin notes, “Underlying all ethnological research was the need to discover which were the most subversive elements of the population and which, if any, were those most likely to cooperate with French rule” (Lorcin 1999: 667).

Rome was not built in a day, nor was French North Africa. Pacification occurred in stages, owing to hostile indigenous populations and unfamiliar terrain. One of the first colonial ventures took place in Kabylia, an inaccessible region dominated by mountains and non-Arabic speakers. Although the Berbers professed Islam, local customs stood out to the French as indicative of “assimilationist” potential. Traditional rule in Kabylia involved the *tajma'th* assembly, in which community members, represented by prominent families, met to discuss affairs and participate in decision-making. All men were technically eligible, yet elders comprised the majority (Lorcin 2002: 18). The assembly collectively chose a leader to serve as the village chief, a practice the French were eager to read as a legacy of Roman rule, as well as indicative of innate democratic potential.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> The *tajma'th* was not an entirely democratic practice, as wealthy families typically dominated the positions of leadership. The French chose to view the institution as such, particularly when traditional practice within Islamic law (i.e. ideas of consultation and consensus) display similar "democratic" structures.

The Kabyle were not the only Berber speakers in Northern Africa, but the first encountered by the French and subsequently essentialized as emblematic; as opposed to Arabs, Berbers ostensibly “were a pure, primitive race. They had a love of the land, were hard working, and... not steeped in the morality and dogma of Islam” (Lorcin 1999: 668). This Manichean dichotomy is known as the “Kabyle Myth,” or the “Berber Vulgate,” and came to govern the scholarship produced on indigenous North Africa. M.E. Lorcin comments “one of the salient facets of the myth was the negative view of Islam, which became inextricably linked to the Arabs” (Lorcin 1995: 3). The perception of Kabyle and by extension, “Berber” society as inherently secular—and only superficially Muslim—was borne not only of the imperial encounter, but continues to skew our understanding of the nation in contemporary studies of Morocco.

In Algeria, the French championing of the Berber population contributed to a reactionary postcolonial process of exclusionary state-building which explicitly underscored Algerian identity as Arab and Muslim. After the Algerian revolution, the 1962 Tripoli Program stipulated that “Algerian culture will be national and that its role will include that of the restoration of the Arabic language...to reflect the values of the nation and its dignity, and to make the language itself effective as a language of civilization” (Gafaiti 1997: 66). Strikingly similar phenomena were underway in the former Protectorate of Morocco, albeit with a less reactionary outcome. The colonial administration attempted a strategy of divide-and-rule through the implementation of the 1930 *Dahir Berbère* (Berber Decree), which placed the rural, Berber-speaking population under local tribal law and the urban (predominantly Arabic-speaking) population under Islamic law. Yet the policy backfired due to the cultural cohesion provided by Islam. M.E. Combs-Schilling states, “Berber-Arab is thus not a sociocultural divide,

yet the French tried to make it one...Instead of dividing the population, the dahir [unified] together nearly the whole of Morocco's Islamic population, Berber-speaking and Arabic-speaking, in opposition to the outsider" (1989: 281). As with Algeria, the framework of Arabo-Islamic civilization provided a mechanism with which to forge a postcolonial unity.

The modern urban/rural divide (and by extension, Berber/Arab) in Morocco cannot be detached from colonial history and the specificities of Protectorate policy (Brett and Fentress 1996: 190). The policies of French commander and Resident General Marshal Louis-Hubert Lyautey bespoke a paternalistic concern for the longevity of Moroccan tradition within the Medina walls. In the name of preservation, Lyautey constructed a French administrative center located far beyond the walls of the traditional city (Swearingen 1997).<sup>32</sup> After the disintegration of the Protectorate and French withdrawal, bourgeois Moroccans took up residence in the former colonial city outside of the Medina walls. Traditional distinctions between region and ethnic distinction broke down as urbanization increasingly rendered visible instead the primacy of other categories, such as class distinctions (Brett and Fentress 1996: 191). Today, as with many African cities, underdevelopment in the rural sector causes overcrowding in the urban sector, further complicating any identification through a rural/urban designation. Since the establishment of an Arab presence headed by 'Uqba bin Nāf'i in 670 AD, cultural mixing has played a definitive role in North African history. For over a millennium, then, the line between "Berber" and "Arab" has progressively blurred.

Persistent scholarly paradigms, in an effort to render Moroccan artistic production classifiable, continue to advance "Berber" and "Arab" as easily separable categories—an approach which unwittingly owes much to the influence of politically-motivated scholarship of

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<sup>32</sup> See also: Janet L. Abu-Lughod. 1981. *Rabat: Urban Apartheid in Morocco*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.



the French colonial period. The fields of linguistics (Sadiqi 2002), sociology (Gellner and Michaud 1972; Silverstein 1996), history (Brouscky 2006; Hannoum 2001; Kateb 2001; McDougall 2003) and archeology (Brett and Fentress 2006; Fentress 2006) have made considerable strides towards the elucidation of the Berber/Arab dichotomy, yet the disciplines of art history and visual anthropology remain mired in outmoded models of “tribal” style, largely inherited from colonial-era scholarship and influenced, to a considerable extent, by Africanist art historiography. One of the biggest problems facing North African art history revolves around the use of these fixed, racial paradigms that obfuscate both the complex hybrid history of the region, as well as the legacy of colonial scholarship on formulating contemporary disciplinary trajectories.<sup>33</sup>

Serious inquiry into traditional North African art remains in its infancy; the few studies produced have been conducted by Africanist art historians without specialized training in Islam. The field is further challenged by the perpetuation of Gellnerian sociology, particularly as concerns the binary model of “High Culture” versus “Little Traditions”—which results in an uneven reliance on oral sources at the expense of the textual. A combination of both, I argue, better positions us to understand the specificities of Moroccan Islamic art and ritual practice.

Although Sidney L. Kasfir’s essay “One Tribe, One Style: Paradigms in the Historiography of African Art” was a devastating blow to the use of “tribal” stylistic models in sub-Saharan art historiography (1984), scholars with a focus north of the Sahara must face a similar shift away from the classificatory comfort afforded by a neat “Berber/tribal aesthetic.” I will demonstrate in the following pages that the lessons of Kasfir’s critique remain applicable

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<sup>33</sup> Chapter Four further expounds upon the colonial intervention’s alteration to traditional arts industries, and by extension, continues to influence contemporary knowledge production on Moroccan visual culture.

and urgent for the study of North African art. Ultimately, visual culture and artistic production better position us to view Morocco as a hybrid contact zone, rather than a peripheral region of arbitrary classification.

Melville Herskovits' 1930 article, "The Culture Areas of Africa" divides the continent into geographically discrete regions, defined by a set of criteria ostensibly shared as to justify their considerations as homogenous regions. In his reading, the Sahara constitutes a cultural vacuum—a misconception that unfortunately colors much contemporary literature on North Africa. Archeologist Timothy Insoll, however, has likened the camel of the desert to the *dhow* of Indian Ocean trade—vehicles enabling the cross-pollination of varied cultures (2003). Herskovits' cultural areas thesis remains in play in many considerations of African Islamic artistic production—ultimately insinuating that a supposedly "Arab" North Africa retains a more authentic Islam than that practiced below the Sahara.

This literature often informs us that Muslims eschew figurative imagery, sculptural forms and communion with the realm of the spirit world. Rene Bravmann remains one of the few scholars to challenge these boundaries in Islamic African art (1974). Examining the Jula and Ligbi of the Ivory Coast, Bravmann foregrounds cross-continental interchange in the form of trade and migration, in conjunction with the foundation of educational systems that ensured a constant exchange of ideas and scholars between North and sub-Saharan Africa. Bravmann identifies three masking traditions which remain prevalent in the region, and argues that these are not the exception to Islam's influence on sub-Saharan African creativity, but rather, the rule.

Unfortunately, Bravmann and Kasfir's pioneering challenges to notions of constructed analytical frames have yet to be adopted by the inchoate field of North African art historiography. Karin Adahl and Berit Sahlstrom's edited volume *Islamic Art and Culture in*

*sub-Saharan Africa* provides a problematic case in point (1995). Adahl's opening essay, "Islamic Art in Sub-Saharan Africa: Towards a Definition," argues for a historicized approach to Islamic cultural production in Africa, yet nonetheless upholds the bifurcation of the "African," and "classical Islamic" worlds. This simplistic division not only ignores centers of classical scholarship such as Fez and Timbuktu, but also falsely characterizes the terrain of "Islam" as fictionally homogenous (and by implication, Arab or Middle Eastern).

However, Adahl and Sahlstrom's text contains one standout essay that illuminates productive methodological possibilities applicable to Islamic North Africa. Labelle Prussin's "Architectural Aspects of Islam in the Futa-Djallon" examines the *hatumere* magical square that is ubiquitous throughout the continent. Prussin contends that rigid definitions of African Islamic cultural production in either precisely "African" or "Islamic" terms are ultimately doomed to failure, on account of historical regional dynamism and identitarian multiplicity. The author argues instead for a "grammatical" reading of African Islamic architecture that examines symbolic forms as dialects; this metaphor points towards a new approach for Moroccan Islamic art and practice in local contexts; they should be seen as vernacular expressions of related religious and artistic language, ultimately located in and produced by cultural hybridity.

Cynthia Becker's *Amazigh Arts in Morocco: Women Shaping Berber Identity* typifies the issues facing North African art historiography (2006). Becker argues that the arts of Berber communities are controlled and produced by women to highlight female fertility and, by extension, to maintain an ethnic purity visible through stylistic choices and recurrent motifs. Although Becker's investigation holds true in the context of her primary focus, the Ait Khabbash community, the generalization of this model to broader Berber groupings proves problematic and risks an inadvertent replication of the tribal stylistic model critiqued by Kasfir.

To provide a brief—if radical—comparison, Jesus of Nazareth was not Parisian. Scholars do not seem troubled by a simultaneous evaluation of European art and architecture as influenced by outside forces, while also considering these cultural productions in the context of Western Europe’s theological development, political climate and social structure. No reputable historian would assign Middle Eastern origins to a Gothic cathedral, deeming its religious designation as “inauthentic” and “imported” to the continent; such a suggestion would be implausible, if not patently absurd. Kasfir points out that, like any discipline, art history is dominated by ideological paradigms “so powerful that they function as unquestioned assumptions when in force. Even more importantly, they are frequently invisible because they are rarely made explicit” (1984: 163). The Gothic cathedral analogy reveals the kinds of disciplinary problems that are still operative (and largely unchallenged) within the historiography of North African art studies.

Even while fostering a categorical division between “Arab” and “Berber,” French colonial ethnographers admitted the impossibility of identifying these groups based on physiognomic difference or artistic style; in the early twentieth century, Jeanne d’Ucel conceded, “It is, of course, extremely difficult to draw the line rigorously between Berber art and Arab art in North Africa, because in the cities and on the plains there was a mixing of the races” (1932: 50). Another statement by this colonial scholar sharply illuminates the racial biases of French imperialism and its impact on overly rigid modes of classification: “If a newcomer to North Africa has difficulty in distinguishing between Berbers and Arabs due to the fact that they are all Moslems and that their costume is identical, he seldom errs in calling Berbers those who work” (1932: 46). This inadvertent admission by d’Ucel of the arbitrariness of stylistic classificatory

criteria underscores a crucial commonality that served to untie multilingual and ethnically varied peoples in the heart of the Moroccan contact zone: Islam.

### **Islam, Authority and the State in Flux**

The cultural fluidity engendered by the Moroccan landscape greatly influenced trading patterns and facilitated cultural contact between disparate geographical locations. Trade within North Africa was enacted primarily through land-based activity via camel and donkey or mule caravans, and subsidiary maritime trade across the Mediterranean. According to Combs-Schilling, “The spanning of the Sahara brought into systematic connection two dramatically different economic and ecological niches of the world, providing the financial base for economic and cultural explosion” (1989: 107). Islam provided a further vector for hybridization in Moroccan territory.

The impact of geography upon trade is self-evident. Regional specificity dictates available mechanisms of trade, and so too did the form of trade influence the nature of Islamic diffusion. The spread of Islam into Berber North Africa did not conform to the commonly-positing model of wide-scale military conquest; rather, Islam’s adoption proved far more gradual in North Africa than elsewhere. Islamization took root slowly among the Berber-speaking inhabitants, beginning with the first wave of Arab immigrants, primarily proselytizers and traders in the late seventh and eighth centuries. Processual conversions, in turn, resulted in a broader accommodation of local practices, which the flexibility of Islamic legal authority often allowed. The legacy of the Arab-Islamic influx into Northern Africa remains a controversial topic—particularly with respect to the depth of cultural influence. Prior to the initial Arab conquests,

Romans occupied Northern Africa, and although they gained some converts to Christianity among coastal Berbers, they remained predominately located outside the hinterlands, and peripheral to cultural life. Arabs began to arrive at the beginning of the seventh century AD, in conjunction with Islam's wars against the Byzantine Empire. The Arab presence remained relatively limited until the arrival of the Banu Hilal Arabs in the eleventh century AD.

Although far from the famed "Bedouin hordes" often described in Orientalist histories, this second wave of Arab migration across North Africa did account for the inroads made by Arabization in the area's urban centers, as well as a gradual diffusion of Islamic conversion in the more geographically isolated mountain and desert areas where—although Islam was gradually adopted—Berber dialects remained primary linguistic vehicles (Brett and Fentress 1996: 120-153).

The consolidation of Morocco as a predominantly Muslim nation with a relatively cohesive regional identity can be attributed to the (Berber) Almoravid and Almohad dynasties of the eleventh through thirteenth centuries AD (Willis 2012: 9-86).<sup>34</sup> Vincent J. Cornell notes that under the Almohads, "For the first time in the history of the Far Maghrib... the universalism of Sunnī internationalism combined to transcend the tribal segmentation that had heretofore characterized social and political relations in the region" (1998: 55). The ideological roots of these movements, ultimately responsible for the consolidation of Morocco as a Sunnī nation, provide a striking counter narrative to the construction of "Berbers" as somehow only superficially Islamized. According to Brett and Fentress, "The unification of North Africa by Islam ensured that the factors which divided them... were offset by others that brought them together. Foremost among these was the state" (1996: 81-119; See also Cornell 1998: 32-62, 230-271).

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<sup>34</sup> See Ibn Khaldūn. 1847. *Tārīkh al-duwal al-islamiyya bi'l-Maghrib*. Algiers.

Four specialists in Moroccan Studies deserve special mention here: Islamic scholar Vincent J. Cornell (1998), political scientist Mohammed Daadaoui (2011), and anthropologists Abdellah Hammoudi (1993, 1997) and Deborah Kapchan (1996). This body of interdisciplinary scholarship informs the study at hand; through careful analysis and consideration of both oral and textual sources on Moroccan Islam, these scholars avoid the pitfalls of the “Berber Vulgate,” foreground the hybrid nature of the North African Kingdom and the existence of a regionally distinctive Islam that is simultaneously rooted in canonical orthodoxy and creatively adapted to innovative local contexts.

Morocco’s complex and hybrid cultural context can be mapped onto henna as a medium. Henna constitutes a religio-national art form shared across regional, linguistic and class lines due to its profound value as sacred substance, as we will see in the following chapter. An investigation of the art in its local religious context provides a partial corrective for previous art historiographies of Northern Africa. As discussed above, overly rigid classifications of Berber and Arab preclude contextualized understandings of art and ritual practice within the context of Moroccan Islam; through a rooted investigation of the adornment in both textual and oral Islamic source material, we will be able to ascertain the symbolic importance of this intimate adornment. Brett and Fentress note, “The people themselves are extremely heterogeneous: the existence of an ethnically unified ‘people’ is no more demonstrable for the past than it is today” (Brett and Fentress 1996: 3). The variability of local Islam, the unifying feature of Moroccan society’s exceptional pluralism, binds together spiritual consciousness and national adherence on the female body.

In subsequent chapters, we will explore henna’s primacy over other available Moroccan body adornments, the art’s relationship to a specifically Moroccan Islam, its implication in life-

cycle transition and religious rituals, and use value as a powerful political symbol of nationalism. Kristin Lofstdottir contends that “stories of origin have to be seen as contextual; people emphasizing different versions of their history according to what elements are meaningful to stress (2002:298).” As we shall see, those who utilize henna adornment in Moroccan society discursively anchor the art form in the canonical traditions of orthodoxy, as well as in the legacy of Morocco’s pluralistic history.



## Chapter 2

### The Matter of Medium / Medium Matters

Two first-time visitors to Morocco stand at opposite ends of a five-star hotel's terrace, overlooking the capital city's downtown center. The spatial division between them serves as a visual metaphor for diametrically-opposed ideological points of view. Our first guest, a wealthy Saudi businessman, surveys the landscape of a land reputed among Gulf Arabs for a decadent sex trade and shocking syncretic saint veneration. To our second visitor, an American human rights activist, groups of veiled women prove the heavy chains of patriarchal Islamic tradition. Two sets of eyes, through wildly variant cultural lenses, fall upon a scene in Rabat's busy streets. Unaware of one another's presence—and similar thought process—each silently muses, “What barbaric ignorance!”

The “shocking” image is far from uncommon in the Moroccan capital: an elderly woman, covered from head to toe by a *djellāba* (the loose, ankle-length robe worn by men and women alike) and *niqāb* (facial veil), strolls arm-in-arm with her young granddaughter—clad in a sleeveless shirt and skin-tight jeans, blond-highlighted hair flowing in the breeze. On neither partner of this seemingly incongruous pair do tattoos appear; only the grand-daughter's face bears the marks of heavy cosmetic decoration. Despite the variance in clothing, however, both women share one resonant adornment: deep red, eye-catching henna designs painted on their interlaced fingers—a visible advertisement that a celebratory event has recently taken place within the family.

To an outside observer, henna's cultural significance may disappear amidst surface assessments of gender in Moroccan society, yet broader dynamics of religion and sexuality are visible for those willing to look deeper—written on the skin in salient, localized ink. The eyes of our tourists on the hotel balcony glide across the henna patterns and fixate instead upon the highly changeable aspects of outward dress.<sup>35</sup> For the Saudi visitor, the young woman's morally reprehensible attire verges on public nudity; his American counterpart feels a pang of sorrow for the elderly woman, for whom her grand-daughter's liberation appeared two generations too late. These characters are stereotypical fictions, yet nonetheless represent predominant strains of thought on fashion, gender and Moroccan modernity.

Paradoxically—or perversely—the seemingly dichotomous forces of literal-minded, conservative reform and the universalisms of Western feminism's human rights discourse focus on the female body, and meet at the level of the flesh. Women's body modification practices have long elicited controversy from European colonial encounters to Islamic reform movements from earlier ages.<sup>36</sup> Although reform-minded Muslims may cite tattoos as outward signs of superstition or heresy, their secular-identified adversaries similarly code the adornment as an emblem of 'backwardness.' Stigmatized differently, some cultural producers, including artists and poets, celebrate female body adornment through the lens of Rousseau's Noble Savage—as a piece of folklore that ostensibly embodies a pristine, pre-colonial Tradition. Although I will return in Chapter Four to the appropriation of this female-affiliated folklore by nationalist artists, it must be noted here that the relationship between modernist notions of cultural identity and the

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<sup>35</sup> Moroccan women's fashion has undergone rapid changes since the French Protectorate and has recently attracted the attention of scholars of media, representation and fashion (El Alami 1999; Osman 2002; Skalli 2006; Sadiqi 2006).

<sup>36</sup> For example, fifteenth-century Moroccan reformer Abū 'Abdallāh Muḥammad ibn 'Abd ar-Raḥmān b. Abī Bakr b. Sulaymān Al-Jazūlī singled out practices for criticism that he deemed particularly detrimental to society due to ostensible origins in Christian practice, among them full-body tattooing (Cornell 1998: 187).

nostalgic (re)invention of Tradition relies heavily on women. Changes in fashion prove particularly fraught with respect to the female body from postcolonial Morocco to Egypt—and beyond.

To return briefly to the pair of women on the Rabat street, the shared body adornment of henna functions as a marker of liminality; inherently transitory, this record of beautification and celebration will gradually fade. The leaves of the henna plant produce an ephemeral decorative stain, but the art form's overarching significance proves far more permanent. Henna has endured—retaining cultural value through massive social upheaval—although other body adornments have not. Only the art form of henna remains shared across class, linguistic, ethnic and ideological lines in Moroccan society.<sup>37</sup> The question persists: why?

Henna, unlike the similarly temporary adornment *ḥarqūs*, retains a symbolic resonance that outlives its limited temporality. This symbolic charge, moreover, has proven far more long-lasting in cultural significance than the permanent modification of tattoo. This chapter argues that the resonant cultural charge of henna is rooted in local interpretations of Islamic tradition. Canonical Islamic texts accord the henna plant (and its coloring matter) a level of spiritual prominence due to its connection with the Prophet Muḥammad, who highly recommended its use. Henna's potency as an art form lies in its simultaneous valuation as significant substance and ritual performance. I first present a theorization of the relationship between meaning and medium in localized contexts, before advancing a typology of predominant female body adornment techniques in Morocco. I comparatively assess *ḥarqūs*, tattooing and henna in terms of substance matter, social function, design specificity and cultural prominence—and argue for consideration of these body adornments through the primary lens of significant materiality and

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<sup>37</sup> Compellingly, other Muslim-majority societies in North Africa evidence a multitude of split opinions on henna's cultural value. This is most noticeable in the divergent attitudes between Egyptian elites and popular classes.

localized meaning-making. Only henna, the “light of the Prophet (*nūr al-nabī*)”<sup>38</sup> crosses class, region and ethnicity to serve as a lasting culturally-specific art form and spiritual medium for Moroccan women.

### **On Anthropology and Art History: Theorizing Materiality**

Feminist performance artist Janine Antoni received international attention from the world of high culture for her 1992 sculpture “Gnaw.” The artist, motivated by a desire to present the body and its residues, transformed approximately 600 pounds of lard with her mouth—using the quotidian actions of eating as an innovative form of carving [Fig. 1]. To explain her interest in the selection of lard as a medium charged with meaning for an explicitly feminist sculpture, Antoni stated, “Lard is a stand-in for the female body, a feminine material, since females typically have a higher fat content than males.”<sup>39</sup> In a presentation at the Museum of Modern Art, Antoni elaborated, “I wanted to carve. I was also interested in the tradition of figurative sculpture, but rather than to describe the body, I decided to talk about the body by the residue it left on the object.”<sup>40</sup> Antoni credits her selection of this symbolic material to the lessons of the Minimalist art movement: “Minimalism really introduced fabrication to us, and what I was taught by Minimalism is that not only the material had meaning, but the process in which it was made.”<sup>41</sup> Although it may initially seem counter-intuitive, Antoni’s conceptualist work finds precedent not merely in the language of an avant-garde sphere of Minimalism and fine art, but also in multiple

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<sup>38</sup> This term, a local name for henna, is widely used throughout Morocco and in some parts of western Algeria—yet is unknown elsewhere.

<sup>39</sup> Laura Heon. “Janine Antoni’s Gnawing Idea.” *Gastronomica: The Journal of Food and Culture*. Vol. 1, No. 2 (Spring 2001), pp. 5-8., p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Janine Antoni. *MoMA2000: Open Ends (1960–2000)*. September 28, 2000–March 4, 2001.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

non-Western art practices.<sup>42</sup> Because of this, it is high time to reconsider the boundaries of media and conceptual artistic production.

The extended process of research for this dissertation has taken many turns, and forced me to critically reconsider multiple disciplinary boundaries—among them, the rigid divide between “Western” and “non-Western” art historiography. Antoni’s discussion of her groundbreaking contemporary performative/sculptural works is instructive here, and illustrates what Sidney L. Kasfir’s landmark essay “One Tribe, One Style? Paradigms in the Historiography of African Art,” refers to as an unchallenged disciplinary paradigm which remains firmly entrenched in the intellectual lens through which non-Western art forms are often examined.<sup>43</sup> Kasfir contends, “Certain paradigms...function as unquestioned assumptions when in force. Even more importantly, they are frequently invisible because they are rarely made explicit” (1984: 163). The relegation of body adornment by art historiography to anthropology and the predominant focus on representation testify to the endurance of such unchallenged paradigmatic thought.

The accolades granted to conceptual Western artists since the rise of post-modernism should draw our attention to such powerful and latent assumptions of art theory as Kasfir mentions. When cultural producers select particular media for their specific social valuation, such choices in contemporary Western “fine arts” are often lauded as theoretically insightful and ground-breaking. However, when Lega artists choose ivory as the appropriate medium in which to sculpt a Bwami secret society figurine, due to the signification of this rare material as a

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<sup>42</sup> Theoretical breakthroughs on feminist artwork and bodily practice have recently been claimed by theorists interested in Western tattoos and women’s subjectivities, most notably Baltzer-Jaray and Rodriguez 2012; Botz-Bernstein 2012; Kang 2012.

<sup>43</sup> Sidney L. Kasfir, “One Tribe, One Style? Paradigms in the Historiography of African Art,” *History in Africa* 11 (1984).

ritually-charged substance, dominant paradigms in art historiography (dis)locate the latter from art to the realm of anthropology and material culture.

To more fully illustrate this disciplinary divide, a brief contextualization of the present project's development is warranted. I began to study henna adornment in Morocco in 2001 as an undergraduate at the University of Kansas. My honors thesis in the field of art history sought to examine the iconography of Moroccan henna in relation to local beliefs concerning reproduction and religious practice. Following an initial field research trip in 2003, however, I began to doubt that designs were more important than the medium itself. A second period of field research (2005-2006) further undercut my earlier assumptions: multiple informants revealed that the significance of pattern choice pales in comparison to the meaning and presence of the substance of henna itself—*no other red material could replace it*. As I discuss in Chapter Three, the significance of henna is closely linked to its blood symbolism within the nexus of the Moroccan cultural imaginary.<sup>44</sup> The results of a third period of dissertation research (2010-2011) continued to complicate my initial thesis. Henna producers and consumers alike stressed to me that, although beautiful designs are valuable, the depth of color and the act of application far outweigh surface décor; substitution of substance would, by nature, fail to carry the *baraka* (blessing) bestowed on the material by the Prophet's approval.<sup>45</sup>

In the years since I began this study, multiple art historians and members of grant committees have reiterated to me that my research findings anchor this project in anthropology rather than art history. This assessment is problematic in a variety of ways. First and foremost, the selection of methodology should not arise from a desire to remain within the arbitrary

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<sup>44</sup> The symbolic connection between henna, bloodshed and *rite du passage* (life cycle) rituals also appears in other religious traditions. However, despite the diverse cultural usage of henna, only within the Moroccan Kingdom's orders does the adornment feature so prominently on every ritually-significant occasion.

<sup>45</sup> One henna seller in the old city of Fez, in fact, displayed Gulf-inspired design stencils for me and categorically denied that patterns carry any symbolism whatsoever.

boundaries of a research discipline: to ignore informants' reports or dismiss the actual findings of field research would risk an unethical skewing of the data—and ultimately betray an adherence to predetermined hypotheses. Finally, the analysis of contributions by theoretical pioneers of art historiography similarly highlights the problematic valorization of media choice in Western fine arts. The resultant paradox demands resolution. If socially-localized theorization of media indeed serves as a milestone in the development of conceptual art, henna adornment's blessed bodily residue certainly provides a precedent for Antoni's contribution. I by no means imply that Antoni drew from henna adornment. Rather, my aim is to draw attention to the parallels between her innovative media-based work, and a radically different symbolic material tied to the female body in a variant cultural context.

Drawing upon literary theory, art theorists have claimed the significance of medium as an innovative contribution by contemporary art producers. Rosalind Krauss' landmark essay "Sculpture in the Expanded Field," argues that medium refers not only to its own logic, but also refers to logic of the culture in which it is embedded.<sup>46</sup> Sculpture, she explains, is located as a monument in a spatial location, but in its "negative condition" refers to no place; rather, it serves as a reference to its essentially nomadic condition. For present purposes, Krauss' theoretical contribution lies in her critique of the notion that Euro-American modern art occupies an idealized, autonomous space. This moment of discovery on the part of Krauss was contemporaneous with the parallel realization by African art historians that African art was not always just a manifestation of a bounded cultural unit.

Because of the burden of describing such fluctuations in cultural context, the field of African studies in general began to address artistic agency, the major concern of the so-called 1980s "cultural turn." African art history looked closely at agency in "popular" or tourist art in

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<sup>46</sup> Rosalind Krauss, "Sculpture in the Expanded Field." *October* 8 (Spring 1979), 30- 44.

Africa. Scholars, however, displayed anxiety over whether certain media, particularly copies of traditional sculptural forms and mass-produced street art, could be considered “authentically” African art. The question of authenticity in contemporary art took an important turn with the 1988 publication of Paul Lane’s “Tourism and Social Change among the Dogon,” which argues that tradition is a series of “choices and strategies of the individuals involved.”<sup>47</sup> Tradition, for Lane, can be understood as a performance with participants who refer to a culture by their own choice, but are not necessarily *de facto* products of that culture.

In conjunction with Krauss’ assertion that the selection of particular artistic media refers to a certain internal logic, the cultural turn destabilizes a paradigmatic assumption in Western art history—that visuality necessarily ranks as *prima facie* evidence in valuations of “authentic” cultural production over other criteria such as performance, process or medium.<sup>48</sup> In the case of henna, regardless of whether an individual, named identity is attached to the work of art (singularity of authorship itself being an Enlightenment construction). The medium provides the vehicle for social performances of normative gender and the vector for interpretation in both the art’s production *and* its reception.

In previous studies of African art, when the conventions of style have been defined through visual formulae, creative agency is located within the cultural collective.<sup>49</sup> Similarly, when the aim of research is to locate repetition in symbols and/or motifs across space or time—as proof of a primordial culture—the medium of an artwork becomes a facet of its style.<sup>50</sup> Style, when divorced from medium, becomes a visual formula that reduces the amount of artistic

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Lane, “Tourism and Social Change among the Dogon.” *African Arts* 21:4 (August 1988), 66-69+92.

<sup>48</sup> This assumption can be seen, for example, in the disciplinary division between art historiography and anthropology in assessments of Bwami figurines produced by the Lega, as previously discussed.

<sup>49</sup> Recent scholarship has challenged this body of canonical art. See Kasfir, L. and T. Förster, Eds. 2013. *African Art and Agency in the Workshop*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

<sup>50</sup> See Erwin Panofsky, “The History of Art as a Humanistic Discipline.” *Meaning in the Visual Arts: Papers in and on Art History* (Garden City, NY: 1955).



decision-making that must occur in each instance of repetition. Much of this type of research—what Erwin Panofsky terms “scientific,” rather than “humanistic” research—is intimately tied to the European colonial project's curtailment of native agency under foreign rule.<sup>51</sup> By being located thematically between the “cultural turn” in Art History, and the growing trend by avant-garde artists to emphasize critically-charged conceptualizations of medium, this chapter challenges the assumptions of non-Western art history while simultaneously remaining rooted in the theoretical contributions of Western art theorists.

In addition to Kasfir and Krauss, three pioneering contributors to the field of art historiography—Erwin Panofsky, Michael Baxandall and Arhurd Danto—have demonstrated the importance of considering henna as an art form in which meaning is discerned not merely in surface patterns but—also—within the conceptualization of materiality itself. German art historian Erwin Panofsky's critical 1939 text, *Studies in Iconology: Humanist Themes in the Art of the Renaissance*, postulates layered stages of meaning-formation in art: 1) primary/natural subject matter 2) conventional/subjective subject matter, and 3) tertiary/intrinsic content and meaning. Although Panofsky's methodology has contributed to more nuanced readings of symbolic content and referential meanings underlying Northern Renaissance masterpieces, it is also relevant to the present study. The final phase of Panofsky's typology of artistic interpretation (the tertiary/intrinsic) locates artistic production within its historical and cultural contexts. In the case of an adornment practice such as henna design, the materiality of substance cannot be divorced from the religious and cultural contexts which underlie a multitude of meanings.

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<sup>51</sup> Although Kasfir's 1984 article provides a now-classic critique of this logic for sub-Saharan masking traditions, recent work on colonial-era North Africa and the restructuring of craft production remains dependent on imperial fictions of authenticity: See Irbouh (2005) and McLaren (2006).

Similarly, British art historian and curator Michael Baxandall's notion of the "period eye" provides a theoretical method that is critical for understanding henna as a resonant medium, decodable as an art form in local contexts. Although Baxandall's 1988 *Painting and Experience in Fifteenth-Century Italy: A Primer in the Social History of Pictorial Style* was written to develop a culturally specific analytical method for deconstructing meaning in Renaissance Italian painting, his ultimate emphasis on social context for the production and reception of meaning proves instructive for considering the nexus of associations within which henna, as a resonant medium, operates. Like Panofsky, Baxandall assigns value to the localized nature of knowledge acquisition surrounding objects of art production. Although considered by many to be an anthropological approach to art objects, Baxandall's "period eye" has been utilized by a variety of art historians to illuminate the social contexts in which art production is embedded and meaning is made.

Philosopher and art critic Arthur Danto provides the firmest anchor of the present study within the discipline of art historiography. Much of Danto's work focuses on contested definitions of "art," representational theory and aesthetic philosophy. In an oft-quoted statement on the so-called "end of art," Danto argues that art began with:

[...] imitation, followed by an era of ideology, followed by our post-historical era in which, with qualification, anything goes... In our narrative, at first only mimesis was art, then several things were art but each tried to extinguish its competitors, and then, finally, it became apparent that there were no stylistic or philosophical constraints. There is no special way works of art have to be. And that is the present and, I should say, the final moment in the master narrative. It is the end of the story.<sup>52</sup>

Yet this "end of the story" may provide instead an opening for the study of non-Western arts. If the definitional nature of art in the Western context has, as Danto points out, perpetually

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<sup>52</sup> Danto, Arthur (1998). *After the End of Art: Contemporary Art and the Pale of History*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 47.

fluctuated and has long since evolved past the mimetic stage, should we not reconsider our evaluations of non-Western art forms which never attached predominant significance to the imitative function?

Kimberly Baltzer-Jaray and Tanya Rodriguez invoke Danto's exploration of institutional art theory to argue for a shift in the canonical valuations of tattoo practice.<sup>53</sup> These authors argue against the inclusion of tattoo practice within the space of a museum's walls while also contending that institutional frameworks of theorization must be opened up to accommodate fresh perspectives. Philosophy professor Nicolas Michaud similarly addresses the myopia of art theory in relation to tattoo in his recent (and under-appreciated) critical essay, "Are Tattoos Art?" (2012). Michaud applies three methodological paradigms of canonical art historiography to the question of the validity of tattoos as an art form: these are 1) expressionism 2) formalism, and 3) institutional art world theory. In Michaud's final reading, these categorizations certainly apply to tattoos (albeit selectively), yet body modification is best understood holistically as a form of performance art, in profound engagement between mobile pictorial symbolism and mortality. In conjunction with Danto's "end of art" explorations, these essays present a compelling case for the theoretical reconsideration of body adornment practices within art historiography. However, the use of institutional theory—i.e., art is art as it is recognizable as such—remains fundamentally teleological and accounts for only half of the story. It is another work by Danto that provides the firmest argument not only for the inclusion of body adornment within the canon of "art," but also the reevaluation of Western art history's sensory hierarchy. Privileging visual aspects over materiality itself may not be applicable in other cultural contexts.

Coupled with the questions raised by Danto's insight on the end of art, his discussion of the imaginary "Pot and Basket" tribes provides a fresh paradigm in which to consider the

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<sup>53</sup> "Fleshy Canvas: Aesthetics of Tattoos from Feminist and Hermeneutical Perspectives" (2012: 40-42).

meaning and function of henna adornment within Moroccan society (1988: 23-26). Danto presents two imaginary groups separated by a few miles who produce objects that are indistinguishable to the eyes of observers. Danto's invention of the hypothetical Pot and Basket people invites us to consider the point at which the object is transformed into "art." For the Pot people, baskets may be purely utilitarian, yet the production of pots gives tangible form to a broader abstraction of localized cosmology; the inverse is true for the people of the Basket. Thus, for Danto, the definition of art resides not so much within an indefinable, vague, and anomalous quality (i.e., "I know art when I see it"), but is rather based on an underlying theorization or *act of meaning-making*. Kasfir (2007) describes this as a "philosophical impasse" presented by Danto and "an elegant intellectual construct without an empirical underpinning." She adroitly deploys the fable to serve as a crucial theoretical terrain upon which to reconsider valuations of art and authenticity in postcolonial and globalized African arts (2007: 189-190).

If, as Kasfir and Danto demonstrate, "art" resides in local theorizations, one must be prepared to accept that the terms "art historical" and "anthropological" are not mutually exclusive but remain as intertwined and permeable as the thinly separated domains of "sacred" and "profane." Building upon the pioneering philosophical insights of these recognized art theorists, I present the following evaluative scale of ritually-charged body adornment techniques in Moroccan society. Folk mythology, canonical textual sources, and ritualized practices surrounding henna in Moroccan culture evidence a thick level of culturally-localized theorization. Hence, this art form must be removed from the realm of anthropological folklore; the study of this adornment, as we have seen, is justified as a category of "art."

### ***Harqūṣ*: Faded Cosmetic, Forgotten Memory**

“*Ḥarqūṣ*” is not a term used in everyday conversation. The adornment’s rarity is rendered explicit by the following exchange with a Moroccan colleague in her mid-fifties. She was teasing me about acting like a grumpy, elderly woman, and joking back in kind, I responded, “*Iyyeh – ‘indī wašm as-siyyala u ḥta al ḥarqūṣ!*” (Of course – I even have the chin tattoo and *ḥarqūṣ!*) She initially regarded me with a blank stare and then burst out laughing, telling me that she had not heard this word in over twenty years. She had, in fact, forgotten that the body adornment called *ḥarqūṣ* even existed (she travels back to Morocco quite frequently, as many of her family members still reside in the Kingdom).

Edward A. Westermarck describes *ḥarqūṣ* as a pigment composed of wood, ashes, tar and assorted spices (1926, vol. ii: 396); Herber lists the additional components of copper sulfate and incense (in Camps 2002: 3409-10). Mohamed Sijelmassi cites pistachios, olive oil and carbonized rose petals (2007:90). Black in color, *ḥarqūṣ* sometimes contains pitch, pot black, oil, leaves and kohl (Searight 159). Marie Morin-Barde suggests that oil and kohl account for primary materials (1990: 24), to which Maria Messina adds India ink, fruit, wood and pitch (1991: 260).

Although colonial-era scholarship recorded *ḥarqūṣ* as an adornment once widespread in nineteenth and twentieth-century Morocco, as a periodic resident and visitor to the country since 2002, I have never seen it used. *Ḥarqūṣ*, like henna, is an impermanent skin decoration, but it is nearly non-existent in contemporary Morocco and Algeria. The term is still known in Tunisia (if not the practice itself), where the word now refers to an alternative form of the eye-brow pencil.<sup>54</sup> J. Herber records that the decoration was once worn by women of all social classes, ranging from prostitutes to married women from honorable families (Camps 2002: 3409). By

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<sup>54</sup> In Egypt, I was unable to locate anyone that recognized the term, or descriptions of the art form.

the time of Susan Searight's 1989 landmark study of Moroccan traditional tattooing, *ḥarqūṣ* was already rapidly disappearing. Searight notes that she witnessed very few women sporting the adornment, even in remote rural areas; far more women continued to bear the marks of tattoos (1989: 160).

With few exceptions (notably Morin-Barde 1990:24, who incorrectly claims that this adornment is practiced everywhere), scholars either mention *ḥarqūṣ* only in passing or fail to comment on it at all, further suggesting its rarity. The majority of publications on Moroccan body adornment include not a single mention of this art form, not even in Deborah Kapchan's otherwise thorough study "Women's Body Signs" (1996) and Patricia Kelly Splurles' dissertation, *Henna for Brides and Gazelles: Ritual, Women's Work and Tourism in Morocco* (2004). A variety of explanations can account for this omission in the literature. Most importantly, the absence of attention to *ḥarqūṣ* reveals a disproportionate emphasis given by colonial-era scholarship (from which much contemporary work draws) on tattooing as tribal identification, and on henna as the paramount Moroccan "cosmetic."

Few reliable clues exist to explain the etymology of the term "*ḥarqūṣ*." The assumption of an Arabic point of origin for the technique is problematic, given the language's root structure: the term appears to derive from ḥ-r-q-ṣ, which does not contain any readily derivable signification. Quadriliteral roots in Arabic grammatical structure often indicate loans from a foreign language, as the majority of the lexicon contains triliteral roots. Because of this anomaly, J. Herber has suggested that not only is *ḥarqūṣ* a foreign art form, but that it was imported to Morocco by female prostitutes from beyond the Kingdom's borders (1929). Further

evidence points away from a Tamazight (Berber) linguistic origin; Searight records a separate set of terminology for the adornment among Amazigh communities.<sup>55</sup>

A more credible explanation, albeit speculative, may reside in the substance matter itself. As stated above, the quadrilateral “ḥ-r-q-ṣ” does not lend itself to meaningful derivation; however, the root ḥ-r-q includes the active verbs “to scald,” “to burn,” and “to set on fire” (Hans Wehr 199-200); this trilateral, moreover, provides the base for the derived noun “muḥarqaṣ,” a term that refers to combustible fuel.<sup>56</sup> This etymological theory finds a basis in the technique and materiality of *ḥarqūṣ*: the art form is essentially a medium of amalgamation, comprised by a variety of burnt matter.

Ingredients may vary, yet burnt matter constitutes the common denominator of *ḥarqūṣ*. None of the recipes with which I am familiar highlight other constituent substances as inherently significant; instead, the process of production functions as a definitional determinant. Although the literature records variations in methods of application and cosmetic ingredients, descriptions of *ḥarqūṣ* production remain consistent. Herber’s entry in Gabriel Camps’ *Encyclopédie berbère* provides the clearest account of its method of preparation (2002: 3409-10). A mixture of the varied elements described above is placed in a hermetically sealed container, such as a ceramic pot near a fire. As the container heats, the enclosed materials slowly melt and amalgamate into a thick, black liquid; practitioners then apply the resulting pigment with a stick, blade of grass, or similarly blunt object to the face of the wearer.

The bodily placement and designs of *ḥarqūṣ* are considerably more restricted than the ingredients of the cosmetic. *Ḥarqūṣ* designs appear primarily on women’s faces, and are

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<sup>55</sup> Searight records “tazuta” or “tazult” (1989: 159), and Morin-Barde claims that Berber terminology for *ḥarqūṣ* also includes “tazuda” (1990: 24).

<sup>56</sup> I am not proficient in any Tamazight dialects and thus, I am unable to hazard an educated guess as to the semantic connotations of the Berber terminology for *ḥarqūṣ*. It remains noteworthy, however, that the Arabic term retains its currency in the vernacular for this rapidly disappearing cosmetic.

concentrated on the forehead, chin, cheeks or nose.<sup>57</sup> Ernest-Gustave Gobert, a French anthropologist who studied late nineteenth-century Tunisian cosmetics, claims that *ḥarqūṣ* provided a licit alternative to the tattoos located on female hands and feet (Gobert 2003 59-63); Herber similarly recorded the occasional use of *ḥarqūṣ* on the hands and feet of Moroccan women (Camps 2002: 3412). Nonetheless, the majority of scholars locate the central axis of a woman's face as the canvas for *ḥarqūṣ* adornment (Becker 2006: 156). Typically, this adornment fulfills an aesthetic purpose, connecting the eyebrows, and emphasizing facial verticality by creating an elongated line down the nose (Searight 1989: 159-60).

The short shelf-life of *ḥarqūṣ*, its lack of spiritually-charged constituent elements, and the basic nature of the art form's patterns further suggest a cosmetic rather than a ritual significance. Recorded patterns, much like tattoos, consist of basic angles, lines and dot formations. Instead of the ornate or elaborate designs recognizable from henna adornment, *ḥarqūṣ* patterns more closely resemble the geometrical forms found in Moroccan tattoos.<sup>58</sup> The bulk of scholarship fails to consider regional variance in design, with the exception of Herber, who argues that the only *ḥarqūṣ* practice in Fez evidences a local style. He attributes this variance to a strong influence from the former imperial city's distinctive tradition of embroidery.<sup>59</sup> By and large, *ḥarqūṣ*, henna, and tattoo all share basic design elements that characterize other art practices dominated by women—for example, pottery and weaving. Such resemblances suggest a gendered iconographic language, which will be discussed further in Chapter Three.

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<sup>57</sup> I have never heard or read an account of men's use of *ḥarqūṣ*; more than henna or tattoo, the adornment appears to be solely feminine in nature.

<sup>58</sup> Technology of application, in part, accounts for this divergence. The use of syringes and stencils in henna adornment allow for more complex design elements.

<sup>59</sup> The supposedly "authentic" regional traditions of Moroccan crafts, however, often date to the organization of arts under the French Protectorate. Refer to Hamid Irbouh (1996) and McLaren (2006).



Beyond the design resemblance between *ḥarqūṣ* and tattoo, similar facial placement coupled with the contemporary scarcity of the practice, renders historicization problematic. Searight comments on the difficulty of differentiating the two types of adornment based on colonial-era photographic documentation and notes that a typical lack of explanation in colonial-era accounts renders reliable identification impossible (1989: 162). An image taken by Jean Besancenot evidences this dilemma [Fig. 2]. A photograph dating between 1934 and 1937, captures a bride from the capital city of Rabat, posing before of henna adornment ceremony. The use of a white pigmentation to create ornate dot patterns on her chin, forehead and cheeks is evident, yet the lack of color in the photograph renders definitive identification of what seems to be black pigmentation difficult, if not impossible. Upon close examination, it is evident that some type of dark cosmetic elongates the bride's eyebrows along a horizontal axis, with an additional shadowy mark running vertically along her chin. Although the eyebrow coloration appears consistent with other documentation compiled on *ḥarqūṣ*, the chin mark is much less certain. The photograph's grainy quality makes it impossible to distinguish specific technical aspects which might differentiate tattoo from *ḥarqūṣ*.

An engraving by Besancenot, presents an easier study [Fig. 3]. In this depiction of a Muslim bride from Rabat's sister city of Salé, the use of *ḥarqūṣ* is more obvious: her eyebrows have been enhanced to form sharpened boomerang-like patterns, above which appear white dots of another cosmetic pigment. Unfortunately, Besancenot did not include annotations that present a detailed adornment typology; thus, confirmation of *ḥarqūṣ* is impossible. A third image, again an engraving by Besancenot, provides the most concrete example of this difficulty [Fig. 4]. A female urban dweller from the northern Moroccan city of Tetouan is depicted clad in the region's distinctive traditional caftan. Although her clothing may be readily identifiable as typical mid-

twentieth century Tetouan fashion, it is impossible to distinguish with any degree of precision the type of cosmetic adornments worn on her face. Thick dark strokes have been used to depict conjoined eyebrows, which is consistent with descriptions of *ḥarqūṣ* usage. However, a vertical marking appears on the woman's chin, extending from the bottom lip to the underside of the chin. The cross-hatch patterns along either side of this vertical line are consistent with both recorded *ḥarqūṣ* patterns and tattoo; yet again, Besancenot's descriptive omissions preclude definitive conclusions.

Given that *ḥarqūṣ* and tattoo resemble one another in both placement and design, multiple scholars have advanced the idea that *ḥarqūṣ* provides a licit alternative to the scripturally-proscribed practice of traditional tattooing (Morin-Barde 1990; Herber 1929). Searight objects to this supposition, noting that although *ḥarqūṣ* is primarily confined to the face, in many communities, tattoos occur in other locations such as the thighs, back, shoulder blades, pubis, wrists and ankles (1989: 162-3). Following the substitution thesis, one would expect to find *ḥarqūṣ* all over the body—which simply has not been the case.

More compelling reasons exist, however, to reject the idea that *ḥarqūṣ* provides an acceptable religious alternative to tattoo. The majority of research on *ḥarqūṣ* has been undertaken in regions of Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia where traditional tattooing was widespread in the pre-colonial era—suggesting that *ḥarqūṣ* and tattoo supplemented rather than replaced each another. Moreover, one should assume that if tattoo proved culturally significant and sufficiently meaningful enough to necessitate the invention of an acceptable alternative, such a substitution would gradually replace the adornment for which it was intended to stand in. This does not appear to be the case; for the informants with whom I have spoken, tattoos were

associated with a resonant memory of mothers, grandmothers (and in some cases, childhood experiences), yet the word “*ḥarqūṣ*” elicited faint, if any, recollections.

It is far more likely that *ḥarqūṣ*—as suggested by our earlier etymological speculation—belongs to the realm of cosmetic adornment, as opposed to the domain of highly-charged ritual substances. As an amalgamation of various quotidian materials, the decoration is not sufficiently significant to preclude the dynamism of changing fashion. Indeed, the bulk of scholars agree that the predominant function of *ḥarqūṣ* is cosmetic decoration and beautification—to the extent that the term encompassed multiple uses (Camps 2002; Morin-Barde 1990; Guessous 2001; Gobert 2003). In twentieth-century Tunisia, “*ḥarqūṣ*” described a material used for fabricated beauty marks (Hejaiej 1996: 258). In Algeria, previous generations used the term to describe an alternate form of kohl, or eye makeup (Zoubida 1998: 78). Soumaya Namaane Guessous records that Moroccan “*ḥarqūṣ*” referred generally to makeup, and was historically used by women on festive occasions for seduction (2001: 232). Dissenting accounts, however, merit a brief investigation.

Cola Alberich (1949) accords *ḥarqūṣ* a ritual value in the negotiation of life-crisis events, yet I am unfamiliar with any other scholarly accounts to substantiate this claim. Cynthia Becker mentions that among former generations of the Ait Khabbash community, *ḥarqūṣ* was used on the face of the bride on the third day of her wedding (2006: 156). Westermarck relates a rare custom of pregnant women decorating their eyebrows with *ḥarqūṣ* patterns prior to the birth of a child, and yet curiously this generally thorough ethnographer offers no speculation as to its ritual purpose or symbolic function (1926, vol. ii, 396).

The few mentions of *ḥarqūṣ* on specifically ritual occasions deserve significant reevaluation. Although Herber concludes that women utilize *ḥarqūṣ* as a cosmetic, he relates a

curious custom of the adornment's application on newborns (Camps 2002: 3410). Forty days following the birth of a baby, parents present the new child to saints to assure a blessed and long life, at which time *ḥarqūṣ* is applied to the infant's face in place of tattoos. In cases such as this, where the child is too young to undergo the actual act of tattooing, I contend that *ḥarqūṣ* does indeed function as a cosmetic stand-in but that this use is not significant in itself. Tattooing a newborn's face is unheard of in North Africa, for the obvious reason that such early body modification would prove highly dangerous. In this light, it becomes possible that *ḥarqūṣ* once served as a substitute for tattooing on limited occasions, yet previously discussed evidence does not bear out the generalization that this temporary art form replaced permanent body adornment to a significant degree. Underscoring the cosmetic function of *ḥarqūṣ*, an association with adornment and beautification continues to exist in Moroccan proverbs. The phrase, “*Zwina blā ḥarqūṣ*” (beautiful without makeup), denotes a woman whose natural beauty renders embellishment counter-productive. Although this form of adornment is now seldom practiced, its cosmetic associations live on—in a fading vernacular.

### ***Wašm*: Ideological Inscription and Heretical Text**

Unlike the dearth of information available concerning *ḥarqūṣ*, a considerable body of literature devoted to North African tattoo practices exists, carried out in regions under French colonial control in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Before an examination of this source material, the framework in which the information was obtained merits analysis. Postcolonial and subaltern studies have called attention to the influence of ideology on historical knowledge, particularly in the wake of European imperialism (Said 1978, 1981, 1993, Chakrabarty 2000,

Spivak 1987, 1999; Trumbull IV 2009). In particular, the roots of anthropology as a colonially-aligned discipline have attracted heated critique (Diane Lewis 1973, 2004), especially in terms of knowledge production surrounding the Middle East and North Africa (Dabashi 2012, Asad 1991; Eickelman 1981).

Much of the extant scholarship concerning North African tattooing was initially collected by medical workers-cum-ethnographers embedded with military missions; more contemporary studies build upon this same body of literature. The work of one such amateur anthropologist, J. Herber, provides the most in-depth collection of tattoo records from North Africa, particularly Morocco, and evidences the skewed perspective on this art form inherited by later anthropological studies (Herber 1921, 1922, 1923, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1950, 1951; Field 1958; Marcy 1930; Vandenbrock 2000).<sup>60</sup> As a medical doctor, Herber had access to Moroccan women, a segment of society closed to the vast majority of men, whether North African or European. Critically, one must note that this data is further biased by the focal point of Herber's work: prisons and hospitals [**Fig. 5**]. Many of the women to whom Herber gained access were prostitutes, or were labeled as such, and thus cannot shed light on tattooing as a generalized phenomenon among Moroccan women.

The use of prostitutes as stand-ins, generalizable for the "Moroccan" or "Arab/Muslim" woman, during the colonial encounter has been well-documented in Orientalist views of North Africa and the Middle East, whether in the postcard industry (Alloula 1987), *National Geographic* magazine (Steet 2000), or Romanticist painters' models (Evans and Phillips 2007).<sup>61</sup> As William C. Young points out, many of Dr. Herber's essays in particular feature language deliberately selected for "shock" value among his European audience, exploiting the paradoxical

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<sup>60</sup> Herber's initial objective was to isolate tribal motifs in Moroccan tattoos, yet he was ultimately unable to do so.

<sup>61</sup> See also Nakkouch (Messaoudi and Rhissassi 2008) and Laamiri (Messaoudi and Rhissassi 2008).

Victorian repression of and fascination with sexuality (Sault: 1994 59-60). The publication of prostitutes' bodily practices as indicative of a backwards, tribally-marked, and decadent "East" relates to a long tradition in Western ethnography that similarly pathologizes tattooing as a component of backwards society. This line of thought is typified by New World writings on the indigenous inhabitants of the Americas (Taliaferro and Odden 2012: 4-6), as well as the testimonies of European missionaries dispatched to the Pacific eager to Christianize native populations, partially through the forcible eradication of this 'barbaric' practice (Ellis 2012: 22-24). Further emblematic of the ideological connection between colonial racism and pseudo-scientific anthropological investigation is the genre of the travelogue.<sup>62</sup>

Moreover, such studies are colored by the trajectory of tattoo studies in American and European societies, where the field of criminology developed a particular brand of pathology classification based on tattoos of convicts in prison communities to better profile possible offenders (Caplan 1997). The pathology attached to tattoo that informs such early studies is not limited to outdated travelogues, criminological studies or colonial "sciences," but also appears in the work of contemporary cultural theorists (Fenske 2007). In American Studies, the stigmatization of adornment may also be attributable to the development of tattooing among counter-culture movements, as well as its early appearance as a clandestine, illegal, and therefore unregulated practice (Rakovic 2012). Stephen Connor implies that tattooing is inherently linked to scarification, itself the "very sign of spoiling and disfigurement" (1998: 55). According to Nina Jablonski, tattoos serve cross-culturally as "lasting inscriptions" that delineate "affiliation to social unit" (2006: 150).

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<sup>62</sup> For a typical account, see H.J.B. Atkins, "The North African Background III: Private Life," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 47, No. 187 (April, 1948), p. 110, where we are told by a surgeon stationed in various north African countries in World War II that tattoos are universal for peasant women and also occur among men, who use "cabbalistic" pattern to ward off the jinn. Other paradigmatic examples include Bensusan 1904; Machab 1902; Brunot and Gotteland 1937; Carpenter 1927; Epton 1958.

Bolstering such sweeping statements, scholars also present historical evidence of body modification from prehistoric times, assuming a stasis in social meaning, and assigning essentialist and universalist meanings across vastly different temporal and cultural contexts.<sup>63</sup> It is only very recently that interdisciplinary scholars have begun to move away from these earlier valuations of tattooing as a byproduct of tribal societies or the criminally predisposed (Featherstone 2000; Inckle 2007). Rock Rakovic's edited volume, *Tattoos: Philosophy for Everyone* (2012) presents a corrective contribution to body adornment studies and argues for a significant reevaluation of this art from a variety of academic disciplinary perspectives.

Arnold Rubin's landmark contribution, *Marks of Civilization* (1988) was the first text to challenge such negative views of tattooing, arguing that body modification practices, in fact, constitute a fundamental role in civilizational progress and serves to humanize its wearers; this is a far cry from earlier scholarship, which considers such adornment the mark of "savage" cultures.<sup>64</sup> The primitivist views against which Rubin argues have certainly impacted the treatment that tattooing in Morocco has received from scholars who have been eager to find within women's adornment practice proof of lineage affiliations and tribal identification denoting a lesser, backward society untouched by enlightened Western civilization. Even Henry Field, one of the most authoritative sources to date on tattoo practices throughout the Islamic world, includes tribalism and pathology into an explanatory paradigm for body modification: "tattooing as a method of identification has been used by tribal groups as well as by more modern social units. It is also current among criminals and gangs" (1958: 5).

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<sup>63</sup> For example, Jablonksi claims that body marking is primarily about the social unit. In her work, she includes a brief survey of body adornment from the late Paleolithic period, with pervasive skin décor as the norm, throughout the Neolithic Age (2006: 142).

<sup>64</sup> See also : Clinton R. Sanders. *Customizing the Body: The Art and Culture of Tattooing*. Philadelphia, PN: Temple University Press, 1989.

Although few in-depth studies on Moroccan tattooing exist, this body of literature nonetheless outnumbers explorations of other types of body adornments, such as henna or *ḥarqūs*. The overrepresentation of tattooing in body adornment research may be explained by the historical development of ethnography as previously discussed. However, fixation on “difference” accounts for only part of the skewed research: restricted access to female populations was not only enabled through practices of active gender segregation, but also by means of mobile restrictions on female visibility—in short, veiling. Facial coverings allowed only fleeting glimpses of a woman’s forehead and eyes, providing a visual target for fixation on tattoos of [Fig. 6]. Furthermore, the permanence of tattoo (and hence, access of visibility), facilitates an easier process of research than do the impermanent natures of *ḥarqūs* and henna.

Scholarly assessments of North African tattoo practices are rare, and the majority of secondary source materials derive from military ethnographers in search of tribal or regional affiliation patterns (typified by accounts such as Alberich 1949: 71-142). More recent analyses replicate the tribal thesis by overreliance on colonial-era sources (Fiore 1982). Some current studies by Moroccan scholars do attempt to move beyond such material (Khatibi 1983, Sijelmassi 1986); these works, however, frame tattoo as an outgrowth of broader cultural heritage, rather than as an art form worthy of investigation in its own right. The most recent and in-depth account remains Susan Searight’s three-volume study, *The Use and Function of Tattooing on Moroccan Women*, which ultimately rejects any singular ethnic, linguistic or tribal explanatory thesis and calls for further investigation on the art form’s diverse functions in Moroccan history (1989).

Tattooing may have fallen from favor in recent decades, but has long left historical imprints on North Africa. According to Mustapha Akhmisse, the practice dates to ancient Egypt



(2000: 77).<sup>65</sup> As early as the Fifth Dynasty (approximately 2500 BCE), tomb inscriptions and other visual records identify Libyan invaders by virtue of tattoo designs identifiably linked to cultures from the Western Desert, and earlier evidence of regional tattoo practice appears in prehistoric cave paintings scattered throughout the Sahara desert (Seaight 1989: vol. 1, 36-8). Legends abound as to the historical origins of Moroccan tattooing. Seaight records the attribution by informants to tattoo's origins at the time of the Roman conquest in the Rif (1989: vol.2, 172). According to this account, men fleeing the battlefield were forcibly tattooed by the women of their families in an effort to shame them, branding them as women as punishment for a lack of a supposedly "masculine" courage.<sup>66</sup> Certainly, historical evidence suggests a much more distant historical point of origin, yet the story is revealing for its explanation of tattooing as a distinctive mark of femininity. Some scholars have suggested that tattoos were placed along the chins of Tamazight-speaking women as replacement beards; in the event of a husband's loss, this mark would identify a widow's previous status as a married woman [Figs. 7-8]. I have also been told that the predominance of cross forms in tattooing points towards the same era of Roman influence; however, in this instance, informers suggested that wily Berbers branded themselves "as Christian" in an attempt to evade imperial taxation.<sup>67</sup> The peculiarities of origin myths vary considerably, yet scholars concur that the adornment's roots predate Islam, several of whom argue for a Neolithic period point of origin (Morin-Barde 1990:24).<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> For further reading on the history of tattooing in North Africa, see Lhote 1973; Keimer 1948; Hugot 1974; Charles-Picaud 1958.

<sup>66</sup> Compellingly, those reminiscing about resistance in colonial-era Morocco recount similar stories, also in the Rif, in which henna was used to mark "men as women," and thus cowards.

<sup>67</sup> I heard this particular account from an elderly Arab man who made no secret to me of his contempt for Berbers in general, and the Rif region in particular. In his mind, Berbers could only be considered nominally attached to any religion and register as non-believers.

<sup>68</sup> cf. Le Quellec, who argues that the origin of tattoo motifs in contemporary Morocco can be found in Saharan cave wall painting (1993: 399-407).

However widespread and ancient tattooing may be in Northern Africa, like *ḥarqūṣ*, the adornment has steadily decreased in prominence over the course of the past four decades. Although the signifier itself fades with each successive generation, the cultural signification of tattooing remains charged as a site of pre-colonial nostalgia. Termed *wašm* in Arabic, the art form carries with it associations of permanence and blood connection. Jamila Bargach's study of Moroccan adoption cites the famous 1970 film by Hamid Bennani, entitled *Washma* (tattoo) as emblematic of the family as a Moroccan cultural construct. The film profiles the struggles faced by an adopted child, never able to truly escape the legacy and destiny attached to the accident of birth. To Bargach, the title chosen by Bennani evokes a Derridean "trace, one that can be erased neither from the body nor from the memory" (2002: 155). Such an association of tattooing with permanence and lineage as cultural ideals is intimately tied to the notion of women as the site of social memory—which, as discussed in Chapter Four, inspired postcolonial artists in search of an authentic national identity.

In the nexus of symbolic signification, etymology may partially account for this associative meaning. According to Searight, the Arabic term *wašm* derives from the root *w/š/m*, simultaneously denoting marks of ownership (for example, brands to distinguish cattle) and cosmetic embellishment (1989, vol.1: 60). She further argues that Tamazight terminology on tattooing emphasizes the adornment's therapeutic use value (such as blood-letting), while Arabic terms remain decidedly neutral. None of the readily derivable terms from the Arabic root, moreover, evoke religiosity nor any generalized sense of the sacred. The position occupied by tattooing in cultural memory appears to stem from a dual sense of permanence and beautification: the practice itself is progressively disappearing, but a mention of the practice will

often elicit recollections of elderly female family members, memories which evoke the visceral physicality of nostalgia, belonging and Tradition.

Tattoo's resonance as a feminine cultural signifier is by no means confined to contemporary Morocco. Curiously, however, although the practice of tattooing is fading across the region, henna remains a potent symbol of local identity only in Morocco. In Algeria, tattooing, rather than henna, retains the rich connotations of traditional society—where the body modification still conjures memories of pre-colonial feminine beauty par excellence.<sup>69</sup> Moreover, Algerian recollections of traditional tattoos often evoke the explicitly distinctive cultural identity of Tamazight-dialect speakers of the Kabyle region and Aurès mountains, rather than a generalized social practice shared with Arabic speakers, or as a pan-Algerian, Islamic pre-colonial practice.<sup>70</sup> Gobert records that Tunisian tattoos were not restricted to women, although the body modification of both sexes already faced eventual extinction by the nineteenth century French occupation, by which point in time the supernatural functions of tattoo had already given way to mere ornamental value (2003: 91). The continued decline of Tunisian tattooing, however, most likely owes more to the aggressive rhetoric of gender reform espoused by President Habib Bourguiba, the champion of secular modernity, than the explanatory thesis attributing the art's disappearance in that society to a rise in literacy and subsequent Islamization. The latter theory may have some currency in the case of Morocco. However, vast divergences

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<sup>69</sup> As will be discussed in Chapter Four, nationalist artists in Morocco selected henna as the ideal cultural tradition on which to build a specifically Moroccan fine arts form post-independence. However, in neighboring Algeria, artists such as Denis Martinez led the foundation of high art through the formation of a movement termed "Wachm," or "Tattoo," and looked not to henna patterns, but to tattoos as the ideal form for carving out an Algerian nationalistic vision for the fine arts.

<sup>70</sup> Bendaas, Yasmin. "Loss of Traditional Tattoos Tied to Islam." Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting. <http://pulitzercenter.org/reporting/algeria-chaouia-tattoos-islam-aures-mountains-amazigh> 26 June 2012.

exist in terms of postcolonial State policies with respect to gender; these should not be overlooked.<sup>71</sup>

The position of tattooing in contemporary Egypt is considerably different, due in part to the prominence of the Coptic Christian minority. Coptic Christians, unlike Amazigh groups across the Maghreb, also speak Arabic as a mother-tongue: unlike Tamazight, the Coptic language is confined to the liturgical rather than the quotidian sphere. Today, tattooing is exceedingly rare among the Egyptian Muslim population, but visual arts from the Fatimid period indicate that this was not always the case (Rice 1958). As recently as the late seventies, Coptic-majority villages in rural Egypt boasted specialist tattoo practitioners (Viaud 1978: 101-2). Among both genders of the older Coptic generations it is not uncommon to find a cross-form tattooed on the inside of the wrist (Early 1993). So prominent is the religiously affiliative significance of this tattoo that Coptic converts to Islam will often cover the cross pattern with the symbol of a sun to formalize their belonging in a new religious community. Some extremely secular Egyptian Muslims, mostly young revolutionaries, also obtain tattoos; however, this group is far from representative of the population at large.

Patterns of tattooing range from country to country and region to region. Owing to their sometimes medicinal function (which take particular local forms), religious affiliation, and differences over time, there is considerable variation in the patterns—to the point of rendering a full recounting of them irrelevant, not to mention impossible. Demonstrating the problem with an investigation of tattooing motifs, Fields claims that designs differ even within the same family or tribe and lack any discernible relationship to ethnic or religious ‘meaning’ as such (1958:

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<sup>71</sup> Mounira Charrad’s landmark study of state policy on gender in the Francophone Maghreb following independence provides perhaps the most grounded account. cf. Charrad, *States and Women’s Rights: The Making of Postcolonial Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco*. Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001.

68).<sup>72</sup> However, the simplicity of design components that permeate the vast majority of North African, Berber-originating art forms mean that many tattoos utilize repetitive building blocks. Although cross patterns have appeared in Moroccan tattoos sporadically (and are common in Egypt among the Coptic population), historically the cross is similarly well represented in Tunisian and Algerian women's traditional tattoos [Fig. 9]. Rather than a sign of Christianity, this is most likely attributable to the symbol of the ancient Libyan Goddess Neit or Tanit, worshipped in antiquity throughout North Africa (Gobert 2003: 99, Westermarck 1915 i: 451-2; Wilkin 1900:116). The simplistic formation of the cross motif in Morocco, I was told, may also derive from animistic beliefs about the power of the natural elements.

Some generalizations can, in fact be made with respect to tattooing iconography. Particularly in Morocco, scholars agree that two broad trends in patterning can be identified, each linked to function and location (Kapchan 1996; Herber 1928; Akhmisse 2004; Chebel 1984; Guessous 2001). Tattooing for cosmetic purposes tends to be practiced by women only, to be circumscribed to the face (nose, forehead, cheeks and nose), and often involves complex patterning—sometimes verging on the representational. Although Westermarck records such designs as palm trees, stylized orator figures and abstracted eyes, he ultimately dismisses one-to-one mimetic representation as an artistic aim; he credits instead a magical precautionary function, or a general desire to embellish all surfaces as a technique to deflect the evil eye (Westermarck 1926 i: 475).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> There is one notable difference, to which we will return in the conclusion. The chin tattoo, in western Algeria and Morocco, is known as *siyalla*, and is confined strictly to women. Upon questioning, many say that the pattern originated with the Prophet's daughter Fatima and is a mark of particular reverence for this quintessential figure of Islamic piety.

<sup>73</sup> Definitive distinctions between the spheres of medicine and magic, however, are quite fraught.

Chebel states that Benghazi prostitutes under Italian colonization were known to carry “In the name of God” tattoos, placed on the pubis to protect against the contraction of venereal disease (1984:77). He establishes a theoretical connection between tattoo inscription and that of the calligraphic variety (1984:175). Searight records Solomon’s seal, fibulas and scorpions as “representational” motifs, yet concludes that the act of naming a pattern does not reveal shared symbolism; rather, names change from informant to informant and region to region (1989 vol.2:226). In Searight’s estimation the names of tattoo patterns serve not to identify symbolic associations but serve merely as descriptions. On the other hand, tattooing undertaken for medicinal or therapeutic reasons consists of more simplistic design formations, such as circles and basic dot-clusters (Akhmisse 2000: 77; Guessous 2001: 222). Bodily placement in these contexts occurs in proximity to the ailment necessitating remedy, such as the ankles, shoulder-blades or lower back.

The placement of tattoos, as discussed previously, occurs primarily on the face of women (Searight 1989: Vol 1: 46, Vol 2: 237), although some exceptional cases have been noted. It is not merely spatial separation that renders henna and tattoos as art forms of differing significance, but materiality itself. Moroccan tattooing tends to be black in color at the time of application and later fades over time to a faint bluish-green. This color results from media choice, often achieved through the use of indigo mixed with charcoal as the primary material (Searight 1989: Vol 1: 141). Krutak records crushed belladonna as a component substance, as well as fava beans and ground bone in order to symbolize life, death and rebirth (2007:26, 33). However, this is an explanation not borne out by any other evidence with which I am familiar. Becker also posits a connection between the materials chosen for tattoos with spiritually-significant motivations, such as pot-black mixed into alfalfa to achieve a greenish color for *baraka* (2006: 58). However, I

have never heard this explanation from any informant. In no other contexts have I come across any convincing argument for a medium-based significance to constituent elements of tattoo.

Neither motivational pole—prophylactic nor ornamental—appears to be adequately sufficient to forestall religious objections. In Morocco, and indeed, globally in traditional Muslim cultures, with a rise in literacy and heightened awareness of Islamic teachings on tattooing, the art form continues to fall from favor. In regions where stricter, more literalist interpretations of Islam predominate, such as Saudi Arabia, the practice still exists, albeit clandestinely. If discovered, tattooists and their clients alike risk punishment with harsh penalties. Recently, a Lebanese tattoo practitioner codenamed “The King of Tattoos” was sentenced to a year in prison and two-hundred lashes for his secret business performing tattoos behind closed doors on local Saudi women.<sup>74</sup>

Interestingly, the traditional tattoo practitioner, from Morocco to Iraq to Egypt, has generally been a traveling woman, often associated with witchcraft (Gobert: 2003 116). This suggests that the Islamic prohibitions on tattooing may have more to do with the origins of the art form as a gendered magical practice rather than with mere scriptural prohibition alone. Additionally, the negative association with tattooing in orthodox Islam as understood today may have roots in earlier class hierarchy connotations attached to tattoos. For example, Chase F. Robinson records that Islam inherited pre-Islamic, near-Eastern practices of neck-branding and tattooing to denote slaves and mark a definitive loss of economic and social status (Robinson 2005: 422). The negative class association with tattooing in Morocco, for example, persists in the widespread assumption that wearers come from poverty-stricken rural regions.

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<sup>74</sup> « Le ‘roi du tatouage’ condamné en Arabie Saoudite. » *RFI*.  
[http://www.rfi.fr/moyen-orient/20120718-le-roi-tatouage-condamne-arabie-saoudite?ns\\_campaign=editorial&ns\\_source=FB&ns\\_mchannel=reseaux\\_sociaux&ns\\_fee=0&ns\\_linkname=20120718\\_le\\_roi\\_tatouage\\_condamne\\_arabie\\_saoudite](http://www.rfi.fr/moyen-orient/20120718-le-roi-tatouage-condamne-arabie-saoudite?ns_campaign=editorial&ns_source=FB&ns_mchannel=reseaux_sociaux&ns_fee=0&ns_linkname=20120718_le_roi_tatouage_condamne_arabie_saoudite) 18 July 2012.

Certainly, the majority of Moroccan society looks down on tattooing, a view which has led women in recent decades to seek out painful treatment options, such as caustic solutions to burn away offending patterns (Kapchan 1996: 27; Ossman 2002:12-13). Despite remaining scar tissue, such women prefer the marks of tattoo removal to the legacy of the tattoo itself; the latter continues to carry negatively-charged cultural valuations of rural origins, poverty and impiety. On occasion, this decision is explained by reference to religion, rather than merely to class. Informants told Kapchan that Ḥādīth warn against tattooing in particular, and assign a penalty after death—at which time tattoos will be burnt off (1996: 27). Messina cites an opinion from informants that God curses women who transform themselves in any way (1991: 253-4). Moroccan women also told me that tattooed body parts will stick to the floor of hell during the prostration component of prayer, as a divine punishment for this transgressive act. In the 1920s, Moroccan lawyers argued against tattooing on the grounds that the adornment rendered the body imperfect and further prevented believers from sufficient completion of the ablutions necessary for prayer (Krutak 2007:25).

The Qur'an itself makes no mention of tattoos—rather, the injunction against the body modification is located in multiple Hadīths. Strictly speaking, orthodox Islamic texts make exceptions for tattooing's permissibility; however, these are not well known or commonly cited by Muslims. Aḥmad ibn Aḥmad al-Hawānī in his treatise *al-Waṣm fi-l waṣm* (1303), explains that tattooing can be excused on four grounds: 1) when ignorance of religious proscriptions is at issue, 2) when the tattooed person is forced to apply this body modification, 3) when the alteration occurs out of irresponsibility, such as being too young to understand the consequences, and 4) in the case of medical necessity (such as curative). Al Masri's contemporary compendium of classical Islamic law across the various schools of thought, classifies tattooing as a



particularly grievous sin (971). The classical opinions cited by Al Masri single out women as particularly prone to the misdeed of tattooing—and position the tattoo practitioner as more religiously blameworthy than her client (691).

The negative evaluation of tattooing by orthodox Islamic texts is not confined solely to manuals of classical jurisprudence. Cynthia Becker records a twentieth century song sung in southern Morocco that warns against the illicit nature of the adornment: “God insults the women who do tattoos, the women with tattoos, and the women who rest near them. / he also insults the wall near them/why doesn’t it fall on these tattooed women?” (2006: 57-8). From the realm of law to the sphere of popular culture, prevalent religious opinion in Morocco remains sharply critical of tattooing.

As mentioned earlier, justifications for tattooing on religious grounds do exist. Ibn Kathir records that the Prophet allegedly stated that tattooing a woman’s hands was recommended for beautification (Khuri 2001: 80). This is, however, far from generally agreed-upon canonical wisdom. Some women have stated that a tattoo placed on the chin is done to demonstrate devotion to Fatima Zahra, the much beloved daughter of the Prophet Mohamed (Searight, vol. 2, 177; Krutak 2007 25; Sijelmassi 2007 91). Other informants told Searight that if a woman is not tattooed in the terrestrial world, angels will undertake the action in the next life (1989: vol. 2, 177). Nonetheless, beyond these rare exceptions from oral tradition and popular folklore, predominant opinion weighs heavily against tattooing.

Objections to tattooing are not only linked to the issue of appropriate piety; class mobility and social origins also factor into the adornment’s gradual disappearance from acceptable conduct. In contemporary Morocco, tattoos have come to serve as a visual stand-in for the problematic issues facing rural communities, namely illiteracy and poverty, particularly with

respect to young Moroccan women. The August 6-September 9, 2011 issue of *Tel Quel*, a francophone literary and political magazine often critical of the Moroccan government, is instructive in this regard [Fig. 10]. An advertisement soliciting help for impoverished regions features the image of a young girl with tattoos as an emblem eliciting pity—and thus, it is hoped—donations. Given that the practice of tattooing is increasingly rare, it is highly unlikely that this young woman’s image corresponds to widespread reality, even in the remote, rural areas where the advertising purports to focus. The tattooed girl’s generalizable inclusion as the campaign’s symbol was deliberately selected: her image locally codes a visual emblem of poverty’s social meaning—an illiterate, rural, tattooed and “backwards” young woman in need of intervention by a paternalistic State.

Further coverage of tattooing in the Moroccan media is also revealing. *Femmes du Maroc*, an expensive, glossy Francophone women’s magazine, regularly covers a variety of social issues, in addition to fashion tips, relationship advice and (strikingly) cultural practices with which the elite, French-speaking class is unfamiliar, such as rural wedding traditions. Latifa Abousaid’s article “Il (elle) l’a dans la peau” tackles the topic of contemporary Western tattoo practices which is on the rise among counter-culture Moroccan teens, and draws a direct contrast with the nostalgia for previous generations.<sup>75</sup> Although Abousaid remains far from arguing for a return to traditional tattooing practices, her narrative clearly elevates the latter as an emblem of Moroccan tradition and pristine culture—and simultaneously warns against the dangers of decadent, Western-style tattooing. The author draws a strict division between this new trend in tattooing and that of the past: “Le tatouage ne date pas d’hier. Certes, nos arrières—grand-mères était tatouées. Et c’était accepté...Mais le tatouage chez les ados relève d’autre chose, qui n’a n’en a voir avec la pratique ancienne d’el wcham” (77). Abusaid’s article is

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<sup>75</sup> Number 185, July 2011 (76-8).

intended as a guide for parents of potentially rebellious teenagers, yet it reveals much about the nostalgic construction of tattooing in the past—ironically, a reality to which few readers of *Femmes du Maroc* would be eager to return. Rather, tattooing remains in the public consciousness as a reminder of what came before: valorized folklore and more critically, a placeholder for the nostalgia of lost generations and moral traditions.

Benjamin Damade's exposé of the hidden world of "modern" Moroccan tattooing for *TelQuel*, "Tendance: l'Encre Dans la Peau" further demonstrates the terrain of moral ambiguity that Western tattooing occupies among Moroccan youth [Fig. 11].<sup>76</sup> None of the artists profiled wish to reveal their names, noting the dangerous nature of their work by insisting on anonymity while detailing the clandestine internet appointment system used to prevent detection and arrest. This indicates the degree to which the illegal practice remains on the Moroccan government's radar of prison-worthy acts. The artists discuss body adornment in the terminology of specifically "art forms," but waver when asked to comment on potential religious prohibitions. One artist, identified by the pseudonym "Ahmed," concedes that he would never tattoo during the sacred fasting period of Ramadan, or the preceding month of Shaaban. However, he attributes this abstention not to piety or religious adherence to prohibitions against tattooing, but rather, the avoidance of alcohol. Ahmed admits that he drinks when he tattoos, but during his observation of the holy months, he must avoid alcohol—and hence, he refrains from working. Concerning the debates on the *ḥarām/ḥalāl* valuations of tattooing, Ahmed compares this issue to that of hijab, concluding that although not wearing the hijab is forbidden (*ḥarām*), many women still abstain from the practice. In Ahmed's final explanation, tattooing may indeed be officially *ḥarām*, but not "that much." Damade concludes, "Ironie du sort, c'est justement par mimétisme de l'Occident que les jeunes Marocains reviennent aujourd'hui à ces pratiques, sous

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<sup>76</sup> No. 483, July 23-29, 2011, pp. 40-2.

l'œil réprobateur de leurs ainées. Entre hypocrisie et schizophrénie” (42).<sup>77</sup> Similar to Abusaid's nostalgic framing of traditional tattoo, Damade's assessment extends the backward looking gaze—this time harnessing the body adornment as an ideal terrain on which to critique the crisis of Moroccan cultural identity, trapped between East and West, and between independence and imperialism.

Given the negative view of Islam and Moroccan culture on the tattoo, many scholars assume that henna arose as a licit substitute (Fiore 1982, Renaut 2009). Religious prohibitions against permanent body modification, as we shall see, simply cannot be advanced for henna. Far from being a religiously debatable action, henna is not neutral in Moroccan interpretations of Islamic texts; rather, its deep connection with the Prophet Muḥammad in orthodox textual sources, folk mythology and Prophetic medicine, render it a highly charged substance which is recommended and even favored as a Muslim spiritual practice.

### **Henna: Alchemical Spirituality and the Light of the Prophet**

On a mild spring afternoon, I stood in front of a small kiosk in the henna market of Fez, drinking tea with proprietor Si M'ḥamed [Fig. 12]. A woman ready to make a purchase approached, but as soon as I stepped aside, Si M'ḥamed drew her into our conversation. Obviously a return client, she jokingly mocked the owner and freely gave me advice on what to avoid. “Bah, don't buy his khol,” she clucked. “It's no good. You're better off going to Marjane (a Moroccan supermarket chain).” We discussed the relative merits of “traditional” cosmetics versus Western makeup, but she quickly interrupted to correct my word choice: “mashi maquillage: l-ḥenna

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<sup>77</sup> “Irony of a sort, it's precisely by mimicking the West that young Moroccans are today returning to their practices, under the disapproving eye of their elders. Between hypocrisy and schizophrenia.”

*fann, ya binayti!*” (It isn’t makeup—henna is *an art*, my girl). I asked her to explain the difference between art and makeup and she sardonically responded that while makeup may be women’s *sihr* (magic) intended to entice men, henna carries *baraka* (blessing).

A few weeks later, I was moving into a new apartment in the formerly European quarter of downtown Rabat. As we unpacked our belongings, one of my roommates—Moroccan women in their late twenties—squealed in excitement. She had discovered a basket on the top shelf of a shared closet, left behind by the previous resident. A collection of dried henna leaves wrapped in small bags indicated that the items were remnants of a recent marriage. In my roommates’ estimation, the discarded henna represented a positive omen for the future of our living arrangements; it was, in fact, a blessing. These two anecdotes illustrate the complex meanings associated with henna, not merely as a body adornment technique but also as a vector for objectified spiritual blessings.

Unlike tattoo or *ḥarqūṣ*, “henna” does not merely refer to an adornment technique but simultaneously denotes a method of application as well as the physical material of substance: the henna shrub. The origins of henna’s applied use as body adornment are hotly debated by scholars, yet coupled with the art’s ephemerality, its wide distribution and long history render attempts at locating a definitive origin impossible. A variety of religious communities throughout the world use the art on ritual occasions, including certain Middle Eastern and North African Jewish and Christian populations as well as Hindus and Sikhs in South Asia. The plant’s widely known medicinal properties have rendered it popular throughout history; it has also been used as a multi-purpose dye, ranging from textile production to cosmetic staining of the human skin. Despite henna’s various cultural, religious and geographical appearances, however, only Islamic canonical texts elevate the plant from the realm of terrestrial botany to a divine substance and a

devotional act. Nowhere is this heightened status more visible than among the Muslim population of Morocco—where the adornment occupies a prominent position on all ritualized occasions.<sup>78</sup>

In Morocco, Tamazight and Arabic speakers alike refer to the plant and its adornment as “henna,” a term ostensibly originating from Arabic. The root *h/n/n* relates closely to the derived noun *hanān*—or, tenderness. This highly-valued quality in Moroccan culture is explicitly associated with normative femininity. The attributes of love, compassion and tenderness are, moreover, intertwined with henna application in exclusively female groups. At critical moments of great change in social status (such as first weddings and childbirth preparation), women’s networks collectively apply the adornment as an act of solidarity, and to ensure blessings for a precarious and unknown future. The etymological connotations of henna’s root meaning are no less significant than those previously discussed for *harqūš* and tattoo; within the Moroccan cultural collective, the function and meaning of each varied adornment is bound up with resonant terminology, comprehensible at a local level.

Throughout recorded history, henna has been known by a variety of names. Its taxonomical designation is *Lawsonia inermis*, but colloquial terms include kopher, myrtle, Egyptian privet, cypress, mehendi, camphire and mignonette, among others. The diverse synonyms for henna indicate a vast geographical presence, due in no small part to the relative ease of cultivation in diverse climatic conditions. Although imported to the West as a hair dye and ornamental garden plant, arid climates across North Africa, South Asia (notably Rajasthan) and the Middle East account for the flowering shrub’s widespread cultivation as a cash crop. Some scholars posit an origin on the island of Cyprus (Meikle 1977: 668), but henna has also long been utilized and grown throughout sub-Saharan Africa, to which some scholars attribute an

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<sup>78</sup> In other Muslim communities, henna adornment is typically confined to matrimonial celebrations.

introduction by nomadic Saharan populations and later dissemination by Hausa and Jula trading communities in contemporary Niger (Bernolles 1966). Henna began to appear in lists of widely cultivated crops in al-Andalus by the eleventh century, although it was certainly common earlier (Bermejo and Sanchez 1998: 21-2, Harvey 1975: 11). The Chinese court was importing henna from Iran as early as the T'ang dynasty (Farmanfarian 2000: 312-3). In the early twentieth-century, henna constituted an important crop for the Nile Valley, concentrated in and around Khartoum and the Blue Nile provinces (Brown and Massy 1929). Within the Kingdom of Morocco, henna is cultivated in the South, near the arid desert provinces and national borders (Akhmisse 2004, 2005; Benjamin 1991; Ensel 1999). Regions such as the Draa Valley and the Souss are renowned for the production of particularly valuable henna crops.<sup>79</sup>

Attempts to locate the origins of henna ultimately prove as amorphous as the substance itself. Since the beginnings of the Orientalist fascination with ancient Egypt, scholars have tried—and failed—to pinpoint the plant's origins (Renaut 2009: 193; Baumann 1960).<sup>80</sup> Rubens posits that cultivation of henna began among the Jewish communities of ancient Palestine, and was only imported into Northern Africa after the fall of the second Temple (1967: 88). Pliny and Dioscorides cite Egypt as the ultimate point of origin, as do the vast majority of contemporary scholars (Renaut 2009: 195). Ancient Egyptians did invent a variety of cosmetics still used today, including khol; women utilized red ochre as a form of rouge and henna as a perfume (Lucas 1930: 44-5).

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<sup>79</sup> The association of henna as a religio-magical substance and the Moroccan Kingdom's claim to the Sahara desert are more fully explored in Chapter Five. I must note here, however, that ambivalent attitudes towards southern communities accord the region a particular proclivity for magic and spiritual power; hence, the reputation of Saharan henna as “darkest”—and thus its superlative valuation—is inseparable not only from nationalistic claims to desert territory but also local beliefs on the Saharan population's disproportionate knowledge of magical efficacy.

<sup>80</sup> A surprising source for providing dates on henna results from European travelogues written during the colonial era. One particularly fascinating source are Victorian literary stories that mix horror with fascination at seeing (what was labeled as) henna on the hands of mummies (see Briefel: 2008: 266), to become a later trope of the disembodied mummy's hand – a cipher for disgust and fascination and a penultimate scene of the uncanny other (Bergstein 2009).

Although henna was certainly known and used in ancient Egypt, the assumption that it was similarly applied for cosmetic body adornment is problematic. Many contend that hands and feet were dyed with henna in much the same way as today (Lucas 1930: 45; Moldenke 1954:160). Some Egyptologists argue that the 11<sup>th</sup> Dynasty mummy of Ramses II evidences traces of henna on his fingernails and hands—which, if true, would allow for dating cosmetic use of henna as early as the Middle Kingdom (approximately 2052 BCE-1991 BCE). Bill B. Baumann casts doubt on such interpretations; in his view, archeologists viewed contemporaneous practices of henna and read them into the physical record; Baumann attributes this assumption to a simple case of mistaken identity. He suggests that an equally plausible interpretation is provided by alternative substance matter for the red stains on mummies, such as madder, or kermes (an insect-based dye) rather than *Lawsonia inermis* (1960: 86). The suggestion that the hair of Ramses had been dyed with henna has also come under fire; although Egyptologists interpreted the red coloration on the mummy as hennaed hair, recent chemical analysis conducted on the corpse's follicles has demonstrated that the red was, in fact, natural—not cosmetic—pigmentation (Renaut 2009: 204).

Henna's long history of use in medicine and cosmetics, however, was not limited to ancient Egypt. The plant also features in records from Roman antiquity as a hair dye (Lucas 1930: 45), and in Biblical botany as an important cosmetic plant (Moldenke 1954: 160), most notably in the Song of Songs. Even more widespread in ancient texts than cosmetic uses are references to the multiple medicinal properties of henna (Stillman 1983: 492). These botanical attributes are also frequently explored in Western scientific journals. In Prophetic medical treatises, bloodletting and cupping provide a multi-purpose remedy that necessitate the surface application of henna to the hands and feet in order to relieve pain associated with the process



(Elgood 1962: 61; Ibn Māja, *Sunan*, Kitāb al-Ṭibb, Bāb 29, Vol. II, Cairo 1953). The plant's antifungal properties are recommended in contemporary Western medicine as a treatment for intestinal amoebiasis (Talaat 1960: 944-5), and by veterinary specialists as an anti-microbial for livestock (Davis 1996: 287). Other therapeutic functions include a pain killing agent (particularly for mouth ulcers), a local anesthetic and a generalized coolant (Ghazanfar and Al-Sabahi 1993: 94, Abulafatih 1987: 354-360), as well as serving as a homeopathic remedy against smallpox (Serjeant 1956: 6).

Norman A. Stillman traces the vast majority of Moroccan herbal remedies like henna to Hellenistic pharmacology preserved by the communal superstition as pseudo-magical remedies (1983: 485). In rural Morocco, henna is used as a post-birth remedy to rectify the “cooling” effect of childbirth on the body (McMurray 2001: 90). In Morocco, the plant still occupies a position as a medicinal remedy par excellence for a variety of ills (Claisse-Dauchy 2001; Belkhadar 1978, 1997, 2002, 2003). It has long been utilized as a clotting agent during rituals of male circumcision (Chebel 2006: 19-20); women recommend henna as a remedy for fever (A.R. de Lens 1925:3-4) and in conjunction with alum and rose water to relieve eye pain (A.R. de Lens 1925: 17, 18). The plant is thought to heal scorpion stings, and its astringent properties account for its application to the vaginas of women recovering from childbirth to prevent post-birth hemorrhages (Kingsmill Hart 1994: 131). In early twentieth-century Morocco, henna was believed to serve as a method of confirming the presence of a syphilitic infection. A.R. de Lens describes the ritual: “mastiquer de l'écorce de noyer; la cracher dans du henné et en passer sur

les boutons. S'ils dessèchent, ce n'est pas la syphilis. S'ils suppurent, c'est la syphilis" (A.R. de Lens 1925: 25).<sup>81</sup>

Beyond henna's recommended medicinal uses in Morocco, its prominence as a body adornment is striking throughout Muslim-majority cultures. It is reported to have been introduced into the Balkans by the Ottomans (Zavada 1993: 98). Among Slavic communities with Muslim minority populations, henna is used by Christians solely as a hair dye, whereas Muslims make use of it on ritual occasions in its familiar form as skin ornamentation (Zavada 1993: 98). Messina argues that henna most likely began as a body adornment tradition in India, and was widely adopted from the Mogul period on during British control (1991:258). A twelfth-century Persian romance detailing the seven obligatory cosmetics for women includes henna on the list, although its mention here is cosmetic, rather than ceremonial or ritual (Farmanfarmaian 2000: 306). Although I asked informants across North Africa (as well as Turkish, Emirate and Diaspora European Muslims) about the origin of the henna plant and its usage as a body adornment in Muslim society, only in Morocco did I routinely hear the following explanation: When the Prophet Muḥammad undertook his *mi'rāj* (Night Journey), the skies opened up and the henna plant fell from the heavens onto blessed regions of the earth; for this reason, henna is also known as the "terrain of Paradise."<sup>82</sup>

While the use of henna for medicinal and prophylactic purposes certainly crosses cultures, the plant's inclusion in so-called Prophetic medicine confers upon it an exalted status as a beneficial treatment in Islamic societies. The umbrella term "Prophetic medicine" refers to a

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<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, in Moroccan oral culture, sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman is believed to cause syphilis. This is a point to which I will return in discussions of the parallel symbolism between blood and malevolent forces, and henna's Baraka, which counteracts the former danger.

<sup>82</sup> This tradition is preserved in oral lore surrounding *ziyāras*, or pilgrimages to Moroccan saint shrines. Visitors in search of spiritual relief for a variety of ills will collect earth surrounding the tomb of a holy person, venerated for its Baraka-laden properties; this material is referred to as "the earth of the saint."

particular genre of Islamic literature; this body of material purports to recommend curative methods sanctioned by the Prophet Muḥammad himself, and relies on sources drawn from various compendia of Ḥādīth. Although often authentically dubious, the genre of Prophetic medicine nonetheless demonstrates communally-accepted wisdom on Islamic therapeutic practices (see al-Jawziyya 1998; Ibn Māja 1953). For example, Al Suyuti's *Ṭibb-ul-Nabī* records that henna contains an aphrodisiac property or restores failing male virility (Elgood 1962: 60). This genre also details the suggested use of henna cosmetics, in addition to “medicine”: although indigo was commonly used as a cosmetic hair dye in pre-Islamic Arabia, Prophetic medicine claims that Muḥammad preferred the use of henna instead as a blessed substance that readily distinguished believers from pagans.

It is thus useful to consider the canonical Islamic sources from which the genre of Prophetic medicine draws. Although the vast size of the Ḥādīth corpus precludes definitive assessment of “authenticity,” distinctions between *ṣaḥīḥ* (strong, verified) and *ḍa'īf* (weak, inauthentic) are not commonly made by the vast majority of Muslims in Morocco who cite the Hadith as a body of guidance transmitted through the Prophet's sayings and actions. Instead, my assessment aims to follow the manner in which believers anchor the practice of henna within textual orthodoxy—and hence, explicitly claim a legacy of juridical authority to sanction the use of a body adornment. The Prophet himself is believed to have nicknamed henna the “queen of all flowers” (Akhmisse 1999: 172); multiple Hadiths refer to it as *sayyid al-rayāḥīn* (prince of fragrant plants). Henna is routinely described as “the dye of Islam,” and was explicitly recommended by the Prophet himself as a praiseworthy method to “increase the good deeds of the faithful” (Elgood 1962: 191). Abu Dawud reports, “There is no plant dearer to God than henna.” Hence, scholars commonly attribute the spread of henna as a body adornment practice

with the contemporaneous Islamization of regions such as India, Pakistan and Bangladesh (Francis 1984; Bhanawat 1974; Vonderheyden 1934). Fatema Soudavar Farmanfarmaian claims that the captivating color of henna adornment provides a visible and “excellent means of displaying ostentatious piety” (2000: 313). Because of the high profile given to the adornment in canonical Islamic texts, the use of henna functions as “a sure sign of devotion, based on the belief that the Prophet himself used henna...a plant from Paradise” (Farmanfarmaian 2000: 313).

The traditional appearance of henna as a coloring agent for men’s beards across the Islamic world is due to such canonical references. Yet more interesting is the explicitly gendered association of henna painting recommended in the Ḥādīth as a near-mandatory marker of Islamic femininity. In one remarkable reference, the Prophet’s favorite wife, Aisha, narrates a conversation between Muḥammad and Hind. Hind, a formerly fierce adversary opposing the incipient Muslim community, came to the Prophet prepared to convert. The Prophet, Aisha tells us, glanced at Hind’s fingers and seeing no henna, responded: “I shall not accept your allegiance until you make a difference in the palms of your hands, for they look like the paws of a beast of prey” (Abu Dawud 33:4153). Abu Huraira records that the Prophet directed, “Jews and Christians do not tint themselves with henna. Be you different from them.” Although this quotation is certainly not an accurate account of contemporary practices—Jewish and Christian groups also make use of henna—the Moroccan Muslim community cites this statement as an explanation of henna’s historical religious value as ordered by the Prophet as a mark of Islam. The sole Arabic-language study of henna in Morocco features this *ḥadīth* on the back cover, as emblematic of the publication’s findings.<sup>83</sup>

Multiple other traditions attributed to the Prophet underscore the recommended use of henna by Muslim women and the sharply gendered implications of its use as a body adornment.

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<sup>83</sup> See Naeem 1985.

Abu Dawud records that women approaching the Prophet as he sat behind a screen were met with initial skepticism, due to the lack of henna traces on their hands—the only body part visible from his vantage point. Yet another account—often cited as proof of a historic Muslim antipathy towards homosexuality and transgression of hetero-normative gender roles—condemns the use of henna body adornment by men. Abu Huraira recounts:

A transvestite (*mukhannath*) who had dyed his hands and feet with henna was brought to the Prophet. He asked: What is the matter with this man? He was told: Apostle of Allah! he affects women's get-up. So he ordered regarding him and he was banished to an-Naqi'. The people said: Apostle of Allah! should we not kill him? He said: I have been prohibited from killing people who pray.<sup>84</sup>

This account is particularly instructive for our purposes here. The cross-dresser is harshly condemned—not on ontological grounds—but rather, for his physical adoption of an appearance deemed womanly. Transgression of (supposedly) divinely sanctioned gender roles risks the harshest of all penalties—correlated in canonical orthodoxy with the adornment of henna.

The association between henna painting, Islamic devotion and the search for divine sanction is not only confined to the texts of orthodox belief. The intimate connection between henna use and allegiance to the Prophet Muḥammad is underscored by a Moroccan term for the plant: *nūr an-nabī*, or “the light of the Prophet.” Oral mythology accords henna a sanctified status as the “earth of paradise” (Akhmisse 1999:172). Abdallah Hammoudi describes henna’s local valuation as a “paradisiacal substance” (1993: 114). The application of henna in Morocco is explicitly described in terms of ‘*ajr*, or religious merit: “women can also earn ‘ajr [religious merit] by painting their hands and feet with henna for the feast. Bel-henna nferhu bel-‘id’ [*sic*] ‘By (having applied) henna we celebrate the feast,’ I was told” (Buitelaar 1993: 74). Religious folklore preserves the relationship between body adornment and spirituality. Women who refrain

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<sup>84</sup> Sunan Abu Dawud 41: 4910.

from applying henna at the end of Ramadan are suspiciously scrutinized, and often asked if they failed to fast.

I was told by numerous Moroccans that henna is used as an adornment because Fatima, the Prophet's daughter, used it in her own wedding and at the circumcision ceremonies of her sons Hasan and Hussein—accounts verified by the findings of other scholars (Fiore 1982: 133; Spurles 2004). Although some informants also claimed that henna is used because of the wedding practice of the Prophet's wife Aisha, far more Moroccans locate the art form firmly within the Fatimid line. Multiple sources told me that the Prophet's favorite daughter is owed credit for the discovery of the henna plant's alchemical dyeing properties. This latter explanation is clearly contradicted by records of henna's use as a dyeing agent in many other societies, in addition to multiple canonical texts. However, widely agreed-upon attributions of henna painting to the revered figure of Fatima Zahra demonstrate that Moroccan Muslims have claimed explicit religious authority, thus anchoring the art form squarely in an unassailable Islamic tradition: the house of the Prophet Muḥammad himself.

Only in Morocco did those with whom I spoke justify the use of the plant with canonical Islamic references. For example, in a debate on the veracity of certain Hadiths with the elderly grandmother of a friend, I asked about injunctions against false hair and tattooing. Why would henna remain licit when tattoos are clearly forbidden? The woman conceded that certainly her tattoo was *ḥarām*, but eschewed moral culpability—having received the adornment by force as a young girl in the Rif Mountains. However, she argued that henna was different. It is a thing of beauty: “*Inna Allaha jameelun wa yuhibbu l-jamaal*” (God is beautiful and loves beauty). This statement originates directly in a compendium of verified Hadith, and is as textually based an

argument as one could find.<sup>85</sup> I pressed her more on this point, particularly concerning the distinction between tattooing for beautification and henna as an expression of personal ornamentation. She clucked her tongue and explained—“*Ehhwa, lakin l-ḥenna? ... l-ḥenna fiha Barakat al-nabī, ṣalla Allāhu ‘alay-hi wa-sallam*” (Alright, but henna? Henna carries the blessings of the Prophet, May prayers and peace be granted upon him).

As with tattoo and *ḥarqūs*, the ornamental tradition of henna adornment is an overwhelmingly feminine activity (Boubrik 2011; Legey 2009; Spurles 2004; Kapchan 1996; Claisse-Dauchy and Foucault 2005; Mezgueldi and Geesey 1996).<sup>86</sup> Despite the wide range of cultures where henna is used as a decorative skin dye, it is universally associated with women. While men and boys sometimes participate in henna rituals, or wear the plant’s coloring matter in beards, it is rarely—if ever—applied to the male body as an ornamental, cosmetic adornment. This gendered nature is, again, particularly evident in the case of Morocco. By and large, henna practitioners are not professionals; most women learn adornment techniques from mothers, aunts, sisters and other female family members. Prior to and during the Protectorate era, however, marital applications of henna were often undertaken by a black female slave belonging to the bride’s family;<sup>87</sup> some wedding planners in contemporary Morocco do continue to offer “rental” henna artists.<sup>88</sup> More often, henna painting is performed by women for women—typically at the hands of a close female intimate.

Although these distinctions and a fuller discussion of henna’s ritual uses provide the focus of Chapter Three, it is useful here to review the occasions in which Moroccan henna is

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<sup>85</sup> Sahih Muslim 1.93:91.

<sup>86</sup> In some instances men do apply henna; however, the manner of application and pattern differs dramatically. Men do not apply henna in decorative patterns, but merely as a stain of color.

<sup>87</sup> This is due, again, to local cultural beliefs concerning ritual knowledge in which Saharan and descendants of former slaves are believed to specialize.

<sup>88</sup> In some areas of sub-Saharan Africa, group outsiders are commonly tasked with ritual adornment out of concern for purity and pollution codes. This does not appear to be the case for Moroccan henna, however, as a henna artist’s qualifications include known moral character.

used. At nearly every critical stage of life, henna is applied to ensure blessings and divine sanction—this is true from first marriage (for both bride and groom), to male circumcision and childbirth. In cases where males use henna, as we will later see, henna serves as a ritual agent rather than an adornment; design is absent and application serves to accentuate the transformation from semi-feminized youth to a responsible, active and fully-capable adult male. In no instance of male henna use, however, does a man apply henna to another man—such is the deeply gendered nature of the ritual adornment. Further, women apply the body art on explicitly religious occasions, such as Laylat al-Qadr (the 27<sup>th</sup> night of Ramadan, on which the Qur’an is believed to first have been revealed), pilgrimages to saint shrines, at Eids (the major Muslim festivals), and at curative ritual therapy intended to alleviate spirit possession.

Typically, these secondary occasions of henna application are not shared between the genders, and moreover—coincide with the sacrifice and the ritualized spilling of blood (a profoundly charged substance that henna serves to symbolize). Chosen sacrificial animals may be a chicken or a goat (in the case of minor pilgrimages), or a ram, in the prominent feast commemorating Ibrahim’s (Abraham) willingness to sacrifice his son on divine command. The fraught nature of life transitions similarly involves the spilling of blood—through the act of birth, the hymen’s rupture or the removal of the foreskin. As we will see in Chapter Three, the sanctified nature of henna as a beloved Prophetic substance acts as a vector of protection against the potential pollution wrought by sexuality and bloodshed, and ultimately ensures a safe transition in social status, provided through a divinely-favored medium.

Circumscribed in location, henna painting takes place only on the hands and feet: as tattoo and *ḥarqūṣ* remain confined to the face, so too does henna adornment adhere to culturally constrained bodily geographies. Adorned hands and feet preclude movement and fix the body in



space—suspended in a liminal time period. Curiously, designs are not as limited. Henna artists described to me the process of adornment as one of spontaneous choice; each woman's body is different, and the action of application takes place within a realm of intimacy. Conversation, supplication and guidance are exchanged as women decorate one another—yet this process supersedes pattern. Beautiful design rendered in ink, I was told, simply would not carry the same spiritual charge. Substitute the medium and the Baraka disappears. Only through the active mediation of the Prophet's light do women obtain the ability to secure blessings for one another. Clearly, medium matters.

As demonstrated above, henna's ritual value in Moroccan culture owes, as demonstrated here, much to the interpretations of Islam given currency by Prophetic medicine, canonical texts, and folk mythology. Human mediation of a blessed substance transforms the natural world, invoking divine protection, blessings and active participation in a devotional act. This final aspect of henna's alchemical importance must be considered. I suggest that beyond Prophetic favoritism, the processual nature of henna's transformation from beloved plant to devotional medium proves further significance for the adornment's religious importance.

The henna dye commonly worn on the hands and feet of Moroccan women ranges from crimson/blood-red to rusty orange, but begins its short life as a small green shrub with white or red blossoming flowers. The skin-staining color is produced from a paste composed of the plant's leaves, which are harvested, dried in the sun, and ground into a fine powder [**Figs. 13-14**]. Water (and occasionally Eucalyptus oil) and eggs are added to form a muddy green-brown viscous matter that is then applied to the skin [**Fig. 15**]. After a period of several hours, this greenish paste will slowly turn brown and dry [**Fig. 16**]. When scraped away, the skin is stained a deep reddish hue. Within the cultural nexus of Islamic symbolism, these colors are inherently

significant. Green is well known as the color of Islam, as it was the Prophet's favorite color. White, although a ubiquitous symbol for purity in many parts of the world, is similarly charged in Islamic mythology—garments of this color are proscribed for the duration of the hajj pilgrimage to Mecca and Medina, as an indication of the believer's state of purity before God. Finally, red—the color of life-giving blood—mimics the fraught bodily substance in tandem with which the body adornment of henna appears.

Unlike *ḥarqūṣ* and tattoos, henna's natural colors render the art and substance charged with the potential for specifically Islamic cultural symbolism. The temporary stain of henna will inevitably fade—yet owing to critical cultural and religious validation, demonstrated by henna's etymological associations, appearance in textual orthodoxy and popular lore, the art form's legacy will outlast its ephemerality [Fig. 17]. Fashions come and go, but future generations of Moroccan women will continue to walk hand-in-hand in the streets of Rabat and other cities, remaining linked by a ritual substance invoking divine blessing through the intricate script painted on the fingers interlaced between them.

### Chapter 3

## Henna in Ritual: the Embodied Terrain of Moroccan Islam

The present chapter transitions from the geography of hybridity discussed in Chapter One, and the spiritual ink of henna described in Chapter Two, to focus on the embodied terrain of Moroccan Islam through the activation of henna's religious import in critical rituals. Part One constructs a theoretical framework for the consideration of henna's critical role in the rituals of Moroccan Islam: I examine the concept of definitional authority in Islamic tradition, the emphasis placed on ritual purity in textual tradition, and the gendered implications of pollution for spiritual practice. The second component of the present chapter anchors henna practice within a uniquely Moroccan Islamic understanding of sexual and religious maturation as processual. I discuss the ritualized importance accorded to the processing and application of henna, the art's bodily placement, and gendered iconography. Finally, I focus on the role of henna in the gendered experience of the marriage ceremony, before an assessment of the adornment's role in other rituals. In each case, henna functions as a didactic tool and agent of purification by virtue of its Prophetic connection. Despite social change and technological innovations, the adornment continues to inscribe gendered religiosity in an embodied calligraphic script.

In 2007, a storm of controversy swept Morocco over a marriage ceremony between two men in the rural agricultural region of al-Qasr al-Kabir (Bradley 2010; Whitaker 2011).<sup>89</sup>

Demonstrators took to the streets in protest and eventually converged upon the private home

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<sup>89</sup> "Moroccan "bride" detained for gay wedding." *Al Arabiya*.  
<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2007/11/27/42200.html> 27 November 2007.

where the heretical ceremony occurred.<sup>90</sup> Following a beating at the hands of approximately six hundred men, the bride turned himself over to the Moroccan police. The Party for Justice and Development (PJD), a moderate Islamist political faction, seized on the controversy to denounce an increasing “brothelization” of society, and warned against the dangers of creeping secularization. Ever eager for a sensationalist sex scandal, the Moroccan media erupted in a frenzy.<sup>91</sup> Much of the coverage, however, centered not on the taboo issue of homosexuality, but rather on the performative aspects of the wedding ceremony.<sup>92</sup> Although the husband’s role was mentioned in passing, the bride’s choice of traditional feminine attire attracted particularly vicious criticism.

Dress has always proved fraught in postcolonial nations (Ahmed 2012; Baron 2007), and becomes especially politicized in relation to cross-cultural contact (Hodgson 2001).<sup>93</sup> Fear of social pollution through the decadent plague of an allegedly Western-imported homosexuality, however, presents only a fraction of the story. Depictions of veiled brides with hennaed hands figured prominently in media coverage and social criticism of the scandal [**Fig. 1**]. To briefly revisit the relationship between henna painting and femininity in Islamic textual orthodoxy, as

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<sup>90</sup> This video, posted to the Internet site Vimeo, purports to depict the deviant behavior present at the heretical ceremony. [http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3mvmj\\_mariage-ou-semblant-d-homosexuels-a\\_news](http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x3mvmj_mariage-ou-semblant-d-homosexuels-a_news)

<sup>91</sup> In summer of 2011, Moroccan media drove itself into a fervor over allegations that the banned Islamist party representative Nadia Yassine, allegedly visited Greece with a fellow party member (not her husband). Photographs were published which would be innocuous in comparison, for example, with the American media’s sex scandals – they simply show a woman who resembles Yassine from a distance walking in a Greek street. Refer to: T.A. « Nadia Yassine : des photos ‘compromettantes’ qui ne le sont pas tellement... » *Demain*.

<http://www.demainonline.com/2011/06/17/nadia-yassine-des-photos-compromettantes-qui-ne-le-sont-pas/>  
17 June 2011.

<sup>92</sup> In the past decade, gay and lesbian advocacy groups have made a tentative appearance across the Islamic world. Collectives such as *Kif Kif* in Morocco regularly blog about the repression faced by homosexuals in the Kingdom, and Tunisia recently saw the publication of its first online magazine targeted to a gay and lesbian Arab demographic.

<sup>93</sup> Wilson Jacko Jabob’s *Working Out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870-1940* (2011) is littered with examples of the fraught nature of male dress throughout Egypt’s postcolonial transition to “modernity” in the wake of British withdrawal. The divide between rural, peasant-glorified *gellabiyas* and urban, middle class Western suit and tie (with requisite fez cap) is also discussed by Gala Amin (2010) and Hanan Kholoussy (2010).

presented in Chapter Two, I return to the *ḥadīth* often cited by critics of Islam as proof of intolerance towards same-gender sexual desire. Abu Hurairah narrates:

A transvestite (*mukhannath*) who had dyed his hands and feet with henna was brought to the Prophet. He asked: What is the matter with this man? He was told: Apostle of Allah! he affects women's get-up. So he ordered regarding him and he was banished to an-Naqi'. The people said: Apostle of Allah! should we not kill him? He said: I have been prohibited from killing people who pray.<sup>94</sup>

Homosexuality does not appear at all to provide a target of attack; rather, the problem is deviation from Islamic conceptions of appropriate gender norms—stated differently, it is a failure to “keep up appearances.” Further *ḥadīth* underscore an explicit association with henna as an emblem of normative femininity in accordance with Islamic ideals. For example, a woman once approached the Prophet with a letter, but her bare hands troubled him, as they obscured her identity:

Narrated Aisha, *Ummul Mu'minin* [Mother of the Believers]: A woman made a sign from behind a curtain to indicate that she had a letter for the Apostle of Allah (Peace Be Upon Him). The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) closed his hand, saying: I do not know if this is a man's or a woman's hand. She said: No, a woman. He said: If you were a woman, you would make a difference to your nails, meaning with henna.<sup>95</sup>

In this case, henna adornment so clearly demarcates gender that the Prophet confronts a potential breach in propriety in the possibility of physical contact with an unrelated woman. Although the passage does not go into further detail, it clearly demonstrates that henna adornment serves to differentiate male from female, which posed a problem for the verification of the visitor's gender identity. The Prophet's skepticism towards the visitor is recorded with precise reference to the gendered use of henna.

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<sup>94</sup> Sunan Abu Dawud 41: 4910.

<sup>95</sup> Sunan Abu-Dawud: Kitab Al-Tarajjul, 4154.

An additional narrative implies a further connection between Islam and the value of henna for delineating religious and political affiliation to the Muslim community. In the early years of Islam, a woman named Hind fiercely opposed the new religion, engaging in armed combat with followers of the Prophet in legendary battles. Eventually conceding defeat, she sought out the Prophet in order to convert. Aisha recorded, “When Hind, daughter of Utbah, said: Prophet of God, accept my allegiance, he replied; I shall not accept your allegiance till you make a difference to the palms of your hands; for they look like the paws of a beast of prey.”<sup>96</sup> These three *ḥadīth* anchor henna ornamentation within canonical orthodoxy’s characterization of appropriate gender behavior and appearance for Muslim men and women.

Although Judith Butler’s landmark text *Gender Trouble* (1999) radically impacted scholarship on Western gender construction, the subject of sexualities in Islamicate cultures has only recently begun to attract academic attention.<sup>97</sup> Butler debunks the paradigmatic assumptions that gender directly corresponds to biological sex; for her, gender is not inherent but constructed through repetitive performances that preserve and re-inscribe cultural norms of “male” and “female.” Drawing on Butler’s insights, recent investigations by Whitaker (2011), Bradley (2010), Massad (2007), Najmabadi (2005) and Kugle (2010) demonstrate the inherent difficulty of mapping “heterosexuality” and “homosexuality” onto gendered behavior in Muslim cultures, particularly in pre-colonial history. Islamic jurisprudential traditions emphasize a view of sexuality that privileges performative action over identity-based constructions familiar from

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<sup>96</sup> Sunan Abu-Dawud: Kitab Al-Tarajjul, 4153.

<sup>97</sup> I use the term “Islamicate” in keeping with Marshall G. Hodgson’s invention of the term to delineate “the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims.” (See Hodgson, M. 1977. *The Venture of Islam, Vol. 1, The Classical Age*, pp. 58-9). As this dissertation focuses primarily on the role of Islam in henna adornment, I utilize “Islamic” as an overarching designation. However, in the instance above, I follow Hodgson’s designation of a socio-cultural complex shared across divergent regions.

gay rights activist discourse in the West.<sup>98</sup> Here, an active sexual role assumes precedence over the concept of same-sex desire as an identity.

The distinction between active and passive conceptions of sexuality and gender, is embedded within the Arabic lexicon: although gay and lesbian activists advance *mithlī* (or, “same”) as politically-correct terminology for identitarian homosexuality, the neologism’s predecessors demonstrate a fundamentally different perception of gender and sexual performance. *Zāmil*, a North African pejorative term for “gay man,” refers literally to the passive partner of homosexual male intercourse—the penetrator remains, if not positively valorized, superior to the penetrated.<sup>99</sup> Although the action of the penetrator’s sexual behavior may be non-normative, it does not fully emasculate him: he remains a “man,” unlike his partner. Classical Arabic refers to a homosexual male as *shāth*—translated simply: “deviant.” It is within this context that we must interpret al-Qasr al-Kabir’s 2007 gay wedding, as well as broader expectations of gender conformity in accordance with Islam. The ostentation of the ceremony provoked the most heated controversy: it constituted a public refusal to perform sexuality within normative religious and cultural gender boundaries.

Chapter Two demonstrated that henna’s prominence as a religious symbol derives from textual traditions closely associated with the Prophet Muḥammad’s preference for the flowering plant. As discussed above, the use of the dye as an ornamental skin decoration carries meaning critical to gender construction. In Morocco, however, both men and women make use of henna

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<sup>98</sup> Similarly to members of the feminist movement, advocates of gay rights in the Muslim world are often split on issues of definitional sexuality. Responses to a 2005 campaign by the state of Israel (“Brand Israel”) have attracted ire for so-called “pink-washing,” or attempts to cover abysmal human rights records by advancing a problematic discourse of fanatical, homophobic Islam. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/11/23/opinion/pinkwashing-and-israels-use-of-gays-as-a-messaging-tool.html>

<sup>99</sup> The colloquial translation of this term (circumscribed, to my knowledge, to the vernacular dialects of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya) is “faggot”; Egyptian derivations include *khawāl*

adornment—albeit in diametrically-opposed ways that underscore locally-gendered propriety.<sup>100</sup> Critical aspects of religious and cultural rituals, such as the method of application, stylistic features and compositional placement underscore henna’s crucial role in providing both spiritual connection to the divine and reinforcing appropriate gendered behavior.

Chapter One advanced an understanding of Morocco as an exceptional hybrid space of ethnic and religious diversity and cultural exchange, bound together through Islam. Chapter Two gave considerable attention to the manner in which henna, as a resonant medium, challenges canonical definitions of “art.” The claim that henna adornment constitutes an Islamic ritual practice, similarly, confronts contentious debates within Islamic Studies—namely, the question of definitional authority. As a religious system which theoretically opposes clerical intervention between individual believers and the Divine, how are we to distinguish between “popular” (or “unorthodox”) and “scriptural” Islamic practices? Indeed, is such a demarcation valid, or even possible? Here, we interrogate classical Islamic conceptions of apostasy and the nature of authority, implicating in turn conceptual notions of orthodoxy and orthopraxy. To grasp the religiously operational value of henna in ritual context, I argue, one must conceive of Moroccan Islam not through a classificatory binary of belief and practice but much like the physical terrain of geography, a hybridized contact zone. In the alchemical space between mind and body, ritual performance activates henna’s potentiality as a dual medium for blessing and purification.

Contrary to assertions that Islam constitutes a “barracks room” religion obsessed with discipline (Lévi-Strauss 1974: 403), or evidences a hedonistic preoccupation with the pleasures of the flesh, Islamic tradition stresses neither ascetic rigidity nor hedonistic abandon but rather a

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<sup>100</sup> Men commonly dye their beards in emulation of the Prophet, and may make use of the material at some ritual occasions, but do not use henna in a manner of decorative ornamentation—this is exclusively a feminine prerogative.



confluence of the divine realm and the terrestrial body.<sup>101</sup> Unlike the worship practice of a Protestant Christian, a Muslim believer's experience of the ineffable is mediated through codified physical actions—for which both physical purity and correct intention are prerequisites.<sup>102</sup> As this chapter demonstrates, women's henna adornment operates at the critical juncture of belief and practice, simultaneously upholding and subverting canonical, textual traditions of Islamic authority.

### **Authority and Textual Tensions: Orthopraxy or Orthodoxy?**

As Fox News demands Muslims denounce radicalism, self-identified moderates often clench their teeth in frustration (Abou El Fadl 2005: 1-26). A post-9/11 scramble to define the soul of this vast and diverse religion has included widely varied voices, including imams, evangelical preachers, military personnel, political scientists, talk-show hosts, and self-styled experts, Muslim and non-Muslim alike. Should the violent acts of a few be discounted as deviations from the “real Islam” or regarded as merely “extreme”? Can the “fundamentalist” and the “progressive” coexist in the same religious category?<sup>103</sup>

Controversial reformist scholar Tariq Ramadan argues, “There is one Islam, and the fundamental principles that define it are those to which all Muslims adhere, even though there

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<sup>101</sup> Much colonial-era scholarship (as well as that of certain contemporary evangelicals) exerted considerable effort in the depiction of Muḥammad as a sex-crazed deviant, and Islam as a religion obsessed with sexuality; the “sexual frustration” explanation for Islamic suicide terrorism often revivifies this characterization of Muslim society and religion (See: Stern 2003).

<sup>102</sup> Unlike some sects of fundamentalist Protestantism, the emphasis on physical actions is shared among all practicing Muslims. While particular aspects of performing prayer may differ, codified Islamic orthodoxy enjoins proscribed bodily practice upon believers, circumscribing the interpretative possibilities seen in cross-denominational Protestant practices.

<sup>103</sup> As some recent scholarship suggests, a closer relationship may exist between fundamentalist tendencies across religious traditions than within denominations of the same umbrella faith. See: Martin E. Marty and R. Scott Appleby (1991, 1993, 1994, 1995).

may be, clothed in Islamic principles, an important margin allowed for ... adaptation to various social and cultural environments” (2004: 9). Ramadan attempts to distill variegated Muslim practices down to the “fundamental principles of ‘universal Islam,’” in an attempt to provide believers in Western nations with the “tools...available to confront diversity and change” (2004: 10). Ramadan rejects the notion that a diversity of legal opinions constitutes multiple conceptions of truth, and underscores the obligation of all scholars (‘*ulamā*) to seek out this singular truth (2004:51). This directive appears as an act of semantic gymnastics but reflects long-standing debates in Islamic theology.

Reformist theologian and feminist Amina Wadud adopts a contrasting position, noting, “While I do not identify with suicide bombers or acts of violence, I cannot ignore that they occur within the ranks of that vast community of Islam...Multiple, contested, and coexisting meanings of Islam are integral to the struggles for justice in Islamic reform today” (2006: 5). Wadud locates definitional authority within a space of contestation; Ramadan instead subjugates the varied voices claiming Islam to the vague realm of “Divine truth.” Wadud explicitly cautions against the temptation to define this (ever-elusive) “real” Islam and clarifies, “When I engaged in such oversimplification and reductionist claims, I inadvertently implied I actually had the power to express and possess the ‘true’ Islam” (2006: 6).<sup>104</sup>

Islamic legal scholar Khaled Abou El Fadl is also concerned with the parameters of communal affiliation in his numerous works on the twin notions of orthodoxy and authority (2001, 2002, 2004, 2005, 2009). Abou El Fadl recounts the experience of growing up in Sunnī Islam, where the concept of egalitarianism among Muslim believers ostensibly precludes a clerical monopoly: “One is frequently reminded by one’s teachers that there is no church in

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<sup>104</sup> Ramadan and Wadud purport to speak both to non-Muslim academic audiences and the community of believers—a genre of Islamic studies often termed “pro-faith.”

Islam, and that no person, or set of persons, embodies God's Divine authority" (2005: 9). The author highlights a fundamental contradiction between ideal (and thus 'authentic') Islam and a religion of earthly practice: "The same teachers who take great pride in the ethos of diversity and egalitarianism will also insist on the existence of an orthodoxy in Islam and the need for unity and uniformity. The orthodoxy is represented not only by a set of basic and common theological beliefs but also by a quite specific and detailed set of laws" (2005: 10). Orthodoxy, Abou El Fadl tells us, is *represented*.

Locating definitional authority in Islam has proven a repeated and problematic theme in Islamic history since the death of the Prophet. Within Muhammad's life span, his personage provided a clear and largely uncontested source of religious authority; disputes surrounding his spiritual and political heir, however, erupted immediately after his death (Dakake 2007; Madelung 1998; Momen 1985; Takim 2007). In addition to contestation of the Prophet's earthly successor, questions of authority were further complicated by Islam's rapid spread across vast geographies in a relatively limited time span. As the religion expanded to diverse and unfamiliar corners of the globe, concern for the organization and codification of religious matters arose. Well into the tenth century, various interpretative schools of Islamic law vied with one another for religious authority (An-Na'im 2008: 45-83). The flexibility of the *madhhab* (doctrinal school of thought) system accounts for much of the divergence in practiced witness in regional iterations of a universal Islam.

The onslaught of modernity, colonial interventions and technological innovations further complicated concepts of authority and orthodoxy; the migration of large communities to non-Muslim majority nations has also contributed to a breakdown in adherence to a singular school of doctrine. The Internet may serve a Bengali Muslim resident of Iowa, for example, in

obtaining an instantaneous *fatwa* (a religious opinion ostensibly issued by a qualified legal scholar) on a question of religious concern. Guest workers from Egypt often return from oil-rich Gulf countries with far more rigid interpretations of correct Islamic practice than what they learned as children. As the forces of globalization connect varied localities at an increasingly rapid pace, academic and religious concern for delineation of spiritual authority continues to grow.

Nikki R. Keddie contends that although the term “orthodoxy” is inappropriate for early periods of Islamic history, it nonetheless accurately denotes “certain trends which had the support of the majority of the pious and/or of the government” (1963: 35). Keddie, however, takes care to underscore that the “emphasis of Islam [is] on practice rather than belief” (1963: 41). Daniel Varisco criticizes such a characterization as fundamentally reductive, and indicative of a latent bias in the view of Islam as “an orthopraxy, a religion united by practice rather than shared belief.” Invoking the extensive corpus of Muslim theology (comparable, in his estimation, to Thomas Aquinas’ philosophical reasoning in Christian tradition), Varisco asks, “Given the extraordinary depth of Islamic thought, is the idea of an Islamic orthodoxy really so toxic to non Muslims?” (2005: 9).<sup>105</sup> Gregory Starrett argues that orthopraxy not only mischaracterizes Islamic tradition but constitutes an ontological mechanism by which Western scholarship has historically fostered cultural division: “The persistent claim that Islam is a religion of ‘orthopraxy,’ concerned with correct performance of ritual, rather than of orthodoxy, concern for correct belief, has been used in part...to distance outer-directed Islam from inner-directed Christianity” (1995: 964). Scholars often view the orthopraxy thesis with considerable suspicion, claiming that it dismisses the importance of Muslims’ belief systems.

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<sup>105</sup> See also Abu Zahra 1997; Assad 1986.

Devin Stewart favors characterizations of Islam that highlight orthodoxy on historical, theological and etymological grounds. Stewart denies the common charge that Islamic theology precludes the presence of a distinctive definitional authority on religious matters: “It hardly seems possible...that definitions of orthodoxy and heresy together with religious authorities who define and set them simply do not exist in Islam. Any religion must regulate the exclusion of deviant elements from the community in some way” (1998 45). Stewart points out that the application of “orthopraxy” to the conformity of religious practice arises from “considerable confusion concerning its meaning. In one usage, orthopraxy refers to the fact that religious conformity in Islam—and in Judaism as well—is based on legal rather than theological questions...orthopraxy does not denote it accurately” (1998: 46). The secondary meaning, moreover, perilously conflates “theology/law and belief/practice” (Stewart 1998: 46).

Stewart further rejects the orthopraxy thesis as simply inaccurate, citing numerous juridical and scholarly opinions to prove that within Sunnī Islam, “the commission of sin, which is incorrect practice, does not render one an unbeliever” (1989: 47). Alcohol provides a paramount example. Drinking does not itself merit punishment; instead, blame is attached to the *belief* that consumption entails no sin—“It is heretical, rather, *to consider it permissible*” (Stewart 1989: 47). Thus, a high value is attached to communal consensus; violation of beliefs shared by the majority constitutes transgression against the parameters of religious affiliation. Legal categories of apostasy and unbelief, moreover, allow considerable variability concerning the boundaries of the faith-based community. To approach the question from a different angle, *ṣalat* (prayer) constitutes the most important ritual pillar of Islam—neglect of prayer renders a believer deficient in the faith, rather than outside the fold of religiosity. To deny that prayer is mandatory, however, *would* serve to dislocate the individual from the community of the faithful.

Classical jurisprudence recognizes the porousness of the boundary between outright apostasy and deviance from communally accepted doctrines and practices. The fourteenth century Shāfi‘ī scholar Aḥmad ibn Naqīb al-Miṣri (d. 1368) categorically states, “To deny the obligatory character of something which by the consensus of Muslims...is part of Islam, when it is well known as such, like the prayer (salat) or even one rak’a [cycle] from the five obligatory prayers” (1991: 598). The jurist lists denial of the mandatory nature of pilgrimage and charity as similarly tantamount to unbelief—in addition to all else “which is necessarily known as being of the religion (*necessarily known* meaning things that any Muslim would know about if asked)” (al-Miṣri 1991: 109). The injunctions outlined by al-Miṣri and Stewart underscore a considerable leeway allowed by classical jurisprudence for variance within the Islamic community. Moreover, Islamic legal scholars throughout history have stressed the theological dangers inherent in the issue of *takfīr* (excommunication) (al-Miṣri 1991: 951-954).<sup>106</sup>

The Qur’an itself makes reference to the perilous nature of declaring another Muslim outside the fold, cautioning that only God knows the intentions of another (74:31):

And We have not made the keepers of the Fire except angels. And We have not made their number except as a trial for those who disbelieve - that those who were given the Scripture will be convinced and those who have believed will increase in faith and those who were given the Scripture and the believers will not doubt and that those in whose hearts is hypocrisy and the disbelievers will say, "What does God intend by this as an example?" Thus does God leave astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills. And none knows the soldiers of your Lord except Him. And mention of the Fire is not but a reminder to humanity.

This Qur’anic reference to intention raises a fundamental issue for our purposes here. The orthopraxy-orthodoxy binary is overly rigid and masks a critical dialectic between the two

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<sup>106</sup> Claims to individual authority over interpretation (*ijtihād*) constitute a thoroughly modern phenomenon that better contextualizes the conflicts within the global Muslim community today. “Liberal” interpretations of Classical Islamic traditions does not necessarily correlate to progressive practice—deviation from orthodox scholarship results in the diametrically opposed ideological perspectives of such figures as “fundamentalist” Osama Bin Laden and “reformer” Irshad Manji.

concepts, rendered visible in Islamic tradition through the concept of *niyya* (intention).<sup>107</sup>

Although incorrect action invalidates mandatory ritual duties (for example, consumption of food during Ramadan’s daylight hours), successful performance is equally contingent upon sincerity of intention—an intimate state knowable to the believer and verifiable only by God. This refers not merely to physical cleanliness or cognitive awareness but to the *congruence* of mental and physical purity.

The primacy accorded *niyya* impacts the concept of mindfulness in Muslim practice, and raises the question of legal responsibility. Ritual actions of children below the age of reason, and of insane or intoxicated persons are considered illegitimate; indeed, Islamic legal thought includes absent-mindedness, in addition to insanity, as a mental state precluding the necessity of sincere intention.<sup>108</sup> Paul Rabinow argues that *niyya*, as a fundamentally divine parameter by which all actions will ultimately be judged, is particularly critical within the context of Moroccan Islam, (1977: 144). The concept is invoked in everyday speech as a reminder that God is the supreme judge and human motivation is always indiscernible.

I do not suggest in this dissertation that previous scholars are incorrect in the characterization of Islam as orthoprax or orthodox system; rather, I argue that pervasive inattention to the gendered aspects of Islamic rituals obscures fundamental differences in the way male and female bodies experience religious practice. This proves especially pressing in traditions where purity is at issue, and more so in the variability of local interpretations of Islamic cosmology. Popular misconceptions define “orthodox” Islam as a male terrain and “folk” or “popular” Islam as the domain of women (despite considerable categorical overlap).

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<sup>107</sup> According to many jurists, hypocrisy constitutes the most blameworthy and abhorrent form of apostasy—“concealed unbelief while outwardly professing Islam” (al-Miṣri 1991: 753).

<sup>108</sup> The age of reason (*‘aql*), at which point a believer is judged fully responsible for religious obligations occurs in tandem with the physiological changes of puberty—semen emission in boys and menstruation in girls. This is generally believed to occur between the ages of eight and ten.

On account of physiology's implications in local ritual interpretation of purity and pollution, the ineffable experience may, in fact, be highly gendered.

The concept of *niyya*, I contend, provides a crucial lens through which Moroccan women's experience of Islam is rendered visible. We thus arrive at the methodological crux of the present chapter. Although utilized to differing degrees in other Muslim-majority cultures, henna is considered obligatory by the majority of Moroccan Muslims for every significant ritual.<sup>109</sup> On many occasions, when women evaluated henna designs to be of poor quality, this was expressed on the basis of deficient *niyya*, whether on the part of the wearer or the artisan. In the community of Moroccan Islamic belief, henna's obligatory usage reflects a communal consensus partly established by canonical, classical jurisprudence, and seamlessly integrated into local context.

In line with al-Miṣri's condition that "what is necessarily known," men and women deploy specific textual evidence as a theological justification for an allegedly "popular" or "folk" adornment practice and firmly anchor the art form within the boundaries of accepted (indeed, recommended) religious practice. The spiritual value accorded to henna is not circumscribed to *ḥadīth* literature recommending emulation of the Prophet but it also—and critically—claims a divine genealogy by virtue of *baraka* to the necessary purity required for religious practice.

### **Purity and Pollution: Theoretical Egalitarianism**

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<sup>109</sup> Henna is also used in Hindu, Sikh, and some Jewish communities. Even within the context of these and other Muslim nations, however, the art form is predominantly associated with bridal ceremony—and is not explicitly justified on the grounds of Prophetic blessing. Moreover, outside of the most westerly periphery of Algeria (where considerable similarity with Moroccan culture exists due to close cross-border historical contact), I am unaware of the term "light of the Prophet" to denote the adornment.



Purity codes are often invoked as demonstrable proof for the characterization of Islam as a religious system in which bodily action and awareness, through ritual, supersedes the primacy of belief. As previously discussed, the concept of *niyya* is of fundamental importance in mitigating such Cartesian dichotomies not wholly applicable to Muslim contexts, particularly when it comes to gendered experience. Concern for ritual purity is by no means confined to Islam, and extant as well in Judaism, Hinduism, Zoroastrianism and numerous other religious traditions (Parrinder 1980).<sup>110</sup> Despite its ubiquity across religious, ethnic and geographical affiliations, however, the concept appears in many studies of Islam as a sexual pathology rendering women second-class in the spiritual community. Abdelwahab Bouhdiba's landmark assessment of sexuality in Islam, for example, locates contemporary Arab-Muslim societies in a state of crisis directly related to the concept of pollution in relation to sexual practice. Bouhdiba's study characterizes Islam as an action-based religious system, in which praxic conformity outweighs that of belief; the author characterizes Muslim religiosity as ritualistic, sexually neurotic, and obsessed with the question of purity (1985).

Despite Bouhdiba's focus on sexual pollution, Islamic concern for spiritual purification is not merely limited to physical interaction between males and females. As previously described, only the congruence of a right mind, a purified state, and the enactment of specified physical actions validate ritual practice. In this sense, one may argue that the emphasis placed on purification does not arise merely from bodily concerns, but rather as a mechanism to enable spiritual concentration and better approach the transcendent; the basis of valid practice, then, is located in the convergence of mind and body, mitigated through the intention to align both.

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<sup>110</sup> Even Christianity once held to ritual purity. For example, 7<sup>th</sup> century archbishop of Canterbury Theodore of Tarsus forbade menstruating women from taking communion and prohibited their entry into churches, due to their spiritually polluted state (Katz 2002:4-5). Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox Christianity, as well as other "popular" Christian practices throughout the world continue to emphasize the importance of female purity lacking, for example, in contemporary American evangelical tradition.

Training the body and the mind of believers relies on a dialectical relationship of awareness simultaneously aimed at terrestrial and celestial realms. Cleanliness by itself is not synonymous with purity, yet “purity cannot be attained without cleanliness” (Jansen 1987: 50). This notion of a relationship at once dialectical and hierarchical provides a model for understanding the critical role played by *niyya* as a mitigating factor bridging abyss between mind and body.<sup>111</sup>

Awareness of physiology is inculcated through the preparation of purified states that are prerequisites for ritual actions. A widely known *ḥadīth*, “Purity is half of faith,” underscores this aspect of religiosity.<sup>112</sup> Ritual obligations demand attention to the physical body and its natural, if polluting, discharges. Islamic thought categorizes impurities (that which invalidates worship) into three primary classes: minor, major and substantive. The first classification, minor impurities (*al- aḥdāth al-sughrā*) consists of defilement by virtue of actions such as passing gas, urination, defecation, loss of consciousness, sleep, vomiting, and skin-to-skin contact with a marriageable member of the opposite sex (Katz 2002:2).<sup>113</sup> This state is rectified through a partial ablution known as *al-wuḍū*. The second category of pollution, major impurities (*al- aḥdāth al-kubrā*) explicitly relates to the by-products of sexual activity: semen, the fluid of ejaculation (male or female), menstruation and the blood resulting from childbirth (Maghen 2006:7; Buitelaar 1993:103). Contact with any of these substances necessitates the performance of *ḡuṣl*, a complete ablution.<sup>114</sup> The final class of substantive impurity (*najāsa*) refers not to the

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<sup>111</sup> Although *jihād* as “holy war” (an inaccurate translation) appears writ large in contemporary studies of Islam, the term literally refers to “struggle.” In the sense of armed struggle, this refers to physical combat, but a secondary appearance of *jihād* in Islamic doctrine refers to the “greater *jihād*” (*jihād an-naḥs*)—the struggle against the desires of the lower, animal self.

<sup>112</sup> *Saḥīḥ* Muslim, 2: 432.

<sup>113</sup> Juridical opinion as to the latter point varies considerably. Some schools view this as a cause of impurity only when one party may be sexually aroused by the contact. Similarly, debates exist as to whether or not the blood emitted from a wound as it heals can be classed within the *al ahdath al sughra* category (Katz 2002:2).

<sup>114</sup> *Ḡuṣl* is also necessary upon conversion to Islam, suggesting that the spiritually deficient state of a non Muslim (unbelief) is rectified through both right belief and right action.

actions of a believer, but contamination inherent in the matter.<sup>115</sup> A general consensus of Islamic scholars identifies blood, fecal matter, urine and specific animals (pigs and dogs, whether living or dead) and meat produced through non-Islamic ritual slaughter.

Collective anxiety, according to Bouhdiba, arises from inevitable contact with innately polluted matter; in other words, merely living in the world defiles believers. It is not sin itself, but inescapable bodily functions which create socio-religious neuroses (despite lawfully legitimate circumstances which produce such pollution) (1985: 43). To be Muslim, therefore, is marked by a need to constantly maintain intimate awareness of the body and its functions. Bouhdiba's critics reject the charge that Islamic purity codes produce social neuroses anchored in anxiety surrounding the human body.

Ze'ev Maghen argues that sexuality, as described in foundational sources, is never viewed as inherently dirty or polluting, but beautiful and powerful—provided it remains in the realm of licit activity (such as lawful marriage). The problem posed by sexuality's physical by-products, Maghen contends, is the challenge such states pose to the maintenance of spiritual mindfulness (2006: 32). Maghen argues that scholars of Islam have long mischaracterized purity codes as negative valuations of the human body itself rather than “an equally valid...meritorious mode of being” (2006: 35). In Maghen's reading, the competition between the battling forces of spiritual and physical drives best explains the Islamic emphasis on purity.

Marjo Buitelaar points out that while purity codes in Islam are theoretically egalitarian, they nonetheless produce asymmetrical consequences in practice (1993: 116). This variance in the social interpretation of purity codes owes much to localized pre-Islamic cultural beliefs—a fact which underscores the hazy terrain of definitional authority in relation to orthodox religiosity. Following Mary Douglas, Bouhdiba underscores the relationship between social

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<sup>115</sup> This may also be translated as “filth.”

control and purity, which “involves the very organization of the historically embodied community” (1985:55). Jansen considers the position of women unattached to men in Algeria as analogous to Mary Douglas’ concept of “matter out of place” (1987). Such women, in Jansen’s estimation, are required to engage in occupations such as washing corpses for burial, attending bathhouses, or serving as maids—jobs which allow for a measure of financial independence, yet nonetheless involve closer contact with potential pollutants. In this assessment, women are not necessarily more predisposed to ritual impurity than men, but are typically in closer proximity to pollutants out of occupational necessity.

Jansen asserts, “On connecting sexuality with pollution, Islam never preached abstinence, but instilled an awareness of sexuality. It provided rules to control sexuality and rituals to neutralize its polluting powers” (1987: 54). Despite this caveat, Jansen nonetheless draws attention to the critical factor of social forces in mitigating ostensibly universal Islamic legal codes: “Clean and dirty, pure and impure, are notions by which many societies express differentiation and hierarchy. By imposing definitions of themselves as cleaner, purer, or more distant from physiological processes, higher groups express and reinforce their superiority” (1987: 43).

Many of the attempts to characterize Islam as an orthoprax religious system rely on valuations of purity and pollution injunctions. Similarly, considerations of women’s status in Islam also derive from the emphasis placed by canonical tradition on the regulation of physiology prior to spiritual engagement. To interrogate the position of women vis-à-vis regulations on bodily states, we must briefly consider the special state of menstruation. The classification *al- aḥdāth al-ṣuḡhrā* consists of defilement resulting from unavoidable natural states, i.e., defecation, urination and loss of consciousness. Conversely, *al-aḥdāth al-kubrā*, in

which menstruation and semen emission appear, construct these forms of pollution as a process that could theoretically be regulated. For example, one may abstain from engagement in sexual activity to forestall, the production of semen. Menstruation appears anomalous, as the physiological function cannot be naturally suppressed or restrained. However, menstrual blood itself does not constitute special class of *najāsa*; it is no more contagiously impure, for example, than the blood of a paper cut.

It is here—on the body of woman—that complex problems of interpretative authority emerge, as do broad parameters for cultural adaptation. Nowhere does the Qur’an correlate female biology with the transgressions of Eve, nor are bodily functions described as a divine curse against women. However, the variant connotations of the menstrual cycle appear more important when we analyze the interpretive possibilities of translation. *Sūrat al-baqara* (the Verse of the Cow) which addresses the state of menses, provides a case in point (2:222):

They question thee (O Muḥammad) concerning menstruation. Say: It is an illness, so let women alone at such times and go not in unto them till they are cleansed. And when they have purified themselves, then go in unto them as Allah hath enjoined upon you. Truly Allah loveth those who turn unto Him, and loveth those who have a care for cleanness.<sup>116</sup>

They ask you about women's menses. Tell them, "It is an ailment. Avoid having carnal relations with them until their period is over." Then you may have carnal relations with them according to the rules of God. God loves those who repent and those who purify themselves.<sup>117</sup>

They ask you concerning menstruation. Say: that is an Adhā (a harmful thing for a husband to have a sexual intercourse with his wife while she is having her menses), therefore keep away from women during menses and go not unto them till they have purified (from menses and have taken a bath). And when they have purified themselves, then go in unto them as Allah has ordained for you (go in unto them in any manner as long as it is in their vagina). Truly, Allah loves those who turn unto Him in repentance and loves

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<sup>116</sup> In Abdullah Yusuf Ali’s translation, he emphasizes, “Physical cleanliness and purity make for health, bodily and spiritual. But the matter should be looked at from the woman’s point of view as well as the man’s. To her there is the danger of hurt, and she should have every consideration” (2002: Note 247, p. 87).

<sup>117</sup> Muḥammad Sarwar (2001).

those who purify themselves (by taking a bath and cleaning and washing thoroughly their private parts, bodies, for their prayers, etc.).<sup>118</sup>

Translations of the word *adhā* range from “hurt” and “illness” to “pollution.”<sup>119</sup> Feminist scholars, such as Wadud, argue for a holistic hermeneutics of the Qur’an and hence prefer the term’s translation as “hardship,” in keeping with broader Qur’anic frames that situate male and female believers as egalitarian participants in the faith-based community.

Although the Qur’an expressly prohibits sexual intercourse during the menstrual period, unlike Judaic law, Islamic legal codes do not compel menstruating women to enter seclusion; neither are women prevented from preparation of food or cultivation of crops, acts in other societies which carry the potential for contagious pollution. The immense corpus of *ḥadīth* (many fabricated), however, demonstrates considerable ambivalence on the question of menstrual pollution. In Muslim’s canonical compilation, the Prophet clearly views menstruation as devoid of contagious pollution. Muḥammad asks his favorite wife Aisha to fetch his prayer rug as he prepares for ritual prostrations. She refuses on the grounds of monthly impurity. The Prophet responds, “(rolling his eyes): ‘For God’s sake, A’isha—your menstruation is not in your hand” (Muslim 3:298).

Deborah Kapchan describes a female Moroccan herbalist invoking another *ḥadīth* to justify her presence in the marketplace on the grounds of religious knowledge: “The Prophet said, prayers and peace be upon him, ‘Whoever looks upon a menstruating woman is like someone who has eaten a viper with poison’” (1996: 147). In this anecdote, one woman lays claim to interpretative authority by virtue of *ḥadīth* knowledge, even though it casts her own gender in an ambivalent position between power and danger. Of greater importance than

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<sup>118</sup> Mohsin Khan (1999).

<sup>119</sup> Additional derivations include “damage,” “irritation,” “trouble,” “grievance” and “insult.”

historical veracity is the quotation's cultural acceptance. The utterance simultaneously appears to undercut women's claims to public space, even as it upholds one woman's exclusionary authority. The herb-seller, herself a potentially dangerous female, capitalizes on the ambivalent view of Moroccan women as she trades in magical remedies in the generally male domain of the public market space. To Kapchan, discursive appropriation of interpretative authority "puts traditional definitions of womanhood into question" (1996: 148).

In the context of Moroccan Islam, such "traditional definitions of womanhood" derive from the culturally specific attribution of pollution attached to menstruation. A woman's physiology places her in contact with polluting substances more often than the body of a male partner. The reproductive complex consists not only of emission from sexual intercourse but also (potentially) childbirth and the unavoidable recurrence of menstruation. Henna adornment, as we shall see, by virtue of the blessings granted to it by textual and canonical Islamic traditions, functions to mitigate these impurities.

### **Women in Moroccan Islam: Hybridity as an Interpretative Lens**

The topic of women in Islam is as popular as it is contentious; debates on the negative or positive position of female Muslims are far beyond the scope of the present study.<sup>120</sup> It is critical here to focus instead on the local interpretation of gendered Islamic practice, particularly with respect to the concepts of purity and pollution. The construction of gendered Muslim roles in Morocco reflects the hybridity of geographical heritage: similar attitudes towards the female body are

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<sup>120</sup> For evaluations of women's status in Islam with respect to contemporary textual interpretation and historical reassessments of "orthodox" legal development, see: Ahmed (1989, 1992, 2011), Barlas (2002, 2005, 2006), Mahmood (2005), Mernissi (1987, 1994, 1995, 2001), El Saadawi (1969, 1975, 1974, 1980, 1986) Wadud (1999, 2006).

equally extant throughout much of the Mediterranean and sub-Saharan Africa. Moroccan history features powerful female figures in legend, collective memory and oral tradition (al-Tāzī 1992; Hannoum 2001; Sadiqi and Nowaira, et. Al 2009). Considerable social ambivalence, however, marks women as a category, due to widespread perceptions that the bodily function of menstruation places them in closer contact not only with pollution (and hence, distant from piety), but also to the realm of malevolent spirits drawn to impurity. As we will see, however, the social tension surrounding femininity is not fixed at birth but fluctuates in accordance with life cycle transitions: women at the peak of fertility (and hence, regular menstruation), pose a considerable risk to the boundaries of the authoritarian patriarchal order if not properly socialized into normative gender roles.

Although sacred texts construct the broad framework for ambivalent valuations of women and menstruation, local cultural specificities cannot be ignored. Labelle Prussin's notion of vernacular dialects in Islamic architecture (discussed in Chapter One), proves instructive here—menstruation is viewed in ambiguous terms in relation to “universal” Islamic doctrine, yet locality imbues its interpretation with precision. Moroccan linguist Fatima Sadiqi has noted such a trend in the nation's languages; Sadiqi's assessment of “linguistic androcentricity” (misogyny encoded in local dialects) underscores the specificity of local vernaculars in constructing and maintaining gender hierarchies.

Regardless of the debates as to menstruation's supposed status as polluting, its onset in a young girl marks the moment at which she is considered an adult who is fully responsible for the proper completion of religious duties (Davis and Davis 1989: 45). With the onset of puberty in both males and females, considerable attention is focused on the emissions of the body. This proves the existence not merely of a system aimed at the control of sexuality (as Maghen has



pointed out, sexuality is not in and of itself negative in Islamic thought); the emphasis placed on bodily control also centers on the obligation of mental and physical purity, as “religious participation teaches self-restraint” (Jansen 1987: 54).

Maria Giovanna Messina describes this state of tension between body and spirit (1991: 178):

The practice of Islam is inseparable from the notion and definition of cleanliness. The commitment to the faith involves recognizing a continual alteration between ‘pure’ and ‘impure’ states. Achieving or maintaining such a ritual state of purity is no small order for the true believer, since everything which emerges from the human body in any form renders a Muslim impure.

Messina underscores the critical necessity of *niyya* in the process of purification, noting, “It is not sufficient to just wash in order to be purified. It is necessary to declare the ‘intention’ or thought (*niya* [*sic*]) of doing so” (1991: 180).

Among many North African Islamic cultures, puberty and the transition to adult sexuality is imbued with social anxiety, particularly concerning women. Patrilineal systems of kinship, descent, and inheritance rely on a definitive validation of paternity (Mernissi 1987: 81). Among the multiple marital practices extant in the pre-Islamic period, the new religion sanctioned only *nikāḥ al-ba’al*—a union facilitating identification of paternity and thus circumscribing female sexual intercourse to a single male partner (Naamane-Guessous 1987 : 58-9). The errant behavior of a woman stands to jeopardize the social fabric much more than that of a man, as “it may lead to confusion between descendants and inheritance...which together constitute the cornerstone of the patriarchal system” (El Saadawi 1980: 56). The notion of the wayward female and her potential threat to the social order is rooted in beliefs concerning biologically-based sexuality and cultural valuations of impurity.

Despite the fact that the Qur'an never assigns blame for menstruation and original sin to Eve, many Moroccans explicitly describe the menstrual cycle as a divine curse—demonstrating that Judeo-Christian attitudes have, to some extent, permeated Moroccan Islam with respect to female sexuality.<sup>121</sup> Moroccan Islamic practice, however, does consider women in a different light than the textual sources in isolation. One must take care, however, to avoid making distinctions between “orthodox” and “popular” Islam: such an approach often defines the popular as a set of practices concerning women and the illiterate, while the former denotes a fictionally rigid body of literate, male believers. Religious attitudes concerning women in Morocco that find Islamic sanction do not derive from textual traditions alone; women and men, literate and illiterate, uphold a matrix of cultural conformity with respect to female sexuality and socio-religious status.

As Namaane-Guessous points out, socio-religious attitudes attaching impurity and shame to menstruation continue to be pervasive (2000: 126). Particularly in rural areas, women cite Eve as responsible for menstruation's curse, and speak of menstruation as a definitive mark of pollution. Some believe that a woman on her period should not cook food for her husband, particularly if he is pious—an injunction entirely absent from the Qur'an. Associated folklore attributes the sterility of mules to the shameful pollution of menstruation. I have heard multiple women relate accounts in which the Prophet's daughter Fatima, journeying with her father, attempted to conceal her period, yet the mule on which she rode charged ahead and exposed her. As a retribution for exposing Fatima's shame, it is said, the Prophet punished mules with perpetual sterility (Namaane-Guessous 2000: 133). The shame of biological function also

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<sup>121</sup> Yet, having said this, it is crucial when considering cultural variance of menstruation to recognize variability in life span, dietary habits and access to medical care (see Lamp: 211; see also Meyer 36). Not only does the physical classification of menstruation vary, but also (naturally), the categorization of its meaning (Gottlieb 55; Buckley 191).

implicates valuations of feminine religiosity: “Piety is an aspect of morality that women cannot easily attain because of their ‘natural’ pollution through menstruation” (Abu-Lughod 1986: 130). The contamination associated with the menstrual cycle extends to “all females from the onset of menarche until menopause and even after” (Abu-Lughod 1986: 130).

Moroccan oral traditions also prove revealing concerning the threat to social cohesion and Islamic piety posed by sexually mature, adult women. According to Sadiqi, “The importance of discourse in understanding the role of gender-related meanings is revealed in the functions of proverbs, jokes, and the process of world-view formation” (2002: 144). Popular sentiment declares that a “woman should be married shortly after she starts to bleed ... That way she will not get into trouble” (Munson 1984: 260). The axiomatic nature of this statement implies that an adult female, by virtue of her sexuality, needs a supervisor to regulate her behavior and virtue. A woman’s morality is subjected to the physicality of her gender.

A common refrain echoed by countless male friends frustrated by interactions with girlfriends refers to women as *ḥbal al-šayṭān* (the tether of the Devil). According to Sarah Graham-Browne, this phrase implies that “they are capable of dragging men away from virtue and also of tying them up (in Arabic, this word is also a euphemism for impotence)” (2003:503). An informant of Lawrence Rosen explained: “Women have very great sexual desires and that’s why a man is always necessary to control them, to keep them from creating all sorts of disorder, to keep them from leading men astray” (1984: 32). The ambivalence surrounding the power accorded to women is reflected in a Moroccan expression to indicate a beautiful, if dangerous woman, *fitna*: a term translating to “chaos” in Classical Arabic and loaded in Islamic memory.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> The fear of chaos is underscored by countless Islamic injunctions on communal agreement and references critical periods of internecine clashes within the ranks of early Muslims. Notably, these incidents revolve around the contested nature of authority over the religious and political community—situations in which women played crucial

The symbolic matrix of a given cultural system imbues physical objects with connotative and pluralistic meaning. *Baraka* (“blessing” or “grace”) and *jnūn* (“spirits,” “ghosts” or “demons”) are metaphysical constructs anchored in sacred texts, and extant throughout the Muslim world. However, in the unique hybrid context of Morocco, where pre-Islamic belief systems, early Christianity, Judaism and a variety of mystical traditions intermingled for more than a millennium, these intangible concepts play a profound role in cultural interpretations of a universal Islam.

The Qur’an describes the *jnūn* as an invisible race of spirits created from a smokeless fire prior to humans (15:27). The root of the Arabic term translates to “concealed,” “hidden or “secret” and signifies a race of human-like beings, capricious and often malevolent. Akin to humans, *jnūn* (singular: *jinnī*) marry, procreate and are eventually subject to mortality. A hierarchy exists within this spirit world: *jnūn* may be pagan, Christian, Jewish or Muslim, yet all remain subservient to the power of God and Muslim saints. Mental illness, deviant behavior and bad luck may be blamed on the (generally) invisible creatures, who are held accountable for dysfunctions of a sexual nature, including infertility, impotence and uncontrollable lust (Westermarck 1926, i: 370). As the Qur’an explicitly confirms the existence of these spirits, one is hard-pressed to dismiss them as the product of folkloric belief. Nonetheless, a well-developed Moroccan demonology elaborates on the beings’ specific names, behavioral attributes and personalities far beyond the limited definitional scope outlined in the Qur’an.

Impurities are considered to draw *jnūn*, including traditional baths and toilets (Crapanzano 1973:138). Blood is especially tempting to the spirits, proving transitional moments in the life cycle particularly fraught. It is said that “nothing is more haunted by *jnūn*”

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roles (Madelung 1998, Mernissi 1997, Spellberg 1996). Hence, the Moroccan euphemism for the dangerous nature of female sexuality is anchored within an Islamic collective memory of womanhood’s divisive potentiality.

than blood and it is considered to be their favorite source of food (Westermarck 1926, i: 277, 264). Human blood (specifically blood associated with sexuality) produced during “childbirth, circumcisions and weddings” renders humans “particularly vulnerable to their attacks” (Becker 2003: 110). Furthermore, the *jnūn* often assume feminine roles in sexual circumstances: “There are numerous instances [in folklore and popular mythology] of marriage or intercourse between a man and a *jenniya* [singular] in the disguise of a woman” (Westermarck 1926, Vol.1: 266). The *jnūn* represent potential danger and serve as scapegoats for social ills. Due to the clear alignment of females with these beings, the danger posed by them in transitional periods, and their attraction to impurity, the *jnūn* can be read as embodying psycho-social tension surrounding the unclean and potentially transgressive female sexuality.

*Baraka*, however, provides a psychological binary, serving to counteract the *jnūn*. The Arabic word can be translated loosely to “blessing,” “holiness,” or “grace.” Vincent J. Cornell notes that the term’s precise definition “has run the gamut from ‘blessed virtue’ and ‘spiritual potency’ to ‘power’ and even ‘luck’” (1998: xxv). Westermarck summarizes *baraka* as “a wonderworking force which is looked at as a blessing from God” (1926: 266). The term carries positive connotations, representing socially sanctioned and desirable qualities. Among a host of others, Geertz (1971), Rosen (1984) and Westermarck (1926), have explored the role of *baraka* in Moroccan cosmology, including its transmission from God to the Prophet, and his descendants. Those possessing *baraka* are often considered saints, and are venerated as such. Saint worship and the transmission of *baraka* (through mere touch, bloodline, or numerous other methods) lacks Qur’anic basis.

As Cornell points out, the application of *baraka* as a conceptual category for Moroccan sainthood implicates the notions of *walāya* (“closeness”) and *wilāya* (“authority”) (1998).<sup>123</sup> Rather than simply charisma, these notions of authority and proximity are associated with the idea of sainthood. Objects which have come in contact with saints are imbued with *baraka*, as are the words of the Qur’an (often utilized in charms to ward off misfortune). A number of natural phenomena containing *baraka*, including streams, mountains, lakes, trees and caves, as well as a number of plant species, most notably: henna. In line with Cornell’s investigation of proximity, authority and charismatic blessing (1998), henna appears to sanctify and provide a connection to the realm of the ineffable precisely through the proximity to the Divine it provides.

A variety of scholars have commented on the blessing inherent in henna.<sup>124</sup> According to Messina, tradition relates that “the henna flower was the Prophet’s favorite and so *baraka* is associated with it, accounting for its prevailing popularity” (1991: 254). Westermarck records “the light of the Prophet” as a name for the plant, and maintains “there can be no hesitation in applying this term to the benign virtue attributed to [it]” (1926, Vol.1: 113). The attribution of *baraka* to the henna plant extends to its capacity as a body adornment. As we have seen, rites of passage and transition between critical life events involve the shedding of blood—a potent attraction for malevolent spirits. Additionally, critical religious rituals often involve sacrifice in which the blood of an animal is shed. In each instance, the use of henna appears as obligatory in the very spaces in which spiritual protection is needed. A clear connection exists between the henna plant and its prophylactic, protective qualities because of its association with *baraka*, just as correlations exist between *jnūn*, bloodshed, and women. The *baraka* inherent in henna acts as

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<sup>123</sup> Cornell describes “*walāya/wilāya*” as “semantic fraternal twins that coexist symbiotically, like yin and yang. Each relies on the other for its meaning...A person can only exercise delegated authority over another by being close to the one who bestows authority in the first place” (1998: xix).

<sup>124</sup> See also: Crapanzano 1973, Buitelaar 1993, Rausch 2001.

a an agent of purification, wards away *jnūn* drawn to impurity and transgression, alleviates social anxieties, binds together the community, and encodes socially-appropriate gender roles with the blessings of the Prophet of God. I contend that henna's proximity to the Prophet mitigates the culturally similar proximity between women's physiology and the realm of pollution to which *jnūn* are attracted.

### **Embodied Pedagogy and Gender as a Process**

As previously noted, gender is a process (Butler 1999). A notable Moroccan proverb declares that children are born closer to the angels; another saying associates baby girls with a multitude of angels that will successively drop away as she ages; the reverse is true for boys, who are considered to become more pious as they mature. As children grow, they experience puberty in divergent, gendered ways that encode social norms through repetition of bodily training.<sup>125</sup> Awareness of bodily functions and purity for both genders begins in the childhood home. Religious and ritual actions may also be undertaken in the private space. Embodied knowledge is not proscribed to private-sphere mimicry of normative gender roles. Textual knowledge and canonical orthodoxy begins with attendance at Qur'anic school in Morocco—a prerequisite for public elementary school.

In Moroccan Muslim culture, the Qur'an is believed to be literally the word of God preserved precisely as it was received in revelations given to the Prophet Muḥammad. Proper performance of ritual duties requires recitation of the Qur'anic text in original form, yet the grammatical and syntactic structure of the holy book does not correspond to the registers of

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<sup>125</sup> Cf Bourdieu (1977), Butler (1999), Mauss (1934) and Mahmoud (1996).

Arabic spoken in everyday life. The acquisition process of liturgical knowledge is, as we shall see, no less a bodily pedagogical process than the inculcation of purity and pollution concerns.

Contact with the sacred text begins in an environment of physical discipline—which Abelhak Serhane terms “l’univers de la répression par excellence” (Serhane 2000: 41; Ossman 1994:33). Serhane links childhood socialization at Qur’anic schools, the mosque’s ritual space and broader social norms, asserting that arbitration of adherence to Moroccan Islam occurs at all levels, by “agents de contrôle gérés par les forces dominantes” (Serhane 2000: 18-19). The experience of physical learning of the sacred text is inseparable from preparation for further “secular” education later in life. Dale Eickelmann criticizes the curriculum of Moroccan Qur’anic schools as a pedagogy of rote memorization, devoid of exegetical content (Eickelmann 1985: 57). He further relates the belief told to children that the parts of the body hit during school will not burn in the flames of hell—thus, physical punishment is a warning of and an inoculation against a far worse punishment in the next life (Eickelmann 1985: 63).

The techniques of the body utilized to train a Muslim in prayer begin at a very early age, and through emulation and mimicry as much as through verbal instruction. In the winter of 2006, I shared a train compartment with a young mother and her five year-old son. The exhausted mother slept in a corner, as I sat writing in a notebook. Her hyperactive and gregarious child demanded to know what I was doing and then proceeded to show me his newly-achieved virtuosity in the art of prayer. “Look!” he cried, poking me in the leg.

Scrunching his face into serious composure, the little boy cleared his throat and cried, “Allahu Akbar” (God is the greatest), bringing his hands to his ears, palms facing outward. “Allahu Akbar,” he yelled again, flopping his body down on the bench and throwing his arms down. He stood back up, and repeated this scene again and again. His mother opened her eyes a



crack, laughed and readjusted her position, smiling at me before she resumed sleeping. Clearly, she had witnessed this scene before. Although he was certainly not performing a valid prayer (at five, he had not yet obtained the age of legal responsibility), the boy's emphatic actions underscored an explicit pride in mimicry of adult activity.

The experiences of childhood, bodily learning, and puberty in Morocco are embodied along bifurcated gender lines, due to two primary social factors: the cultural primacy placed on female virginity and the concept of *hšuma* (shame). Although young Moroccan children are often allowed to play with one another and experience relative freedom in their early years, at puberty, the sexes are separated. Boys run the streets, and experience few restraints on their bodily actions, nor are they interrogated concerning their whereabouts. By contrast, families keep a much closer watch over girls and their activities. Rough play, for example, is frowned upon for their female peers—not merely out of concerns for propriety but also out of concern for the preservation of an intact hymen.

From an early age, a boy's experience of socialization allows him to “demand ... a submissive attitude” from the female members of his household (Crapanzano 1973: 8). By contrast, a young girl's childhood consists of learning from the mother vital skill sets necessary to maintaining the domestic realm, such as cooking, cleaning and embroidery (Davis and Davis 1989: 23). The restrictions placed on girls in youth also arise from fears about the potential for pregnancy and damaged reputations (shame not only for the girl but for the extended family) (Davis and Davis 1989: 57).

The concept of *hšuma* is also revealing. Although the term may be translated as “shyness” or “timidity,” it is often invoked in the imperative form to mean, “for shame!” For young women, the adjective denoted modesty and an appropriately circumspect appearance and

general demeanor. In Moroccan Islamic society, gendered gestures convey similarly gendered notions of morality. While control over the self (and the human body, as well as its emissions) is required of males, the female bodily experience is even weightier. Not only must women and young girls remain aware of personal hygiene, ritual purity and the state of the body, but also the public advertisement of adherence to locally significant understandings of gender conformity to Islamic values.

### **Body as Canvas: Corporal Terrains of Inscription**

Studies of Islamic calligraphy often invoke the resonant images of the pen and the tablet in Islamic symbolism (Hassan 1992: 148-226; Akkach 2005: 96-101). Although the majority of master calligraphers in Islamic history have been men, henna artists are exclusively female, working with a much more intimate canvas than parchment—the human skin. The final section of this chapter departs from the ideological terrain of textuality for the territorial canvas of the body, and concentrates on henna’s activation as a powerful medium in the space of gendered Islamic ritual. The compositional locus of henna adornment proves highly charged and occupies religiously ambiguous body parts, where the profane and the sacred intersect. Hands and feet appear as singular emblems and as synecdoche in both textual tradition (Qur’anic imagery, for example) and socio-cultural discourse (i.e., euphemisms and proverbs). Hands and feet are bodily extremities in constant exposure to physical pollution but are also critically important for the maintenance of purity.

The choice of placement on the female body also celebrates eroticism within a socially-acceptable medium. Respectable dress for a Moroccan Muslim woman often consists of careful

covering of the head, neck, and body, from wrist to ankle (although fashion varies). Traditional, pre-colonial coverings such as the *haik* (a large, single piece of cloth elegantly draped over the wearer) leaves only the hands and feet exposed. Painting the body with henna draws attention to the female as an erotic being and claims space for the celebration of femininity, while not deviating from norms of propriety.

These sections of the female form are not considered to constitute *'awrah* (nudity), or that which must be hidden from unrelated men. According to Bouhdiba, everything but the hands, face and feet comprise feminine *'awrah* (1985:39). Abou El Fadl notes that “various juristic interpretive communities throughout the ages have decided that the whole of a woman is *'awrah* (private part that must be covered) except for the hands and face,” further noting that this is not considered “negotiable” by the majority of scholars (2005: 143, 185).

If exposed, these parts of a woman’s body do not invalidate prayer or other ritual obligations. Kapchan writes:

[...] the total depiction is of the feminine body, highlighted and elaborated—and thus objectified and eroticized. Henna application is forbidden during the holy month of Ramadan, for example, as it conveys vanity and self-conscious sexuality. It is this aspect of body design that imputes ambiguity to its symbolism for according to Islam (and most religions), a sexually alluring woman and the promiscuity that she can incite are of a highly polluting nature and can pose threats to social concepts of patriarchal honor. Henna thus empowers its wearer, protecting her, but also making her potentially ‘dangerous.’ (1996: 161).

That henna adornment appears in a bodily forum at once public and spiritually permissible discourages an interpretation of the art as primarily erotic; the intimate nature of the henna process demands close interaction with other women, and may serve to solidify gender solidarity. Skin-to-skin contact carries significant social meaning (seen, for example, in codes of purity). Touch functions to bind together social networks: massages by midwives or female relatives are considered by many cultures to greatly ease the stress and pain of childbirth

(Jablonski 2008: 103). Although conceptions of appropriate touch are socially bounded, scientific studies suggest that skin-to-skin contact is not only beneficial for emotional bonding but functions as psychosomatic therapy, demonstrable, for example, in the successful use of massage to decrease anxiety in premature infants and depression in the elderly (Jablonski 2008: 106).

Although a man may dip his small finger into henna at his wedding, the woman's henna canvas consists of the entirety of her hands and feet. Only a married woman, however, may apply henna to her feet—virgins must abstain. Henna appears on the hands, both on the palms and the backsides, as well as on the feet [Fig. 2]. Ornamentation typically stretches from the tips of the fingers and the nails to slightly above the wrists; the soles of the feet are often completely covered, with additional decoration ending around the ankle.

To the Sufi Ibn 'Arabī (d. 1240), the hands signify “two perspectives [that] define the dual nature of the human relationship to God” (Murata 1992: 89). Interpretations emphasizing duality and interlinked, complementary opposites derive from the Qur'anic invocations of Divine Hands: “the cosmos comes into existence through the mixture of the two handfuls. Without yin and yang, nothing could exist” (Murata 1992: 90). To scholars such as Mu'ayyid al-Din Jandi, the dual “hands” of God are responsible for the creation of the capacity of both good and evil in the human being. 'Abd al-Razzaq Kashani, a Qur'anic commentator of the school of Ibn 'Arabī, interprets the two Hands as polar attributes of the Divine, possibilities manifest in Adam, and the binary aspects of the cosmos.<sup>126</sup>

Cosmological duality epitomized by the Divine Hands also concretely manifests on the plane of terrestrial, human existence. A great number of human cultures associate the actions of

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<sup>126</sup> Sachiko Murata emphasizes a further level of meaning—the role of the human as bridge between the duality of terrestrial and heavenly realms—“In short, the integrated and realizes microcosm plays an active role in relationship to the macrocosm, which is always dispersed and differentiated” (1992: 100).

the left hand with impurity, and the right with the domain of the sacred. Islamic scripture accords the right hand prominence as an emblem of ownership, as well as of mutual obligation in swearing allegiance. Morally upright action is aligned with the right hand, in terms of the obligations accompanying ownership (Qur'an 4:3, 16:71):

If ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly with the orphans, Marry women of your choice, Two or three or four; but if ye fear that ye shall not be able to deal justly (with them), then only one, or (a captive) that your right hands possess, that will be more suitable, to prevent you from doing injustice.

Although the hands provide the primary terrain for ornamentation with henna, feet are also a potential canvas; as previously stated, however, this is confined to married women [Fig. 3].

Although I inquired about this prohibition to multiple women and men, I was never able to obtain a conclusive response. My questions met with the repeated explanation, “Single women just shouldn’t. It’s poor taste.”<sup>127</sup> Feet, however, occupy a far more ambiguous position than the hands in Islamic cosmology.

Veneration of the *qadam al-rasūl* (footprint of the Prophet) is a well-known phenomenon in many regions of the Muslim world. As portraiture of Muḥammad is not widespread beyond Persian miniature paintings, the abstracted shape of a foot has often served as a representational synecdoche; the image of a sandal-shaped form is common, for example, in the leatherwork of nomadic Tuareg populations throughout Northern Africa [Fig. 4]. The *qadam al-rasūl* appears in central locations of religious practice—such as the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem and the tomb of Sayyid Ahmad al-Badawi in Tanta, Egypt. The stylized sandal affiliated with the Prophet also

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<sup>127</sup> The human feet are viewed as potentially dirty; shoes must be removed prior to entering a mosque as assurance that no impurity pollutes sacred space. Additionally, feet carry a local sexual connotation: for a woman in search of a juridical divorce in the pre-colonial legal system, placing an upside-down slipper in front of the judge indicated sodomy on the part of the husband—a euphemistic gesture allowing the wife to provide legitimate grounds for separation without the shame attached to public utterance.

provides a compositional space for students of calligraphy [Fig. 5]. This representational style, although not well investigated by scholars, is by no means a new phenomenon (Hassan 1993; Sijelmassa 1987). Images of the Prophet's footprint are often explained by virtue of the Night Journey, on which it is believed that the Prophet ascended to Heaven, communed with the Prophets of previous revelations and negotiated with God over the number of required daily prayers.

### *Incapacitation and the Adornment Process*

A common Moroccan rebuke inquires, "Why can't you help me? Are your hands hennaed?" Fresh application of henna often exempts a woman from undertaking household chores that may disturb the design. In addition to the adornment's appearance in rituals of socialization, the decoration affords to women the opportunity to take time off and be cared for by others. This state of incapacitation is crucial for understanding the socializing and subversive possibilities of this body adornment.

The process of henna application serves a critical function in gendered ritual practice. A man's brief interaction with the substance matter of henna emphasizes an active role, corresponding to the normative nature of masculinity described in the opening of the present chapter. A man's experience of henna does not involve ornamental decoration, and as such, does not necessitate the immense patience and acquiescence of his female counterpart. Critical to understanding feminine embodiment is attention to the obligatory incapacitation associated with the adornment process. Passivity and patience are fundamental requirements for an artistic-ritual pedagogy, which trains the woman for the traditional marital role of a modest Muslim wife.

Processing the henna plant into a medium for body adornment requires a variety of stages. Leaves are harvested and sold in markets, often in stalls run by *'attār* specialists; although the Classical Arabic term translates as “perfume,” in Morocco the word refers to proprietors of specialized products such as magical materials, bathhouse items and female cosmetics. Lemon juice is often added to deepen the dye’s color, and water applied in small amounts to thin the substance for application.

This mixture was traditionally applied with the fingers, or a thin, blunt utensil such as a stick. Ribbon-stenciling provides a method suitable for the creative manipulation of negative space, clean lines and clear geometry. The common method of application for contemporary henna adornment is a syringe: the needle is removed and the paste is drawn into the body of the implement and gently released with variant pressure. This method allows for an intricate patterning much more difficult to achieve than the designs achieved through application by a blunt object. Henna application demands an extended period of immobilization—first as the paste is applied and subsequently as it slowly dries to a crust. This material is left on the surface of the skin as long as possible, and is often covered with trash bags, newspaper or other material to preserve design integrity as the mixture dries. Heating henna paste over a stove of heated coals expedites the drying process, and deepens the color [Fig. 6]. To enhance the hue and preserve the integrity of design, a woman attempts to leave this paste undisturbed for as long as possible. Messina describes the process:

a woman is literally immobilized for at least an entire day and night during these hours of careful, skilled work. The specialist (*mu'allima*) may begin mid-morning. After completing one hand, usually the left, the women will recess for lunch while the right hand is still free, so the woman having the henna done can still feed herself” (1991: 287).

Finally, after this long process of careful bodily awareness, the dried paste is scrubbed away to reveal intricate stains of reddish orange, lasting up to three weeks. The fortitude required to undergo henna treatment recalls the title of Susan Schaefer-Davis' dissertation, *Patience and Power: Women's Lives in a Moroccan Village* (1982). Rituals which require such endurance do not automatically translate to an inscription of passivity; they also provide training in socially-sanctioned acts of subversion. After all, as Sadiqi relates, "Patient wives may 'get away' with things more often" (2002: 62).

The patience of the woman being hennaed also reflects on the judgment made concerning quality of the final product. Women sit still as long as possible, carefully preserving the design by restricting all bodily movement. During one application, I was chastised for my inability to sit still long enough for the patterns to adequately stick. The friend decorating my hands laughingly mocked my impatience, and warned that the light color and smeared design would advertise to the world my inadequacies as a future wife. The linkage between qualitative valuations of henna and female piety directly impacts the selection of a henna artist for critical rituals. Many women learn to apply henna from immediate family members; there is no formal process of apprenticeship or official training. I was told on numerous occasions that in a traditional wedding, an ideal henna artist would be an older woman within the family, known for her religiosity, who had borne children and only experienced a single marriage. Many Moroccans with whom I spoke eschewed the henna practitioners who cater to a tourist market as "inauthentic," and characterized this group of artisans as loose women who supplemented their income with prostitution. Patience and piety are necessary for an "authentically" beautiful result, both on the part of the wearer and the artist. The construction of feminine patience is closely intertwined with ideals of beauty, virtue, and morality. By learning to embody patience through



the application of henna, women demonstrate adherence to cultural norms and render visible proof of upright behavior in accordance with normative models of female piety.

### *Iconography and Gendered Aesthetics*

Henna's inherent materiality accounts for its universal importance in Moroccan Islamic society. As discussed in Chapter Two, the proximity henna establishes between believers and Divine blessing is achieved through the Prophet's sanction recorded in canonical tradition. It is the medium itself, however, that carries primary meaning; depth of color subjugates form and iconography to subsidiary positions. This does not indicate that the designs themselves are meaningless. However, visually similar patterns are accorded different names and conceptual attributes of meaning according to the individual asked. An underlying, generalized aesthetic and shared style does appear to exist, yet there is no direct correspondence between ritual occasion and design specificity; for example, the patterns of a bride's henna may bear remarkable resemblance to her decoration on a visit to a saint's shrine months later. Undoubtedly, the individual imagination and creativity of the artisan plays a crucial role in this variance.

In-depth analysis of the patterns of henna symbolism is lacking in the literature, for a variety of reasons. The nature of henna art, owing to its temporality, limits the window of opportunity in which to study, interpret and preserve iconography. Prior to the advent of photography, henna patterns could only be recorded in literary description or drawings. Insofar as the local collection and recording of designs is concerned, neither a need nor an interest has heretofore existed. This should not imply that the art form is not valued, but rather that the designs constitute part of a deeply-embedded cultural aesthetic. Furthermore, early

anthropologists and ethnographers working in Morocco, such as Westermarck, met with resistance as Western males. The documentation of a feminine art form, particularly one so closely tied to marital and sexual rituals did not come easily for cultural outsiders, particularly men.

Although textual mentions of henna often refer vaguely to “ornamentation” or “decoration,” tracing the historical innovations of the art form is considerably difficult for the reasons outlined above. The *ḥadīth* do not go into a considerable level of detail about early patterns, nor do colonial ethnographies, wherein tattoo arouses considerably more interest. Many women in rural areas continue to stain the entirety of the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet, eschewing ornamentation altogether; this, I was told, is also typical of the Algerian henna tradition. Owing to henna’s ephemerality, one cannot date with precision the origin of each decorative form. However, tangential evidence provided by colonial-era photography and post-cards (unfortunately devoid of narrative accompaniment) indicate that a similar emphasis on basic geometric patterning dates at least to the late nineteenth century [Figs. 7-8]. Generalities concerning iconography can, however, be made. Indian and Middle Eastern designs tend towards the organic, while angular forms and geometric shapes dominate North African patterns [Fig. 9]. Linearity abounds, replete with the intricate repetition of triangles, diamonds, and lozenges [Figs. 10-11]. Recognizable, repeated patterns have led some scholars to posit a relationship between henna decoration and female sexuality. A number of authors have called attention to visual similarities between henna and other female-dominated art forms such as tattooing, pottery, textile work, embroidery and the interior paintings of rural homes (Becker 2006; Messina 1991; Samama 2000; Visona 2001) [Fig. 12].

According to this thesis, henna designs comprise an exclusively feminine visual vocabulary tailored to fertility concerns and sexual references. 'Weaving,' for example, is used as a euphemism for sex. Courtney -Clarke reports that upon giving birth, rural Berber women are congratulated on the "beauty of her 'weaving'" (1996: 40). Mernissi declares that the symbolism in these art forms is far from naïve, innocent, or devoid of meaning (2004: 67). This school of thought posits that female-dominated iconography creates a safe space for coded expressions within a patriarchal Moroccan culture of frustrations, dreams and secret desires. One such shared symbol is the triangle, denoting womanhood and prophylactic power. Visona comments on patterns of "painted triangles surrounding square or rectangular niches," calling them "references to femininity" (2001: 37) [Fig. 13]. Iconography shared by these gendered visual domains appears time after time. As the case with carpet-makers, henna designs address illicit subjects (such as sexuality, in addition to procreation), disallowed publicly in complicity with codes of honor and shame (Ramirez and Rolot 1995: 140).

The asymmetry noticeable in henna adornment is not arbitrary, but rather is allowed for a variety of reasons. A lack of canonization in the body art allows its makers to express creativity, working from freedom of expression and inspiration. Hennaed hands have structural patterns that differ from front to back, as well as from hand to hand [Fig. 14]. As no two persons have the same hand, each design is a unique work of art, tailored to the individuality of its wearer. At first glance, it may seem that the composition is unimportant or random. Stylized asymmetries, however, relate to shared belief in the threatening concept of the evil eye. Intricate designs are often believed to confuse and thus thwart the malicious gaze of an envious person.

Those who interpret henna patterns as primarily indicative of gendered language and sexuality often note the precarious life cycle transitions in which the adornment is used, and

hence attach great value to the notion of prophylactic iconography—often deriving from pre-Islamic fertility cults (Mernissi 2004: 99; Ramirez and Rolot 1995: 131). However, I suggest that the continued emphasis on fertility, in conjunction with continued divisions between “popular” and “scriptural” religious practices, have led scholars to overlook a potentially crucial source for motifs, patterns and compositional styles—the occult sciences of Islamic treatises on *sihr* (magic) and *‘ilm al-ḥikma* (the science of [esoteric] wisdom).

Henna has long been used in magical practices and as a therapeutic remedy for a variety of ills, many of which involve attacks by the *jnūn*. Male healers termed *fqiḥ* will often inscribe eggs with mystical characters or Qur’anic verses, and order the afflicted patient to shatter the egg in a specified location such as a cemetery to clear away evil forces [Fig. 15]. Morocco has a legendary reputation within the Islamic world as the producer of potent specialists in magical practices; esoteric treatises and spell books, as previously mentioned, can be readily obtained in the same market stalls in which henna is purchased (that of the *‘aṭṭār*).

Ahmad al-Būnī (d. 1225) is perhaps the most famous author of esoteric, occult treatises. Born in present-day Annaba, Algeria, al-Būnī studied Sufism in Egypt, where he produced several works still used today in magical practices throughout the Islamic world; copies of his work circulate widely in contemporary Moroccan markets. Al-Būnī’s work *Kitāb Shams al-Ma’ārif* (The Book of the Sun of [Esoteric] Knowledge) is particularly well-known by occult practitioners.<sup>128</sup> I first came into contact with these spell-books in the old city of Fez in 2006, and the compositional similarity between henna adornment’s patterning and al-Būnī’s esoteric talisman designs struck me as highly significant [Figs. 16-17].

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<sup>128</sup> To my knowledge, no English translation is available. Many of al-Būnī’s works were destroyed on the grounds that it constituted sorcery, yet official injunctions did nothing to prohibit its reproduction. Although generally speaking, segments are sold in abridged, spell-book form, I was able to obtain a full copy through a book-seller located in Damascus.

In addition to spell books featuring patterns attributable to al-Būnī, anonymous compilations of magical treatises contain charms to ward off the evil eye, secure a lasting romantic attachment, prevent miscarriage, ensure marital fidelity, and multiple other concerns replicate the patterns seen in henna adornment [Figs. 18-19]. Compositional similarity is striking; checkerboard patterns mingle with intricate, interlocking geometrical forms and mystical, abstracted numbers and letters [Fig. 20]. Previous scholarship, in focusing primarily on henna's allegedly "popular" function as a female cosmetic practice may obscure a deeper significance and entrenchment within esoteric Islamic tradition than recognized.

*Henna and Ritual Inscriptions of Gendered Moroccan Islam*

We now turn our attention to the most emblematic instance of ritual henna adornment: the Moroccan wedding. A commonly cited *ḥadīth* declares, "marriage is half of the faith," and fully renders the believer mature and normatively gendered within the processual conception of Moroccan Islamic sexuality. During the wedding ceremony, men and women make use of henna in diametrically-opposed ways.<sup>129</sup> Although the divine nature of henna blesses both bride and groom, its performative qualities encode divergent gender norms, conveyed through the intersection of medium, associative ritual, and iconographic specificity.

Islam, as opposed to Christianity and Judaism, never recommended celibacy (Chebel 1995: 84). The Prophet advocated marriage as an appropriate method through which to channel sexual desire (Fisher 1992: 99). In Morocco, a pervasive cultural assumption holds that "everyone will, [or] at least should, marry. Being unable to wed and have a family is considered a great misfortune" (Ossman 1994: 175). Although Islam stresses the importance of pre-marital

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<sup>129</sup> For a full description of masculine and feminine use of henna in wedding ritual, see M.E. Combs-Schilling. *Sacred Performances: Islam, Sexuality and Sacrifice* (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1989), 210-212.

virginity for both bride and groom, male abstinence cannot be physiologically measured, and hence the burden of virginal proof falls upon the body of the female; for men, “virginity is not a culturally significant quality” (Jansen 1987: 132). Although no longer common in urban areas, traditional Moroccan wedding customs included the exhibition of hymeneal blood from the wedding bed’s sheets, to publicly laud the honor of both bride and groom. According to Jansen, this represents “one of the strongest symbols of respectfulness and civilization because it shows a high degree of control over sexuality” (1987: 128).

Female virginity (its existence, in theory, symbolically proven by blood) contains “a *baraka* all its own” (Dwyer 593: 593). Preservation of the hymen, as previously noted, is of utmost importance in the lives of young women. Virginal women often shun the use of tampons and avoid gynecological examinations until marriage, as it might preliminarily destroy the hymen. Soumaya Namaane-Guessous describes the extreme anxiety posed by initial menstruation for young girls who, lacking sexual education, suppose that they have accidentally deflowered themselves (2000: 102-103).

So crucial was the display of blood in the traditional matrimonial ceremony that a multitude of replacement tactics existed for non-virginal brides (in some rural areas, and among conservative families, these tactics continue): if complicit, the groom may slaughter a chicken, substitute the blood of a ram, or cut himself on the wedding night. Hymeneal reconstruction constitutes a lucrative gynecological practice in contemporary Morocco, indicating the persistence of the tradition in some areas and the continued importance attached to female chastity (Bargach 2002: 255). The socio-cultural value attached to virginity rests on honor signified by blood (whether authentic or not).<sup>130</sup> The public knowledge of defloration marks the

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<sup>130</sup> Women outside the family are often hired to conduct virginity tests on brides, and doctors can be consulted in order to produce certification of virginity. However, it is thought that doctors can be bribed, and that the women

ritual as one both sexual and social, with grave consequences for the familial honor of each spouse.

Marriage functions to “cement social relations within a community,” and specific symbolism within these ceremonies conveys important expectations of adulthood within the social order (Kapchan 1996: 175). In the traditional context, the marital ritual consists of sexually bifurcated experiences. The honor of the husband and his family relies on his virility and ability to produce hymeneal blood; indicative of an active role. Conversely, the reputation of the bride’s family rests upon her careful protection of sexuality; in preserving and acquiescing to the groom what rightfully belongs to him. Precisely as the presentation of hymeneal blood underscores divergent constructions of gender propriety, so too do the respective manners of henna decoration illustrate the socialization of properly managed sexuality.

In the groom’s experience of marriage, the importance of producing virginal blood underscores culturally normative masculinity. Social tensions, for a man, manifest themselves in a widespread fear of being rendered incapable of piercing the bride’s hymen. Aisha Qandisha, a prominent (and terrifying) female *jinn* is often blamed for impotence at the moment of defloration; for this reason, many families of the groom employ the use of virility charms. Rosen argues that henna in the wedding ceremony explicitly feminizes the groom, and marks an inversion of gender roles (2002:31). However, an analysis of spatial, temporal and associated ritual aspects of the groom’s henna reflects, rather, the Moroccan construction of masculine sexuality.

The wedding ritual for the male is a “practice in becoming active, central and public” (Combs-Schilling 1989: 190). The groom’s henna application generally takes place in the public

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may be attempting to conceal the bride’s indiscretions. In either case, the female gender is considered suspect when the authenticity of the hymen is at stake.

arena, such as outside his father's house, in the yard, or in another typically male-designated sector. Regardless of specific locale, the bridegroom's henna application occurs in the eyes of the community, for all to witness. The symbolism of this spatial choice "physically moves the boy out of his father's house and onto the streets, and publicly lauds him as a man capable of participating in the community" (Combs-Schilling 1989: 190).

Guests of both genders may attend, and in some cases the person responsible for the groom's henna is a female of his family. Henna application appears to be much less gender-specific in the case of the groom. The manner of application and the design itself differs from that of the bride. The protracted temporal experiences of restraint and patience (necessary for the intricacies of bridal henna décor) are here lacking. The groom's adornment of henna is confined to a small smear on the palm of the husband-to-be, or merely the staining of the smallest finger of the right hand [Fig 21]. Furthermore, only the hands of the groom may be hennaed, as the feet are reserved for married women.

Associated henna rituals emphasize an active role in sexuality. Often, a male in the party of the groom places henna paste and eggs in a bowl; eggs signifying fertility, and in some regions, serving as a referent for the testicles. The groom's male friends dance with the bowl, passing it from one to the other. This process culminates in the last unattached bachelor dropping or forcibly hurling the mixture onto the ground. The bowl shatters, and the motion symbolically ensures the dissipation of evil and the clearing of malevolent forces. The container of the henna can be understood as a hymeneal signifier. The action required to break the bowl (and by extension, the hymen) indicates mastery, dominance and if necessary, sanctioned aggression.



An associated ritual consists of the groom's mother handing him a ball of henna, and referring to it as the "blood clot;" which, in Qur'anic cosmology represents the origin of life (Chebel 1995: 79, Qur'an 23: 12-14). Combs-Schilling interprets this as a symbolic usurping of the procreative role (1989: 189). Additionally, the groom may dip his hand in henna and forcibly press it against the wall on the exterior of the bridal chamber, where consummation will later occur. The number of handprints left is said to represent the groom's desired number of children. By "placing his handprint on the wall, [he] demonstrates his pivotal role in biological creation" (Combs-Schilling 1989: 189). The groom's assumption of an active role in the procreative process makes him the bearer of responsibility in the conception of children, and reinforces his position of control and dominance within the patriarchal familial construction. Participation in the public sector, activity, and procreative control are not only valued as aspects of sanctioned male sexuality, but are underscored by the blood of defloration and henna ritual.

Moroccan wedding rituals express "one's femininity or masculinity, the maintenance of social order between the sexes. This difference is judged to be natural, divine" (Ossman 1994: 167). For the female, marriage represents entry into mature selfhood; an end achieved in the male experience through circumcision. In a woman's life, "the key event is marriage. It represents the transition from being a part of one family to becoming a part of another, the transition from childhood to adult identity" (Baker 1998: 5). This sexual asymmetry is reflected in the lexicon of Moroccan Arabic, as "*bint*," translates simultaneously to "virgin," and "girl." "*Mra*," translating to "woman," and "wife," carries the implication of an active sexual life, unavailable outside of the marital bond.

The emphasis on female virginity upon marriage, and the exhibition of hymeneal blood, has powerful ramifications for women, creating tension for the family of the bride. Her honor is

at stake in the need for proof of her correct behavior. Concerns about impotence plague the groom, while anxieties for the bride revolve around lack of blood, or having an impenetrable hymen. An abundance of magical charms are utilized for the bride, to ensure the ease of defloration. The transition from maiden to wife is a drastic one, presenting a situation fraught with tension. The woman, no longer a virgin, must keep careful control over her newly-attained sexual state, to preserve the patriarchal social order.

The link between henna and female blood is nowhere more evident than in the wedding ceremony. Ossman comments on this directly, referring to the decoration as “symbolic of the blood that should be spilled on the marriage’s consummation” (1994:174). Montgomery Hart cites it as the most recognizable symbol of a married woman: so much so that virginal girls are prohibited from wearing it (1976: 131). Furthermore, when a widower or a divorcée remarries, henna decoration (if present at all), is much starker. As in the case of the groom, spatial, temporal and associated ritual aspects of henna foreshadow what must occur during consummation and for the duration of marriage. However, for the bride, patience, socialization into the realm of domesticity, and acquiescence are highlighted.

As the groom’s henna is taking place in public view, his bride-to-be sits on the floor of her father’s home. She is often concealed from guests by being seated behind a curtain or sheet in the corner, or in a small room away from the main section of the house. Traditional roles for Moroccan women designate the home as a female space reflected in the proverb “There is no good in a woman who roams about and no good in a man who does not.” The bride’s henna, may only be conducted by a trusted female. A mature woman with a “successful” marriage is typically responsible for the act of decorating the bride, or an unmarried female of her family. In other cases, a professional henna artist, the *neggafa* (literally “engraver”) is hired to dress and

adorn the bride. The specific relationship of decorator to the bride varies, yet gender is an absolute. Multiple women stressed to me the importance of *niyya* in this selection; only a mature woman with well-established morally correct reputation should be tasked with the responsibility.

Similarly, although a mixing of genders occurs in the party of the groom, the bride's henna ceremony is restricted to women. In some cases, only the woman's mother and sisters are allowed to view her. The segregation based on sex marks a relaxation of social norms. The females in the room speak openly amongst themselves about matters of sexuality which would be taboo in mixed company. Throughout the process of henna adornment, women in attendance occasionally will become bawdy in action, "play act[ing] sex, pregnancy and birth to make the other women laugh" (Jansen 1987: 91). Davis and Davis note that much of a young woman's socialization is "by example; very little is explicit" (1989: 75). As a new bride undergoes henna decoration, surrounded by female relatives and friends, she not only becomes initiated into the realm of mature women who compose her social network. These older women give advice to one another in the presence of the bride, recounting anecdotes from their own married lives, and indirectly instruct her. Due to the gender segregation inherent in both the wedding, and in life, the "dependence of women on other women is ...all the more necessary" (Maher 1974: 49).

Temporal concerns of the henna ritual are of utmost importance in the socialization process. Both the bride's hands and feet will undergo hours of elaborate design-work, rendering her unable to participate or move, necessitating much patience and restraint. This passivity is further exacerbated by the restrictive headdress, facial veil or diadem she wears; weighing the bride down and constraining movement [**Fig. 22**]. She must give herself over to the groom and allow him to assume responsibility for the management of her sexuality, precisely as she does

with the henna artist. Kapchan writes, “the blood of the broken hymen externalizes what the bride has internalized: the social acknowledgement of responsibility that must be controlled and hidden” (1996: 160). Henna provides an integral component of this “internalization.” For this reason, the bride demonstrates deference towards the *neggafa*, remaining inert. Kapchan characterizes the bridal participation as “symbolically giv[ing] up...volition” (1996:160). The wife will also be expected to relinquish control to her mother-in-law, in the hierarchical structuring of her new home (Davis and Davis 1989: 68). As in any culture—patience is key.

Namaane-Guessous asserts that the depth of henna’s hue indicates the bride’s morality (1987: 170), later noting congruent belief corresponding to the shade of the stain left by the blood of the hymen. The similar emphasis laid upon depth of color is striking—the patience required to undergo henna application, and hence, deepen color, clearly relates to valuations of the wearer’s morality. One might well conjecture that a similar causal connection exists between the hue of hymeneal blood: at issue in each instance is the concept of restraint and self-control in keeping with Moroccan Islamic behavioral norms for gendered activity. Moreover, henna, in effect, foreshadows what will occur during consummation and expectations of married life thereafter: after a trial of patience and perseverance, a woman’s sexual mores accord her respectability if she is careful to preserve and maintain the social order.

### **Henna as a Medium of Religious Connection and Ritual as an Index of Social Change**

Beyond his wedding day, a man’s only other experience of henna adornment was traditionally circumscribed to the celebration surrounding his ritual circumcision—marking the transition from unsexed child to responsible believer. However, as hospitals increasingly provide early

circumcisions in a clinical environment, ritualized circumcision has become far less common.<sup>131</sup> Female use of henna, however, continues throughout her adult life cycle in contemporary Morocco [Figs 23-24]. In each case, the blood of a sacrificial animal accompanies ritual adornment process, prayers and invocations to God, the Prophet and members of his family. Saint shrine visitations, the Prophet's birthday, and the Eid feasts (to mark the end of Ramadan, and to commemorate Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son at God's command) all necessitate feminine adornment of henna as a critical aspect of religious celebration.

The increased number of Moroccan women entering the workforce and providing a necessary second income coincides with an increase in educational opportunities for women, and hence implicates shifting social notions of normative gender roles. Similarly, changing technologies have impacted the usage of henna in contemporary ritual and practice. Today, pre-packaged stencil kits are readily available for purchase in the market, and facilitate time-saving techniques for women unable to spare the necessary hours for the incapacitation associated with traditional henna adornment [Fig. 25]. Women have begun to incorporate popular iconographic traditions from beyond Morocco's geographic boundaries. The vehicle of satellite television and the Internet have allowed Moroccan henna artists to introduce foreign symbols into their art practice. Bollywood films rank foremost among the new sources of inspiration. The bold geometric shapes characteristic of North African henna now exist side by side with organic floral patterns common in India and Pakistan—easy to produce from ready-made stencils.

A further indication of changing social roles in cultural-religious rituals are innovations in Moroccan women's magazines. The lunar Islamic month of Sha'aban has traditionally been a

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<sup>131</sup> As previously noted, female circumcision is not practiced in Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria or Libya. Where the tradition does exist, such as in many parts of Muslim (and non-Muslim) sub-Saharan Africa as well as among Coptic Christian Egyptians, the practice was extant prior to the arrival of Islam and was widely adopted as a cultural practice.

period of purification in preparation for the Ramadan fast, and provides the most popular month for weddings and henna parties to occur. Throughout these two months, even Westernized women tend to partake in the celebrations and trappings of “traditional Islamic” culture, from prayers to dress. Muḥammad Fajri considers this renewed interest in traditional body coverings to be a mark of what he considers merit-worthy “shame” during the holy month—in which women are held to close scrutiny by society at large.<sup>132</sup>

Some upper class women have begun to hold dual weddings, one of which consists of the Western white dress and another in commodified folk attire, complete with henna (Kapchan 1996: 169). Elite women thus displace the medium’s “traditionalism,” reinterpreting it as folk while ascribing to themselves a “modern” identity. Magazine “bridal specials” in the month of Sha’aban feature cultural articles, focusing on traditional wedding ritual and attire [**Fig. 26**]. Such coverage was nonexistent in 2005, but by the time of my return in 2010, considerable emphasis on henna’s traditional application proved ubiquitous in the pages of women’s magazines. Despite the fluidity of cultural change, however, henna remains an integral component of gendered religious ritual [**Fig. 27**]. The adornment is still a prerequisite for women on ritual occasions; even as the patterns of adornment shift and vary, the light of the Prophet continues to shine, illuminating the bodies of female believers.

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<sup>132</sup> Muḥammad Fajri. *Al Mulabis at-Taqlidiyya : ‘awudat ar-ruh fi Ramadan*. pp 38-41 *Al Mushahid al Maghribi*. July 29-September 8, 2011. No. 87.

## Chapter 4

### Marketing the Postcolonial State: Henna Nationalisms from Fine Arts to Tourism

In 2008, the Association of Lebanese Industrialists filed a lawsuit against the state of Israel, claiming that the marketing of hummus as “authentically Israeli” critically undermined the Lebanese economy.<sup>133</sup> To anyone with basic background knowledge of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the political logic of the court case is evident.<sup>134</sup> Although the lawsuit—and its elevation of cuisine to the level of “copyright nationalism” may seem surreal, it brings to mind a common (and contentious) question I faced in Algeria: “Be honest—who has better couscous, us or the Moroccans?”<sup>135</sup> Recent scholarship has slowly begun to recognize the critical role of so-called “popular culture” in the production of modern nation-states, particularly in the case of Egypt (Abu Lughod 2004; Armbrust 1996; Fahmy 2011; Mehrez 2010). The same can be said for Israel and Palestine (Fleischmann 2003; Oren 2004; Shohat 2010; Stein and Swedenburg 2005).

The literature, however, has failed to consider the lasting use-value of this same “popular culture” in the political economy, from Morocco to Egypt alike. Be it hummus in Lebanon or couscous in Algeria, elements of national identity are often bound up with nostalgic ideas of precolonial “authenticity.” The process of decolonization, in particular, implicates cultural heritage from architecture to food—as a terrain on which to reclaim autonomous control over the social order. As we will see in Chapters Five and Six, the popular culture that underpins a

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<sup>133</sup> David Kenner, “Who Owns Hummus?” *Foreign Policy* [http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2008/10/08/who\\_owns\\_hummus](http://blog.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2008/10/08/who_owns_hummus) 8 October 2008.

<sup>134</sup> Matthew Shaer. “Conflicts Spread: the politics of hummus.” *New York Magazine*. <http://nymag.com/news/intelligencer/hummus-boycott-2012-4/> 25 March 2012.

<sup>135</sup> In conversations with Libyan and Tunisian friends, the battle shifts from *couscous* to *harissa*—a type of hot sauce.

postcolonial state's carefully choreographed socio-political legitimacy not only impacts identity formation during the nationalist era, but also (and critically) provides the symbolic battleground where continuing legitimacy is tested. In the so-called 2011 "Arab Spring," advocates of reform and regime partisans alike drew from the same locally-significant popular culture wielded in processes of state formation to topple—or reinforce—the State's governing legitimacy. From the Israeli-Lebanese "Hummus Wars"<sup>136</sup> to Morocco's commodification of henna, popular culture's role in political economy merits far greater attention than it has received so far.

Part One of this dissertation established the profoundly localized spiritual significance of henna in Morocco; we now turn to the implication of this female-dominated adornment practice within a broader globalized political economy. In the present chapter, I examine henna's critical value as a nationalist signifier in postcolonial fine arts, and argue that the French Protectorate's construction of "art" versus "craft" created a situation in which female adornment provided artists an ideal locus for resistance against cultural occupation. I then present the Moroccan State's adroit manipulation of henna as a marketing mechanism for "tolerance" and national exceptionalism. By capitalizing on the localized spiritual resonance of an intimate adornment, the ephemerality of which escaped the French colonial classification of both art and craft, I argue that Moroccan women's henna adornment began to serve not only as religious devotion, but also as an emblem for, and performance of, citizenship.

In the case of modern nation-states born out of struggle against foreign occupation, the twin notions of heritage culture and the "native woman" are tightly interwoven. To both colonizer and colonized, the female body serves as a site for intervention and struggle—an ultimate, and intimate, signifier of national cultural cohesion. British and French policies from

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<sup>136</sup> Josh Mitnick, "Hummus Wars: Israelis Respond to Lebanon's World Record Dish." *Christian Science Monitor*, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Middle-East/2010/0511/Hummus-wars-Israelis-respond-to-Lebanon-s-world-record-dish> 11 May 2010.



Morocco to Egypt sought to consolidate imperial control through the re-education of indigenous women, in line with European norms of hygiene, civilization, morality, and (compellingly), dress. Nationalist “modernist” movements, paradoxically, often mirrored these colonial objectives; Qasim Amin’s *Tahrīr al-Mara’a* (1899), widely considered the foundational text of Egyptian feminism, argued that only liberation from woman’s “backwards” cultural state could provide—through the citizens produced from her womb—the path to independence. Gandhi’s India and post-British Egypt birthed their own particular maternal figures, as did a multiplicity of other postcolonial nations.<sup>137</sup> Yet questions of cultural authenticity and linkages between territorial integrity and the female body have proven especially fraught in Arab-Islamic societies, the ideological ghosts of which persist in the West today.<sup>138</sup> From female dress to architectural enclosures, the intimacy of a woman’s body remains a highly charged battleground. It is within this contextual legacy, I argue, that Moroccan henna adornment’s nationalistic value is best understood.

Across much of North Africa, female traditions of body adornment served as readily available inspiration for nationalist artists—providing at once familiar and resonant design motifs, as well as inspiration rooted in cultural memory—a method, I suggest, for the re-appropriation of identity, emasculated by colonial encroachment.<sup>139</sup> Convincing evidence of this can be found in contemporary discourse, which politicizes women’s dress along the “traditional”

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<sup>137</sup> Throughout its postcolonial history, Egypt has had its own array of Mother figures. Sadiya Zaghoul (wife of Nationalist Wafd Party leader Saad Zaghoul) was popularly known as “Umm al-Misriyeen,” the Mother of all Egyptians. The same title was revived and used to greet the mother of Khalid Said (the Alexandria youth whose murder by the police sparked the seeds of protest groups eventually birthing the January 25<sup>th</sup> Revolution) as she entered Tahrir Square. More recently, demonstrators against post-revolutionary president Mohamed Morsi disseminated a video message from this newest “Mother of all Egyptians,” spurring the country to rise against controversial decrees by the leader that many perceive as unconstitutional, a betrayal of the revolution and indicative of encroaching dictatorship.

<sup>138</sup> For example, selling the American population on the Afghanistan invasion relied on Laura Bush’s explicit pseudo-feminist discourse aligning a nation’s “freedom” with the female dress (i.e., the burqa) of its female population. Similar discourse can be found from Iraq to Yemen.

<sup>139</sup> cf. Virinder S. Kalra (2009): “Between emasculation and hypermasculinity: Theorizing British South Asian masculinities,” *South Asian Popular Culture*, Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 113-125.

versus “Westernized” dichotomy.<sup>140</sup> Significantly, however, only the Kingdom of Morocco was able to “nationalize” henna as a marketing emblem in tourism and fine arts, largely due to its preexistent cultural and religious resonance.

### **Engineering Authenticity: Architecture, Gender and the Colonial Legacy**

Type the words “visit Morocco” into any search engine; this cursory Internet investigation results in endless offers of guided desert tours and walks through the ancient, medieval cities, as well as camel rides, henna decoration and belly dance shows.<sup>141</sup> The marketing of Morocco to foreign tourists often makes explicit use of the well-preserved colonial stereotypes—veiled women, mysterious and hidden culture, and “ancient labyrinths”—particularly in picturesque depictions of the former Imperial cities Marrakesh, Meknes and Fez, and their exquisitely preserved architectural heritage.

In particular, the UNESCO designation of the Fez medina as a world heritage site (Decree N°2-81-25 of 22 October 1981) forms a crucial aspect to the narrative of touristic value attached to Morocco.<sup>142</sup> UNESCO’s website specifically articulates the all-important criterion of “authenticity” in justifying the decision to select particular sites as “world heritage:”

All the key elements that comprise the property reflect in a clear and integral manner the Outstanding Universal Value. The survival of traditional architectural know-how, notably as regards architectural building and decoration trades, is a major advantage for the maintenance of the values of the property. The Ministry for Culture endeavours, not without difficulty, to ensure that the different actors respect the authenticity of the property.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>140</sup> See also: Jean Allman, Ed. 2005. *Fashioning Africa: Power and the Politics of Dress*. Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press.

<sup>141</sup> Representative of the “visit Morocco” brand are the results of the following Google Images search: <http://goo.gl/Ir35B> (Accessed December 09, 2012).

<sup>142</sup> UNESCO. “Medina of Fez.” <http://whc.unesco.org/en/list/170> (Accessed 27 December 2012).

<sup>143</sup> Ibid.

The value of “traditional” in the global tourist market has been well documented in the literature (Karp and Kratz, Eds., 2006; Kasfir 2000, 2007). When it comes to Morocco, however, the blurry and tenuous separation between “authentic” or “traditional” versus “modernity” merit significant reevaluation. Although tourist guides often describe the “old cities” of Morocco as spaces of stasis in which medieval life continues unabated, this depiction is equally a result of constructed marketing of the exotic, as much as it is the legacy of French colonial policies that utilized art, crafts and architectural industry to bolster European economic control.<sup>144</sup> Far from being motivated by a benevolent concern for Moroccan heritage, “historic preservation was a policy that supported the political association of the colonial regime,” (Holden 2008: 6) a conclusion that is similarly applicable to the capital city Rabat (Abu Lughod 1981). As Stacy Holden points out, “the present-day remnants of the medieval medina have little to do with Moroccans themselves. It was officials of the French Protectorate who embarked on a policy of historic preservation, and they did so despite the wishes of some of the medina’s wealthiest merchants and most prominent scholars” (2008: 6).

One of the most ubiquitous symbols used in Moroccan tourism advertising is a city gateway into the old city of Fez, known as “Bab Bou Jeloud” [**Fig. 1**]. Postcards and framed photographs of this entrance to the old city are a hot commodity at tourist shops, despite the fact that rather than belonging to a supposedly “ancient” heritage, the French originally constructed this gate, which today “represents the pomp of monarchical power” (Holden 2008: 7). The contemporary marketing of Morocco as an exotic tourist destination relies, paradoxically, on

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<sup>144</sup> See Holden, S., 2008. “The Legacy of French Colonialism : Preservation in Morocco’s Fez Medina.” *ART Bulletin*, Vol. 39, No. 4 (2008), pp. 5-11. See also: Lyautey: An Interpretation of the Man and French Imperialism Barnett Singer, *Journal of Contemporary History*. Vol. 26, No. 1 (Jan., 1991), pp., 131-157.

French colonial classifications of “authentic” cultural products, rebranded as commodified tradition by a postcolonial, monarchical State.

Beyond architectural heritage, much of what we currently identify as the “authentic” in Moroccan arts and crafts is rooted in policies implemented by the French colonial administration, including regional and tribal or ethnic styles of pottery, embroidery, and carpet motifs. Hamib Irbouh’s landmark study of art education policy under the Moroccan Protectorate, *Art in the Service of Colonialism: French art education in Morocco, 1912-1956* (2005), provides a corrective counter-narrative to predominant notions of the “traditional” in Moroccan arts. Irbouh outlines the inseparable goals of imperial economic control, gendered educational policies and arts/crafts production regulation, bringing to light largely overlooked factors accounting for “nationalist” identity as understood in contemporary Morocco. Active monarchical participation in the contemporary global neo-liberal economic market relies on discourses of authenticity to stimulate Diaspora remittances (a point to which I will later return) as well as to draw revenue from both domestic and foreign tourists. The most important contribution of Irbouh’s study for our purposes here, however, lies in his argument that the French restructuring of arts and crafts sectors played a critical role in the consolidation of imperial European control: selected aspects of heritage culture informed artists’ choices in forging an independent identity for the postcolonial nation-state, a legacy of cultural mediation which continues to impact valuations of authenticity and tradition from local and international tourist marketing to fine arts production.

Protector General Marshall Lyautey occupies an ambiguous position in the history of Moroccan cultural heritage. Lyautey’s cultural imprint lives on even in the central design elements of the Moroccan flag.<sup>145</sup> Although the color red has traditionally denoted the ‘Alawi dynasty’s claim of Prophetic descent through the bloodline (enshrining the King with divine

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<sup>145</sup> Lyautey est le pere du drapeau marocaine, *Zamane: l’histoire du Maroc*, No. 8, June 2011, p. 21.

right to the throne), the flag of the contemporary monarchy was, in fact, configured by the French. Lyautey chose to juxtapose the color of the ruling dynasty with the representative green of Islam—the Prophet’s favorite color (Flint 1973; Madkour 2008).<sup>146</sup> Although Lyautey initially considered a six-pointed star (known as the Seal of Solomon, or the Star of David) as the flag’s central image, the Protectorate General decided instead to select a five-pointed star—an act aimed at avoiding giving offense to anti-Jewish sentiment among the Moroccan population. The six-pointed star appears in popular Moroccan magic and religious rituals as well as on multiple ancient architectural facades including mosques; hence, this image constituted not a divisive design element as understood today but, rather a traditional emblem shared between the faiths.

Lyautey underscored the Kingdom’s identity as predominately Islamic: the five-pointed star was explained in terms of symbolic reference to the five daily prayers, as well as the five members of *Ahl al-Bayt*, the family of the Prophet Muḥammad. French Protectorate interventions into visual culture symbolically reinforced the relegation of Moroccan Jews to a secondary position among monarchical subjects. More quotidian aspects of Moroccan visual culture further reveal the impact of French conceptions of “Morocco”: the postal service similarly preserved not a localized vision of cultural heritage but rather, the idealized fiction of Lyautey and his colonial administrators.<sup>147</sup>

Protector General Lyautey is best remembered today for the architectural infrastructure of contemporary Morocco. Lyautey’s urban planning policies were driven, on one hand, by a seemingly sincere desire to preserve Moroccan cultural heritage and, on the other, by a paternalistic desire to keep the “folk” culture of a supposedly backwards population under foreign control. To this end, Lyautey’s administrative directives included the construction of

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<sup>146</sup> Abd Allah Shaqrūn. 2003. *Al-Lawn min al Funūn al Maghribiyya*. Casablanca : Annajāh al-Jadida.

<sup>147</sup> Zoe Deback. La Poste et le Makhzen, *Zamane: l’histoire du Maroc*, No. 8, June 2011, pp., 60-65.

colonial urban sectors beyond the boundaries of the traditional cities—in the case of Fez, the Protectorate-era separation barrier remains visible today [Fig. 2]. Lyautey’s infrastructural intervention thus accounts for the contemporary classificatory division of Fez into *al-madina al-qadima* (the old city) and *la ville nouvelle* (the new, or French, city).<sup>148</sup>

French colonial officials undertook active measures to evaluate arts and crafts production for properly “Arab-Islamic” authenticity. Initiatives and policies followed which sought to maintain supposedly untainted traditional practices and keep them pure of outside influences. Much architectural ornamentation in the old city of Fez, in fact, was reconfigured during the Protectorate period on the grounds that too much Spanish influence was apparent—i.e., not conforming to France’s idealized notions of local authenticity. Colonial goals were charged with an additional layer of imperial vision: not only was traditional Moroccan identity upheld by the benevolence of French paternalism, but it was done specifically at the expense of former colonial powers. By redressing the interventions made by Spanish-Moroccan interventions, French Protectorate policy asserted imperial authority to define a subject population over which they claimed jurisdiction. This proved equally demonstrable for the classical arts of architecture as it is for the more “popular” creative fields of embroidery, pottery and weaving, which was typically dominated by women.

Irbouh describes colonial intervention in artistic industry as follows: “The French scholars established the general assumption that Moroccan urbanites exercised ‘noble’ crafts and that the community considered those involved in them as its pillars” (44).<sup>149</sup> French Protectorate policy in Morocco extended to Tunisia and Algeria as well, and constructed an artificial division

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<sup>148</sup> Interestingly, the linguistic designations for these separate parts of the city remain divided into French and Arabic ; the Arabic terminology for “traditional” Fez has been maintained, as has the French vocabulary for designating the colonial, or “modern” city.

<sup>149</sup> For a typical account, see Henri Terrasse and Jean Hainaut. *Les Arts Decoratifs au Maroc*. Casablanca: Afrique Orient (1988) ; cf. Gotteland, 1973. *Initiation au Maroc*. Paris: Institut des Hautes Etudes Marocains.

of labor grounded in foreign evaluations of authenticity in arts and crafts industries, which resulted in wide-ranging implications for class hierarchies solidified in the postcolonial era.

Reconfiguration of traditional cultural production sectors was not limited to the French-controlled Maghrib; Italian Fascist policy in Libya resulted in parallel policy directives and production outcomes, driven by similar motivations.<sup>150</sup> One of the few texts to consider the intertwined motivations of imperial military infrastructural development and tourist initiatives in pre-Gaddafi Libya, Brian McLaren's *Architecture And Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya: An Ambivalent Modernism* (2006), provides a parallel narrative for the neighboring North African nation. He notes, "While the intention was to preserve the local culture, this effort was framed within the limits and according to the perspective of the Fascist authorities" (82). McLaren's account uncovers the underlying racial "science" behind this paternalistic structuring of the craft sectors in Libya—an intimately related motivation to that of the French across the Maghrib.

Many imperial projects aimed, in particular, at the inclusion of women into colonial objectives through the regulation of arts and crafts and the creation of "traditional art" schools in which to train young women. The gendered implications of colonial art policy in relation to educational initiatives have yet to be analyzed in depth—unfortunately such a study is beyond the scope of the project at hand. However, it is worth returning to Irbouh's point that French evaluations of "noble" crafts impacted the restructuring of educational policies for cultural production in a particularly gendered manner.<sup>151</sup> Not only were women targets of reeducation policy in vocational and technical craft schools, but moreover, French women themselves carried

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<sup>150</sup> McLaren, B., 2006. *Architecture And Tourism in Italian Colonial Libya: An Ambivalent Modernism*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press.

<sup>151</sup> See "Chapter Five: Women's Vocational Schools," pp. 107-132, in Hamid Irbouh, 2005. *Art in the Service of Colonialism: French Art Education in Morocco, 1912-1956*.

out these initiatives, teaching appropriate design skills for embroidery and other “feminine” visual culture.

French policies that reconfigured craft industries were charged with ulterior motives aimed at “civilizing” Moroccan Muslim women. Within the colonialist logic of race and “science,” local women were inherently unable to become “fully Westernized” and thus needed educational initiatives targeted at preserving the specificities of their own cultural milieu. Alongside discursive configurations of the traditional city as unclean, women’s education aimed at inculcating normative European hygiene alongside the spatial reorganization of the home, and introducing foreign notions of privacy and personal space.

More broadly, French oversight of the crafts industry imposed an artificial division between the supposedly “urban” arts industry as overwhelmingly Arab and Islamic, while “rural” crafts were framed as Berber and therefore lesser in terms of French-constructed Islamic hierarchies of artistic production [Fig. 3].<sup>152</sup> Implicated in the divisions of arts and crafts, hygiene and civilization, I argue, are the arts of the female body. As discussed in Chapter Two, women’s body adornment such as tattoo were deemed fundamentally backwards indicators of a tribal society, necessitating paternalistic intervention in order to achieve modernist notions of progress. Unlike calligraphy, architecture, or even weaving and pottery, I suggest, the arts of the female body were—if not ignored—most definitely *not* lauded by French colonial authorities. For artists attempting to champion an identity harkening back to the precolonial era, not only was the woman an ideal symbol (the terrain of the body itself was a site for the construction of “heritage” and “cultural preservation”) for fighting against colonial control, but so was the

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<sup>152</sup> The Berber Eco-Tourist Museum outside of Marrakesh provides a quintessential example of such policies’ implications in contemporary tourist industry. The majority of displays in the small open air exhibition space highlight women’s traditional dress, colonial-era photographs and quotidian household items as defining features of Moroccan cultural heritage, packaged under taglines “Berber” and “traditional.”



*terrain of her body itself.* As sites of contestation, the intimacy of women's bodies contained cultural inscriptions resonant among a population eager to carve out an independent identity from the fragments of foreign imperial cultural intervention.

### **Henna and the Art World: Vernacular Modernities**

French civilizational initiatives in North Africa, as we have seen, targeted the foundational bases of Moroccan identity—particularly through the intertwined arenas of the Arab-Islamic city space,<sup>153</sup> native female bodies, and many other fields of cultural production. The loci for imperial social control was not restricted to merely economic and political domains but followed an intrusive spatial-cultural logic, from the walled boundaries of the traditional city to the uncovered and covered skins of local women. Such a totalizing colonial project gave rise to a particularly fraught context of limited symbolic possibilities available in the struggle against the French for independent cultural identity. How, for example, to resist imperialist interventions in artistic production while simultaneously—through educational policies, for example,—being a product of such institutional interference?

As we will see, even contemporary Moroccan intellectuals wrangle with this ideological legacy as Irbouh points out, the overwhelming majority of local art critics and theorists remain bound up in a division of arts/crafts implemented by the French and largely unchallenged to the present day. I argue that, despite the lack of inherent significance attached to henna by (male) contemporary local theorists, the adornment's physical substance, coupled with the framing of “traditional” expressive and artistic culture by French colonial administrators, inevitably

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<sup>153</sup> Celik, Z., 2008. *Empire, Architecture, and the City: French-Ottoman Encounters, 1830-1914*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press; Slyomovics, S., 2001. *The Walled Arab City in Literature, Architecture and History: The Living Medina in the Maghrib*. New York: Routledge.

constructed a situation in which henna served as a spiritually resonant and locally convenient trope for the crafting of a uniquely Moroccan postcolonial artistic identity.

Compellingly, none of the female Moroccan intellectuals and artists with whom I have spoken concurs with the perspectives voiced by male cultural mediators on the matter of henna's signification. The interpretation of henna—itsself an art form dominated by women—continues to bifurcate along gendered lines; variant opinions are expressed, among others, by Fatima Sadiqi, Latifa Toujani, Lalla Essaydi and Fatima Mernissi. Moreover, disagreement over henna's classification is not limited to women within the elite community of Moroccan intellectuals, but is also shared by women of the lower classes. In a striking encounter at the henna market of Fez, as I spoke with the male proprietor of a bath-product shop, a female patron awaiting her turn, provoked only by eavesdropping on our conversation, interrupted his description of henna as “cosmetic,” informing me quite explicitly that henna is “not merely a cosmetic, or a facet of women's magic but it is, daughter, our art.”

My suspicions that henna's cultural value in the precolonial era accounted for the adornment's visible prominence in the arena of nationalistic “high” or “fine” arts was paradoxically confirmed by the results of an initially discouraging interview. Back in Morocco in 2010 for further field research, I was thrilled, through the introduction of a former student, to secure a meeting with Farid Zahi, one of Morocco's most famed art critics and cultural theorists.<sup>154</sup> I was excited to discuss my preliminary research findings with Zahi, yet our encounter initially deflated my sense of surety in the project's development. As we sat over coffee, he perused the Arabic abstract of my dissertation and quickly began to deconstruct my

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<sup>154</sup> Dr. Zahi's interests and specialties include the role of the body in Moroccan fine arts, the rise of nationalism and critical art theory in the Maghreb. Zahi's multiple publications include *Positions, compositions : Ecrits sur l'art* (2012), *al-Jasad wa al-sura wa al-muqaddas fil Islam* (1999), *and D'un regard, l'autre : L'art et ses médiations au Maroc* (2007).

linguistic choices and eventually its fundamental theoretical premises. In addition to his prominence in the field of art criticism, Zahi is renowned as a French/Arabic translator of art theory and philosophy, as well as a specialist in the history of Maghrib fine arts. I felt myself sinking lower and lower into my chair as he proceeded to deconstruct my argument, and eventually dismissed the project altogether.

Initially discouraged by this meeting, I returned home dejected at the possible failure of my project. Zahi had explicitly rejected henna's symbolic use value in cultural representation; in his opinion, the adornment constitutes "art" in no sense of the term, but instead belongs to the classification of popular folklore. After reflection, however, Zahi's criticisms of my interpretation of henna—far from challenging the basic premises of the research or undercutting my assumptions—in fact substantiated my view that this female adornment was not only highly significant as an art form in its own right, but provided a pivotal and ideologically-charged vector of nationalist sentiment in postcolonial "fine arts" and cultural production. Specifically, Zahi took issue with two of my theoretical assumptions: the value of henna as a ritually infused medium and, more broadly, the anchoring of nationalist Moroccan cultural identity in female-dominated visual culture.

Near the end of our meeting, Zahi offered to arrange a meeting for me with the father of contemporary Moroccan fine arts, Farid Belkahia—a world-renowned cultural producer, sculptor, painter and theorist.<sup>155</sup> Belkahia rose to fame on a rocket of "traditionalism" in the name of postcolonial national identity. Much of the artist's pioneering work has deep roots in elements of Moroccan women's culture. For example, his designs often draw upon elements such as the characters of Tifinagh, a script for transcribing Amazigh languages (Berber dialects). The Amazigh languages, or "mother tongues" of Morocco are, as the terminology indicates,

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<sup>155</sup> Unfortunately, due to Belkahia's scheduling, this meeting was not able to take place.

generally preserved and transmitted by women (Sadiqi 2002). Further design elements originate in the female-dominated art forms of carpet weaving, tattooing and embroidery.

As elaborated below, however, the accolades received by Farid Belkahia for his innovative artwork generally focus on his rejection of “Western” media, in favor of “traditional” matter. The artist broadly rejects the use of canvas and oil pigments, selecting instead the medium of sheep skin stretched on frames of copper or iron, themselves locally resonant materials charged with sacred meaning. The same is true for pigmentation: Belkahia chooses to work with henna and saffron in lieu of oil or acrylic, which he considers an ideological imperative as well as a manner in which to highlight the role of memory in cultural production and to emphasize the media’s “alchemical autonomy” (Khatibi 2001: 112). It is this aspect of Belkahia’s work to which critics accord the most innovative prominence. Within the elite world of fine arts, the artist’s definitional intervention in postcolonial art was the choice not of subject matter, but of the specific media. Through the use of henna, saffron, iron, copper and sheep skin, Belkahia emphasizes a return to indigenous “Moroccanity,” and hence hopes to purge local identity and artistic production of French imperial interventions.

Even as Zahi and I discussed the fundamental role played by Farid Belkahia in crafting nationalistic fine arts in postcolonial Morocco, my interlocutor did not recognize the overarching implications of Belkahia’s ideological motivation in media selection. Between our discussion of my own research and the foundations of Moroccan fine arts, Zahi presented two opinions that, upon examination, prove at odds with one another. First, he shrugged off the suggestion that henna provides any connection whatsoever with female religiosity and identity in Morocco; henna, Zahi stated, is above all, *shī basīṭ* (a minor thing)—evaluating the medium itself as devoid of significance at a sub-surface level. Secondly, Zahi emphasized Belkahia’s significance in

pioneering modern artistic identity in Morocco, ironically, through the use of supposedly “meaningless” media. However, when we reconsider the impact of the colonial heritage and situate contemporary art theorists’ observations within that discourse, it becomes clear that significant levels of historical meaning in the crafting of Moroccan nationalist arts have been sorely neglected.

### **Farid Belkahia: Women’s Visual Culture and Building Modern Moroccan Art**

How could masculine appropriation of a female-dominated traditional visual culture result in the elevation of Farid Belkahia to the status of international superstar, trailblazer and artistic pioneer, if Zahi’s cursory disregard for henna’s value is accurate? If henna adornment’s significance truly remained circumscribed to the realm of folklore, a mere “simple thing,” or hollow substance, there is simply no means by which to account for the resonance Belkahia’s visual and material choices held for Moroccan identity in a postcolonial art world, whether local or global. Moreover, we find further evidence here of henna’s decidedly gendered reception.<sup>156</sup> Lifted from the female body and reapplied to the skin of a sacrificial sheep, henna adornment’s role in commemorating Moroccan heritage, religiosity and memory finds recognition—provided a male mediator demonstrates the adornment’s merit, as he transfigures (mere) substance into alchemical “art.” If one follows Zahi’s evaluation of henna to its logical conclusion, his dismissal of henna’s significance becomes more striking in relation to the pioneering legacy of Farid Belkahia. This artist’s gestures towards an independent Morocco rely on his presentation of religious identity, symbolic heritage, and cultural pluralism through a feminine medium in which

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<sup>156</sup> Notably, Moroccan female academics and artists with whom I have spoken concerning the topic of this dissertation have a decidedly varied interpretation of henna and have been most interested in this project. Nearly every one of them has offered countless examples in support of my thesis and have been eager to add further layers of interpretation to the project.

all three factors intertwine. Farid Belkahia's rise to international prominence came, one might say, quite literally, at the hennaed hands of Moroccan women.

Farid Belkahia, European trained and internationally exhibited, remains rooted in the medium of henna and its symbolic value by his own explicit admission. In interviews, Belkahia has often described his belief that particular objects and media serve as mnemonic devices for the preservation of cultural memory. The deliberate juxtaposition of henna and skin, for example, functions as an alchemical combination rooted in the local specificities of Moroccan artistic and spiritual heritage.<sup>157</sup> It is the choice of henna, in fact, which provides the clearest insight into the far-reaching ramifications of Belkahia's pioneering influence.

Educated in Milan, Prague and Paris, Belkahia returned to Morocco in 1961 as the director of Casablanca's Ecole des Beaux Arts.<sup>158</sup> Rather than advocating a passive repetition of Western media and techniques, such as canvas and synthetic oil or acrylic paints, Belkahia championed the adoption of a more authentically Moroccan process of artistic creative production.<sup>159</sup> The selection of recognizably North African iconography in resonant material allows the artist to convey a local sense of the sacred and preserve what Belkahia considers uniquely Moroccan collective memory.

Belkahia's *Main*, or *Hand* (1980) provides a quintessential example of the artist's manipulation of localized medium and resonant iconography [**Fig. 4**]. *Main* is a work created not on canvas but on animal skin, stretched to mimic the form of a female, hennaed hand with fingers spread. The disembodied woman's fingertips have been entirely covered with blocks of henna, mirroring the common feminine practice of staining the fingernails entirely with the dye.

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<sup>157</sup> Afaf Zourgani. « Fatid Belkahia: Epidermique et Insransigent. » June/July 2010. Diptyk. No. 6, 64-71.

<sup>158</sup> Nadia M. Shabout. *Modern Arab Art* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 29.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 30. See also: Hamid Irbouh. 1991. *Farid Belkahia: A Moroccan artist's search for authenticity*. New York: City College of New York.

Zigzag shapes alternate with checkerboard patterns; geometric linearity abounds. Intricate Tifinagh symbols are integrated throughout the composition; particularly compelling is a conjunction of lozenges located in the central palm of the hand. Here, Belkahia joins together henna's prophylactic charge with another emblem drawn from "popular," feminized Islam: the protective Hand of Fatima, which typically includes the representation of a protective eye poised to stare down the malevolent potential of the evil eye.

The artist may draw from familiar patterns within the Moroccan context, but for Belkahia it is ultimately the choice of medium which activates the work's symbolic resonance. According to Cynthia Becker, Belkahia "does not place the motifs that adorn his leather canvas in any particular historical, cultural or temporal context but uses what he feels are universal artistic symbols that transgress culture and time," with the critical aim to establish Morocco's "postcolonial identity as a multi-cultural pluralistic society."<sup>160</sup> Belkahia, an artist returning from Europe amid the turmoil of independence, rejects Western hegemony through his careful choice of medium as a vector of cultural meaning. Although his symbols occasionally derive from classical genres such as Arabic calligraphy, an overwhelmingly feminine visual vocabulary (such as textiles, Tifinagh characters, and pottery) informs and dominates Belkahia's compositions. More critically, however, the artist views media as charged with primary meaning. In both iconography and materiality, the father of Moroccan fine arts finds inspiration from the country's female spiritual and visual culture.

Exhibition catalogues, journal articles and other texts often cite *Main* as a prototypical example of Belkahia's technical and philosophical approach to the decolonization of Moroccan arts and North African artistic production more generally. Although certainly emblematic of his

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<sup>160</sup> Cynthia Becker. *Amazigh Arts in Morocco: Women Shaping Berber Identity* (Austin, TX: University of Austin Press, 2006), 180-1.

critical intervention in postcolonial fine arts, *Main*, however, represents merely the most obvious—and representational—emblem of Belkahia’s work. A wider view of Belkahia’s productive spectrum underscores the crucial role played by henna adornment—specifically the adornment’s embeddedness in the “moderate” or “popular” Islamic traditions that often proves a powerful antithesis to extremist interpretations of religiosity.

Another work, produced in 1997 (titled *Untitled* and undertaken in henna and saffron on a base of sheep skin stretched over copper structural frames) further demonstrate henna’s value within Belkahia’s postcolonial vision [Fig. 5]. The composition is organized into smaller, square-shaped subdivisions within which the clustered lozenge patterns and checkerboard motifs commonly used in female adornment reappear, intermingling with Tifinagh characters. *Untitled* is dominated by typically Amazigh-influenced Moroccan design elements lending themselves to stark linearity and basic geometries. Noteworthy in this particular image are repetitive triangular forms, often locally-comprehensible vaginal referents and visual metaphors for fertility. In the upper right hand corner appears one of Belkahia’s signature iconographies. White, domed structures rise in parallel against a desert-colored background—cross-cut by an arrow along a vertical axis. Belkahia describes the use of similar arrows in other works as a method of depicting in material form the intangibility of spiritual energy; he often makes use of these symbols to represent Sufi mystical performances in a geometrically-schematic, “non-representational” manner. The abstracted, arching structures are meant to convey saints’ tombs, resting atop a coloring of deep umber and crimson mixture, obtained from repeated application of henna dye—perhaps a referent to a Moroccan name for the dirt around the shrine of a deceased holy man or woman: “henna of the saint.” *Untitled* brings together Belkahia’s characteristic interest in local forms of spirituality in conjunction with ritually-charged substance



matter. Read in the context of Belkahia's stated aims and previous work, this piece's marriage of female sexuality and religious ritual underscores the profound anchoring of henna adornment within Moroccan Islamic culture.

Of course, as a plant-based dying agent, henna as matter carries no stable meaning. The adornment remains, however, locally charged as a readily-interpretable symbolic substance. Vectors of signification do interact at the level of materiality, which produce meaning that is simultaneously fixed in territorial locality *and* socially dynamic. Such variant layers of interpretation are inextricably attached to Belkahia's selection of henna as a vehicle for his own "fine arts" work. The artist's appropriation of female visual culture thus inscribes the medium with a different meaning than a bride's adornment. For Farid Belkahia, this negotiation of a symbolically charged medium is intertwined with resistance to colonial cultural inheritance. Left unstructured by the art versus craft regulatory divisions under the French—and already significant as an artistic practice associated with local Islamic practice in all its feminization, henna provides an ideal venue for carving out a Moroccan nationalist identity. Memory, womanhood, and cultural inheritance meet at the level of pigment and skin: a grace-giving substance infused with imperial history, and reclaimed in an effort to reshape local visions of the postcolonial future. The points at which these meanings are created reside ultimately in the medium's materiality and reveal the broader cultural, religious and gendered significance of henna as an art form. Presaging Marshall MacLuhan, henna in its fine arts appropriation and original embodied context demonstrate, quite literally, that "medium is also message." Were henna, in fact, to constitute a *tabula rasa* for the inscription of nationalist significations, Belkahia's contributions to indigenous identity construction in postcolonial Morocco would logically not exist.

### **Nativism, the Naïve and the Social Currency of Women’s Popular Arts**

Farid Belkahia is by no means the sole founder of Moroccan fine arts, yet he is widely regarded as its most prominent and influential representative. Hamid Irbouh classifies postcolonial movements in Moroccan art history into three separate but interrelated ideological and technical schools: the Nativists, the Populists and Bi-Pictorialists.<sup>161</sup> As we shall see, regardless of ideological motivations and variances in approach, all three movements are united by a focus on the emphasis of local, feminine visual culture in Morocco as a counter to colonial history. Along with Hassan Slaoui, Mohamed Melehi and Muḥammad Chebaa, Farid Belkahia formed the “Casablanca Group,” which provided a base for the movement that Irbouh terms “Nativism.” This association of artists trained in Western centers of cultural production returned home and reacted against what they perceived as the French colonial “ghettoization” of the traditional artistic industry.<sup>162</sup> The Nativists, led by Belkahia, viewed the decolonization and democratization of Moroccan art as critical imperatives—the movement’s “messianic opposition to the West” drove not merely the selection of themes and media, but also the spatial configurations of display. In 1969, Belkahia and his colleagues from the Casablanca Group refused to exhibit within the confines of an elitist gallery space, and chose instead traditionally

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<sup>161</sup> A full investigation of these three movements is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of the present chapter. Omitted in the primary text above is a discussion of the bipictorialist movement, including artists such as Ahmed Cherkaoui and Jilal Gharbaoui. This group took a middle-ground approach, blending Western media and “local” themes in order to destabilize French supremacy by rendering it equivalent to Moroccan culture. Nativism and Populism represent the most diametrically opposed poles of Irbouh’s classification system—yet foregrounding feminine visual vocabulary used in tattoos and pottery, for example, run throughout all three diverse ideological and technical schools of Moroccan fine art. See also: Flamand, Alain. 1983. *Regard sur la peinture contemporaine au Maroc*. Casablanca: Société d’Edition et de Diffusion Al-Madariss.

<sup>162</sup> Nadia M. Shabout. *Modern Arab Art* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2007), 29.

open-air public squares such as Djemaa el-Fna in Marrakesh.<sup>163</sup> As seen above in the analysis of Belkahia's work in particular, the Nativists encouraged the adoption of media utilized in traditional artistic and craft production, such as henna, to underscore their ideological opposition to French colonial encroachment on Moroccan religion, culture and identity.

The "Populist" school identified by Irbouh does not share the philosophical orientation and motivations of Belkahia's Nativists. Populists did, however, choose to emphasize Moroccan visual culture through the repeated depiction of quotidian life and locally-meaningful scenes, such as henna parties, weddings, religious festivals and weaving. The artists grouped into this classification are often auto-didacts, or are described as "naïve" painters; compellingly, this is the only category of the modern Moroccan arts movement in which female artists are well represented. In addition, along with Ahmed Louardighi and Moulay Ahmed Drissi, one finds Fatima El Farouj, Radia, Fatima Mellal, Fatna Gbouri, Radia and Chaïbia. Furthermore, many of these female artists were introduced to creative expression in plastic arts through the intervention of male family members, and were "discovered" by European collectors who then championed the work of "illiterate, uneducated Moroccan women" as both authentic cultural production untainted by the colonial era, and as a strategy through which to bolster women's education initiatives. Strikingly, although Radia and Chaïbia do have surnames, the majority of texts refer to them only as such—which surely one could not envision as applicable to "Farid" as a stand-in for the great Belkahia.

In terms of content, technique, form and themes, Populists also depict localized arts, crafts and everyday life in an effort to represent Moroccan visual culture. The ideological project here is perhaps more subtle, yet the force of cultural mediation becomes readily apparent

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<sup>163</sup> In later years, however, Belkahia's rejection of institutional gallery space as "elitist" in the period of decolonization underwent a shift. The artist's works have been exhibited and sold by multiple international art traders and are now featured in some of the most world-famous "high-art" contemporary museum collections.

when contextualized in the “discovery” of naïve female artists by male specialists, whether foreign or Moroccan.<sup>164</sup> In explanatory texts—unlike Belkahia and the members of the Casablanca school—biographical narratives emphasizing the poor, peasant and rural origins of female artists play a predominant role. Dounia Belqassem’s comprehensive dictionary of artists in Moroccan history, for example, devotes the bulk of attention in Chaïbia’s entry to a discussion of her rural origins, illiteracy, and miraculous discovery by a foreign arts dealer; the themes and techniques of the artist’s work, however, are given only secondary emphasis (Benqassem 2010: 64-5).

Irbouh’s classification of Nativist and Populist movements in Moroccan fine arts does correspond to the realities of ideological variance in motivation between the groups; however, upon examination, a more precise line of demarcation exists relative to art education. Subject matter used by Belkahia and his group does not differ dramatically from that used by the so-called “naïve” or Populist artists.<sup>165</sup> Unifying themes in the works of this group focus on daily life, family ritual and so-called folk culture, carried out in a technique emphasizing bold colors and careful attention to identifying details of quotidian life, such as tattoo patterns, henna designs and intricate adornments replicated on the clothing worn by human figures in these compositions. Fatna Gbouri’s “They Are Making Bread” provides a prototypical example [Fig.6].

Fatima Louardiri (the daughter of Ahmed Louardiri) provides an example of yet another naïve female painter, whose connection to a masculine artistic mediator provided her

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<sup>164</sup> Parisian museum director Pierre Gaudibert is widely credited with the discovery and promotion of Chaïbia—whose work was later recognized by the French Academic Society for Education and Encouragement. Moreover, several other women within this grouping, such as Radia and Fatima El Farouj, were introduced to artistic creation and subsequently promoted by brothers and other male relatives trained in fine art production.

<sup>165</sup> Refer to : Boutaleb, Abdeslam., 1985. *La peinture naïve au Maroc*. Paris: Les Éditions du Jaguar, 1985 ; 2002., *Artistes singuliers d’Essaouira: 23 juin au 15 septembre 2002*. Martigny, Switzerland: Le Manoir de la Ville de Martigny, M’Rabet, Khalil. 1987. *Peinture et identité: l’expérience marocaine*. Paris: L’Harmattan.

introduction into the world of “fine arts” production. Overarching themes in Louardiri’s work include the preparation of tea, curative spirit possession rituals, and women at work weaving. The undated gouache on paper, *The Couple*, typifies the subject matter, style and gendered implications of the naïve-art designation [Fig. 7]. Bride and groom provide the visual center of the colorful composition, against the two-dimensional background characteristic of self-taught artists. Space has been flattened and divided along a horizontal axis between patterns familiar from the female-dominated art of textile weaving, and motifs suggestive of rolling hills—themselves inscribed with designs from henna body art. Louardiri delicately renders the patterns of traditional wedding attire—the groom is dressed in a *djellāba* and fez cap, while his bride wears a traditional, belted caftan and ornate facial makeup.

“Quaint” or “folkloric” images such as Louardiri’s *The Couple* are best understood in terms of the trajectory which contemporary Moroccan fine arts has developed—from French colonial interventions that elevated masculine dominated “arts” to the appropriation of henna motifs by male fine artists, visual culture framed as feminine plays a fundamental role in the creation, preservation and maintenance of Moroccan identity. Far from a phenomenon limited in time, the use of women’s artistic expression continues to play a politically-important role—currently, in marketing the Moroccan state’s legitimacy vis-à-vis progressive policy on female education, broader women’s rights and—as discussed later—the relationship between women, Moroccan Islam and pluralistic history for foreign tourists.

Excerpts from the following account reveal the role in which female marginalization plays a fundamental role in the framing, championing and marketing of women’s visual culture on the international fine arts scene:

Chaïbia Tallal was born in 1929 in Chtouka, near El-Jadida. Nothing seemed to predestine Chaïbia's career as a painter of international renown. Indeed, she was born into a peasant family in the heart of the of the

countryside at a time when schooling was still a privilege of the upper class children. Chaïbia was illiterate ...At the age of thirteen, Chaïbia Tallal was married to an older man; this was his seventh wedding. This union lasted two years. Following an accident, Chaïbia's spouse died, and she ended up a widow at the age of fifteen, as Hossein's mother, a child barely a year...Chaïbia Tallal continued to do her household, while Hussein built his career as a painter. When the mother saw her son smeared with paint, she scolded him, explaining she was tired of washing this kind of filth. It is far from imagining that the roles would be reversed.<sup>166</sup>

The Moroccan Ministry of Culture champions Chaïbia as a positive symbol of art, education and cultural policy aimed at empowering the Moroccan woman, and features her exhibition history prominently on its website.<sup>167</sup> Global initiatives championing the “Moroccan woman” have foregrounded the artistic contributions of other naïve female artists as well; the Word Bank in Washington DC, for example, includes as permanent display artwork by Fatima Mellal (Benqassem 2010:141). From international initiatives for Moroccan female empowerment to State-sponsored artisan cooperatives, women’s art forms continue to provide a focus for civil society strategies.<sup>168</sup> The long history of gendered colonial interventions, particularly with respect to art education, compels us to consider the broader implications of utilizing female visual culture to champion and brand particular modes of governmental intervention in production as Morocco increasingly participates in global neo-liberalism. Stated succinctly, female-dominated expressive culture sells—and will continue to sell—along with associative messages about the Moroccan State’s self-representation as inclusive, pluralistic and peaceful.

Contemporary female artists with a Moroccan background (whether working from the Diaspora or within the nation itself) also recognize the currency of henna as a deeply localized signifier for female identity and one which has proven highly marketable in a global art market

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<sup>166</sup> Osire Glasier. “The Path of a Great Painter,” *Le quotidien maghrébine* [http://en.lemag.ma/The-Path-of-a-great-painter\\_a1084.html](http://en.lemag.ma/The-Path-of-a-great-painter_a1084.html) (Accessed 24 December 2012).

<sup>167</sup> “Espace des Arts.” Homepage, Moroccan Ministry of Culture. [http://www.minculture.gov.ma/fr/index.php?option=com\\_content&view=article&id=147%3ACha%C3%AFbia-tallal-&catid=43&Itemid=129&lang=fr](http://www.minculture.gov.ma/fr/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=147%3ACha%C3%AFbia-tallal-&catid=43&Itemid=129&lang=fr) (Accessed 25 December 2012).

<sup>168</sup> International aid organizations in recent years have supported women’s empowerment through small arts and crafts businesses and micro-credit supported initiatives. See, for example, the UNHCR program designed for production of jewelry and other handicrafts by refugee women in Morocco. <http://www.unhcr.org/4bc725096.html>

that attaches value to the exotic (particularly in terms of Muslim women's representations) [Fig. 8]. The internationally-renowned Iranian artist and filmmaker Shirin Neshat obtained recognition largely through her use of henna adornment in juxtaposition with veiled female bodies in stark monochromatic photographs. Neshat, moreover, was inspired by Moroccan traditions of henna adornment and has chosen the country in which to produce her films. Also noteworthy are contemporary Moroccan artists Aicha Hammu, who uses henna as a pigmentation agent for figurative paintings on white cloth pillows [Fig. 9],<sup>169</sup> and Latifa Toujani, whose work includes a photographic montage of hennaed women participating in religious rituals such as curative performance of spirit possession [Figs. 10-11].<sup>170</sup>

One of Morocco's best known contemporary artists, Lalla Essaydi, is best understood in the context of her predecessors: both Belkahia's Nativist movement to decolonize fine arts production *and* the female dominated expressive culture from which Belkahia's movement drew inspiration. Essaydi's work has recently received international attention, and her exhibitions include prominent representations at the Smithsonian Museum of African Art,<sup>171</sup> the Brooklyn Museum,<sup>172</sup> Bab al-Rouah (Morocco) [Fig. 12], the Art Institute of Chicago, the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, and many more.<sup>173</sup> The Smithsonian exhibition, "Revisions," slated to open in May 2013, will feature a broad range of Essaydi's artistic media.<sup>174</sup> However, she is most renowned

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<sup>169</sup> Diptyk No 8 Dec 2010\_Jan2011, page38-2.

<sup>170</sup> Noteworthy as well is that Toujani's utilization of henna and other locally recognizable emblems of femininity in the art world have attracted the attention of the State. In addition to serving as an art producer in her own right, Toujani also curated exhibitions and directed national museums before prior to her appointment on the Council of Fine Arts in the Moroccan Ministry of Culture (Benqassem 2010: 181).

<sup>171</sup> Eddie Burke. "National Museum of African Art Presents 'Lalla Essaydi: Revisions': Boundary-Pushing New Works Featured in Exhibition." *Smithsonian*. <http://newsdesk.si.edu/releases/national-museum-african-art-presents-lalla-essaydi-revisions> 10 April 2012.

<sup>172</sup> Brooklyn Museum. "Elizabeth A. Sackler Center for Feminist Art: Feminist Art Base: Lalla Essaydi." [http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist\\_art\\_base/gallery/lalla\\_essaydi.php](http://www.brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/lalla_essaydi.php) (Accessed 27 December 2012).

<sup>173</sup> Imani M. Cheers, "Q&A: Lalla Essaydi Challenges Muslim, Gender Stereotypes at Museum of African Art." *PBS Newshour*. <http://www.pbs.org/newshour/art/blog/2012/05/revisions.html> 9 May 2012.

<sup>174</sup> National Museum of African Art. "Lalla Essaydi: Revisions" <http://africa.si.edu/exhibits/revisions/index.html> (Accessed 27 December 2012).

for her use of henna as a predominant focus in works that merge photography, performance and installation.

Born near the city of Marrakesh in southern Morocco, Essaydi received her training in France and the United States and also spent time as a resident of Saudi Arabia. The Smithsonian Institution has chosen to include Essaydi's work as particularly "boundary-pushing" and groundbreaking for the innovative technical media she integrates into a body of work that challenges Orientalist stereotypes of Muslim women. Such a summary introduction to Essaydi's work, however, obscures deeper levels of meaning that animate her cultural production. *Converging Territories* (2002-2004) and *Les Femmes du Maroc* (2005-2007) are emblematic of Essaydi's approach to exploring the questions of veiling, the Orientalist gaze, and—critically—what she considers to be the confining architectures of silence that Moroccan women face.

*Converging Territories* consists of a series of photographs set in the family home of Essaydi's childhood—a space she has described as a prison-like harem enclosure. To the artist, henna provides a medium in which to contest patriarchal structures of traditional Moroccan society. Essaydi characterizes her work as "intersecting with the presence and absence of boundaries; of history, gender, architecture, and culture; that mark spaces of possibility and limitation. That is my story as well." To this end, she makes use of henna as a medium through which to reclaim women's right to sacred history: in the majority of her compositions, Qur'anic verses, Hadiths of the Prophet and Islamic poetry are inscribed in the female-identified body adornment, covering every inch of the composition—the skin of models, the cloth enshrouding their bodies, architectural features and quotidian objects [**Fig. 13**].

As pioneering as Essaydi's work may be vis-à-vis the international image of Moroccan fine arts and culture, it nonetheless draws on the manner in which henna adornment has



traditionally operated within Moroccan women's artistic heritage. As demonstrated in Chapters Two and Three, dyeing matter has occupied a position of prominence as a vector of religiosity, and is given special resonance for its female users in the intimate search for spiritual blessings. Moreover, specific objects selected by Essaydi for depictions of women's cloistered lives reveal the precedent for the treatment of henna as a resonant medium.

In *Coverging Terrorities, Number 6*, Essaydi portrays seven Moroccan women shrouded from head to toe in long white *haiks*, or traditional body covers [Fig. 14]. Only the space of the forehead and eyes are visible to the viewer, allowing us to follow their downward gazes focused on broken eggshells in the lower foreground of the composition. These objects, as are the women's garments and the white backdrop, are covered with intricate henna patterning. Objects such as eggs operate similarly in the religio-cultural imaginary as does henna. Popular Islamic rituals, such as spirit possession cures, make use of symbolic materials associated with fertility (i.e., henna and eggs); these highly charged objects are used to obtain answers to prayers, to obtain mediation from the Divine and spiritual release. Although Lalla Essaydi's work is visually stunning and technically innovative, the henna adornment traditions from which she draws are deeply rooted in the manner in which the art form has long operated for Moroccan women. From Farid Belkahia to Lalla Essaydi, fine arts production would simply not have the same international and local social currency were it not embedded in intimate female visual culture of Morocco's heritage.

### **Diaspora Nationalisms and the Ideal Tourist Destination**

From remittance programs aimed at Moroccans in the global Diaspora to international tourist initiatives, the Moroccan government has championed henna as a nationalist marketing device.

Emblems of folk culture and religiously plural heritage, as well as female culture more specifically, appear prominently in advertisements aimed at foreign and domestic tourism. Implicated in these visual frames are claims to Saharan territory as well as a definitive stance against Islamic fundamentalist trends spreading across North Africa. As we shall see briefly below and elaborate in Chapter Five, this strategy of utilizing popular Islamic practices—particularly associated with women—has proved particularly effective in the wake of political crises, be it terrorism or mass protests.

In recent years, academics have begun to investigate the links between Moroccan economic development and initiatives to increase tourism, both domestic and international (Spurles 2002, Gaultier-Kurhan 2003). Studies devoted to the role of patrimony, museums and religious heritage as contested and fraught territories for cultural tourist development are also on the rise (Boissevain 2009-10, McGuinness 2009-10, Pieprzak 2008, 2010, Touzani 2003). Only in the past decade, however, has the value of female-dominated patrimony in promoting an image of pluralistic heritage and religious tolerance become more visible in Moroccan initiatives to attract and solidify revenue from international tourism, while simultaneously drawing on this body of visual culture to increase Diaspora remittances.

Marketing strategies that advertise Morocco as a bastion of religious tolerance and cultural pluralism became increasingly visible following September 11, 2001, the 2003 Casablanca bombings, the Marrakesh attacks in 2011, and demonstrations occurring in tandem with regional revolutions during the 2011 Arab Spring. As discussed in Chapter One, governmental recognition of Berber minority groups surged in the wake of September 11<sup>th</sup>. In the aftermath of the 2003 bombing in Casablanca, an anti-terrorism campaign featuring the Hand of Fatima appeared throughout the country—returning as the Arab Spring arrived in Morocco.

Chapter Five elaborates in further detail the enmeshment of monarchical policy with the Moroccan media. As El Karmouni's adept investigation of the Hand of Fatima's appearance in anti-terrorism billboards demonstrates, advertising power is rarely detached from governmental approval.<sup>175</sup>

An analysis of henna's appearance in tourist and marketing campaigns reveals that the symbolic social capital of a supposedly popular Islamic adornment translates into viable capital with economic use value. Particularly in a nation like Morocco, where the majority of national revenue results from the tourist industry (and only secondarily from phosphate mining), attracting visitors relies on the promotion of the Kingdom's image as stable and welcoming. Even before the April 2011 bombing at a popular Marrakesh tourist café, the Moroccan press issued explicit warnings against participation in the February 20<sup>th</sup> governmental reform protests, on the grounds of that tourism would inevitably suffer, a disastrous result given its critical role in bolstering the Moroccan economy.<sup>176</sup> This worry was underscored by the positive implications of Tunisia's declining tourist numbers for the Kingdom's economy: Europeans eager for a visit to North Africa were choosing to divert itineraries from Tunisia to Morocco in the interests of a peaceful vacation. Fahd Iraqi records as an explicit objective of the Moroccan National Tourist Federation (FNT) reassurance to international tourists that Morocco is a stable country and an excellent replacement for Egypt and Tunisia.<sup>177</sup>

The urgency of promoting both domestic and international tourism as a supplement to the phosphate-reliant Moroccan economy virtually exploded as a topic in local Moroccan media

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<sup>175</sup> Ghassan Wail El Karmouni. « Touch Pas à Mon Pub. » *Economic Enterprises*, April 2011, No. 136, pp. 19-26.

<sup>176</sup> Loubna Bernichi. « Crise du Tourisme: Faut-il craindre le pire? » *Maroc Hebdo International*, No. 923, March 11-17, 2011, pp. 36-7.

<sup>177</sup> Fahd Iraqi, « L'effet révolution. » *Tel Quel*, No. 465, March 19-25, 2011, pp. 36-7.

during the Arab Spring.<sup>178</sup> In a pattern similar to the period following the September 11, 2001 attacks on New York City, in the wake of the Marrakesh café bombing in April 2011, officials from regional tourist boards hastily broadcast Morocco's stability, pluralism, and religious tolerance to the international public.<sup>179</sup> Although we will examine the “Ma Tqich Bladi” anti-terrorist campaign more fully in the following chapter, it bears mentioning that a new iteration of the Hand of Fatima in sticker format was widely sold in Marrakech's Djemaa al-Fna Square shortly after the attack [Fig. 15]. Following the events of September 11, Morocco also saw an uptick in programs championing indigenous Amazigh heritage and culture, popular Islamic traditions, and the contributions of the Jewish population to the fabric of the country's diversity.<sup>180</sup> Although it is always in the interest of the state to simultaneously preserve revenue and stability, a curious double-speak undergirds such initiatives.<sup>181</sup>

Let us briefly examine the manner in which henna is implicated in tourist strategies that project an image of Morocco as tolerant of religious diversity and a bastion for cultural pluralism. The practice of henna design is itself offered as a crucial experience of “authentic Moroccan culture,” but the art form is also resonant when transferred from the intangible

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<sup>178</sup> See Hajar Dehmani. *Tourisme solidaire: voyagez autrement! Femmes du Maroc*. No. 185, July 2011, 146-7; Hayat Kamal Idriss. L'ONMT sur l'offensive. *L'observateur du Maroc*, No. 131, July 8-14, 2011, pp. 42-43; Mehdi Michbal, « Tourisme interne: très chères vacances! » *Tel Quel*, No. 481, July 9-15, 2011, p. 30 ;

<sup>179</sup> Marouane Kabbaj, « Attentat de Marrakech: Quel impact sur le tourisme. » *Maroc Hebdo International*, No. 931, May 6-12, 2011, pp. 24-25 ; Abdelatif Mansour, « Detournement de touristes. » *Le Temps*, No. 105, July 29-Aug23, 2011, p. 50.

<sup>180</sup> On October 17, 2001, for example, King Muḥammad VI issued decree 1-01-299, which founded the Institut Royal de la Culture Amazighe (IRCAM). The organization's aims include advising the government on policies intended to preserve Berber culture and dialects, yet IRCAM's recommendations have no binding authority. Given the prominence of Amazigh activists in the 2011 demonstrations, and the lack of authority beyond an advisory capacity granted to the body, IRCAM appears to fulfill a function more useful in terms of public relations, rather than effective policy.

<sup>181</sup> A noticeable shift in tone is demonstrable in media between the outbreak of February 20<sup>th</sup> protests and the April 2011 Marrakesh bombing—initially, tourism officials warned the domestic population that participation in the pro-democracy reform movement would greatly jeopardize the Moroccan economy through the revenue generated by the industry. However, immediately following the Marrakesh café bombing in April, these same officials moved quickly to reassure the international community that Morocco's positive steps towards reforms could only ensure greater progress towards the nation's internal stability.

experiential realm to that of commodified souvenir (such as the postcard, coffee-table book, or tourist brochure cover [Figs. 16-20]). The tradition of depicting Moroccan culture through postcards foregrounding henna has a long history in French colonial tourism as well [Fig. 21]. Furthermore, in museum spaces, henna often appears on quotidian objects displayed to laud the “folk culture” of the home or the varied aspects of Moroccan religiosity [Figs. 22-23].

Tourist industry strategies that make use of henna both converge and diverge in terms of the specific target audience. Foreign visitors to Morocco will immediately notice itinerant young female henna artists, congregating at national monuments, open spaces, and multiple places frequented by foreign tourists. Similar sites appealing to tourists elsewhere do not contain the same phenomenon. The Makam Al-Shahid in Algiers, Algeria, as well as the Giza Pyramids outside Cairo, Egypt do not give evidence of young women massed to offer henna services. Outside of Morocco, I only encountered henna practitioners advertising their services in the highly-tourist trafficked city of Sidi Bou Said outside of Tunis, Tunisia—and even in this circumscribed locale, a henna artisan was available on call, rather than wandering the alleys in search of customers [Fig. 24]. Curiously, henna is advertised by the French word “tattoos,” and by the Arabic term *harqūṣ* rather than under the name “henna itself.” Moreover, the Tunisian tourist industry emphasizes the nation’s Mediterranean heritage rather than practices of “folk” or “popular” Islam—as in Morocco [Fig. 25]. For example, Tunisian postcards more frequently feature Roman murals and mosaics, unlike Moroccan depictions of traditional female-dominated visual culture.

Patricia Kelly Spurles’ dissertation *Henna for Brides and Gazelles* provides a thorough investigation of henna adornment’s use in Marrakesh, among both domestic and international tourist markets, including the fraught relationship between henna artists and—critically—the

police sector responsible for the regulation of tourism. In discussing the implications of henna as symbolic capital appealing to both domestic and external tourist markets, however, we will also consider sites beyond Djemmaa al-Fna square in Marrakesh and examine broader tourist sites, frequented by Moroccans and foreigners alike, throughout the Kingdom.

As Spurles' work demonstrates, the central plaza of Djemmaa al-Fna in Marrakesh provides a space in which local and foreign tourists converge in pursuit of Moroccan authenticity. Henna artists in the square sit at umbrella-covered makeshift booths, along with portable galleries of work or books of previous designs for foreign and domestic tourists to peruse [Fig. 26]. A majority of the Djemmaa al-Fna henna artisans cover their faces with the *litham*, or black facial veil, perhaps owing to a higher proportion of foreign clientele and the stigma often faced by highly visible women working and interacting in a traditional public space with strangers. Many Moroccans with whom I spoke told me that the *litham* or *niqab* worn by these women serves a dual function: to mask personal identity and "shame," as they are "known" to serve as prostitutes once the sun goes down. Regardless of whether or not this is a valid charge, it was repeated enough to me that it bears mentioning, particularly given the dynamics of open-space female employment and traditional codes of gendered behavior. For poorer Moroccan families, the tourist's desire for henna-as-commodity provides an additional source of revenue. Kapchan documents emergent market conditions and their ramifications for feminine honor in Morocco's Muslim social context. Although young women interacting in economic forums outside the home (particularly with foreigners) risk social marginalization, the tourist market nonetheless provides a more viable and honorable alternative to other sources of income such as prostitution.

Spurles' dissertation notes that, among the locals of Marrakesh, tourist use of henna in the square is considered less authentic—in part, on the grounds that the adornment here occurs in an inverse of the art's traditional public/private division (2002: 247-8). Although Moroccan women do patronize the henna artists in Djemmaa al-Fna plaza, they are far outnumbered by foreign tourists; even male visitors partake in henna adornment, often seeking temporary tattoos of the Western variety. Henna artisans working in the Moroccan tourist sector—as well as the Moroccan population at large—recognize foreign men's unfamiliarity with henna as a traditionally female-dominated practice. Typically, the gallery books carried by henna artists include images that resemble “Western” tattooing displayed on male bodies. Although itinerant henna artists at other locations are more reticent to approach European men and solicit their henna services, within Djemmaa al-Fna itself transgression of the traditional male-female henna boundary is quite common. This not the case for all countries in which henna provides a component of the tourist industry. On a recent study abroad program I directed in Dubai, students arranged to go on a “Desert Safari” tour in which camel riding and henna painting were critical selling points. A male student asked a reluctant artist to do henna for him as well, and encountered a high degree of curiosity and confusion from Emirati students at his decision to engage in the feminine practice. Interestingly, the henna artist appears to have taken measures to gender her approach even in providing him with the “same” adornment as women; however, the patterns on his skin were definitely less floral than that on his female counterparts [Fig. 27].

The use and marketing of henna for “tourist” purposes varies between domestic and international tourist markets. One such example is the difference between the site of Moulay Yaqoub, a hot spring outside the city of Fez, and the Oudaya Kasbah gardens located in the capital city of Rabat. Bus tours through Morocco nearly always include a stop in the Oudaya

Kasbah, with a walk through the garden and a stop for traditional tea on the sea-side café's terrace.<sup>182</sup> Typically, these international groups are comprised of middle-aged Europeans and Americans, and the Kasbah is flooded with Moroccan women offering to design henna as a memento of the country or as an emblem of beautification for a visitor's boyfriend or husband. Unlike henna artisans located in Djemmaa al-Fna square, practitioners frequenting the Oudaya are much more aggressive in their pitches to visiting tourists. Henna artists in this space do not typically approach the Moroccans congregated on the café terrace, and the few times I have seen them do so, they are cursorily waved away. Often, however, henna sellers in the Kasbah will grab a foreign visitor's hand and begin applying henna as a "gift," before demanding payment when she finishes.

This latter approach, far more intrusive, is likely impacted by spatial differences and target audiences. Although Djemmaa al-Fna's henna artisans occupy set locations that are fixed in space, the Oudaya's sellers come and go, following visitors around the space of the gardens. Moreover, the technical ability and styles of henna in each locale differ. Transactions in Djemmaa al-Fna take between fifteen minutes and half an hour, and often include discussions between artisan and client; artisans obtain credibility through the quality of their designs and occasionally pass business cards out to lure the friends of customers. In the Oudaya, however, designs are much rougher, and undertaken in fewer than five minutes [Fig. 28]. Artisans disappear as quickly as they appear, and do not frequent the space day after day—an easily comprehensible strategy, given that international tour groups pass through and depart en masse, and are unlikely to remain long enough for referrals.

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<sup>182</sup> *Lonely Planet*, "Kasbah des Oudaias." <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/morocco/rabat/sights/other/kasbah-des-oudaias> (Accessed 27 December 2012).



Conversely, the hot springs of Moulay Yaqoub, about twenty kilometers outside the city of Fez, are occasionally visited by foreign tourists, yet the site lies further from the well-beaten tourist track of Rabat's Oudaya Kasbah or Marrakesh's Djemmaa al-Fna. The number of Moroccans far exceeds that of European and American visitors. Moulay Yaqoub provides an easily affordable and accessible vacation spot for locals who have long visited the site for the renowned healing properties of the hot spring's waters. Recent development projects have sought to turn the site's fame into an opportunity for a high-class spa facility and medical tourism site located near the "traditional" hot springs.<sup>183</sup> Henna does play a role in the marketing of Moulay Yaqoub to foreign visitors,<sup>184</sup> yet the sulfur baths are celebrated primarily by Moroccans for the healing *baraka* contained in the waters; Visits to Moulay Yaqoub are reputed to clear up skin problems, and to cure syphilis, mental illness and infertility.

At this site, too, henna artists appear. Rather than the rapidly disappearing Kasbah artisans, or the Djemmaa al-Fna permanent stalls, practitioners at this site exhibit a far more sedate approach in seeking customers. Henna artisans at Moulay Yaqoub appear with the ubiquitous array of image gallery books, disposable syringes and jars of henna paste, yet they dress in traditional djellabas and sometimes come accompanied by family members. These women tend to keep to themselves and wait for visitors to approach, rather than calling out to passersby (as in Djemmaa al-Fna) or chasing after strolling tourists (as in the Oudaya). In all the tourist sites I visited where henna was offered as an integral component of the visitors' experience, the time to complete the designs was longest at Moulay Yaqoub. Henna artists appear to spend more time with visitors already frequenting the locale in search of a cure for

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<sup>183</sup> Home Page, Hot Springs of Moulay Yacoub. <http://www.moulayyacoub.com/> (Accessed 27 December 2012).

<sup>184</sup> Adelaïde Jannot. "Moulay Yaqoub: Environs de Fès." *Azurever*, <http://www.azurever.com/maroc/magazine/moulay-yaqoub.php3> (Accessed 27 December 2012).

various ills, and the hot springs experience is marked as one of relaxation. Among the three sites profiled above, differences can be discerned in terms of henna artisans' dress, foreign versus local audiences, technical ability, spatial logistics, and manner of approach. Locations which target a primarily foreign and temporary clientele feature lower standards of quality, quicker interactions, and more aggressive pitches; those sites which deal with local clients demonstrate the reverse.

The use of henna in tourist industries is far from confined to the experience of adornment. Images of henna itself—during the application process, or in its final results—have become a marketing icon for the Kingdom of Morocco in the international market. On my first several field research trips to Morocco, I rarely saw signs advertising henna adornment, even in the heavily tourist-trafficked old city of Fez. However, between my first extended residence in Fez in 2005, and moving back to Morocco in 2010, I noticed that nearly every stall in the old city—regardless of the primary wares for sale—took active measures to draw in customers through prominent advertisements of henna adornment [**Figs. 29-30**]. As we saw with the fine arts production of Farid Belkahia, Lalla Essaydi and many others, promotion of so-called popular culture has its own economic use-value. That henna has become an easily recognizable, swiftly marketable stand-in for the Moroccan nation is readily apparent at any tourist site, book shop, or small grocery store. Row after row of post-cards commonly depict women's hennaed hands and the hand of Fatima alongside old images of the “traditional city,” enigmatic alleyways and veiled women. The message to tourists is thus clear: authenticity in Morocco relies on age-old, unchanging, timeless traditions in a country where cultural tolerance allows foreign visitors a secure space in which to interact with the “exotic.”

A brief review of State-run tourist websites reveals the subtle use of popular Islamic rituals and female expressive culture in the promotion of Morocco as an ideal location for those wishing to experience a “stable yet exotic” Muslim country. A screen shot from the Moroccan Ministry for Tourist Affairs is revealing [Fig. 31]. Primary categories pitched to foreign tourists highlight arts and crafts, traditional festivals, geographical beauty, and leisure activities such as golf. This site links to other promotional materials for the foreign visitor, among which henna, and “ancient methods of beautification” feature prominently, as in the “Health and Wellness” brochure published by the Moroccan Tourist Authority [Fig. 32].<sup>185</sup> In addition to its functional use as an experiential souvenir, henna is offered to tourists in a manner that emphasizes religious and cultural history, carefully tailoring the experience of Moroccan culture to female traditions and moderate, folk spirituality.

Another level of meaning in the marketing of henna as part and parcel of Moroccan cultural pluralism and national tradition becomes apparent when we analyze the art form’s connection to the Sahara desert, particularly in nationalist visual culture. Technically, the southern region claimed by the Moroccan state falls as a disputed territory under international law—but it is fundamental to nationalist identity as historically under monarchical jurisdiction. Formerly a colony of Spain, the disputed Western Sahara is a critical component of Moroccan nationalist sentiment and provides one of the clearly prohibited “red lines” of Moroccan discourse. For this reason, under King Hassan II, the strategic Green March of 1975, which involved some 350,000 unarmed Moroccans marching into the desert to “reclaim” the Western Sahara for the crown, continues to have resonance in nationalist sentiment. As we will see in

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<sup>185</sup> Moroccan National Tourist Office. “Wellness in Morocco.” [http://www.visitmorocco.com/var/ezwebin\\_site/storage/original/application/c61400e1f13610b94d13d4f4f4d3e5ad.pdf](http://www.visitmorocco.com/var/ezwebin_site/storage/original/application/c61400e1f13610b94d13d4f4f4d3e5ad.pdf) (Accessed 27 December 2012).

Chapter Five, the Green March and its linkages to henna appear in all manner of popular culture, including in videos of renowned rap group Fnaire.

Moroccan evaluations of henna's quality are often inextricably linked to the plant's point of origin; the best henna is believed to come from Southern Morocco, in the spaces of the arid desert, where popular religiosity holds that magic is also strong. The Moroccan Ministry of Culture's headline photograph provides a compelling example of the manner in which this localized belief in henna's Saharan origins as a critical nationalist emblem [Fig. 33].<sup>186</sup> This image depicts a traditional dance known as the "*Guerda*," by the Hassaniya nomadic population traditionally belonging to the border between Morocco and Mauritania.<sup>187</sup>

The *Guerda* dance itself is associated with town of Goulmima in southern Morocco. Typically, *Guerda* dances are performed as blessings for newlyweds or the community at large and consist of a lone woman wrapped in veils alternately dancing and revealing herself as the ritual proceeds to the beat of a drum. Hennaed hands form a heightened visual component of the dance, as the gestures foreground the movements of the performer's hands and arms.

Many Hassaniya currently live in refugee camps on Algerian territory, administered by the Algerian-backed Polisario Independence Movement.<sup>188</sup> The indigenous status of the Hassaniya population is itself contested, yet the Moroccan State has taken active measures in other tourist promotion campaigns to champion this ethnic group as the "last nomads of the Sahara."<sup>189</sup> From the image header on the Moroccan Ministry of Culture's homepage, to post-

<sup>186</sup> News, Moroccan Ministry of Culture. <http://www.minculture.gov.ma/fr/> (Accessed 27 December 2012).

<sup>187</sup> Hennaed, Hassaniya nomadic women reappear as a nationalist trope in the Fnaire video production "Yedd al Henna," which reenacts the Green March, and is discussed in the following chapter.

<sup>188</sup> Tony Hodges, 1983. "The Origins of Saharawi Nationalism." *Third World Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 1, pp. 28-57. See also: John Mercer, 1976. "The Cycle of Invasion and Unification in the Western Sahara." *African Affairs*, Vol. 75, No. 301, pp. 498-510.

<sup>189</sup> Cauvin Verner, Corinne. 2008. « Les Hommes bleus du Sahara, ou l'autochtonie globalisée, » *Civilisations*, Vol. 57, No. 1/2, pp. 57-73.

card displays throughout tourist sites, hennaed women are fundamental marketing tropes, associated with the space of the desert, to lay claim to the Sahara as part-and-parcel of Moroccan territorially-based identity [**Fig. 34**]. Particularly through the trope of the nomadic, hennaed woman, Moroccan tourist authorities send a simultaneous message aimed at nationals and visitors alike: rightful jurisdiction over the space of the desert belongs to the monarchy—whose continued presence ensures the preservation of “unorthodox,” or popular (read: tolerant) practices of these varied ethnic groups. Thus, henna is linked in tourist campaigns not merely to the female body and religious tolerance but also to the politicized nature of the State’s foundation—disputed territorial borders.

Forging bonds between Moroccan residents and those in the Diaspora, the activities of the Ministry for Moroccans Resident Abroad—as with the tourist industry—weds territorially-bounded nationalism to lauded conceptions of moderate and folk Islam, championed through the images of hennaed women. Appearing in “naïve” arts, or among the gallery-vanguard, henna’s profound connection to localized conceptions of spirituality, Moroccan women’s bodies and territorially-based claims of identity reveals a deep level of nationalistic sentiment marketable in both liquid currency and social capital.

## Chapter 5

### Warding off Terrorism and Revolution: Moroccan religious pluralism, national identity and the politics of visual culture

Can the image of a temporary tattoo save lives? Could such an ephemeral adornment hold together a nation amidst sweeping regional unrest? Moroccan reaction to the 2003 Casablanca bombings and the uprisings of 2011 Arab Spring suggests so; the hennaed Hand of Fatima provided the focal point of both anti-terror and pro-democracy demonstrations. Although henna is used throughout Northern Africa, South Asia and Middle East—regions that also face the twin threats of religious extremism and popular revolution—the Kingdom of Morocco remains the sole state to mount an ideological campaign in reclamation of a national religious brand: “tolerant” monarchical Islam—embodied by depictions of the female Hand.

This chapter examines the mobilization of expressive culture as a powerful vector for social cohesion and disputation; I first discuss the implications of the symbiotic relationship between henna and the Hand of Fatima in the work of Farid Belkahia, the “father of Moroccan modern art,” who capitalized on the visual forms as a mechanism of cultural/political decolonization. I then turn to the Casablanca bombings of 2003 and analyze the manner in which the Moroccan state also drew on these resonant tropes to craft the nation as an embodiment of benevolent patriarchy and tolerant Islamic values. Finally, I shift focus to Moroccan iterations of the 2011 Arab Spring and the convergence of governmental forces and public citizenry in a symbolic forum, where Nation itself is contested. The spiritual future of Morocco rests—once again—in the hennaed hands of women.

Over the course of the past decade and the post-9/11 rise of Al Jazeera, pundits and scholars have tackled the topic of Arab-Muslim media networks with relish (El-Nawawy and Iskandar 2003; Miles 2005; Seib 2008). No aspect of emergent media has escaped notice, from the use of the internet to recruit militants into jihadist networks and organize international operations (Bunt 2003; Sageman 2008) to Islamic e-dating and broader participation in civil society (Bunt 2009; Eickelman & Anderson 2003; Kraidy 2009). The uprisings of the so-called 2011 Arab Spring further contribute to an exploding interest in new media (Campbell 2001; Feiler 2011; Wright 2011); websites Twitter and Facebook are widely credited with transmitting populist anger across international lines, enabling the organization of protests and combating regime black-outs imposed on official media outlets.<sup>190</sup> Even scholarship which contextualizes the Arab Spring as a broader political phenomenon dedicates space to the innovative use of new media technology (Abidi 2011; Guidère 2011; Tayara 2011)—its role in fomenting revolution has attained axiomatic status.

Slavoj Žižek argues that “the only way to grasp the true novelty of the New is to analyze the world through the lenses of what was ‘eternal’ in the Old” (2009: 6). Indeed, in the widespread trumpeting of new media as a key to democratic uprisings and extremist recruitment, scholars overlook a profound symbolic significance inherent in the very forms transmitted by innovative technologies—as well as the act of mediation itself. Judith Butler claims that “normative” moral judgments are inherently conditioned and “tacitly regulated by certain kinds of interpretative frameworks” (2009: 41). In times of conflict, governmental systems sustain themselves through a careful maintenance of expressive culture, “acting on the senses, crafting them to apprehend the world selectively” (2009: 51-2).

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<sup>190</sup> Lisa Anderson (2011) is one of the few commentators to disagree with the “Facebook Revolution” thesis; she argues that new media merely provides a different platform on which to enact older forms of protest.

At the heart of debates concerning the compatibility of Islam and the West, revolutionary new orders and shifting geopolitics lie symbolic ideological claims to national identity, and the silence of art historians is deafening. Who can forget the image of Christians protecting Muslim Friday prayer at the height of the Egyptian regime's brutal crackdown in Tahrir Square? The iconic photograph embodies dreams of a pluralistic, tolerant Egypt—and such depictions often account for the difference between international support for a regime—or its global isolation. Amidst a cacophony of Western punditry: “What kind of Islamic democracy do *we* want”—forgotten are the more critical questions: “who defines Islam?” and “how?” The battleground is fundamentally symbolic; wars for national, religious and political authority are waged through imagery. I center here on the powerful imagistic setting of the battleground itself. Excitable discourse trumpeting the power of Arab-Islamic new media eclipses the critically *local* anchoring of visual material wielded as a powerful weapon.<sup>191</sup> In the case of Morocco, a media-savvy government and its population drew on deeply rooted tropes from indigenous material culture.

The Kingdom of Morocco endures—through terrorist attacks and popular uprisings, yet we must analyze *how*. Žižek's criticism of liberal permissiveness points out that “the very fascination with the obscenity we are allowed to observe prevents us from *knowing what it is that we see*” (2009: 8). We must not allow the focus on Twitter, Facebook and new media to obstruct analysis of symbolic mechanisms already extant in the socio-cultural imaginary. The Moroccan regime, I contend, has triumphed thus far through its careful crafting of a religious nationalism

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<sup>191</sup> Tina Rosenberg (2011) provides one of the few accounts to examine the efficacy of visual media on fomenting, spreading and maintaining Arab democratic revolution. Rosenberg profiles the work of Belgrade-based C.A.N.V.A.S. (Center for Applied NonViolent Actions and Strategies). Egyptian revolutionaries borrowed their mentors' icon of a clenched fist (itself an ironic cooptation of the Serb Partisans' logo and an emblem of global communism). These non-violent revolutionary strategies favor a Coca-Cola-like branding mechanism to keep render the movement easily identifiable.



unique in the region, defined through powerful symbols. The hands of Moroccan women prove resonant images in the fight against terrorism, populist discontent and the specter of regional regime change. Fatima's hennaed palm serves as a terrain on which to articulate and contest national identity, revolutionary struggle and the people's voice in forging a new and more open future.

### **Decolonizing the Arts: Promoting Mythic Tolerance in the Service of National Identity**

Images of the Hand of Fatima, in the forms of key chains and door-knockers, typically consist of highly ornate, metal filigree-work that evokes not only the natural creases of skin but also the resonant local decoration of henna painting. Often, these emblems include a Moroccan flag superimposed on the palm—linking feminized Nation to spiritual protection. Both images serve a highly significant role in magical-religious protection against the forces of evil and witchcraft—associated with female spirituality.<sup>192</sup> Henna is often the preferred pigment in which to depict the Hand of Fatima; such designs appear at weddings (marking the bridal chamber) or as an identifier for the residence of a *sharif* (descendent of the Prophet Muḥammad). Musical associations specializing in spirit possession, such as the Gnawa and the 'Aissawa brotherhoods, frequently use leather-covered drums depicting the Hand in curative rituals.

The visual resemblance between henna and Fatima's Hand belongs to a broader, generalized hand iconography of spiritual power prominent within Moroccan culture. The majority of bodily symbolism within local Islamic culture, in fact, references the human hand (Chebel 1995: 255-7). The Qur'an itself makes multiple references to the close connections between the body part and religiosity as a representation of God's creative abilities, infinite

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<sup>192</sup> So-called "popular" religious practice, as previously discussed, is widely believed to be the realm of women. The more orthodox in society point towards amulet usage as indicative of typically-feminine superstition (Alberich 1949, pp. 19-40).

power and transcendent justice. Muslim folklore accords a particular preference to the hand of the Prophet; so central is the image of the hand to spirituality that it serves as synecdoche in multiple religious texts for humanity itself (Fahmi 2007).

Yet the symbol's use is not confined to Islam; henna and Fatima's Hand constitute shared emblems in Morocco's heterogeneous culture—historically produced and consumed alike by Jewish, Muslim, Arab and Berber populations. The Hand (albeit variant in composition), can be traced back to Andalusian Spain, where Christians also made use of its protective powers (Hildburgh 1955). Yet as early as the Spanish Inquisition, henna was sufficiently recognized a particularly Islamic emblem that its use figured within the Church's list of "suspicious acts" (in addition to the observance of too many baths, and strange eating habits)—fundamental tenets of living a covertly Muslim life (Areeg 2008: 219). The reference to "shared" religio-cultural tradition, however, ultimately rendered hennaed Hands an ideal symbol around which to reinvent history and promote a myth of tolerance—both in nationalist fine art, and governmental propaganda.

Prominent contemporary artists appropriated the hennaed Hand as a signifier for an autonomous post-colonial heritage capable of instilling indigenous pride and maintaining cultural memory. Ubiquitous post-cards for sale at tourist sites feature hennaed hands, in conjunction with other emblematic "tastes" of Morocco—such as representations of ornate doors and local cuisine. The appearance of hennaed Hands, as a resonant metonym for national identity, began not with the rise of the travel industry, but with the country's first generation of contemporary fine arts—most particularly—under Farid Belkahia, the father of Moroccan painting. Upon his 1962 return from studies in Europe after the demise of the French Protectorate, Belkahia joined

with like-minded colleagues from Casablanca's Ecole des Beaux Arts to form a "decolonization" movement for Moroccan arts.

Indigenous tradition provided unrivaled inspiration—artists, Belkahia argued, must turn away from European techniques and instead embrace local materials. An authentic national identity could only be found in a return to origins through the use of sacred materials and local symbolism. Belkahia rejected the synthetic materials of canvas, oils and acrylics in favor of henna, saffron and sheep-skin; magically-charged metals, such as copper, replaced wood frames and superstructures. In the artist's world view, these objects embody local memory (Zourgani 2010: 64-71). Belkahia and his colleagues, moreover, fervently argued for the reclamation of art by the masses—and took exhibitions out of gallery spaces into Moroccan streets and public squares (Pieprzak 2008: 48-54). These radical actions were motivated by intense pride in vernacular modernity, conceptions of the local and a celebration of quotidian life as fundamentally authentic.

More than merely embracing local tradition, Belkahia and his contemporaries turned towards an ultimate trope of mother-country: the body adornments of women.<sup>193</sup> He viewed henna painting as intimately connected with the figure of the mother, resurrected through "hand, skin, and smell" (El Aroussi 2002: 81). Ahmed Cherkaoui and Jilali Ghabroui, among others, sought inspiration from tattoo patterns, jewelry and henna designs (Khatibi 1983: 209-255). Eschewing "representational" iconography, Belkahia depicts Sufi meditation circles—the human form pared down to its most basic, rectangular forms. Surface decoration is provided by patterns taken from the tattoos and henna designs gracing both Arabic and Berber speaking women

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<sup>193</sup> A parallel case of female body adornment as an underlying inspiration for postcolonial identity can be found in Nigeria's Nsukka Movement, in which women's *uli* body painting came to serve as a motif in the realm of contemporary fine arts. See Simon Ottenberg. 2002. *The Nsukka Artists and Nigerian Contemporary Art*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press; Enid Schildkrout. 2004. "Inscribing the Body." *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 33, pp. 319-344.

throughout the Moroccan countryside. The artist characterizes this stylistic approach as a rejection of elitism, celebration of heritage and, above all, a “demystification of the artist” (Desanti & Decock 1969: 29).

Cynthia Becker considers Belkahia’s appropriation of feminine expressive culture as fundamentally “apolitical” and as a reductive use of folklore to configure nationalist identity (2006: 181). However, as reactions to the 2003 Casablanca bombings and the 2011 Arab Spring demonstrate, nothing could be further from the truth. Hennaed hands, and the spiritual protection they confer neither arose from or remained as a depoliticized motif in fine art. Rather, Fatima’s hennaed Hands provide a terrain on which to contest visions of the nation state; arguments for and against the legitimacy of governance are inscribed—in an ancient medium—on the female body.

### **Casablanca 2003: State Regulation of Affect and Imagistic Response**

On May 16, 2003, bombs ripped through the economic center of Casablanca and punctured the myth of Morocco as a bastion for moderate Islam; targets included a Jewish community center, foreign-owned restaurants and hotels. Nicolas Beau and Catherine Graciet characterize selected locations as ideologically motivated—a public stage for “révolte contre les symbols de pouvoir” (2006: 28). Public (state-sponsored) response upped the political-imagistic ante: protests circulated a locally-resonant icon—a Hand of Fatima emblazoned with the slogan “Ma Tqīch Blādī “(Don’t Touch my Country).<sup>194</sup> The distinctly feminine symbol provided a focal point for demonstrations: it appeared on T-shirts, banners, billboards and posters and continues to function as cultural marketing device—multiple levels of signification operate within the isolated image.

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<sup>194</sup> The Hand of Fatima is a gendered referent in North Africa; in addition to a folkloric association with the Prophet’s daughter, the icon and other “popular” religious practices are considered the domain of women—in contrast with male-dominated spaces of the mosque (Dialmy 1995; Mernissi 1997).

The singular depiction, at work as simulacrum, aims to create a fictional Real of “tolerance,” and delineate the limits of nationhood.<sup>195</sup> Susan Sontag notes, “memory freeze-frames; its basic unit is the single image” (2003: 22). Although Sontag refers here to war photography as “a quotation, or a maxim, or a proverb,” the concept extends to the aesthetic branding mechanisms that underpin contemporary marketing. The Hand simultaneously demarcates the boundaries of citizenship and attempts to curb political dissent—within the framework of an all-powerful monarchical State. An analysis of the image’s polyvalent significations opens a window onto the constellation of “acceptable” civil, religious and national identity in the Kingdom of Morocco. Baudrillard conceives of contemporary representation in zero-sum terminology: every process is deterred “via its operational double...that offers all the signs of the real and short-circuits all its vicissitudes” (1994:2). The call for “tolerance” represented by the Hand is one specific to the utopian visions of the state: the image dissimulates to mask a reality lacking in historical anchor.

The symbol recalls Moroccan stop signs; selected colors, red juxtaposed with a warning message emblazoned in white script. Enforced is absolute authority of the State to regulate conduct at literally every turn. I raised this resemblance to Moroccan cultural theorist Farīd Zāhī, who sardonically declared, “ah, but here we don’t need stop signs—we have the baton.”<sup>196</sup> Zāhī intended to dismiss the power of the traffic placard as a means of public control, yet his comments are revealing. The warning proves extraneous—an illusory referent where the true locus of power is force—tacitly acknowledged by all. At the most basic level of interpretation,

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<sup>195</sup> Jean Baudrillard characterizes the present-day relationship between image and reality as hollow at best: “The territory no longer precedes the map, nor does it survive it. It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory—*precession of simulacra*—that engenders the territory...it is the real, and not the map, whose vestiges persist here and there in the deserts that are no longer those of the Empire, but ours. *The desert of the real itself*” (1994:1).

<sup>196</sup> Interview, December 28, 2010.

then, this image tells us: “nothing falls outside the purview of *Our* jurisdiction.” Beyond color and script schema lurks another critical semiotic component: composition.

The outstretched right palm, or *khamisa*, is renowned in North Africa as a prophylactic emblem against the workings of witchcraft, malevolent intentions and the evil eye. A Moroccan gesture to repel evil consists of displaying the right hand while stating, “*khamisa fī ‘aīnek*” (five in your eye): verbal and physical action blinds the effects of the evil eye and prevents its damage. Ma Tqīch Blādī’s co-optation of this culturally specific emblem presents a visual quotation drawn from another call to “tolerance.” The French organization, S.O.S. Racisme, first circulated the prototype of a hand raised in warning—with the message “*Touche Pas à Mon Pote*” (Don’t touch my friend), as an attempt to instill cross-racial solidarity within the idealistic national vision of “*fraternité et égalité*.” This paternalistic rhetoric and its exclusionary discursive partners are writ large in contemporary French debates on Muslim immigration and integration. Yet this avowedly secularist origin masks a similar condescension to that at work in the Ma Tqīch Blādī campaign: the nation and its citizens are *my* object to protect, rather than a full partner in solidarity struggles. Sadri Khiari, in a scathing critique of French nationality’s racist underpinnings, attacks the organization on the basis of its calls for assimilation and pluralistic coexistence—these goals of the Left, he argues, aim at the erasure of difference—a project unwittingly aided by “*ces imbéciles de S.O.S.-Racisme*” (2009: 110).

Moroccan iterations of the warning Hand replace the secular French message of equality and brotherhood with that of a monarchical vision of Islam, in which feminine submission to the protection to the state reproduces the sanctity of tradition and inoculates citizens against the extremist threat. Music videos by the famously pro-monarchy rap group Fnaire reinforce this interpretation. Fnaire’s governmental ties are widely acknowledged and revealed in thematic

content, a disparity in equipment, publicity and sponsorship.<sup>197</sup> Tellingly, each time the king releases a speech concerning a particular problem in Moroccan society, a feel-good Fnaire promotional anthem follows. The video “Ma Tkich Bladi” blends gesture, image and lyrical guidelines to transmit a clear message concerning the boundaries of Moroccan Islamic identity.<sup>198</sup>

The initial shot depicts a record placed on a turntable; the needle drops and an unseen camera focuses on the label: the image circulated through anti-terror demonstrations. The director then turns our attention to members of the rap group, as they enter the setting through a red doorway identifiable as Marrakesh.<sup>199</sup> “Ma Tkich Bladi” follows a standard stylistic format familiar from American rap videos regularly circulated on MTV and YouTube. Costume consists of university football jerseys, do-rags (bandanas), and oversize-attire intended to evoke the counter-culture legitimacy of American “thug” style. Bravado and swagger recall American rappers such as Tupac and Biggie; however, the decisively pro-government message of Fnaire creates a rift between the Moroccan musicians and the American icons they emulate—Tupac’s astute social criticism was wielded at the failures of the State—decidedly *not* in its service. Choreography features the *khamisa* gesture; the clip depicts “everyday” Moroccans as they contribute their own outstretched right palms in defense of the homeland.

Lest the viewer miss monarchical production and regulation of religio-nationalist sentiment from visual effects of the video alone, lyrics further guide our interpretation. The text

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<sup>197</sup> Interview, Youssef Amine Elalamy: December 24, 2010.

<sup>198</sup> Although an accurate transliteration of the Moroccan Arabic phrase is rendered as “Ma Tqīch Blādī,” when referring to Fnaire’s video, I choose to replicate the spelling utilized by the musical group itself, and thus refer to the song by “Ma Tkich Bladi.” [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0tKoJ\\_3GtE](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0tKoJ_3GtE).

<sup>199</sup> The location is itself significant. Much of Fnaire’s self fashioning as The Image of nationalistic youth derives from a double discourse: the Saharan origins of Moroccan culture—thus Western Sahara as Moroccan territory (under the purvey of the state/homeland), and the cross-roads to sub-Saharan Africa—the latter, a meta-reference to the African American hip hop that spawned North African rap as a popular genre. These references are intended to grant the group a global legitimacy in counter-culture youth movements.

of the song replicates an exclusionary discourse of “tolerance” that relies on gender as a primary signifier for cultural preservation and the homeland: “How beautiful you are, my country / your love in my blood runs / Oh kohl of the heart, nothing equals you.” Singers chastise the bombers in explicitly theological terminology: “it’s a shame, what you wanted / It’s *harām*, what you did / (so) raise the *khamsa* / (for) peace morning and night.” The words evoke more than mere shame, embedded within the explicitly Islamic discursive binary of *harām/halāl*—that which is religiously blameworthy or permissible, a delineation of acceptable Muslim behavior’s boundaries. The *khamsa*, again, serves as prophylactic emblem—a semiotic sign of femininity as emblematic of spiritual protection and benign religiosity.

Further lyrics embed gendered notions of “homeland” within a broader discourse of paternalistic exclusivity. The singers forestall the possibility of rehabilitation for the bombers, declaring: “it’s impossible for you to get out of this mindset / this is my country and for her good we close the door (on you).” The possessive form (“my,” neither “your” nor even “our”) raises the broader question of audience. Although Fnaire ostensibly speaks to the perpetrators, the language of propriety operative here asserts that attackers are not Moroccans, implying that they remain outside the bounds of acceptable national ideology. Such a process of definitional exclusion regurgitates the official government line that the attacks were really those of outsiders—if not in action, certainly in philosophical and motivational origin (Beau & Graciet 2006: 124).

A liberal discourse of “tolerance” is layered within references to a nostalgic past that proves utopian in its attempt to rewrite the historical narrative: “touch my country, you’ll regret it / we lived as brothers / Christians, Muslims and Jews / we didn’t hate in our country as a rule.” Although many Moroccans pride themselves on the country’s position in the Muslim world as a



haven for religious tolerance and cultural pluralism, the historical record is far more complicated.<sup>200</sup> Fnaire whitewashes the factual occurrences of pogroms and fluctuating hostility against Jews throughout Moroccan history (the Christian population has always been negligible). We witness in Casablanca the investiture of the sign as described by Baudrillard: behind the symbol lurks a bulwark of constructed nostalgia when “the real is no longer what it was” and the supposed equivalence between signifier and signified proves, if not fundamentally utopian, exaggerated (1994: 6).

We turn now to “Yed al Henna” (Hennaed Hand), a song rich enough to merit a dissertation on its own accord; spatial constraints, however, limit us to a summary.<sup>201</sup> The viewer meets again with the following propaganda messages: Morocco is peaceful, pluralistic and tolerant—provided subjects acquiesce to the benevolent paternalism of a religiously sanctioned king; henna signifies love of country, marks the disputed Saharan territory as Moroccan and emphasize the feminine legacy of culture bearer, preserving the submission necessary for full citizenship-subjectivity in the Kingdom.

The film clip opens with conventional Orientalist tropes. A dark-skinned Saharan woman, clad in blue garments of Hassaniya and Tuareg nomads, leads her camel before a vast desert horizon.<sup>202</sup> Through the manipulation of woman as introductory voice, Fnaire both pays lip-service to the necessary visibility of Moroccan women, while simultaneously relegating them to the culture bearer in search of protection. A breeze across the vast desert sands whips through

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<sup>200</sup> It must be mentioned that prior to the 1948 creation of Israel and the concomitant exodus of the Jewish population, Morocco provided a more hospitable climate than other Muslim countries—and indeed, Western Europe. However, the historic experience of Jews in Morocco remains a hotly contested subject.

<sup>201</sup> Accurate transliteration of Moroccan Arabic renders the word “yedd,” with two letters to denote the diacritical “shedda.” As youtube utilizes one “d,” I duplicate the spelling as it appears. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R7-riibZl6s>.

<sup>202</sup> Although a detailed account of governmental policy concerning nomadic populations is outside the scope of this chapter, it must be noted that the Tuareg and Hassaniya populations continue to face campaigns of forcible settlement, and resist the Kingdom’s attempts at sedentarization; by exploiting the trope of nomadic women, Fnaire claims state jurisdiction over peripheral groups.

her scarf and garments as she searches the skyline for help—a damsel in distress. Her costume unfolds nomadic populations into the purview of postcolonial governance—despite the existence of dissenting voices.

The Saharan woman calls upon the youth (and the Arab Woman, in particular) to preserve Moroccan traditions—deep and meaningful as henna from the Sahara.<sup>203</sup> Her words remind the listener that henna is “our tradition,” originating in the vast desert. She further calls out to the young people of the nation to remember that henna presents a tradition inextricably linked to the vast Sahara desert. The relationship between the natural material of spiritual protection and the southernmost point of governmental jurisdiction runs throughout ‘Yed al Henna,” and presents a fraught claim to contested territory.

Moroccans claim that the best henna—the most powerful and deepest in color—is that cultivated in the Sahara desert. As the singer’s introduction trails off, a smile dawns across her face when she catches sight of a male crowd marching across the desert horizon toward her tented encampment. Members of Fnaire walk alongside a crowd of other Moroccan men—holding aloft banners caught in the breeze: prominent red and green national flags. This choreography explicitly references the famed Green March of November 6, 1975. The well-publicized and carefully orchestrated event was intended to pressure Spain to relinquish the Western Sahara (at that time, still under colonial control) to Moroccan sovereignty.<sup>204</sup> More than 300,000 Moroccans, at a signal given by His Majesty Hassan II, walked into the territory unarmed—carrying only Qur’ans, green banners (the color of Islam), photographs of the King

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<sup>203</sup> Her call to the Arab Woman underlies a claim to the Moroccan state not as Amazigh (Berber) but as thoroughly Arab—a further erasure of the pluralism governmental campaigns and state-sponsored expressive culture strive to create.

<sup>204</sup> Although claimed by Morocco, the Western Sahara is technically still considered disputed territory. However, discussions of the prolonged military engagement in the south provoke heated reactions, and the prevalence of state claims to the region are literally inscribed on the landscape—as one travels further south within Moroccan territory proper, it is not unusual to see stones arranged to read “The Sahara is our Sahara.”

and Moroccan flags. Through this peaceful march, the State laid claim to the region on supposedly populist and religious grounds that underpinned monarchical legitimacy.

Fnaire's reenactment of the Green March links the "cool" of contemporary youth culture to the maintenance of monarchical power: as the group approaches a desert tent decorated with framed portraits of the current king. Underneath the nationalistic discourse evoked by the connection between the desert and state sovereignty resides a further gendered discourse of Moroccan religiosity. The production of henna as a bodily adornment involves the crushing of leaves into a fine powder to be fully processed later—percussions in the song occur in tandem with images of mortar and pestle beating a rhythm as the leaves turn into the substance of pigment. Simultaneously, the image and sound of another woman ululating (action and tattoos on her face re-emphasizing "tradition") is spliced with close-up shots of henna powder and Fnaire members scattering henna leaves across the viewers' field of vision.

Calls for religious tolerance are referenced through a shot of an elderly man holding his hands aloft, cupped together—in the gesture of invocation known as *dua'a*, or superogatory prayer. The image of *dua'a* is reiterated by stickers the rap group creates for the bulk of the song. As members rap about henna's purifying potential, they sit around a table, in production of a striking image: hennaed female hands, cupped together in an identical invocation. Later scenes depict women slapping these stickers on Marrakesh city walls—in a further claim to the spatial boundaries of a religious tolerance embodied in feminine expressive culture.

Throughout the song's texts, linkages abound concerning the themes previously discussed. The hennaed hand, Fnaire claims, will shun those who cheat, those who bribe, those who oppress—through its purifying potential. Two stanzas in particular exemplify the specific manipulation of female art forms in the service of the state-defined parameters of citizenship.

Fnaire calls out, “My Moroccan brother, this speech is for you / with the hand of henna raise with me this flag and (the trial) we escape from this suffering.” Again, the possessive address used is significant—the Arabic references a singular masculine form; listeners understand that reform of the country is incumbent on its male members. Another stanza reveals the masculine co-optation of the female spiritual symbol. The first line may be translated as “Men, move your hands with us,” in a gesture familiar from hip hop swagger, yet an equally faithful translation (preserving the precise wording) can be rendered as “Men, raise your hands praying with us (in *dua*’a).” The following line contrasts the command addressed to men with an earlier remonstrance that women must raise the children to walk with “us.” Henna is wielded as a rallying symbol—its original practitioners tasked with the responsibility for raising and educating children in the correct manner. The stanza concludes, “my hands are in your hands, our king is protecting you.” Here—at last—is the clearest demarcation of the hierarchical paternalistic structure of the Moroccan state.

### **Logic of Image in Service of the State**

Ma Tqīch Blādī’s nationalistic discourse exemplifies Judith Butler’s description of mechanisms that underpin a “certain version of the subject... produced and sustained through powerful forms of media, and that what gives power to their version of the subject is precisely the way in which they are able to render the subject’s own destructiveness *righteous* and its own destructibility *unthinkable*” (2009: 47).

M.E. Combs-Schilling’s analysis of Moroccan ritual vis-à-vis semi-sacred kingship makes a similar point (1989); rite-du-passage events are so closely intertwined with monarchical legitimacy—mapped onto the individual body—that they literally come to embody nation and

anchor the state on a personal level. Although Combs-Schilling interprets potential revolts as suicide (against both self and nation), Ma Tqīch Blādī and Fnaire’s cultural productions render the point explicit in light of contemporary anti-terror measures: to revolt against monarchical governance—or deviate from normative nationalistic religious orthodoxy—is tantamount to treason.

Similarly, in the production of post 9/11 grief, American media dared not criticize U.S.-Iraq policy and risk the dislocation engendered by a shift in perspective that included state-sanctioned violence abroad. Noting that “affect depends on social supports,” Butler points out that the regulation of public perception of viable (i.e., “worthwhile”) life, depends on sensory levels for its production (2009: 16). In an analysis of Guantanamo Bay poetry censored by the Department of Defense, she critiques censorship of material that shatters “dominant ideologies that rationalize war through recourse to righteous invocations of peace; they confound and expose the words of those who torture in the name of freedom” (2009: 61). Dissent, particularly in the realm of affective culture, places one far outside the delineation of appropriate citizen-subject.

The same holds true for Moroccan state control over potential political threats, defined broadly. Postcolonial monarchical efforts to consolidate an independent and cohesive state in the wake of the French Protectorate involved such regulation of affect. Peaceful Islamist dissident Ahmed Lahlou, “paid dearly for his writings on the wall ... He was sentenced to 30 years in prison.”<sup>205</sup> From the 1960s through the 1980s, a dark period in Moroccan history, under the rule of King Hassan II, came to be known as the “Years of Lead” (*zamān al-rasās*). During this time, activists from all sides of the political spectrum faced arrest, torture and disappearance—on the grounds that cultural productions posed a clear and present danger to the government, a direct

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<sup>205</sup> Susan Slyomovics, personal communication: December 30, 2010.

plot “against the state” (Slyomovics 2005: 169). Moreover, the inquisitorial criminal justice system secured convictions through admissibility of cultural production as evidence of seditious tendencies. The events in Casablanca, 2003, would re-ignite both the memory of the Years of Lead, and the need to maintain a heightened control over public affect—as would the onset, eight years later, of the Arab spring.

As the casualty count rose, details surfaced concerning the identity of the perpetrators: disaffected young men motivated by extremist ideology from the Sidi Moumen *bidonville*, or shanty-town, on the outskirts of Casablanca. State reaction was swift and resulted in the roundup, detention and interrogation of thousands in urban centers across the nation. Shattering cherished illusions of “la particularité marocaine” (an exception to the radical violence gripping neighboring Algeria), the attacks revealed a weak Moroccan state—which took rapid action in a desperate attempt to bolster legitimacy. The outburst of violence proved especially damaging to the public image and credibility of King Mohammad VI. While his father was widely viewed as a fearsome figure, Hassan II enjoyed considerable popularity bolstered through an iron-fisted security system—premises in which the current monarch falls short (Beau & Graciet 2006: 33).

Jean Baudrillard characterizes Watergate not as a scandal but rather as “a large dose of political morality reinjected on a world scale,” and a “lure held out by the system to catch its adversaries—a simulation of scandal for regenerative ends” (1994: 14-6). The philosopher links Watergate to a host of other “unethical” and/or “terrorist” actions in a cyclical, teleological system that serves to benefit everyone—including both the state and its adversaries. Casablanca 2003 revealed the weakness of a state—which seized the opportunity to prove itself anything but—and the subsequent crack-down on dissent, in turn, allowed opponents to critique a supposedly democratic monarchy in its crushing suppression of opposition.

In the sense that the “condemned at Burgos are still a gift from Franco to Western democracy... to regenerate its own flagging humanism” (Baudrillard 1994: 18), May 2003 created an opportunity for the Moroccan government to consolidate authoritarian control—and presented an ideal terrain on which to reassert Islamic legitimacy. As with “the way that Spanish executions stills serve as a stimulant to Western liberal democracy, to a dying system of democratic values” (Baudrillard 1994: 24), the bombs that ripped across Casablanca conversely revived the Moroccan State and provided “fresh blood, but for how much longer?” The Ma Tqīch Blādī campaign excludes Islamists, Amazigh-movement leaders, nomadic rebels and Marxists alike.

We witness not a battle for Islam nor religious pluralism but state manipulation of resonant symbols to maintain nationalist claims to authoritarian power. This is particularly critical in light of the power shift and reforms that occurred in the wake of Muḥammad VI’s succession. Žižek argues that “the ultimate show of power on the part of the ruling ideology is to allow what appears to be powerful criticism” (2011: 9-10). Upon closer analysis, the rush to quash dissent on the part of the Moroccan authorities, reveals an underlying fragility—that would arise again throughout the events of 2011. According to Baudrillard (1994: 23):

Power itself has for a long time produced nothing but the signs of its resemblance. And at the same time, another figure of power comes into play, that of a collective demand for *signs* of power—a holy union that is reconstructed around its disappearance. The whole world adheres to it more or less in terror of the collapse of the political. And in the end the game of power becomes nothing but the *critical* obsession with power—obsession with its death, obsession with its survival, which increases as it disappears.

Susan Slyomovic argues that post-2003, if one could still claim a “Moroccan exceptionalism,” it lay in the regime’s attempt “to transform itself from inside... to become democratic yet retaining control” (2005: 41). Beau and Graciet note that the rallying cry of

Islamists (and other political actors) consists of exposing and condemning the hidden mechanisms of a brutal and repressive regime with a vested interest in suppressing democratization at a full level (2006: 64-70). The Moroccan government swiftly passed reforms to the penal code, ostensibly to crack down on the threat of religious extremism; yet, Article Number 03-03 broadly defines terrorism in ambiguous terminology (any “attack against the public order”). Cultural productions critical of monarchy, at the time, faced suppression, at best—or harsh punishment.

The creation, proliferation and suppression of selective visual culture produces a simulation of control over oppositional discourse—and acts primarily through the senses. Artistic production served the State with as a mechanism to control the message, drowning out dissent. In the combat against challenges to state legitimacy, image construction protects the powers that be. State regulation of critical affect is not a phenomenon limited to post-9/11 America or post-2003 Morocco; further challenges to established regimes would come as the turmoil of the 2011 Arab Spring rocked Northern Africa and the Middle East.

### **Consolidating and Contesting the Nation: Warding off the Arab Spring**

Late January, 2011: Cairo’s Tahrir Square grips the imagination of the world.<sup>206</sup> Moroccan televisions at every café and home tune to Al Jazeera—a channel officially banned from the country. Following closely on the heels of the Tunisia uprising, the Egyptian revolution has Twitter, Facebook, and local news media united in the query: who is next in line to fall? On the way to Spain for a routine visa renewal, a friend and I stopped off in a Tangier bar to watch

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<sup>206</sup> The Arab Spring began when a young fruit vendor by the name of Muḥammad Bouazizi, fed up with the governmental corruption, lit himself on fire following the seizure of his merchandise. The fire sparked by Bouazizi rapidly spread and led to regional demonstrations. At the time of writing, the regimes of Tunisia, Egypt and Libya have fallen, and challenges to the governments of Yemen, Bahrain and Syria continue.



Mubarak's eagerly awaited address to the protestors gathered in Tahrir Square. His defiant refusal to step down came as no surprise, but nonetheless gave us pause. If Egypt erupted, would it spread to Morocco? Would we be allowed back in the country? Morocco faces one of Northern Africa's highest poverty rates and notorious problems with governmental corruption—tension escalated as dates for regional “Days of Rage” were posted on the internet. Morocco's pro-reform contingent scheduled a day of demonstrations on February 20th, and as we traveled back to the capital, I wondered aloud how long it would take for the Ma Tqīch Blādī signs to reappear.

Indeed, on February 19, the billboards familiar from Casablanca 2003 were quietly resurrected in city centers throughout the country [Fig. 1]. The Ma Tqīch Blādī signs were placed in strategic locations—at the projected meeting points for demonstrations. In Rabat, the prominent billboards were erected above near Bab al Had, a city gate and public square straddling the French colonial city center and the traditional old medina. The ubiquitous display of the images suggests a coordinated, state-backed project.

After the horrific Casablanca attacks, the red Hand of Fatima proliferated with a vengeance—appearing in “spontaneous” demonstrations, billboards, t-shirts, flyers and bumper stickers. The emblem's intimate association with the fight against terrorism even led to its adoption as the icon of the “Ma Tqīch Blādī” collective—and graced the cover of a multi-volume compendium of global anti-terror policy memorandums. For years, my queries as to the originator of the campaign met with shrugs of shoulders and the answer, “I don't really know—it's a good question.” Many voiced a surety that the shadowy collective and image campaign is backed by the highest state levels. Definitive answers are still lacking. The group refuses to divulge the identity of the funders, yet one aspect is clear: the widespread image campaign, if

not directly financed by the monarchy, well serves its interest—drawing, as it does, on recognizable tropes that strategically market a benevolent ruler and moderate Muslim kingdom. It is the populist transformation of *Ma Tqīch Blādī*, rather than proof of a regime-backed propaganda campaign, that is much more telling concerning the contemporary contestation of nationhood. Through various iterations of Fatima’s hennaed Hand, Moroccan demonstrators took to the streets and contested not only the fabric of the nation, but the legitimacy of monarchical governance itself—for the first time in modern history.

State violence against protestors in Morocco is common; the Tunisian and Egyptian regimes had set a new precedent for crack-downs on media freedom and brutality. Were we to face the same, I reasoned, witnesses would be needed. What I saw shocked me—the monarchy reacted brilliantly to the repressive strategies undertaken by its neighbors. In a decade of working in Morocco, I never witnessed anyone allowed to photograph government buildings. On February 20, however, nearly every demonstrator recorded events with no police interference. Internet, television and phones experienced no service interruptions: Morocco’s regime had learned its lesson well, carefully crafting an unprecedented illusion of free expression.

Academic research was far from my mind on the morning of February 20; at every turn, however, the hennaed Hand of Fatima confronted me. Several protestors carried crude hand-shaped cutouts, emblazoned with the familiar slogan: “*Ma Tqīch Blādī*.” From Casablanca to Rabat to Tangiers, demonstrators altered the message in a subtle challenge: many read instead “Don’t Touch my Freedom.” Previous marketing of *Ma Tqīch Blādī* rendered the Hand of Fatima an easy, culturally-recognizable protest slogan. But—would it last? Although revolutions and demonstrations in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya made great use of imagery mocking the

respective nations' leaders, Morocco's protests featured nothing of the sort. Challenges to the figure of the king in a country where his legitimacy to rule is enshrined in the constitution—by virtue of descent from the Prophet Mohammad—were naturally anathema and tantamount to treason. Did the Hand provide a proxy through which to attack the regime?

A month after Morocco's initial "Day of Dignity" protest, demonstrators again converged on Bab al Had before marching to Parliament, and brought with them the protection of Fatima's Hand. It had proliferated, with multiple claims to national identity and necessary reform converging in the palms of women. The jubilation of February 20<sup>th</sup>'s bloodless gathering reigned, and enabled the display of ever-bolder criticism. I was approached by a father and son, who asked me to photograph their demonstration signs: identical in color, composition and script to the Ma Tqīch Blādī campaign, they had added a new slogan: "Don't Steal my Country." When asked about the sign, the father told me that Morocco's people need protection—from a government rife with corruption, stripping the masses of their financial security.

I spotted another group of demonstrators with similar protest images, with a new—and more defiant—use of color. No longer were the Hands shockingly red, and outlined with a thin green strip; green now predominated [Fig. 2]. This color substitution is telling; rather than the bright red swath of color which simultaneously evokes the traffic placard and flag, red is also the color identified with the reigning Alawite dynasty. In a bold move, the recognizable color of Islam took precedence. The script remained white, matching Moroccan stop-sign, yet protestors had again chosen new slogans. A group of overtly pious Muslim women, evidenced by their conservative head coverings and *djellabas* (long, hooded robes), held aloft the new signs—which warned: "Don't Starve the Children of my Country."<sup>207</sup> A contingent of similarly-conservative

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<sup>207</sup> Those suspected of involvement in Islamist politics face harsh penalties in Morocco; as I had just met several of the demonstrators, I did not feel comfortable asking direct questions about the relationship between color choices of

bearded-men gathered nearby. Standing against a backdrop of signs proclaiming solidarity with the people of Libya, Tunisia and Egypt, their own signs declared, “Enough Mocking Us” [Fig. 3].

A group of young secularists created their own version of Fatima’s Hand. Clustered directly in front of the Parliament gates, bareheaded women and *kaffiyeh*-clad male members of the February 20<sup>th</sup> Movement held up poster-board cut outs in the shape of a Hand. No indication of the original Mā Tqīch Blādī color scheme remained [Fig. 4]. The familiar, large Arabic script of “Don’t touch my country” with its smaller, French translation shared billing: Tamazight (a Berber language), French and Arabic held equivalent space within the palm of nation. Again, the message had been altered: No longer a “hands off” my country, but rather the “don’t steal my country.” As the Fnaire music videos demonstrate, the Hand of Fatima has been used to represent Moroccan diversity—as it is a symbol long shared by Berber and Arabic speaking Muslims and Jewish communities. The youth of February 20<sup>th</sup>, in their cooptation of Fatima’s Hand, stake a claim to pluralistic national identity; beyond the level of the platitude, members seek official recognition of Amazigh (Berber) contributions to Moroccan culture.

The demonstrations continued, even following the April 2011 terrorist bombing at Café Argan, a popular tourist destination in Marrakesh. Unsurprisingly, the monarchy moved quickly to condemn the atrocity—and the Mā Tqīch Blādī campaign sprang back into actions; new versions of the original sticker were mass-produced, billboards resurrected and the logo projected in neon lights at “concerts for peace.” In light of the ongoing manifestations of discontent, the posters appeared desperate reminders to a populace that violent dissent was out of

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the signs and their owners’ religio-political affiliations. Thus, the inference that a correlation exists between the conservative garb of these groups, and the color substitution remains speculation based on observation of the relationship between clothing trends and political affiliation.

the question. The event itself was shrouded in conspiracy theories—given the seemingly relentless pace of Arab Spring protests. YouTube videos, casual whispers and even some media outlets raised the possibility that the government orchestrated the attack in order to provide a palatable justification for cracking down on dissent, while simultaneously maintaining a monopoly over “democratic reform.”

Although the climate following the Marrakesh bombing proved tense, protests continued even in the wake of the King’s decision to expedite elections and put forth a referendum proposing constitutional reform. The date of July 1<sup>st</sup> left little over two weeks for voters (the literate, of course) to decide on a sweeping host of legislative change. Instead of laying to rest mass discontent, the measure led merely to progressive defiance—on the part of February 20<sup>th</sup> and their pro-government detractors. June 26 demonstrations were marked by a noticeable absence of Ma Tqīch Blādī iterations. As the press worried about the real possibility of violent conflict, both sides discarded the image of female protective hands, in favor of overtly combative rhetoric.<sup>208</sup> The resolution of July 1 was unsurprisingly passed by an overwhelming—and improbable—majority vote. Neither the vote itself, nor the superficial constitutional reforms included within the referendum (including, for example, the official recognition of Berber heritage as a component of national history) proved sufficiently adequate to quell public discontent.

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<sup>208</sup> Unfortunately, a full description of the inflammatory images (utilized by both sides of the constitutional debate) is outside the scope of this chapter. However, it should be noted that the battling of propagandistic images reached a fevered pitch in the days leading up to the referendum. Rabidly pro-monarchy protestors were bused in from neighboring Sale—a poorer sister city to the capital Rabat, and famous as the home base for the banned Islamist group, al-‘Adl wa al-Ihsan. Taxis “spontaneously” blocked protestors from reaching the Parliament building—each adorned with large flags and identical photographs of the King gracing their windows. Drivers stood on the streets, drinking tea and watching the conflict grow between dissenting coalitions. Although the illusion of open and free expression was in force, so too were notorious riot police. The stage-managing of the demonstrations meant that the symbolic center of Parliament was “defended” by loyal citizens, while leftists and Islamists were blockaded outside the city ramparts.

The last demonstration before Ramadan occurred in August and was striking for the most recent transformation of Fatima's Hand. For the first time since March 20<sup>th</sup>, government forces allowed demonstrators access to the square facing the Parliament building; photographs, however, were disallowed—the charade of free expression had come to an end. The regime could tolerate no more, and the crowd of protestors appeared similarly resolute. As riot police hemmed marchers against a wall, and began to physically crack down, attendees defied the ban and snapped image after image even as they ran. The last image I saw before fleeing is a fitting summary of the changes taking place in popular re-appropriation of the Hand.

A defiant young woman among the marchers held aloft, with hennaed hands, a banner in the familiar shape [Fig. 5]. Although the text, “Don't steal my country,” appeared on previous signs, subtle changes to its visual depiction carried a subversive new message. A total transformation occurred in color scheme: the shocking red of the monarchical state was gone, as was its replacement with the bright green of Islam. The Hand of Fatima had turned black. On one level, this black-and-white juxtaposition is evocative of news-print, a reference to the lack of free media (and subsequent international quietude on Morocco's demonstration movements). Moreover, the colors matched those selected by the February 20<sup>th</sup> Movement. Yet a shift in the script itself reveals a deeper message of protest: no longer did the font match that of the state-approved stop signs—an image of ultimate monarchical authority. The tighter new script mimics a movement known as “Mamafakinsh” (No Compromise)—an outgrowth of February 20<sup>th</sup>. A more radical iteration of its initial inspiration, the former refuses to be appeased by governmental reforms.

The warning “don't steal my country,” in light of the sign's alignment with anti-government branding mechanisms, elevates the terms of the debate. The message has shifted

from a direct identification with the monarchy—buying into it “as is”—to a more direct refusal of the status quo. No compromises, the protestor suggests, are acceptable as the nation must be reclaimed by its citizens—not its state. In a curious twist, the woman’s hennaed hands reveal another level of depth to the role of female visual culture in political protest. Throughout the course of demonstrations, a number of hennaed women accompanied the Hand of Fatima signs.<sup>209</sup> Others similarly adorned their hands—not in the intricate manner of wedding decoration, but rather full-palm stains. Mothers of disappeared Islamists and secular students alike wore the decoration as they laid claim to their own visions of good governance. Although the crimson hue of henna itself evokes a symbolic connection to bloodshed, an aspect of the adornment’s history is often overlooked: the art’s use in struggles for Islamic identity in the midst of conflict is far from novel in Muslim history.

### **Henna and Militancy: Between Exceptionalism and Rebellion**

Although the literature on Moroccan culture and women’s expressive traditions primarily treats henna as a cosmetic imbued with celebratory potential (Kapchan 1996; Messina 1991; Spurles 2001), it has never been detached from a deeper significance—rebellion. As demonstrated in descriptions of wedding rituals, henna adornment also enables women to subvert the same paradigms which it serves to socialize; brides ultimately relinquish independence not merely to husbands, but to new mothers-in-law. Similarly, the non-ritualized occurrences of henna painting allow women to sidestep heavy workloads; pilgrims to saint shrines and sufferers of jinn possession render themselves temporarily immobile in order to spiritually profit from the

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<sup>209</sup> A full examination of henna’s historical connections to Islamic protest is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this chapter. I refer the interested reader to Acara 2010; Ait al Fqih 2002; Baker 1998; Beeston 1952; Kamrava 2007; Ruffle 2009, 2010.

adornment's purifying blessings. Henna adornment does not evoke rebellion for the sake of rebellion alone, but rather, as a sign of ultimate faith in God to triumph over injustice. The art form's use in contesting authority, conflict and warfare has assumed variant roles across regions and throughout history—although most prominent in the contemporary Kingdom of Morocco.

A female demonstrator I encountered in Rabat challenged the widespread acceptance of henna as a joyous emblem. The elderly woman attended the March 20<sup>th</sup> gathering to protest against the state's abduction of her son, on the grounds of participation in banned Islamist politics—an incongruous appearance, should henna merely signify celebration. Susan Slyomovics relates the account of another Islamist mother—Zoubida Bouabid, whose vision of henna in a dream state foretold the imminent release of her son, In 1983 he was taken by Moroccan secret police as part of the infamous 1983 raid and trial of the Group 71 Islamists (Slyomovics 2005: 160-2):

A woman said to me to alert the mothers that their children would appear and asked me to make henna ad to tell them to make themselves beautiful with henna and to hoist the flags. I told them about the vision. A beautiful woman, I see her always in my dreams, the same age as I am, elegantly dressed, wearing a caftan. She said 'Do not forget, make yourself up with henna.' For the trial, because I was very sad, cried all the time...I soaked my hands in the henna...I told them that this woman had informed me that the children would appear...they were astonished and they said the vision was true.

Precedent for these accounts can be found in one of the earliest recorded accounts of henna's use in Islamic history. After the Prophet Muḥammad passed away in 632 A.D., his successor Abu Bakr faced a difficult situation—holding together an inchoate Arab community rocked by their leader's death. Many tribes who had pledged allegiance to the new Muslim *umma* ultimately retracted, given that conversion occurred not from religious conviction but political necessity. The refusal to pay taxes effectively created a financial secession and culminated in open rebellion.



Dissent against the Muslim community occurred in the crucial areas Hadramaut and Kinda, in modern-day Yemen—a region long notorious for its prominent female rulers (Mernissi 1997). A revolt led by women, in fact, threatened to undermine the fragile Islamic empire at the critical moment of Muḥammad's death. Upon receiving the news, a group of noble women hennaed their hands and entered the streets—playing music and joyfully celebrating in the public realm. Complaints reached Abu Bakr, who dispatched al Muhagir ibn Abi Umayyah with orders to sever the women's hands as a fitting punishment for mocking the Muslim community (Kamrava 2007: 196). Attempts at intervention proved unsuccessful.

Ibn Habib al Baghdadi's overlooked third-century Islamic account, the *Kitab al Muḥabbar*, records (Beeston 1952):

The women who desired the death of Muḥammad and their story... There were in Hadramaut six women, of Kindah and Hadramaut, who were desirous for the death of the Prophet of God; they therefore [on hearing the news] dyed their hands with henna and played on the tambourine. To them came out the harlots of Hadramaut and did likewise, so that some twenty-odd women joined the six. They belonged to various villages [...] Thereupon Imru' al Qais ibn 'Abis al-Kindi wrote to Abu Bakr al-Siddiq [...] saying as follows - "The harlots rejoiced on the day when Gahbal announced the death of Ahmad the Prophet, the rightly-guided, who had been laid to rest in Yatrib." [...] Saddam ibn Malik ibn Dam'ag wrote to Abu Bakr thus--"Tell Abu Bakr when you reach him that the harlots have desired most eagerly, and have shown joy at, the death of the Prophet, and they have dyed their hands with henna. So strike off their hands (may I be rightly guided!) with a sword sharp as the lightning which flickers in the banks of clouds." [Abu Bakr] then wrote to al-Muhagir ibn Abi Umayyah as follows - "In the name of God the Compassionate the Merciful. From Abu Bakr to al-Muhagir ibn Abi Umayyah. The two righteous servants [of God], Imru' al-Qais ibn 'Abis al-Kindi and Saddam ibn Malik al-Hadrami, who remained steadfast in their religion when the greater part of their tribes apostasized (may God grant them the reward of the righteous for this and smite the others with the fate of the wicked), have written to me declaring that before them there are certain women of the people of Yemen who have desired the death of the Prophet of God, and that these have been joined by singing-girls of Kindah and prostitutes of Hadramaut, and they have dyed their hands and shown joy and played on the tambourine, in defiance of God and in contempt of His rights and those of His Prophet. When my letter reaches you, go to them with your horses and men, and strike off their hands. If anyone defends them against you, or stands between them and you, expostulate with him, telling him the enormity of the sin and enmity which he is committing; and if he repents, accept his repentance, but if he declines, break off negotiations with him and proceed to hostilities. God will not guide traitors! [...] I am sure that no man will condone the evil acts of these women.

This account has begun to receive the attention of revisionist historians with the growth of Islamic feminist studies. A.F.L. Beeston, writing in 1952, was the first scholar to seriously analyze the account recorded by ibn al Baghdadi. Although al-Tabari also documents the event, his record remains anecdotal, focused on “the legal principle thus enunciated rather than for any interest in the personalities concerned” (1952: 19). Women involved in the conflict ranged in status, from grandmothers, very young women to prominent members of the nobility. According to Beeston, “they cannot have been common prostitutes... Nor would it be clear, had they been nothing but prostitutes, why the local tribes gathered so vigorously to defend them.” (1952: 19). The feasible explanation, then, is that these women served as pre-Islamic priestesses—rather than the sex workers portrayed in Islamic sources. Upon the death of the Prophet, according to this theory, women rose up against gender restrictions imposed by Islam and to reclaim their religious status.

Recent feminist scholarship largely concurs, albeit with minor variations. According to Mehran Kamrava, women revolted not as members of a dispossessed religion but foremost “as women” (2007: 195-7). The accounts of Leila Ahmed and Fatima Mernissi follow this explanation (Ahmed 1986; Mernissi 1987). According to this body of literature, pre-Islamic Arabia offered more freedom to women—and henna served not only as a sign of joy but a battle-cry—mobilizing brethren to reinstate the old order. The true motives behind the rebellion remain lost to history, yet the multivalent meaning of henna is clearly discernible from al-Baghdadi’s text. The use of henna as a demonstration of joy was certainly provocative, but its potential as a call to arms in the public realm proved adequately offensive for punitive military action. Above all else, it was a highly inflammatory symbolic rebellion—a flagrant protestation literally embodied by women.

This connection with warfare did not remain limited to the seventh-century Arabian Peninsula. In fact, the connection between henna, bloodshed and rituals of combat may extend much farther back in mythic history. Specialists in Ugaritic texts found at Ras al-Shamra (contemporary Syria) contend that Anat, consort of Baal, underwent ritual application of henna before slaying enemies and subsequently bathing in their blood as a rite of vengeance for her murdered lover (de Moor 1971; Gibson 1977; Walls 1992).

As in Morocco, henna is used by modern-day Turkish brides in weddings, as well as a decoration with which the sacrificial sheep is adorned during Eid al-Adha (the Feast of the Sacrifice). However, the body adornment also fulfills a third function—a reminder of love and farewell marker for men conscripted into military service. To Eda Acara, the bridal, sacrificial and “marker of the embodied military nation” serve as three key events which link ideological imperatives of Muslim nation and sacrifice, and ultimately act to reinscribe a masculine hegemonic power base—through symbolic encouragement of masculine procreative and destructive power (2010: 93).

The intimate relationship between mourning, combat and remembrance is also evident in henna usage among the Shia community of Hyderabad, India (Ruffle 2009, 2010). Local Muharram practices memorialize the battlefield wedding and subsequent sacrifice of Fatima Kubra, “daughter of the third Shi’i imam Husayn, [who] was married to her thirteen-year-old cousin Qasem at the battle of Karbala, Iraq, in AH 61/680” (Ruffle 2009: 502). Karen Ruffle characterizes this tradition of reenactment as a “vernacularizing impulse in the Indian Deccan,” and describes related Ashura rituals in which “young men and women flock to these *majlis* mourning assemblies with the hope of being able to grab a small daub of the henna that is passed around at the height of the ritual performance...and ask for the intervention (*shafa’a*) of the

members of Imam Husayn's family (Ahl-e Bait) in securing a good marriage alliance" (2009: 506).

Although the appearance of henna in Islamic wedding rituals serves to convey a spiritual blessing, among South Asian Shia groups it conversely delineates religious sacrifice. Ruffe concludes, "Fatimah Kubra and Qasem are religious and social role models—hagiographers depict Kubra as an idealized Indian Shi'i Muslim bride and widow, willing to sacrifice her own status as an auspicious bride in order to allow her husband to be martyred for the cause of justice and religion" (2009: 514). A widespread conception that the art form's association with joy translates to prohibitions on its use during mourning periods seems to be far from universal. Upon closer examination, henna stands in for blood in the sexualized ritual of first marriage and battlefield commemorations. In both instances, physical sacrifice decimates the individual body in service preserving the Muslim nation.

The Kingdom of Morocco has its own history of henna as an expressive component of conflict and bloodshed, linked in many cases to the defense of familial ties and the integrity of the nation. Edward Westermarck recorded widespread prohibitions on the use of henna during intertribal conflicts: oaths of revenge included the promise to abstain from henna usage until the blood feud was settled, whether through the shedding of more or through the payment of blood-money (1926, vol. 1: 516). Veteran of the indigenous struggle against French colonialism, Oum Keltoum El Khatib recalls (Baker 1998: 116-117):

Because henna was a symbol of joy and was worn during celebrations, at women's Chebana parties in the month before Ramadan and on the twenty-seventh day of Ramadan. It was the Moroccan woman who decided not to wear henna or make-up anymore, to go into mourning. They sang, "don't put on henna! Don't put on make-up! The children of the motherland are in prison!" So there were no more celebrations.

Despite the avoidance of henna described by El Khatib, oral histories abound of Morocco's own direct utilization of henna in the midst of conflict. Throughout the course of my fieldwork, many women told me of the strategies they used to evade French surveillance in the struggle against the French; female rebels decorated themselves with henna and claimed to be attending weddings in order to travel freely, smuggle arms and obtain information. Alison Baker's compilation of Moroccan women's oral narratives describes another use of battlefield henna in Morocco at the time of the French protectorate: "in the Middle Atlas mountains... women followed the male fighters into battle, loaded their guns...they urged on the fighters with ululations (youyou's), and carried bags of henna in order to throw the henna on any man who tried to run away from the fight. In that way he would be recognized and shamed afterwards" (Baker 1998: 19).

The practice of women following men into battle with sacks of henna paste appeared in textual sources documenting Amazigh-speakers' warfare rituals well before the colonial era (Ait al Fqih 2002). Lahsen Ait al Fqih theorizes a shared cultural ideology operative in weddings, combat and circumcision which binds together the control of sexuality, sacrificial bloodshed and henna (2002: 47-54). I asked an elderly friend to explain this phenomenon of battlefield cheerleaders: why henna to brand cowardly deserters, in lieu of another pigment? She laughed, and responded, "to declare them women. As women." These accounts underscore the multivalent uses of henna in combat, uprising, mourning and remembrance. Far from a simple pigment indicating joyousness, the spiritual blessing embedded in the plant's substance acts to protect wearers confronting life-changing circumstances, be it battle, birth or betrothal.

### **Stage-Managed Revolution: Morocco, a Lasting Exception?**

We have seen the profoundly meaningful role played by the hennaed Hands of women as a protective icon, against a backdrop of terrorism and popular uprising. A full understanding of their significance within the definitional battle for Moroccan religio-nationalist sentiment, however, necessitates a contextualization of monarchical policy vis-à-vis symbolic expression in comparative perspective with other regional states.

The streets of North African cities seem eternally populated by itinerant, black-market merchants; common too are police raids—and the sight of street vendors in a rush to drag away ware-filled plastic sheets as the police approach. The appearance of these police skyrockets as holidays approach, but more than indicating a heightened concern for security or a desire to enforce official policy, the presence of the officers marks an impending demand for bribes. Such corruption and exploitation of the poor motivated Muhammed Bouazizi to strike the match that lit North Africa’s Arab Spring; the Tunisian fruit seller’s self-immolation as a public protest rippled across the region, and frightened governments took note. Monarchical officials discouraged the previously-accepted policy of bribery, in an attempt to eliminate copy-cat calls to action (Hari 2011: 42-3). As never before, the power of tightly-interwoven mass media and inflammatory symbolic action forced ideological combat into the visual realm.

The state crafted a policy in response to its neighbors’ experiences; the security apparatus received unequivocal orders to avoid the bad press generated by police crackdowns in Tunisia and Egypt (Sehimi 2011: 14). Moroccan press coverage of the demonstrations emphasizes the international aspect of this directive: Muḥammad al Juwahri, writing for *al Mushahid al Maghribi*, published an editorial lauding the Moroccan exception (2011: 5). The piece profiled not imagery culled from the protests themselves, but regurgitated Western media coverage—including English phrases such as “success story,” and clips from CNN. Monarchical

triumphalism is exclusively affirmed through the citation of American media outlets, Morocco's closest ally.

Local media are broadly acknowledged to be heavily controlled by the state. Al-Jazeera is officially banned from broadcasting within the country, yet remains available via satellite—and the prominent Moroccan television network 2M is widely considered as an unofficial voice of the state. Despite seeming relaxations on censorship in the first months of the Arab Spring, some commentators remained pessimistic (Choukrallah 2011: 18-21). Similar to the extraordinary coverage dedicated to Fnaire following the Casablanca bombings of 2003, vehemently pro-monarchy musical groups received massive publicity. Masta Flow, Would Cha3b (inaptly, “Children of the People”) and Donn Bigg were quick to champion Muḥammad VI's reforms (Saadi 2011:50). The latter's clip, “Mabghitch” (I don't want) took on the February 20<sup>th</sup> movement directly (Crétois 2011: 50). Bigg's photo graced the Moroccan print media, the rapper a loud embodiment of patriotism—clad in a thugged-out version of the Moroccan flag. Followers of the February 20<sup>th</sup> movement struck back, lambasting Bigg in their own video clips disseminated on youtube; polemic accusations ranged from branding the rapper a secret member of the Illuminati to a stand-in for Satan himself.

As the demonstrations dragged on, such religiously-inflected invective became progressively more common across the region. Hasni Abidi warns “if the liberation wars undertaken against former colonial powers permitted these regimes to continue, even in defiance of the popular will, it is worrying to see that in countries like Morocco and Jordan, one continues to invoke divine right as an end to legitimacy or the lines of direct descent from the Prophet Muḥammad in order to not relinquish the religious victory to Islamists” (2011: 50). State-backed demonstrators disseminated images of Islamist leader Abd al-Salam Yassine in diabolical guise,

and co-opted the voices of religious leaders to affirm the monarchy's legitimacy; some came forward to declare that protests after the July 1 referendum marked demonstrators as unbelievers, and was tantamount to heresy. Both sides increasingly embrace religious culture as a means to contest or affirm the Moroccan state—Sufi brotherhoods mobilized to encourage the end of demonstrations, and Islamist al-Adl wa al-Ihsan published a video in which their leader explains that its followers did oppose not the king, but the concept of hereditary monarchy—on Islamic grounds. Journalist Karim Boukhari terms this phenomenon a worryingly “explosive haram-halal cocktail” (2011: 4).

When February 20<sup>th</sup> spokesman Karim El Ghazali suggested that demonstrators break the fast of Ramadan in a public act of civil disobedience, the French language weekly *Le Temps* demonized his statements on the grounds of heresy and apostasy. The journal portrayed El Ghazali's provocative call to action as a direct attack against as *national* identity rather than religious identity (Dalil 2011: 30-1). Such discourse reveals that the close association between religious affiliation and national identity remains far from a tangential issue of semantics. Governmental mobilization of the Islamic religious establishment against post-referendum protests indicates, moreover, that state propaganda underscores connection of dissent to perceptions of treason and apostasy. The upsurge in boldly religious rhetoric evident at all levels cuts to the heart of Moroccan national identity and monarchical legitimacy

The propaganda machine operated at full force in the days between the July 1<sup>st</sup> referendum and the holy month of Ramadan. Owing to the complexities of Morocco as a nation in which the King's sacrality is literally enshrined in the constitution, dissent against His Highness translates to sedition against the “Commander of the Faithful.” In Libya, Egypt, Yemen and Tunisia, demands for reform accompanied imagery mocking the nations' respective



autocratic rulers; direct attacks against the Moroccan king, however, were practically nonexistent. Symbolic warfare in the Kingdom cuts much deeper than the personality and photograph of the current ruler: the continuity of government as both modern state and Islamic spiritual community.

Any deviation from the vision of a moderate religious monarchy—with Islam as the linchpin of its legitimacy—came under fire. As protestors refused to concede defeat, the news media stepped in to champion the stability engendered by the institution: Bahia Amrani explicitly warned: “La monarchie—qu’on le veuille ou non—c’est la garantie de l’unité du Maroc” (Amrani 2011:3). As the Arab Spring gave way to summer, temperatures and tempers alike soared; media commentators lost patience with the presence of demonstrators, and called for the state to retaliate with force—with striking language centered on the necessary reclamation of symbolic terrain. The power of digital media and the visual image presents an ideal platform for the hennaed Hand of Fatima’s multiple significations. Public debates on the very fabric of good governance and religio-nationalist identity continue to use these resonant icons in a variety of forums, and reinforce the fundamental issues at stake: submission to a benevolent patriarch and the “soft” power of religious tolerance—provided the monarchy retains absolute control.

The question remains: will the desire for change and its demonstrative manifestations last? Robert Danin (2011) envisions the continuity of regimes in Morocco, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Qatar, attributable to a monarchical system that—in his estimation—effectively provides a buffer zone between ruler and people. To Danin, separation enables useful criticism which does not necessarily result in accusations of treason (an account which fails to explain the continuity of the Yemeni and Syrian governments). The anchors of religious legitimacy in nationalism vary dramatically across Qatar, Libya, Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Morocco. Strategic use of expressive

culture has proved a constant in maintaining the stability of Morocco's monarchy, from terrorist attacks to the Arab Spring.<sup>210</sup> Karim Boukhari notes, “quand la machine invisible du système ne fabrique pas un ‘phénomène,’ elle a l’art et la manière de la récupérer, le doper, le surdimensionner (2011 : 20)” The deft maneuvering of the Moroccan regime exploits resonant religious tropes that both bolster legitimacy and cultivate the illusion of contestation.

Slavoj Žižek presciently notes, “the ultimate show of power on the part of the ruling ideology is to allow what appears to be powerful criticism” (2011: 9-10). Imagistic strategies used to bind together the nation become even more powerful when polyvalent; ancient symbols, transmitted in new media, provide a force to be reckoned with for governmental contestation and nationalistic reclamation. Although at the time of writing, it appears highly likely that the monarchy will withstand continued demonstrations, answers can only remain speculative—ephemeral as the thin lines of henna etched in the outstretched hands of a woman at prayer.

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<sup>210</sup> Morocco has a long history of harnessing expressive culture as a means to legitimacy. The regime has made a concerted effort to put claim Morocco as historically plural through the vehicle of culture; the 1997 establishment of the Essaouira Gnawa Festival and the 1994 founding of the Fez Sacred Music Festival provide merely two examples (Verderen 2011: 223-34 ).

## Conclusion

### Visual Culture, Symbolic Capital and Locality: the Public and the Political

2010: France deports the nomadic Roma population in defiance of global protest; politicians speak of the now-infamous “burqa bans” now rapidly disseminating throughout European capitals. Simultaneously, Palestinian scarves and “gypsy-style” fashions appear in Parisian tourist shops, with henna tattoos advertisements and Hand of Fatima pendants displayed alongside Eiffel Tower key chains and Champs-Élysées kitsch – reinvested with a surreal and fictional veneer of cosmopolitanism, the realm of commodity here mimics symbols of the very communities deemed anathema by xenophobic immigration policy.

In a surreal reversal—or inversion—2011: A wave of popular protests and mass demonstrations culminates in the toppling of stale regimes across North Africa; protest iconography manipulates American popular culture, such as the ubiquitous English phrase “Game Over”—marketing revolution to media of Western nations who long backed the dictators against whom such signs were wielded. Tunisia’s Ben Ali, Egypt’s Mubarak, Libya’s Gaddafi...the uprisings swiftly spread to Syria and Yemen—leaving other regional actors, such as Morocco and Algeria (to say nothing of the states in the Middle East and Gulf) bracing for the worst and struggling to buck the revolutionary trend. Two years—and a series of vastly different phenomena—yet the tone of Western punditry and academia remained nonetheless predictable.

At the heart of debates concerning the compatibility of Islam and the West lie visual ideological claims to national identity, conversations to which art history can enormously

contribute. Amidst the cacophony of voices: “What kind of Islam do *we* want” – forgotten always are more critical questions: “who defines Islam?” and “how?” Contemporary battlegrounds are—if nothing else—primarily symbolic; wars for national, religious and political authority are marketed and waged through imagery and cultural production. I have chosen instead to center on the powerful imagistic setting of the battlegrounds themselves, the localized anchors of cultural production, and argue that inquiries into visual culture as symbolic weapon (by state and non-state actors), provide the most viable analytic frame and critical methodology for comprehension of localized political, religious and social movements.

This dissertation has escorted art historiography out of the museum and into the public spaces of decorated skin, and street demonstrations; we have revealed the powerful cultural production of local heritage in framing political theater. Part One demonstrates, through a deep contextualization of henna adornment within Moroccan religious culture, the significant social and spiritual currency of an art form often dismissed as merely “folk.” Part Two explored the political and economic ramifications of “popular” artistic practices through tourist and fine arts markets, as well as government and opposition movements’ manipulations of such symbols in times of political crisis. An anchored approach to resonant, culturally-specific images in historical context has immense potential for revolutionizing the manner in which political events are understood, and performance of protest interpreted.

By way of conclusion, I offer here the stakes of taking an iconoclastic approach to the history of art—one that considers media as fundamental and the visual as an opening for the political—in juxtaposition of the contemporary and the traditional, the spiritual and the banal, the local and the global. Judith Butler argues that any reasoned assessment of conflict must reject the “ought to be” of culture, in favor of examinations that are firmly “based on a field of

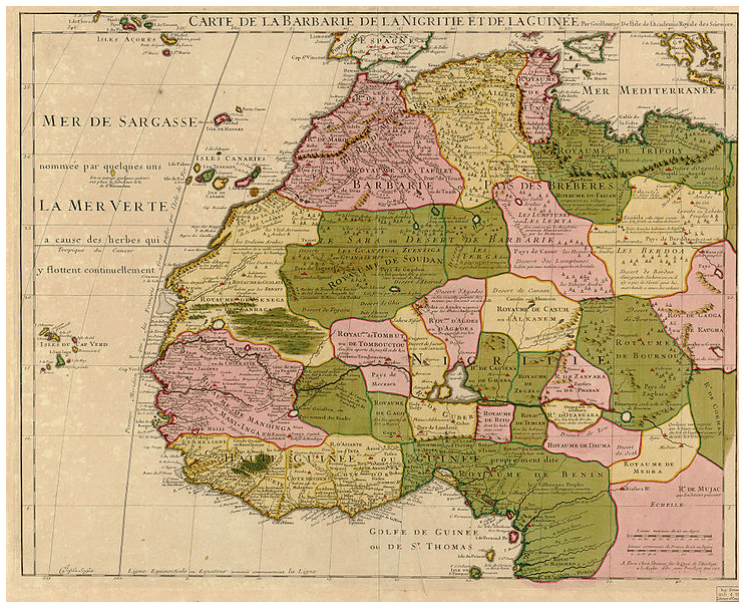
description and understanding that is both comparative and critical in character” (2009, pp. 156-7). She claims, following Talal Asad, that “normative” moral judgments are inherently conditioned and “tacitly regulated by certain kinds of interpretative frameworks” (2009, p. 41). In war-time, conflict sustains itself “through acting on the senses, crafting them to apprehend the world selectively” (2009, pp. 51-2). This dissertation does not consider henna as a mere medium, or visual images themselves—as fundamentally conclusive – but rather, by grounding understanding in local heritage culture and the process of nation-building – smashes through surface readings to advance new methodologies for understanding the powerful manner in which contemporary images fulfill spiritual needs, mobilize masses, topple regimes, or combat and alleviate political crisis.

This study intervenes in predominant bodies of scholarship by making the case for henna’s consideration as an Islamic art form, uniquely interpreted in Morocco as a spiritual release for women through its deeply-rooted presence in local orthodoxy and canonical text. In so doing, we see that the frames of art historiographic consideration of “Islamic art,” as well as religious studies’ treatment of “popular spirituality” contain considerable flaws. Part Two posits a further intervention in a related body of literature, and argues for the reconsideration of a visual studies methodology as an analytical mechanism for the political. As discussed above, it is a scholarly imperative—particularly those working in regions of the world experiencing conflict—to reassess the predominant paradigms of thought governing the production of knowledge. This is, as I have demonstrated, best accomplished at the level of art historiography, visual studies and critical attention to the Image—rooted in local interpretive contexts.

Whether on the hennaed palms of Moroccan women, or the tri-corner hat worn at rallies of the American Tea Party activists, visual culture associated with national foundational

mythologies plays a fundamental role in the articulation of national belonging and political contestation. The terrain and materiality of inscription proves culturally variable, yet the mechanisms of twenty-first century struggles for reclamation and maintenance of interpretative authority—be it cultural, religious or political—are markedly similar. Due to the growth of interconnected telecommunications industries and the democratization of mass-media, localized visual culture that delineate values held as sacred and shared occupy a space in the public imagination more highly visible than ever. In an increasingly visual world, art historiography provides profound opportunities for critical reevaluation of pressing interdisciplinary issues: a fact clearly legible in the writing on the wall—or in this case, on Fatima's hennaed hand.

## Image Appendices: Chapter 1



**Figure 1**

Present-day Morocco occupies the most northwesterly extreme of the continent, bounded by the Mediterranean Sea from Europe, the Atlantic Ocean from North America, by the vast desert from sub-Saharan Africa, and by mountainous terrain from immediate Maghreb neighbor Algeria. This crossroads geography facilitated considerable diversity within “natural demarcation lines” and provides contemporary Moroccan Studies a unique situation that poses specific difficulties for singular disciplinary analysis.



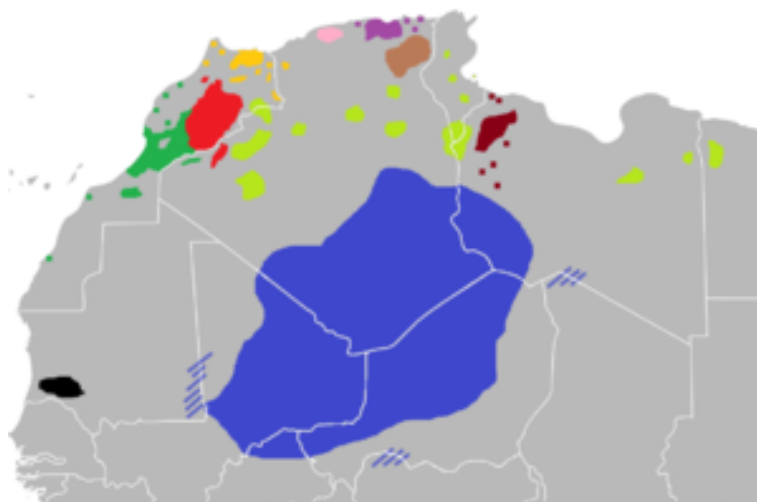
**Figure 2**

The theme of territorial integrity continues to play a critical role in the inculcation of nationalist sentiment in present-day Morocco. Nowhere is this rendered more visible than in State claims to the Western Sahara, technically classified as disputed territory by the United Nations.



**Figure 3**

Morocco's internationally-recognized boundaries constitute some 446,550 kilometers; by the Kingdom's own account, which takes into account the Western Sahara, this number approaches 710,850 kilometers.



**Figure 4**

The term “Berber” itself is a problematic misnomer, suggesting an underlying unity rather than its function as an umbrella adjective and nominal designation for speakers of the Afro-Asiatic language's dialects. Yet even this distinction proves highly problematic. Algeria's largest Berber speaking minorities include the Mozabites of the northern Sahara, the Tuareg of the central Sahara (also present in Mali, Libya, Niger, Mauritania and Morocco), as well as the Chaouia located in the southeastern Aurès Mountains—and the largest group, the Kabyle (Tamazight-speaking) population of the Kabylia region. This map depicts concentrations of Berber Dialects in Africa.



**Image Appendices: Chapter 2****Figure 1**

Janine Antoni, *Gnaw* (1992). Brooklyn Museum, New York.

**Figure 2**

A bride from the capital city of Rabat poses advance of her henna adornment ceremony.



**Figure 3**  
Muslim bride from the city of Sale wearing ḥarqūṣ cosmetic adornment.

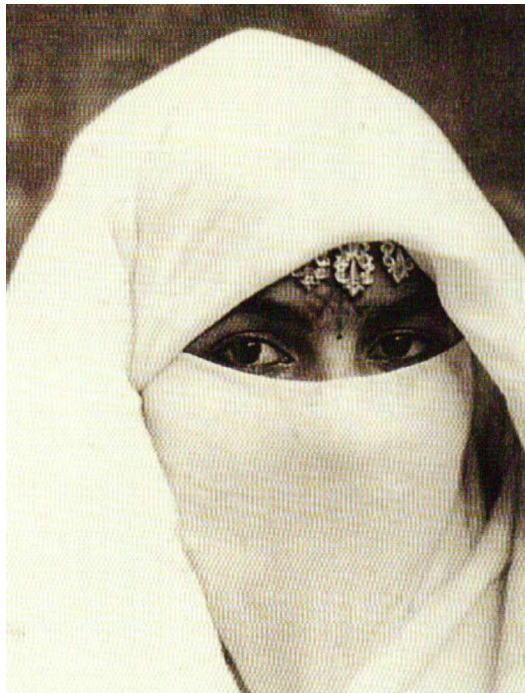


**Figure 4**  
Female urban dweller of Tetouan, Morocco, wearing the distinctive regional caftan.



**Figure 5**

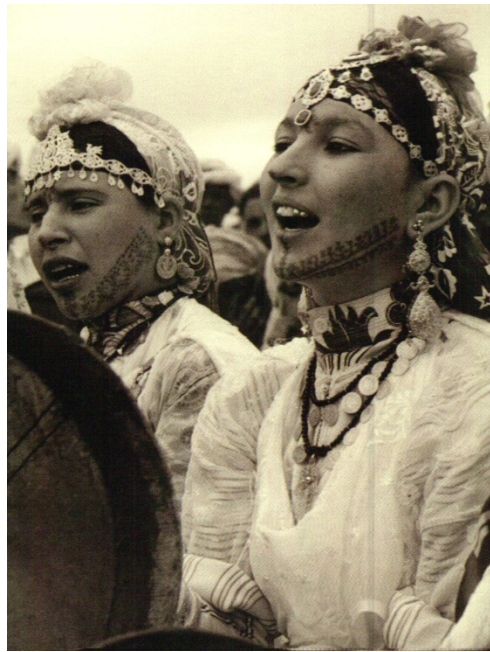
North African prostitute displaying her tattoos for colonial scholars.



**Figure 6**

Veiled woman in Fes photographed by colonial-era scholars.





**Figures 7-8**

Colonial-era photographs of Tamazight-speaking women with tattooed chins.



**Figure 9**

Colonial-era engraving of Moroccan women with cross tattooed on her hand.

**Je m'appelle Aya. Mon sourire, c'est à nos parrains que je le dois. Grâce à leur générosité, je vais à l'école, je vis dans une maison avec mes frères et sœurs et ma mère SOS qui s'occupe bien de nous. J'aimerais tellement que tous les enfants orphelins ou sans famille aient, comme moi, la chance d'être heureux dans un village d'enfants SOS !**

**Avec 100 dirhams par mois, devenez parrain ou marraine SOS et aidez un enfant à construire son avenir.**

Renseignez vous au 05 22 77 72 85 / parrainage@vesosmaroc.org / Site Internet : www.vesosmaroc.org  
RIB : 013780 01195 001 031 001 59 48 / Casca Val Pieur - IMC  
Association reconnue d'utilité publique et placée sous la Présidence d'Honneur de SAR La Princesse Lalla Hasnaa

**Figure 10**

An advertisement soliciting help for impoverished regions which capitalizes on the “tattooed girl.”



**Figure 11**

A market for Western tattoos does exist in Morocco; owing to its illegal nature and negative social valuation, however, the practice is shrouded in secrecy.



**Figure 12**

In Morocco today, henna is often sold in markets specifically catering to women's cosmetics.





**Figure 13**

Dried henna leaves available for sale in the Fes henna market, along with syringes and stencils.



**Figure 14**

After leaves are harvested and dried, they are ground into a fine greenish powder.



**Figure 15**

Once the powder is mixed with constituent substances, a mud-like paste will form that is then applied directly to the skin.



**Figure 16**

As the paste dries, it begins to flake away—leaving a crimson stain beneath.





**Figure 17**

Women applying henna at a ceremony for Diaspora Moroccans studying in Rabat.

### Image Appendices: Chapter 3



**Figure 1**

In 2007, a storm of controversy swept Morocco over a marriage ceremony between two men in the rural agricultural region of al-Qasr al-Kabir. Depictions of veiled brides with hennaed hands figured prominently in coverage of the scandal, such as this image, which ran in *Al-Arabiya*, under the caption: “Traditional Moroccan bridal wear.”

<http://www.alarabiya.net/articles/2007/11/27/42200.html>



**Figure 2**

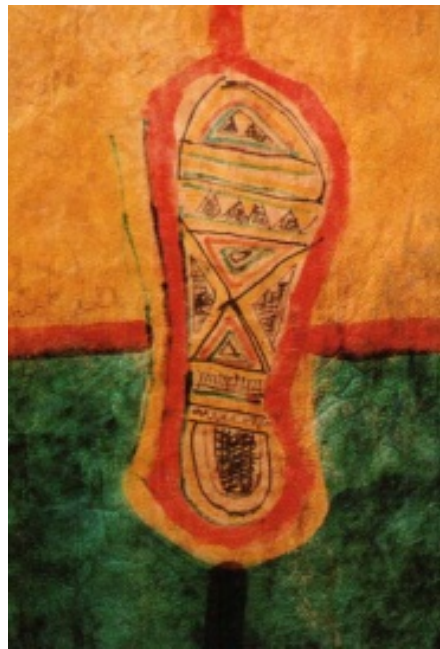
Henna adornment takes place on the hands and the feet of women (generally circumscribed to a pinkie finger for men in critically-important rituals). Only a married woman may apply henna to her feet—virgins must abstain.

Henna appears on the hands, both on the palms and the back-sides, as well as the feet.



**Figure 3**

Although the hands provide primary terrain for ornamentation with henna, feet are also a potential canvas; as previously stated, however, this is confined to married women. Although I inquired about this prohibition to multiple women and men, I was never able to obtain a conclusive response. My questions met with the repeated explanation, “Single women just shouldn’t. It’s poor taste.”



**Figure 4**

As portraiture of Mohammed is not widespread beyond Persian miniature paintings, the abstracted shape of a foot has often served as a representational synecdoche; the image of a sandal-shaped form is common, for example, in the leatherwork of nomadic Tuareg populations throughout Northern Africa.





**Figure 5**

The stylized sandal affiliated with the Prophet also provides a compositional space for students of calligraphy. Images of the Prophet's footprint are often explained by virtue of the Night Journey, upon which it is believed that he ascended to Heaven, prayed with the Prophets of previous religious traditions and negotiated with God over the number of required daily prayers.



**Figure 6**

Henna application demands an extended period of immobilization—first as the paste is applied and subsequently as it slowly dries to a crust. This material is left on the surface of the skin as long as possible, often covered with trash bags, newspaper or other material to preserve design integrity as the mixture dries. Heating henna paste over a stove of heated coals expedites the drying process, and deepens the color.



**Figure 7**

Owing to henna's ephemerality, one cannot date with precision the origin of decorative form. However, the tangential evidence provided by colonial-era photography and post-cards (unfortunately devoid of narrative accompaniment) do indicate that a similar emphasis on basic geometric patterning dates at least to the late nineteenth century.



**Figure 8**

Owing to henna's ephemerality, one cannot date with precision the origin of decorative form. However, the tangential evidence provided by colonial-era photography and post-cards (unfortunately devoid of narrative accompaniment) do indicate that a similar emphasis on basic geometric patterning dates at least to the late nineteenth century.



**Figure 9**

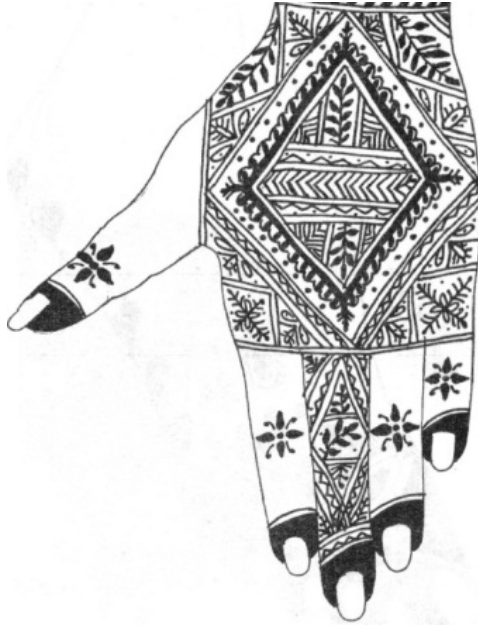
Generalities concerning iconography can, however, be made. Indian and Middle Eastern designs tend towards the organic, while angular forms and geometric shapes dominate North African patterns.



**Figure 10**

In Moroccan henna, linearity abounds, replete with the intricate repetition of triangles, diamonds, and lozenges.





**Figure 11**

In Moroccan henna, linearity abounds, replete with the intricate repetition of triangles, diamonds, and lozenges.



**Figure 12**

A number of authors have called attention to visual similarities between henna and other female-dominated art forms such as tattooing, pottery, textile work, embroidery and the interior paintings of rural homes.



**Figure 13**

This school of thought posits that female-dominated iconography creates a safe space for coded expression within patriarchal Moroccan culture of frustrations, dreams and secret desires. One such shared symbol is the triangle, denoting womanhood and prophylactic power.



**Figure 14**

The asymmetry noticeable in henna adornment is not arbitrary, but rather, allowed for a variety of reasons. A lack of canonization in the body art allows its makers to express creativity, working from freedom of expression and inspiration. Hennaed hands have structural patterns which differ from front to back, as well as from hand to hand.





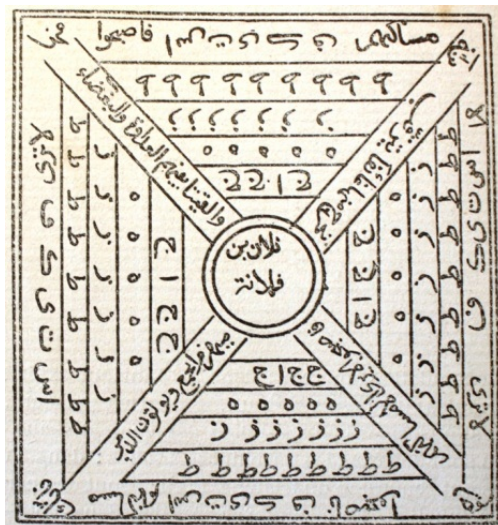
Figure 15

Henna has long been used in magical practice and as a therapeutic remedy for a variety of ills, many of which involve attacks by the *jnūn*. Male healers termed *faqih* will often inscribe eggs with mystical characters or Qur'anic verses, and order the afflicted patient to shatter the egg in a specified location, such as a cemetery to clear away evil forces.



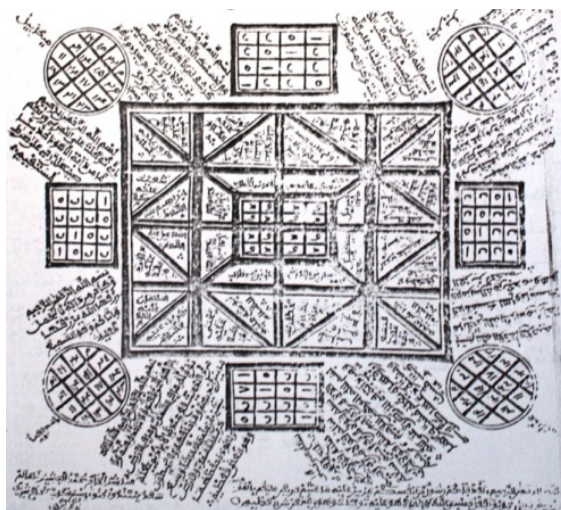
Figure 16

Al-Būnī's work *Kitāb Ṣams al-Ma'ārif* (The Book of the Sun of [Esoteric] Knowledge) is particularly well-known by occult practitioners. Compositional similarity between henna adornment's patterning and al-Būnī's esoteric talisman designs are striking.



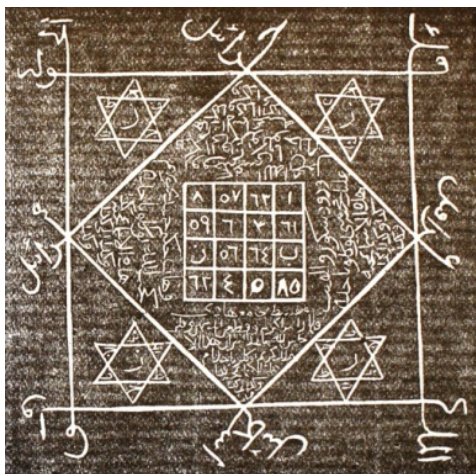
**Figure 17**

Al-Būnī's work *Kitāb Šams al-Ma'ārif* (The Book of the Sun of [Esoteric] Knowledge) is particularly well-known by occult practitioners. Compositional similarity between henna adornment's patterning and al-Būnī's esoteric talisman designs are striking.



**Figure 18**

In addition to spell books featuring patterns attributable to al-Būnī, anonymous compilations of magical treatises contain charms to ward off the evil eye, secure a lasting romantic attachment, prevent miscarriage, ensure marital fidelity, and multiple other concerns replicate the patterns seen in henna adornment.



**Figure 19**

In addition to spell books featuring patterns attributable to al-Būnī, anonymous compilations of magical treatises contain charms to ward off the evil eye, secure a lasting romantic attachment, prevent miscarriage, ensure marital fidelity, and multiple other concerns replicate the patterns seen in henna adornment.



**Figure 20**

Compositional similarity is striking; checkerboard patterns mingle with intricate, interlocking geometrical forms and mystical, abstracted numbers and letters.





**Figure 21**

The manner of application, and design itself differs from that of the bride. The protracted temporal experiences of restraint and patience (necessary for the intricacies of bridal henna décor) are here lacking. The groom's adornment of henna is confined to a small smear on the palm of the husband-to-be, or merely the staining of the smallest finger of the right hand.



**Figure 22**

Both the bride's hands and feet will undergo hours of elaborate design-work, rendering her unable to participate or move, necessitating much patience and restraint. This passivity is further exacerbated by the restrictive headdress, facial veil or diadem she wears; weighing the bride down and constraining movement.



**Figure 23**

Female use of henna, however, continues throughout her adult life cycle in contemporary Morocco [Figs 23-24]. In each case, the blood of a sacrificial animal accompanies ritual adornment process, prayers and invocations to God, the Prophet and members of his family. Saint shrine visitations, the Prophet's birthday, and the Eid feasts (to mark the end of Ramadan, and to commemorate Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his son at God's command) all necessitate feminine adornment of henna as a critical aspect of religious celebration.



**Figure 24**

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**Figure 25**

Today, pre-packaged stencil kits are readily available for purchase in the market, and facilitate time-saving techniques for women unable to spare the necessary hours for the incapacitation associated with traditional henna adornment.



**Figure 26**

A further indication of changing social roles in cultural-religious rituals are innovations in Moroccan women's magazines. The lunar Islamic month of Sha'aban has traditionally been a period of purification in preparation for the Ramadan fast, and provides the most popular month for weddings and henna parties to occur. Magazine "bridal specials" in the month of Sha'aban feature cultural articles, focusing on traditional wedding ritual and attire.





**Figure 27**

Despite the fluidity of cultural change, however, henna remains an integral component of gendered religious ritual. The adornment is still a prerequisite for women on ritual occasions; even as the patterns of adornment shift and vary, the light of the Prophet continues to shine, illuminating the bodies of female believers.

## Image Appendices: Chapter 4



**Figure 1**

One of the most ubiquitous symbols used in Moroccan tourism advertising is a city gateway into the old city of Fez, known as “Bab Bou Jeloud.”



**Figure 2**

In the case of Fez, the Protectorate-era separation remains visible today.





**Figure 3**

The “Berber Eco-Tourist Museum” outside of Marrakesh, Morocco, exhibits the inheritance of French administrative policy that divided “arts” and “crafts.” A new approach to marketing heritage, this museum includes quotidian objects in the space of a “heritage” museum, rather than the space of a predominantly ethnographic or fine arts exhibition space. Here rural crafts are framed as Berber—in keeping with French distinction from “noble” arts constructed by (ostensibly) Arab, urban men.



**Figure 4**

Belkahlia’s *Main*, or *Hand* (1980) provides a quintessential example of the artist’s manipulation of localized medium and resonant iconography.



**Figure 5**

Another work by Belkahia, produced in 1997, titled “Untitled” (undertaken in henna and saffron on a base of sheep skin stretched over copper structural frames), further demonstrate henna’s value within Belkahia’s post-colonial vision.



**Figure 6**

Fatna Gbouri’s acrylic on canvas “They Are Making Bread” (1993) evidences the critical aspects of artwork classified by Hamid Irbouh as “naïve,” or “populist.”



**Figure 7**

Fatima Louardiri (the daughter of Ahmed Louardiri) provides an example of yet another naïve female painter, whose connection to a masculine artistic mediator provided her introduction into the world of “fine arts” production. Overarching themes in Louardiri’s work include the preparation of tea, curative spirit possession rituals and women at work weaving. The undated gouache on paper, *The Couple*, typifies the subject matter, style and gendered implications of the naïve-art designation.



**Figure 8**

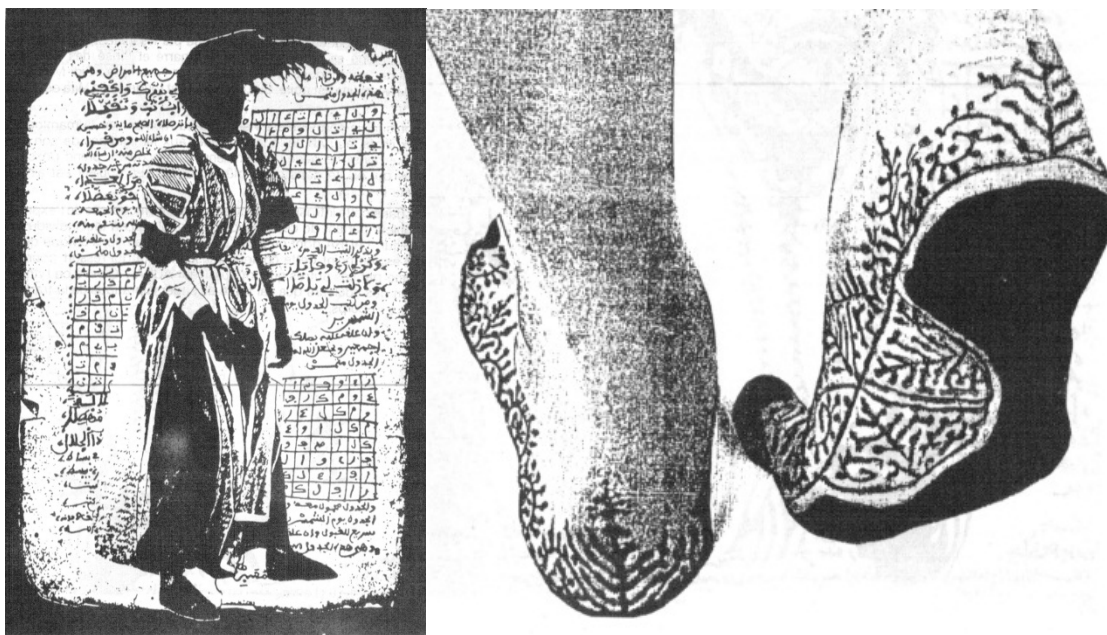
Majida Khattari, portrait with hennaed forehead, veil and grenade. Contemporary female artists with a Moroccan background (whether working from the Diaspora or within the nation itself) also recognize the currency of henna as a deeply localized signifier for female identity—and one which, frankly, proves highly marketable in a global art market that attaches value to the exotic (particularly in terms of Muslim women’s representations).





**Figure 9**

Aicha Hammu's "Henna," hennaed portrait of women on white cloth.



**Figures 10-11.**

Latifa Toujani's work includes photographic montage of hennaed women participating in religious rituals such as curative performance of spirit possession.



**Figure 12**

Lalla Essaydi's 2011 Exhibition, *Converging Territories*, Bab al-Rouah, Rabat, Morocco



**Figure 13**

Lalla Essaydi, *Converging Territories, Number 5*. In the majority of her compositions, Qur'anic verses, Hadiths of the Prophet and Islamic poetry are inscribed in the female-identified body adornment, covering every inch of the composition—skin of models, the cloth enshrouding their bodies and architecture.





**Figure 14**

In *Coverging Terrorities, Number 6*, Essaydi portrays seven Moroccan women shrouded from head to toe in long white *haiks*, or traditional body covers. Only the space of the forehead and eyes are visible to the viewer, allowing us to follow their downward gazes focused on broken eggshells in the lower foreground.



**Figure 15**

Although we will examine the “Ma Tqich Bladi” anti-terrorist campaign more fully in the following chapter, it bears mentioning that a new iteration of the Hand of Fatima in sticker format was widely sold in Marrakech’s Djemma al-Fnaa Square shortly after the attack.



**Figures 16-20.**

Henna as an art form also provides a resonant tourist souvenir when the adornment is transferred from intangible experiential realm to commodified object (as in the magnets and post-cards depicted).



**Figure 21**

This post-card, dated to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century reveals the historical fascination with heritage culture, marketed by the French colonial state to European tourists in post-card format.





**Figures 22-23**

In museum spaces, henna often appears on quotidian objects (left: Berber Eco-Museum with hennaed bridal veils) displayed to laud “folk culture” of the home, or the varied aspects of Moroccan religiosity (right: Ddar si Said Museum, *Gnawa* Brotherhood *guembri* decorated with henna).



**Figure 24**

Highly-tourist trafficked city of Sidi Bou Said outside of Tunis, Tunisia offering henna for tourists.





**Figure 25**

Tunisian tourist traps that make use of female dominated expressive culture, such as the Hand of Fatima as an ideal souvenir, market not juxtaposition with feminine religious culture (as with henna), but rather, elide the Hand of Fatima with Tunisia's Mediterranean heritage of Roman mosaics.



**Figure 26**

The central plaza of Djemma al-Fnaa in Marrakesh provides a space in which local and foreign tourists converge in pursuit of Moroccan authenticity in cultural practice. Henna artists in the square sit at umbrella-covered makeshift booths, along with portable galleries of work, books of previous designs for foreign and domestic tourists to peruse.



**Figure 27**

Female (left) and male (right) student hands after obtaining gendered henna in the UAE. The patterns on his skin are definitively less floral than that on his female counterpart.



**Figure 28**

In the Oudaya, however, designs are much rougher, and undertaken in fewer than five minutes. Artisans disappear as quickly as they appear, and do not frequent the space day after day—an easily comprehensible strategy, given that international tour groups pass through and depart en masse.





Figures 29-30

In the past five years, advertisements for henna have proliferated in the highly tourist-trafficked areas of the old city of Fes—regardless of the shop’s primary contents.

## Discover Morocco while enjoying your favorite activities!

From sport to lounging, from culture to crafts, experience every aspect of Morocco while practicing your hobbies



### ART AND CULTURE

Visit museums, monuments and gardens to discover the thousand and one facets of cultural Morocco.

[More](#)



### HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Let yourself be pampered in traditional hammams or take advantage of our modern spa or balneotherapy facilities.

[More](#)



### CRAFTS AND SHOPPING

Discover age-old crafts and fill your suitcases with typical and varied souvenirs.

[More](#)



### BEACHES

Take advantage of hundreds of kilometers of sand and dunes overlooking the Atlantic ocean or in the blue waters of the Mediterranean.

[More](#)



### DESERTS

Head off to discover the desert as part of an organized tour or, too be sportier, in a 4X4, on foot or on a camel.

[More](#)



### GOLF

Don't forget your clubs! With clear skies 360 days a year, Morocco's golf clubs await you for a few colorful rounds

[More](#)



### HIKING AND TREKKING

Walk from the Saharan sands to the Atlas mountains and enjoy the infinite variety of Moroccan landscapes.

[More](#)



### CRUISES

Climb aboard for comfortable and unusual cruises marked out by unforgettable stopovers

[More](#)



### OTHER SPORTS



### FESTIVALS AND MOUSSEMS

Figure 31

A brief review of State tourist websites reveals the subtle use of popular Islamic rituals, and female expressive culture in the promotion of Morocco as an ideal location for the experience of a “stable yet exotic” Muslim country. Primary categories pitched to foreign tourists highlight arts and crafts, traditional festivals, geographical beauty and leisure activities such as golf.

**Henna,  
a plant out of paradise**

Henna is obtained from drying the leaves of the henna plant (*Lawsonia inermis*) and reducing them to a fine olive green powder, to which hot water is added to produce a thick paste. The product is used for making up hands and feet, and also to treat and dye the hair.

**Beauty and symbolism**

Moroccan tradition accords henna major symbolic value, and the product is an essential feature in ceremonies marking the major stages in life – birth, circumcision, marriage, and finally death itself. Creation of henna motifs is the work of highly skilled women known as “hennayates”. Henna is not only used to produce intricate temporary tattoos, but is also a medium for full-scale works of art. Many artists use it to decorate goatskins, canvases, candles and light globes. In brief, henna – the “plant from paradise” – has become an essential part of everyday life in Morocco.




*Henna, the “Plant of Paradise”, marks the highpoints of Moroccan life*

**Figure 32.**

This “Health and Wellness” brochure published by the Moroccan Tourist Authority emphasizes religious and cultural history—carefully tailoring the experience of Moroccan culture to female traditions and moderate, folk spirituality.



Royaume du Maroc  
**Ministère de la Culture**  
Français العربية

**Figure 33.**

The Moroccan Ministry of Culture’s headline photograph provides a compelling example of the manner in which this localized belief in henna’s Saharan origins as a critical nationalist emblem.



**Figure 34**

Post-card displays throughout tourist sites—catering to international and domestic clientele—also feature blue-clad, hennaed women are, themselves, fundamental marketing tropes, associated with the space of the desert lay claim to the Sahara as part-and-parcel of Moroccan identity.



**Figures 35-36**

Hand serves as a stand-in for political unity, and a stance of “moderate Islam” against terrorism—one that occupies not only a social currency but a marketplace value through its fixity in multiple forms (stickers, T-shirts, and so forth). The Hand has appeared as an emblem on academic works devoted to combatting terrorism (left), and in the popular pro-monarchy rap anthems of Fnaire (right).



## Image Appendices: Chapter 5



**Figure 1**

“Don’t Touch My Country” billboards resurrected at the onset of Arab Spring demonstrations.



**Figure 2**

Protestor holds placard reading, “Don’t starve the children of my country.”



**Figure 3**  
Protestor holds hand-shaped placard reading, “Stop Laughing at Us.”



**Figure 4**  
Multi-lingual, hand-shaped placard reading “Don’t steal my country.”



**Figure 5**

A defiant young woman among the marchers held aloft, with hennaed hands, a banner in the familiar shape. Although the text, “Don’t steal my country,” appeared on previous signs, subtle changes to its visual depiction (such as the coloration) carries a subversive new message.



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