# ‘Grandma, why did you have face tattoos?’: Exploring the roles of traditional tattoos in the resistance of Moroccan women under the French Protectorate

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

‘Stories are at the heart of what explorers and novelists say about strange regions of the world; they also become the method colonised people use to assert their own identity and the existence of their own history.’ Edward Said (1994, p.xii).

When I was a child, I used to go almost every summer to Morocco, my father’s country. Each year, I would visit my paternal family, especially my grandma Fatma, or as everyone calls her, Tata. The language barrier between us — she speaks Moroccan Arabic and understands some French, I speak French and understand some Arabic — made the communication hard at times, and even created some distance. The desire to get closer to her was also tinted with intimidation and awe, seeing how such a small woman could garner so much respect from those around her. One day, whilst looking through family pictures in Tata’s house upstairs, I found a black and white photograph of a young woman who looked familiar. She had black markings on her forehead and chin. I recognised Tata through the photograph, but the Tata I knew had no marks on her face. I asked my dad ‘Why does grandma have these patterns on her face here?’. He told me these were tattoos, that she had them inked when quite young, and decided only recently to laser them off. Too shy to ask Tata directly, I asked my father why she had them tattooed, but he did not know. Though I was intrigued, I accepted my father's answer and thought no more of it.

Yet as I grew up, and kept coming back to Morocco, curiosity grew stronger, as I sensed it was a somewhat peculiar practice — no one at school had a grandma with a tattooed face. I started to ask questions to my aunts about their meanings. They told me that, according to the rumours, some women had tattoos done at the time of the arrival of French settlers and American soldiers in Morocco. They vaguely suggested that it was a way to prevent a girl from getting kidnapped by a foreigner. I started doing more research, and learnt about the ancient practice of face and body tattooing among Berbers, or Amazigh people, which predates the arrival of Islam and colonialism (Mesouani, 2019). It seemed that the practice was more complex than at first glance, and even underwent a mutation in order to adapt to –and resist?– political shifts in Morocco. So how exactly did this ritual evolve under colonisation in Morocco? Did it constitute a form of resistance, and if it did, how?

The choice was made to study Moroccan women in Morocco, even though the whole of North Africa is rich with tattoo culture. Due to the Amazigh roots of these tattoos, this is not

a practice only pertaining to Morocco, as Amazigh people have a transnational identity. However, not only Amazigh women went through this practice, as ethnic and cultural Arab women had tattoos as well. In this study, the subjects are Moroccan women as a culturally mixed population, in Morocco from the Algeciras conference in 1906 which put the country under European guardianship, to the Moroccan independence in 1956.

Why specifically traditional tattoos, and why just on women? This study could have focused on men's tattoos or other body modifications. However, to focus on tattoos would not only make the goal more precise, but would also prevent the study from falling into a catalogue. Beside, as aforementioned, the practice of tattoos among Moroccan women probably underwent mutations directly linked to colonialism. Finally, the concept of facial tattoos–once very popular in North Africa–inked onto the face and communicated to society, the most public body part, has strong symbolic and social meaning.

Moreover, there is the danger to study traditional tattoos through an indulging, fetishising scope that would be symptomatic of imperialist ideologies. This study will try to delve into the social and the political fields of resistance through body art. More than just aesthetic and ornaments, 'tattoos illustrate and confront the inscription of social norms and codes upon the body. Tattoos implicate the skin, they become part of the body, and therein resides their power and the subsequent desire to regulate their meaning.' (Fenske, 2007, p.55).

So how exactly did this ritual evolve under colonisation in Morocco? Does it constitute a form of resistance, and if it did, how?

The study will be focused on the practice of traditional tattoos among Moroccan women, and will discuss the links between tattoos and women's resistance. This research will investigate whether and how tattoos would be an expression of Moroccan women's agency through tattoo rituals.

## 1. Literature review

### 1.1. Tattoos and resistance

Edward Said, in *Culture and Imperialism*, defines culture both as an aesthetic form that is rather independent from politics and social spheres (Said, 1994, p.xii) such as novels, but also as a 'source of identity, and a rather combative one at that', tinted with moral codes and norms, 'a battleground' infused with ideologies and politics, to the point of nationalism (p.xiii). Said differentiates colonialism and imperialism, the latter being 'the practice, the theory, and the attitudes of a dominating metropolitan centre ruling a distant territory; ''colonialism'', which is almost always a consequence of imperialism, is the implanting of settlements on distant territory'. Imperialism permits colonialism to exist by exercising another state's authority through political, economic, cultural and social means (p.9). Said explores the different types of resistance against imperialism: the 'primary resistance' is direct fight led against intruders, while the secondary resistance is meant to preserve the sense of a surviving and ongoing community despite colonial violence (p.209). The French protectorate exerted a colonial hold over Morocco, and the body art of tattoo as a cultural tool which shifted under this authority, could be either seen as a direct fight without weapons, or as a way to rebuild a wounded community.

Tattooing is a worldwide practice which has been recorded since at least 4,000 years ago, according to the Office for Science and Society of McGill University (2017). The word tattoo comes from 'the Tahitian "tatau" which means to mark or strike, and hence refers to some of the traditional modes of application where ink is "tapped" into the skin by using sharp sticks or bone.'(OSS, 2017). Tattoos have been at the heart of anthropological studies historically done by Western intellectuals at least since European colonisation. Interestingly, another interpretation for tattoo is proposed by McNeece 'that suggests defamation and the disruption of the opposition of the sacred to the profane, and, etymologically (from an early English form, ''tapto'' or ''tatu''), a shutting off or silencing, originally a signal given to soldiers or sailors to return to camp after encounters with local women [...], it refers to the ''silencing'' of the colonised under colonial rule, when the indigenous culture quite literally ''loses a voice'' in its cultural destiny.' (McNeece, 1993, p.13-4). This compelling point is made in the context of a semi-autobiographical and poetic analysis, but is striking in its closeness to the core of this study.

There is existing and extensive literature about tattoos, their meaning to the tattooed individual and the group they belong to, the non-group, and the external world. Tattoos have already been assigned to a form of possible resistance among marginalised groups (Atkinson, 2003), but has not been researched from the perspective of resistance against forms of colonialism; hence, Atkinson further explores the relationship between subcultural tattoos, like 'neo-primitive' or gothic tattoos under globalisation. Even though he touches upon the topic of indigeneity through interviewing Indigenous Natives and their relationships to tattoos (2003, p.99), this example is more focused on their belonging to alternative groups expressed through tattoos, rather than the perpetuation or mutation of traditional body art meant to resist a colonial power. When the idea of traditional tattoos is mentioned, it is through the scope of non-indigenous individuals choosing to get tattooed 'Neo-Primitive', tribal-inspired patterns as a way to reject the Western Christian body ideal. In a similar vein, Pitts' *In the Flesh* relates the practice of indigenous tattoos emulated by a Western audience, as a means of revolting against misogyny, societal norms and traumas, but the author points out the problematic of the underlying thought behind this practice: these tattoos, though an expression of revolt, are ultimately reinforcing the idea that so-called tribal cultures are primitive, compared to Western cultures. Moreover, the topic of gendered and sexual violence and its link to tattoos is evoked multiple times in Atkinson's writings (Atkinson, p.59, p.195-6), although it is rather labeled as a coming-to-term with traumas ritual rather than an act of political resistance. However, Atkinson writes that 'in some cases, while it is difficult to understand exactly what group members are resisting, their involvement in tattooing is predicated upon waging various cultural wars through their bodies.' (p.100), an affirmation which could qualify this practice as a possible act against orientalism in Morocco during the Protectorate.

On the other hand, Mesouani's work presents extensively the traditional practice of tattoos among Indigenous women of Morocco, the Amazigh. She investigates the history and original meanings of this body art among Amazigh women, and explores the attempts of post-independent Morocco at smothering its Amazigh roots, thus endangering this tattoo practice. Indeed, this tradition is at odds with Moroccan society and its effort to unite around an Arab-Islamic identity (Mesouani, 2019). Nevertheless, Mesouani does not mention the role of cultural resistance tattoos played in the relationship between Moroccan women and European settlers.

## 1.2. The figure of the subaltern woman

Cultural resistance against any type of domination has been the focus of a range of academic works, especially the Subaltern Studies collective initiated by Ranajit Guha, among other scholars. The definition of subalternity is found in his 'Prose of Counterinsurgency': 'When a peasant rose in revolt at any time or place under the Raj, he did so necessarily and explicitly in violation of a series of codes which defined his very existence as a member of that colonial, and still largely semi-feudal society. For his subalternity was materialised by the structure of poverty, institutionalised by law, sanctified by religion and made tolerable — and even desirable — by tradition.' (Guha, 1982, p.45). The figure of the subaltern is intrinsically linked to India's legal status under the British Raj, structured not only by a colonial system but a class system, which differentiates for example the Indian elites working for the British administration, and the Indian population living under this structure of domination. The Subaltern Studies collective worked towards a fairer retelling of the subaltern's narrative of resistance, a narrative that was usually the prerogative of Western intellectuals or former officials in India (p.71). Consequently, the subalterns are never at the centre of their own stories, or actions, but rather described as natural overwhelming elements in these discourses, such as 'waves', a 'tsunami', as objects but never subjects (p.77). The Subaltern Studies, in that sense, seem a good starting point for the subjects of this study.

A member of this collective, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, centred her article 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' around the figure of the subaltern woman, and the use of her voice for narrative. 'Within the effaced itinerary of the subaltern subject, the track of sexual difference is doubly effaced. The question is not of female participation in insurgency [...] it is, rather, that, both as object of colonialist historiography and as subject of insurgency, the ideological construction of gender keeps the male dominant. If, in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak, the subaltern as female is even more deeply in shadow.' (Spivak, 1988, p.287). Her input is important to consider: not only is she vocal about the process of othering the East by the West through discourse, but she highlights that the subaltern woman in an imperialist context is 'mute as ever'. 'Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears, not into a pristine nothingness, but into a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third-world woman' caught between tradition and modernisation' (p.306). Her reasoning matters for the present study, as Spivak focuses her attention on the figure of the subaltern

women, while not completely disclosing this figure's way to resist through culture. Indeed, she proceeds to give an example of a subaltern woman, Bhuvaneswari Bhaduri, who hanged herself in a symbolic gesture, an attempt to rewrite 'the social text of sati-suicide in an interventionist way'(p.307), a gesture that was her own, deviating from the traditional sati narrative of women and not what was expected of her from her community or the imperialist elites. Here, the discussion touches on an interesting point: a symbolic way for subaltern women to rewrite, to appropriate their own narrative. However, Spivak went back on her word and clarified that the subaltern woman indeed spoke, but was not heard (Spivak, 1999, p.247), because the structural powers working against her would smother subaltern discourses, as per Guha's 'Prose of Counterinsurgency'. The way resistance from subaltern women is envisioned is one of the keys to this study.

There is the danger of simplifying or even stereotyping Moroccan women under the guise of the dreaded term 'Third World woman' against dominant powers. Leela Gandhi in her essay *Postcolonial Theory: a Critical Introduction* writes that the problem of the third world woman figure can be met with the innuendo of the 'status of victimhood from both sides, patriarchy and colonial mindset, which seems the perfect example of marginality, but also with sentimentalism and even tokenism and voyeurism of the difference between the mainstream and the margins', 'it is as if everywhere we go, we become Someone's private zoo' (1989, p.82). Spivak warns in 'Can the Subaltern speak?' about the 'monolithic third world woman', whose positionality in the game of power of structures will depend on the depiction of the subjects (p.296, 1988). Leela Gandhi hints that this figure of Third World Woman serves Western feminist projects, because the Western Woman and the Third World Woman are always compared, in stereotypical dichotomies: backwardness and modernity, tradition and freedom (p.86, 2008). She clarifies that the Western feminist wants to know more about herself than the other woman, and quotes Spivak: 'Her question, in the face of those silent women, is about her own identity rather than theirs [...] their repeated question is obsessively self-centred: if we are not what official history and philosophy say we are, who then are we (not), how are we (not)?' (1987, p.137). The women in question are usually not talking about themselves in traditional Western feminist research, they are neither heard nor placed at the centre of their own representation; the Third World Woman is seen as an object or victim, not a subject (Gandhi, 2008, p.86). There is a risk with postcolonialism and feminism being the scope of representation for the gendered subaltern, as she rarely, if ever, speaks about herself: 'Between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman

disappears, not into a pristine nothingness but a violent shuttling which is the displaced figuration of the 'third world woman' caught between tradition and modernisation' (Spivak, p.306, 1985). This figure is tricky, and can also be a vicious circle, as Spivak and other authors find themselves to invert the argument made against this figure towards a homogenisation of the Third World Woman. Indeed, Leela Gandhi writes that 'Trinh's rampant prose valorises the racial, gendered body as a revolutionary archive, while Spivak [...] urges the academic feminist to speak to the subaltern woman, to learn from her repository of lived experience. [E]ach of the critics explored are guilty of the reversed ethnocentrism which haunts Said's totalising critique of Orientalism [...]. As it happens, there are always other stories to tell — on both sides of the fence which separates postcolonialism from feminism.' (2008, p.88).

### 1.3. The question of agency through rituals

The idea of female resistance against imperialism has been evoked by Sherry Ortner in *Power and Projects: Reflections on Agency*, through the concept of agency. She defines agency as an action or intervention that produces a particular effect, or has the capacity to affect things: this action is part of a project she calls 'serious games'(2006, p.29). 'Serious games' refers to social life as a game actively played by actors, seen as agents, through intentionality and agency. Even though the agents are active, they are not completely free, because they belong to a social pool, which can be defined in two categories: the relations of solidarity, embodied by the community, and the relations of power and inequality, like colonialism. In both cases, agency is constituent of structure, like institutions, and not opposed to it. Indeed, traditional tattoos performed by and on indigenous women is part of a long-standing tradition, usually dating back to centuries or millennia — a practice that had to go through a type of adaptation within those rules which will be discussed later, and directly linked to the imperialist environment under which it was performed. Ortner sees resistance as a form of power agency in the optics of power. In the optics of subalternity, intentionality is central because it defines an enactment of the subalterns' projects in this serious game. In the second chapter, the rules of the serious game for Moroccan women under the Protectorate will be explored, thus their intentionality explained.

In that sense of agency as the pursuit of projects, Saba Mahmood's *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* illustrates it in a refreshing way. Mahmood highlights the absence in the literature of Muslim women's resistance, especially through

Islamic religious practices. Saba asks herself the question of how religious women, Muslim women, can be subjects of feminist projects. How do they enact agency? ‘The focus on women’s agency provided a crucial corrective to scholarship on the Middle East that for decades had portrayed Arab and Muslim women as passive and submissive beings, shackled by structures of male authority. Feminist scholarship performed the worthy task of restoring the absent voice of women to analyses of Middle Eastern societies, portraying women as active agents whose lives are far richer and more complex than past narratives had suggested’. (p.6). Mahmood describes agency as the capacity and ability to realise their ‘own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)’ (p.8). Mahmood, after spending time with Muslim women, understands that the component of desire, played in the structure of religion and against the structure of patriarchy, reveals itself through traditional practices and rituals they use in their own way. For example, 'modern' Egyptian women are wearing the veil as a means to avoid sexual harassment in public spaces, or turn themselves to regular prayers as a means to better themselves ‘inside’ their bodies and react in a stronger, more grounded way to inequalities they face (p.156). ‘In other words, action does not issue forth from natural feelings but creates them, [...] through [...] bodily acts.’(p.157). Here, the outward appearance resonates with the interior self, the veil becomes a symbolic marker and instrument for what these women desire, piety, as a way to counter unwanted male interactions. It echoes the article ‘Rituals of World Politics: On (Visual) Practices Disordering Things*’* by Aalberts et al. According to them, rituals are predictable routines whose goal is to stabilise ‘social orders and limit conflict’ (2020, p.240), deeply intertwined with structures of power; rituals are the response of adaptation to these structures. However, this article focuses on how the states perpetuate this power relation and dominance through rituals, and not how subaltern individuals use rituals to disrupt the state’s imperialist project and organisation; this could be related to the concept of everyday resistance, the ‘sequencing’ of the performance (p.163) which Mahmood also highlights, seeing ritualistic acts as triggers of resistance and self preservation. It is useful to remember that this study could inform the reader on the balance of power relationships between practices of subaltern subjects and dominant colonial structures.

## 1.4. Methodology

This study is built on a postcolonial framework based on the literature of resistance of Subaltern scholars who did extensive research about agency and resistance against dominant powers. Because of the polysemic nature of these tattoos, its different meanings will help to explore whether and how this practice is tied to resistance. The subjects of this study can be considered subaltern women under colonisation. The sources used are both in English and French–the topic of Moroccan tattoos specifically is more widely known in French literature and documentaries, due to France's colonial past in North Africa–with a personal translation provided when needed. The study will be conducted first by laying down the historical and institutional bases of the Western–mostly the French Protectorate–occupation of Morocco, followed by institutional violence and inequalities directed towards the local population and specifically the intertwining of colonial policies and gendered and sexual violence directed towards Moroccan women. Before delving into a possible form of resistance, it is essential to know about the events which triggered this cultural response. In this context, academic literature about the history of occupied Morocco in the 20th Century will be used, along with studies from Moroccan authors about this state violence and acts of resistance from subalterns, sometimes with a testimony of an author's family member, and state archives about the Protectorate. After exploring structural colonial violence, North African tattoo practice will be investigated historically to contextualise this ritual, through academic sources, and has been heavily explored in documentaries, reports and video essays based on academic literature. To give more weight to this cultural practice, lesser known under a scope of resistance against colonialism, an interview has been performed with my grandmother about her own tattoos and their purpose. Some French orientalist responses to this practice at the time have been integrated in order to analyse the perceived impact towards ruling colonial classes. This ritual will therefore be analysed through the resistance literature structure and literature about tattoos, using topics of agency and rituals of resistance, through academic sources and articles, and apply it to Moroccan women and their tattoo practice to determine if this shift in this cultural practice was indeed a resistance act.

This juxtaposition of research will meet and answer the question: is the mutation of the practice of tattooing among Indigenous women a form of cultural resistance against imperialism?

## Chapter 2: Structural domination of the Protectorate and Moroccan resistance

'In some of my earlier work, as in that of others, there is perhaps a tendency to *romanticise resistance*, to read all forms of resistance as signs of ineffectiveness of systems of power and of *the resilience and creativity of the human spirit in its refusal to be dominated*. By reading resistance in this way, we collapse distinctions between forms of resistance and foreclose certain questions about the workings of power.' (Abu-Lughod, 1990, p.42). Lila Abu-Lughod asks herself whether it is possible to detect occurrences of women's resistance without 'misattributing to them forms of consciousness or politics that are not part of their experience', and, after an introspection about her previous work on women's resistance in Bedouin communities, worries about being too eager with 'explaining resistance and finding resisters' without delving too much into the power structures at stake (p.43-7). Hence, following her advice about assessing a diagnostic of power prior to analysing resistance, this chapter will be dedicated to exploring the history and power structures of the Protectorate system and foreign presence in Morocco before allowing the investigation of Moroccan indigenous resistance.

Recent Moroccan history was heavily defined by the French and Spanish Protectorates. Olivier Pironet's 2006 article in the newspaper *Le Monde Diplomatique* recounts a chronology of this era, which will help comprehend the context under which practices of resistance arose. After Morocco's economic opening to international trade in 1864, the 1906 Algeciras conference put the country under European guardianship and made Tanger an international city, accompanied by a progressive French occupation in the main cities experiencing political turmoil. As he was no longer able to repress riots, the sultan Mawlay Hafid was compelled to sign the Fez treaty on the 30th March 1912, which put in motion the French Protectorate system. The sultan was dismissed and replaced by his brother appointed by the new regime, while Lyautey, the Protectorate's main figure, became Resident-General. Hopes for independence grew with the creation of the Istiqlal party. However, riots were quelled by the French regime in Casablanca in 1947. The pro-independence sultan, Sidi Mohammed, was banished by the French and replaced while the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution on the right to self-determination for Morocco. Eventually, Sidi Mohammed was crowned king Mohammed V, the Fez treaty was abrogated, and Moroccan independence declared the 2nd March 1956.

As the history of Morocco under the French protectorate is being unfolded, a question arises: what kind of power structures and gender violences under the French Protectorate led to a Moroccan popular resistance?

Recounting the French Protectorate history of structural violence in Morocco will shed light on the motivation which sparked a popular Moroccan resistance in which women participated.

### 2.1 The French Protectorate in Morocco: structures of power and colonial violence

According to French military history, the Protectorate as a structured system of power 'does not want to conquer a country, even less to assimilate or annex it; but, by relying on its own structures and local elites, and by exercising regalian powers in its name, the 'protecting power' controls its administration while strengthening the basis of the central power in place: this is what is known as indirect administration, which retains the local administrative and judicial apparatus at all levels, but superimposes on it representatives who depend on the services of the Residence' (Franc, 2019, p.115), translated from French–all translations are my own. This system was considered by the instigator of the Protectorate in Morocco, Lyautey, to be the transition towards modernity through the advent of French civilisation and guardianship in North Africa. This administration was meant to govern in the name of the sultan and rely on local elites, was intended to strengthen the central state or *makhzen*, especially against civil revolts happening under sultan Mawlay Hafid's reign. However, the French administration proved to be increasingly direct, as Moroccan civilians were removed from occupying public function roles (p.119). Perrier talks in his article of a 'provisional protectorate forever' (2019, p.2). He declares that the Fez treaty was supposed to bring reforms related to the administration, judiciary system, education, economic, financial and military system which the French government would see fit to introduce on the Moroccan soil, and once the introduction is done, the Protectorate system is meant to disappear (Perrier, 2019, p.2). However, France made it permanent by letting a class of settlers implement a structured colonial state in parallel with the managed one. There is the idea of getting the Moroccan state out of its perceived archaism through the perceived modernity of France (p.3), but postponed until further notice. The promised training of Moroccan civil servants by France and reforms were slow to be put in motion, and equal treatment between French and Moroccan civil servants was demanded by

the Ministry of foreign affairs of the Popular Front, to which the Residence answered that this equality will be implemented 'when the natives will have not only the same formation but also the same living conditions' (CADN, 1936). Education and access to school was mainly targeted towards sons of French elites, which made it very difficult for local boys to enter French schools, and impossible for girls (Pennell, 2003).

The Residence started to establish a two-tier society, between Europeans and Moroccans, but also between Moroccans themselves. The 1930 'Berber Dahir' was an attempt at writing down Amazigh tribal laws in an effort to counterweight Islamic *shari'a* law used by Arabs (Pennell, 2003, p.151). The idea behind this dahir was to dismantle a possible nationalist sentiment (Baker, 1998), a divide and rule policy in order to integrate Amazigh people into a French model. The Protectorate also worked towards a spatial segregation between the European settlers and local citizens (Maghraoui, 2013, p.72). This modernisation of society would benefit French society, with the building of European towns around old medinas, in which Moroccans would live (p.72). European cities would slowly make the medinas dependant on them for the resources they would gather, and symbolically would relegate Moroccans 'to the status of a submissive partner from whom resources, both natural and human, were to be extracted' (Abu-Lughod, 1980, p.168).

This regime was accompanied by physical violence from the French administration towards the local population. There are instances of French civil servants or military at the time justifying resorting to violence. For example, General Henrys wrote: 'Our goal is first to ensure security on the front of all occupied territories, then, to thwart enemy plans and impose our will on the adversary [by] shattering all resistance in a manner that will lead to the disintegration of the tribes and their submission' (Henrys, 1914). Caroline Campbell informs that 'For many Amazigh people, the *Rumi* [Christians] were destroyers who not only launched fiery attacks that killed everything and caused their cities to fall and lands to be abandoned, but undermined religious practices and unleashed the *Berger* [nickname for French authority] to violate their private spaces' (Campbell, 2018, p.553). The military method to stop Moroccan riots at the start of the Protectorate was named the 'oil slick policy' by Lyautey (Pennell, 2003, p.142), as a way to prove that 'civilised colonial warfare' could be done (Campbell, 2018, p.537). Yet this policy was implemented 'with first a military and political penetration of an area, and the second was the area's organisation and administration' (Campbell, 2018, p.540), which was not a peaceful tactic. This ideal of peaceful conquest was soon shattered, and the perceived

uncivilised recourse to violence was justified if it was in retaliation (p.538). In the same way, in the context of the Second World War, the recorded American presence on the Atlantic coast by the end of 1942 was designated by Pennell as an Allied 'reconquest of North Africa', and not a liberation (Pennell, 2003, p.156).

However, colonial violence towards locals was not limited to warfare, and targeted Moroccan women in various manners, starting with orientalist conceptions which shaped the experience of European settlers and soldiers. According to Julia-Clancy Smith, 'the representations of empire owed much to the gaze of European men and women directed to Arab Muslim females'; the colonial gaze defined Moroccan women as 'libertine Saharan beauties', (1996, p.202), and participated to a hypersexualisation and objectification of the subaltern woman. This vision of the 'other', the 'oriental' woman had been fed in the Western world throughout historical depiction and imagery inherited since the Crusades (Said, 1978) and aggravating stereotypical portrayals in mass media (Shaheen, 2003). In this context, her body is coveted either for sex and domestic work, or studied and policed as a 'medical object', for example to observe syphilis cases (Maghraoui, 2013, p.66). Folkloric or ethnic prostitution 'establishes indigenous women as touristic resources by transforming their bodies into an exotic landscape. The picturesque quality of the indigenous body/landscape is attested to by its depiction in postcards which disrobe the Moorish woman while adorning her with elements deemed oriental' (Staszak, 2015, p.39). Colonial prostitution was on the rise, and with it came a particular conception of urban city planning, as well as an institutionalisation of sex work and the development of sex tourism especially in Casablanca. Maghraoui declares that despite the taboo, prostitutes were integrated in Moroccan society, either in delimited districts called *quartiers réservés* or 'reserved districts', or with 'the honourable people of the city' (2013, p.64). This author demonstrates that the figure of the 'colonial prostitute [...] was not only created as a result of the economic realities of colonialism and colonial war, but as a 'sex worker' she became simultaneously an important component in the functioning of the French colonial apparatus. The attempt to control and discipline the prostitute as a subaltern colonial subject made her also an integral part of how the colonial administrative machinery sought to control and organise the broader urban space in Morocco' (2013, p.65).

Some women would choose prostitution, a choice led by economic necessity, or escaping patriarchal violence in their families; but in many cases, they were forced by colonial authorities.In his work *Revisiting the Colonial Past in Morocco*, Maghraoui discloses the

testimonies of women made in this era in the Bousbir district, and concludes that these women were often young, recruited as teenagers or in their twenties, from rural areas or slums and looking for jobs in bigger cities; they would work several jobs before finding themselves in reserved districts, with some being forced to prostitute themselves after police arrests 'on legal grounds' (Maghraoui, 2013, p.76). Moreover, there were *Bordels Militaires de Campagne* or Military Countryside Brothels: a military creation made of peasant women from the Atlas Mountains who would be forced into recruitment and follow French soldiers (p.70) along their battles intended for the 'peaceful penetration' policy–an expression forged by Lyautey which frightfully parallels the nature of this violence (Campbell, 2018, p.538). These travelling brothels would give these women a 'state of being', a classification for their profession directly linked to the army. During those campaigns, a nurse testified that it was 'a real chorus of laments and despair among its followers' (Salardenne, 1930, p.98). Maghraoui adds that 'these women were ''casualties' of colonial warfare [...] as a result of their uprooting from their family unit and tribal environment. The other meaning is literal, making the prostitute part of the combat zone and a real, unaccounted, casualty of war. Many of these women were forced into what I call a military-sexual recruitment into the colonial army. [...] As resistance collapsed and the tribal population was displaced, each new geographical context created an ideal social pool for the French colonial military authorities to recruit more sexual labour.'(Maghraoui, 2013, p.70-1). Going back to cities, prostitutes would be confined in reserved districts which they could not leave without police, and medical examination. Prostitutes had to be medically controlled, their bodies subjected to inspection and policed by the figure of the doctor who happened to fill the role of policeman of the bodies, and who also helped to recruit the women (p.79). Reserved districts were the results of colonial urban planning projects, and experimentation was encouraged by the Direction of Indigenous Affairs. Indeed, under the Officer of Indigenous Affairs's watch, a '*section socilogique*' would gather information about Moroccan society. The members were 'essentially military officers trained to be ethnographers and sociologists', so the figure of the academic scholar and the military officer merged (p.67). Encouraged and funded by colonial authorities, the research conducted on reserved districts mixed academic research and the policing of spaces and bodies (p.67). Finally, sexual tourism 'played upon logics of attraction/repulsion, identity construction, and alterity' which 'reassured the moral and political order [...] it also justified the colonial order.' (Staszak, 2015, p.28). The main attraction of Bousbir in Casablanca was 'in making available [...] the indigenous female body. [...] The eroticisation of the Empire inherent to the colonial geographic imaginary and

the power imbalances which transformed indigenous women into potential prostitutes had turned the Empire, in the eyes of Westerners, into a giant brothel.' (p.33).

### 2.2 Popular Moroccan resistance and women's participation

However, this colonial violence was not met without resistance, and since the start of the Protectorate, Moroccans attempted to short-circuit this institutional violence. At the establishment of the French and Spanish Protectorate, local attempts at uprising started with a Saharan Jihad–in this context, holy war–and the Rif war (1921-1926), (Pennell, 2003, p.140-4). The attempts at dividing Amazigh Moroccans and Arab Moroccans under the 1930 Berber Dahir did not meet the Protectorate's expectations. Pennell specifies that the Amazigh were not keen to see an implementation for their traditional laws by the French, and while the latter 'mythologised the Berbers as natural collaborators, [...] many of them fought back very hard indeed' (2003, p.141-2). Campbell writes that, more than just physical violence, the 'cultural and psychological aspect of violence was [...] significant. Colonial violence shaped strategies of solidarity for the Amazigh victims' (2019, p.533). Chrifi Alaoui writes that 'Lyautey tried to create a conflict between the Arabs and Amazighs; however, [a] common struggle for freedom pushed [Moroccans] further toward resistance against the French.'(Chrifi Alaoui, 2020, p.289).

Another kind of organised resistance was triggered due to the difficulties for Moroccans to access institutional French schools that would train future civil servants of Morocco. Free Schools were created by Moroccans. 'Most Moroccans had very little chance of an education because the French intended most of their new schools for the sons of the elite. [...] Because their numbers were so small, some modernist Moroccans, in the Salafi tradition, began to establish their own educational system.'(Pennell, 2003, p.150). These Free Schools were focused on delivering a 'modern Islamic education' for young boys, in Arabic (p.150). This phenomenon prompted nationalist sentiment because the same boys who studied in Free Schools or abroad were, years later, leaders of the Moroccan nationalist movement (p.151).

Meanwhile, despite the national French and Moroccan narratives obliterating women's participation in the fight for independence and resistance, more and more testimonies rose to the surface years later. Women were usually at the forefront of colonial, gender or economic

violence: when the 1929 stock market crash happened, 'the Moroccans suffered very severely. [...] Again, women workers suffered the most as family income declined and they had to work to make up the difference; their labour became very cheap.' (Pennell, 2003, p.149). In another work from Pennell, Moroccan women undertook even more agricultural work when the men were gone to join the French army, which more generally changed the gender division of labour (Pennell, 1987, p.112). More so, baking bread for the troops of the newly formed Rifi government, and legally enforced prayers five times a day for everyone formed part of Rifi warfare (p.112). Moreover, there are accounts of spying women for both the Rif and Spain (p.113-4). However, their power also came from the ability to form, create or undo rumours and reputations at social gatherings, at markets; women could influence public opinion for and against the Rifi cause (p.114). The Rifi women had a real political influence to the point that they were organised in a 'female security system', or even asked to perform ritualistic sacrifices in order to form alliances, a tradition usually devolved to men (p.114-5). Occasionally, women participated directly in fights (p.115-6). Campbell details the participation of Amazigh troubadours or *imdyazen*, women and men in the resistance, essentially by moving through the Middle Atlas and producing performances and poems in Tamazight that would carry information about the French army, while simultaneously strengthening a sense of solidarity among Amazigh communities (Campbell, 2019, p.534-48).

Finally, the scholar Chrifi Alaoui, in her article 'Morocco from a Colonial to a Postcolonial Era – The Sociopolitical Environment through a Grandmother's Autoethnography', hosts a dialogue with her grandmother. She personally participated in Moroccan resistance, but deplores that history and the national post-independence narrative did not remember women like her (Chrifi Alaoui, 2020, p.288), a factor emphasised by the lack of a formal women's organisation–the main leaders of the movement were the male students talked about earlier, who could access education. She confirms that men and women collaborated and organised themselves in the nationalist movement. She then proceeds to describe urban resistance, when some houses in Fez 'were built without windows facing the street to protect them from the French being able to access their houses' (p.288). To try smothering uprisings in Fez, the French decided to put the city under lockdown without food, water or electricity for weeks, which did not deter the movement; indeed, during these lockdowns, women would show solidarity and organise support systems and resources sharing. The French sent Senegalese soldiers to tackle the resistance, while torture and massacres were

recorded (p.288). Baseless accusations, arbitrary arrests, house searches, death threats from French authorities, and surveillance occurred. The women started throwing rocks at soldiers from their balconies, or hot water and oil, to the point where soldiers got approval to fire in their direction (p.288). Moreover, women carried weapons through checkpoints as they were unsuspected by French authorities (p.290). Despite their actions, the Manifesto signed in favour of independence, presented in 1944 to the French, did not include any woman's name: 'We fought for it, we died for it, but we were not recognised' (p.291-2). Alaoui's grandmother concludes by this quote: 'I resisted the French, I resisted my husband, I resisted my father, I resisted my aunts, and I resisted the women who opposed me. I did it because I believed our land and our freedoms were worth fighting for.'(p.293).

Several forms of resistance by Moroccans were indeed deployed against colonial rule, with women proven to be efficient participants in the path for independence. Yet after laying down the structural inequalities and violence perpetuated by the Protectorate system, and the responding efforts to strengthen communities, to partake in wars and nationalist campaigns, there is one type of resistance that has not been explored in this chapter: the opposition to colonial sexual violence, characterised by the kidnapping of women and the institutionalisation of reserved districts. The next chapter will try to delve into one of the possible tools used to counteract these policies: traditional tattoos.

## Chapter 3: Tattoos and Resistance against Colonialism among Moroccan women

Women have a long intertwined history with politics and resistance. Their bodies are subject to distinct norms of beauty and decency: the transgression of these ideals make their bodies inherently political. They are frequently used metaphorically as the repository of collective identities and national territories, whether described as being possessed, with rape metaphors for invasions and wars, or pure, clean, preserved, for a strong and steady nation. Intrinsically, what women do with their bodies, particularly indigenous or subaltern women, is tightly bound to the narrative and collective identity of a people or conflict, which will be discussed through the hypothesis of tattoos as cultural resistance.

A brief history of the North African tattoo is essential in order to understand the politics tied to tattoos under colonial structures. The Amazigh people, recognised as the indigenous populations of North Africa, have their presence attested in archives dating back to at least a millennium BCE (Jack, 2021). The practice of tattooing is intrinsically linked to Amazigh culture and history, and dates back to pre-Islamic times, through animist, polytheist, Jewish and Christian periods in the whole of North Africa (Bou-Saha, 2016). These tattoos are usually displayed on women but not exclusively (Lebkiri 2013, Bou-Saha 2016). Women were and are considered as actors and transmitters of traditions and rites in North Africa, which is why, when they left their household to find work in the cities, they contributed to the progressive erasure and simplification of customs (Bou-Saha, 2016). A ritual previously held in high regard, sought after and transmitted, these traditional tattoos from indigenous Amazigh roots were abandoned in less than a generation: it is now regarded as outdated, sinful, and worthy of shame (Bou-Saha, 2016).

However, before public opinion shunned the practice, North African tattoos filled multiple cultural functions. Tattoos were first and foremost ornamental (Searight, 1993). Young women would even be pressured by elders to get marked: a woman without face tattoos would be considered ugly, unsuitable for marriage, her food inedible, and guaranteed to be infertile (Bou-Saha, 2016). It would even play a role in gender differentiation: a tattooless woman would be said to look like a man. Tattooed women were allowed to participate in social life, and the rite of getting marks was also intrinsically linked to courtship and union with a man. In this case, it would either be the woman getting tattoos because she saw someone she liked, or it would be a man offering her the inked ornaments, or both, according to the regions. The patterns could also provide clues about where or which tribe the individual was from, and

even some characteristics and qualities about the individuals, or wished upon them, with symbols which would relate to nature, animals and cosmic elements. As such, these indications of character and origins can be perceived as a language, a way of communicating between Moroccan women who, very often, were illiterate. Moreover, tattoos were therapeutic: to get ink under the skin was believed to act as a remedy against illnesses, migraines, infertility, or curses. Tattoo traditions in North Africa are attached to concepts of purification and protection from the evil eye, as well as the belief that dripping blood by piercing the skin would keep away and soothe malevolent spirits (Bou-Saha, 2016).

Apart from being a ritual of beauty, identity and protection, some grandmothers and aunts spread rumours to granddaughters and nieces that tattooing practices were linked to the presence of Western soldiers in Morocco. This ancient ritual seemed to evolve and take a new turn, due to imperialist structures of power. Today, the large majority of traditionally tattooed Moroccan women are at least in their 80s since the practice stopped in the mid-20th century, making them the last generation to enact this practice (Mesouani 2019). So, what is at stake in retracing a cultural rite no longer practised today? In what way can traditional Moroccan tattoos be perceived as a ritual of resistance and even shed light on the political and social relations between France and the French Protectorate of Morocco? Today, these women still exist, and with them the testimony of a peculiar diplomatic and political context. This chapter will delve into what can still be known about this rite and its ties with dominant structures which took place at the time of the French Protectorate.

However soon after independence, the practice of traditional *wshem*–meaning tattoo in Moroccan Arabic–saw a fall from grace. The Amazigh scholar Mesouani wrote about the complex relation between this ancestral body tradition and contemporary Morocco, which is due to the building of an Arab-Islamic national identity (Mesouani, 2019) and economic liberalism which encouraged women's education and enrollment in the workforce. Reconstructing a national Moroccan identity after decades of Protectorate meant to erase or relegate indigenous Amazigh identity. The desire for modernity and a new reading of Islam gave a coup de grace to traditional tattoos (Mesouani, 2019).

At first, the testimony given by my grandmother, as a personal, lived account, will help to put this practice into context. Subsequently, the study will continue with an analysis of the ritual of tattooing through the scopes of subaltern resistance and agency in order to demonstrate the attempted sabotage of colonial projects. This cultural act, because of its

polysemy, will then be put into the perspective of resistance through rituals which could disrupt colonial projects.

### 3.1. Testimony in the flesh

The interview performed with my grandmother was made during my visit to Morocco in June of this year. She was tattooed as a child, around eight years old, which was mostly decided by her mother, probably at the turn of the 1930s to the 1940s. The translator established that 'in fact she was not really forced, but it was a lady who came to get them, telling them, if you don't have tattoos, the Americans will come and marry you, take you away', to which I asked if it was only intended towards Americans, or also French settlers. She answered 'Foreigners in general'. Later in the interview, she added the apparent motives of this practice: 'We said it was so that no one would come and bother you, so that no one would bother the girls.'

Because it is just one interview, the idea that there was an organisation or preventive effort elaborated among Moroccan women cannot be confirmed. Some questions were left unanswered. How did these women organise if they did? What made them think tattooing would repel foreigners? It is not clear on which terms this mutation of cultural practices took place, how in this case ancient Amazigh rituals of beauty turned into rituals of protection against foreign presence in Morocco, and whether it was organised. Yet as the threat came from 'foreigners', Moroccan women's acts of tattooing seemed to be aimed against types of both colonial domination and gender-induced violence. Given the little available information–scarce literature confirms this practice intended as resistance against settlers' violence (Jack, 2021)– this rumour will be investigated through the polysemic meanings of tattooing in Morocco in this context, and link them to the idea of resistance.

### 3.2. A serious game of culture and subaltern sabotage

For some Moroccan women, getting tattoos could have been a way to avoid unwanted interactions with male foreigners. Their intention was to ward off foreigners, but on which grounds did they think it would be efficient? As seen in the previous chapter, the

Protectorate system and mindset relied heavily on orientalist ideologies at least when it came to local women, not only in the way they were envisioned, but also the way they were exploited through domestic or sex work, the latter often occuring against their will by forced enrolment in military brothels (Maghraoui, 2013). When Maghraoui writes about the policing, prostitution and medical examination of the subaltern body by the institutions of the Protectorate, Fenske's work comes to mind: 'the body that does not conform to norms of physical homogeneity and behavioural control is constructed as deviant in order for society to maintain a sense of order and to assert control' (Fenske, 2007, p. 65). Hence, the first assumption that emerges is the impact these tattoos had towards Western masculine presence in Morocco and the idea that body markings, especially face tattoos, could have been efficient to undermine unwanted attention from foreigners, simply because it would have made Moroccan women look repulsive according to Western aesthetic standards. This practice seems to have undergone a mutation, from beauty enhancer and social marker inside Moroccan communities to a repellant under Western domination. If a woman was deemed ugly and unworthy for marriage within her community without tattoos (Bou-Saha, 2016), the contrary could be proven true within the Western colonial society of the time. Body transformations are 'not just about gender but also hierarchies of 'ethnicity, race, and economic status as well', 'the body continually displays its status. It bears messages and marks of differentiation' (Pitts, 2003, p.39). Here, two kinds of oppressions are at play, which confer to Moroccan women the status of subalterns: the Protectorate's colonial mindset and structure, and the gendered aspect of violence coming from European men towards local women in an already patriarchal Moroccan society.

To decide getting tattoos under a colonial context, for subaltern women, has to do first with tackling Western body norms. The colonial 'West' as a constructed cultural entity is traditionally timorous regarding body modifications: 'it offends Western sensibility (at least the white, and especially middle-class sensibility [...]) that a subject would voluntarily undertake the permanent inscription of a verbal or visual message on its skin. Its superficiality offends us; its permanence alarms us.' (Grosz, 1994, p.138). This echoes Pitts' writings, who sees that 'marks are symbolically weighted by their visibility [and] by their signification of Otherness' (Pitts, 2003, p.105), an otherness entertained by the orientalist mindset of the Protectorate dominant classes, and thus exacerbated, or at least intended to be controlled, by subaltern individuals in order to survive violence. This evokes Bourdieu's thought about subverting or perpetuating social codes and performances that challenge the norms of the dominant classes, which is why these practices are designated as distasteful by the disapproving

rulers (Bourdieu, 1994). After interviewing tattooed women about the motives for modifying their bodies, Atkinson found out that the most commonly encountered resistance through tattoos is the attempt 'to break free from what they perceive to be repressive conceptualisations of beauty (based on Judeo-Christian ideologies about the body)' (Atkinson, 2003, p.173). In his study, tattooed individuals claimed that body art can be a mean for social resistance, an act of 'personal reclamation' against imperialist norms, discriminations, or overcoming rape and sexual traumas (p.59). In the hypothesis that Moroccan women subverted colonial sex trade and violence, or attempted to do so, through traditional tattoos, they did it by infringing orientalist tinted Western norms that were expected of them. An academic-based video essay about Amazigh tattoos, created by the anthropologist Manon Jack in 2021 in *Les Ethnochroniques* channel, seems to confirm these tattoo's purposes of deflecting rapes from happening: 'It is also said that French colonists would find these women with tattooed faces so hideous that all the Berber women tattooed each other with a multitude of tattoos on their foreheads, cheeks, chins, etc. so that the colonists would find them horrible and would not rape them.'–translated from French (Jack, 2021, 4:50-5:08). This also echoes a testimony recorded in the podcast '*Sauce Algérienne*' broadcasted in 2022 by Paul Max Morin. Morin went to interview young French people for his PhD thesis about their ties with the Algerian War (1954-1962). In this recorded podcast, a young woman, Kahina, recalls interviewing her uncle. He told her that he witnessed women smearing their bodies with faeces during the war so they would not be touched: 'I remember when I was a kid, we were in the middle of the war, [...] I saw the girls, young girls from my village, smear themselves with shit so they wouldn't be touched, they would put shit on their face and body… Can you imagine doing that?'–translated from French (Morin, 2022, 10:14-10:38). In a way, this could mirror Moroccan women's case: their bodies under the imperialist colonial gaze are objectified, made for consumption or exploitation, in postcards or brothels. Metaphorically, their bodies do not belong to them anymore, until they decide to transgress colonial norms which heavily relied on hypersexualised orientalist ideals.

Moreover, the decision to get tattoos, not only related to challenging colonial Western norms, but also to a gender power imbalance under patriarchal structures.

Feminist readings give an interesting insight into the perception and politics of female bodies and their modification under cultural and social constructs, which dictates how female bodies should look according to patriarchal norms. The bodies of non-white women especially do not belong to themselves, but are usually considered, as seen in the previous

chapter, through the coloniser's gaze, for their own convenience and disposition. Atkinson dissected the way body conformity also has patriarchal roots: 'quite simply, the female body is socially constructed, monitored, regulated, and maintained according to dominant notions of femininity [...] traditional body codes promulgate the idea that feminine bodies are both passive and powerless' (Atkinson, 2003, p.16-7). He adds that the reason given by some women about tattooing themselves comes from gender resistance motives, and agency: 'scores of women tattoo enthusiasts I met stressed the importance of taking personal control over the body', as a way to contest 'dominant codes about gender and beauty' (Atkinson, 2003, p.173). To spoil what could be considered a useful body by tattooing could be seen as pulling the rug out from under prospecting foreign men. Moroccans knew that their body modifications would be considered repulsive and 'vulgar when compared to conventional images of the beautiful female body. For some women, modifying the body in these ways creates [...] personal emancipation.' (p.17).

In a colonial and gendered context of violence, the concept of agency is key to understanding subalternity under structures of oppression and finding out whether or not this tattoo practice could be qualified as a resistance act.

According to Sherry Ortner in *Power and Projects: Reflections on Agency*, agency is the 'capacity for forming intentions and for acting creatively' (Ortner, 2006, p.136), an act which triggers a particular effect or has the capacity to affect things, in a context of what she calls 'serious games'–social life governed by structural norms which would determine one's place–in which the 'agents' are playing by the rules of the community (2006, p.29) or under systems of domination. She adds that in order for the 'serious game' to be performed and agency enacted, players need intentionality, meaning all the ways in which action is cognitively and emotionally pointed toward some purpose (Ortner, 2016). In this context, the serious game in which all individuals had a part to play, and assume risks and consequences if the rules or norms were to be transgressed, was Morocco under the French Protectorate. Considering Moroccan women as subaltern subjects in the Spivak tradition–'between patriarchy and imperialism, subject-constitution and object-formation, the figure of the woman disappears'–(Spivak, 1988, p.306), these individuals had to play by the patriarchal rules of their community and the French settlers, as well as standing in the lowest scale of the colonial system, where they could not reach the elite spheres or be emancipated through an exclusively male education (Pennell, 2003). They might have developed some solidarity within their community, if the practice was organised between local women, or even men who might have participated in the

tattooing, as was the case with Tata's male tattooer. The subjects seemed to form intentions–to ward off foreigners from taking and bothering them. They somehow understood this practice was deemed strange by Westerners. Moreover, they enacted these intentions through creative acts: the intensification, upkeep and mostly shift of meaning of these markings, and the creation of a new purpose. These once pivotal social markers had been transformed and played out by some Moroccan women in a context of inequality and power imbalance under the Protectorate. However, what was the impact on the concerned population, male foreigners? Did it trigger an expected reaction?

At least two French authors from before and during the French Protectorate noted their impressions about these markings. Herber's writings published in 1946 are as follows: 'We can hardly find any practices, magical or otherwise, which explain these designs which "disfigure the creature of God", it is well to say, for there is not a single Christian who would disagree with the opinion of the Muslim jurisconsults on tattoos; but, whatever our impression, we must consider them, until further notice, as attires.'–translated from French (1946, p.344). Later, Herber quotes the author Edmond Doutté in his *Magie et religion dans l'Afrique du Nord*, who in 1909 wrote: 'The tattoo can be considered an ornament, an initiation test, a distinctive tribal mark, a repulsive mark'–translated from French (p.323). This attitude could be seen as a value judgement that has its basis in Orientalism. Referring to Orientalism, the cultural and ideological domination by the Western world onto an imagined Orient on which fantasies and desires are pushed for colonialist purposes, according to Edward Said, these authors are following this orientalist tradition already present in the Protectorate's mindset, as seen in the previous chapter. Orientalists will consider the Orient or 'orientals' 'as an "object" of study, stamped with an otherness as all that is different, whether it be "subject" or "object" but [...] will be, as is customary, passive, non-participating, endowed with a "historical" subjectivity, above all, non-active. non-autonomous, non-sovereign with regard to itself' (Said, 1977, p.97). Even though Doutté and Herber seemed to be aware of their polysemic purposes, they implied their disbelief and aversion towards this body art, a kind of repulsion, which seems then to reach the goal of turning women 'hideous' for foreigners (Jack, 2021, 4:50-5:08).

The power of cultural dissonance and differences of perception is described by Engelke: 'Culture is a way of making sense [and] is also what fills our head in the process of thinking in a particular way [...] my body is cultural, or enculturated, itself' (Engelke, 2018, p.25-28), the same way some foreigners were appalled at body modifications, and the same way individuals are carrying culture, in this case tattoos, within their skin, on enculturated

bodies. Culture is not solely a concept: ‘There is a materiality to culture. It is embodied and enacted’(p.28). The dissonance between Western and Moroccan perceptions of women’s beauty was most likely played out intentionally until the departure of the foreign presence; it can be considered a form of cultural resistance and sabotage of colonial projects. They weaponised an ancient tradition by keeping it alive, found a new intentionality from its traditional purpose, and duly tattooed themselves, as they had done for centuries.

In an attempt at dispossessing the bodies in a ‘serious game’ (Ortner, 2006, p.29) landscape stricken with norms, the Protectorate’s gendered violence triggered a response from Moroccan women, through a little window of agency left: to take control back over their own bodies, by the means of ancient traditions and cultural perceptions.

However, some scholars who look at the sociology and politics of tattoos, like Pitts, highlight that initiated body modification could be seen as a ‘liminal rite of passage’ (Pitts, 2003, p.73), which echoes one of the many social meanings of this practice before colonial structures. This brings the reflection to another scope of resistance: the act itself, rituals, and the sacred meanings attached to them.

### 3.3. Rites of resistance and politics of the spiritual

There is a pitfall about finding a seemingly too easy and heroic solution when it comes to linking tattoos and political or ideological resistance, where ‘researchers are not allowing themselves to be ‘surprised’ by what they find, and are missing the inherent possibilities for exploration and discovery.’ (Atkinson, 2003, p.59-60). Looking back at the original purposes of Amazigh tattoos before they were reappropriated by some Moroccans, another assumption arose, not antithetical to the first one and even possibly complementary to each other.

Hence, one of the Amazigh tattoo’s original indigenous properties is the belief in magic, therapeutic and protective purposes induced by the ritual in itself, the act of tattooing. Traditional North African markings are deeply linked with spirituality, cleansing of the soul, remedy and protection from the ‘evil eye’ thanks to the belief of drawing blood and rituals of embedding ink amulets inside the skin (Bou-Saha 2016, Mesouani 2019). The evil eye is a very prominent belief in the North African and Middle Eastern cultures since Antiquity, which has very real consequences for people’s way of conducting themselves, and shapes social structures

and personal relationships even today: ‘If a mother displayed too much affection for her child, if disaster struck, if crops failed or livestock mysteriously died, if injury or illness befell you, the natural power of the eye could be to blame. However, beliefs and practices concerning the Evil Eye resist interpretation as magic or superstition. Rather, the cultural concept of the Evil Eye incorporates a complex worldview about disability, affection and envy, causes of disaster and harm, trauma, social tensions, and protection of the self in antiquity.’ (Askin, 2019, p.5). The evil eye could be seen as irrational and superstitious from an external position, sometimes even deemed backwards; but it would be a mistake not to study cultural practices–especially the meanings attached to tattoos–in North Africa without incorporating this belief, which very much impacts Maghrebi societies. As seen in Gröning’s work, tattoos were used by the Amazigh to ward off the evil eye, and more generally evil forces: ‘Because the harmful forces prefer to enter people through the bodily orifices [...] the women therefore tattoo their faces in particular, although protective and curative tattoos and paintings are also found on other parts of the body that cannot be protected by clothing at all times’ (Gröning, 1997, p.121). The importance of symbols as protection is prevalent in North Africa, and markings are associated with amulet properties: ‘Whether worn under or on one’s skin, these symbols safeguard the well-being of the wearer, ward off evil spirits, and channel the strength of nature and community to provide levels of protection and support to girls entering womanhood.’ (Mesouani, 2019, p.41). Delving further, there is evidence that chin tattoos specifically played a role in protection from sexual violence: while the vertical line inked from the lips down to the neck highlights a young woman’s features and beauty, the Amazigh people assure that this symbol ‘both sexualise and protect from hypersexualisation. The line both reaches up for divine protection and simultaneously goes down to the earth, grounding her not only in the strength nature provides her but symbolically planting her roots in her community, a community that will protect her from physical or spiritual harm or assault.’ (p.72). Furthermore, in Bou-Saha’s documentary, one tattooed elder informed the interviewer that the act of tattooing in North Africa was usually tied to a chastity rite: an incantation was repeated seven times to ensure the protection of the girl’s virginity while she was being marked, and this rite would take place once more on the day of her wedding (Bou-Saha, 2016). It is therefore possible that some Moroccan women who had markings and decided to mark their daughters borrowed from Amazigh traditions and beliefs so these symbols would act as constant protective amulets from unwanted interactions, thanks to a sacred protective ritual.

Some authors, like Saba Mahmood, link the concept of resistance, agency and rituals. Mahmood, in her work *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject,* describes agency as 'the capacity to realise one's own interests against the weight of custom, tradition, transcendental will, or other obstacles (whether individual or collective)' (Mahmood, 2015, p.8). She illustrates how traditional rites linked to the spiritual realm can be a gateway for sparking agency among women who find themselves in a position of inequality and vulnerability under power structures, by reappropriating religious rules and practices. For her, the component of intentionality, or as she calls it 'desire', is a motor to this rebellion to dominant powers. In her work, Mahmood explores the desire of Egyptian Muslim women not to be bothered or sexually harassed by men in public spaces through wearing the hijab, an Islamic tradition usually deemed oppressive in the Western world. The ritual of prayer, repeated several times a day, was found to be another traditional Islamic practice in which these women would try to better themselves and their personality to become stronger people and properly face gender injustices (Mahmood, 2015). The women exploring religious life through wearing the hijab, attending prayers or gathering at the mosque, say it is external actions that will imprint themselves in their 'inside': 'But you *must* wear the veil, first because it is God's command [*hukm allah*], and then, with time, because your inside learns to feel shy without the veil, and if you take it off, your entire being feels uncomfortable [*mish rādī*] about it.' (p.156). Mahmood invites the reader to look at agency not just as an act of resistance, but also as 'a modality of action', saying that 'what is striking here is that instead of innate human desires eliciting outward forms of conduct, it is the sequence of practices and actions one is engaged in that determines one's desires and emotions. In other words, action does not issue forth from natural feelings but *creates* them' (p.157).

Here, while the intentionality through the use of sacred means by Muslim Egyptian women is very similar to Moroccan women's intentionality to subtract themselves from gender sexual violence and domination, it would not be in the same way and not in the same line of sacredness. The will to tattoo themselves, tattoo their daughters or warn and advise about getting tattoos as protection is unrelated to Islamic teachings–current Islamic movements in Morocco discourage body modifications or displays of 'Amazighness' (Mesouani, 2019). What Mahmood interestingly brings to the discussion is the repetition of a sacred gesture or ritual that changes or even is a way to change who the individual is inside, by triggering an outward action that would have repercussions on their personality and self-discipline. The ritual of tattooing could be likened to these Egyptian women's Islamic prayer in its implementation.

Just like rites of ensuring chastity and protection are sung, the inking thorn repeatedly pressed into the skin of many women, both rites are meant to provide these women with protection, physical and spiritual wholeness or cleanse them from evil influences – the tattoo ritual, with its complexity, would moreover bring luck and prosperity through the marking of amulet patterns. According to Mahmood, the mosque participants, through prayers and hijab-wearing, 'treat the body as a medium for, rather than a sign of' (p.166), a way to internalise qualities which will help them face the outside world and sexual harassment. What some Moroccan women most likely did, by metamorphosing this ancient practice of beauty to a practice of resistance against sexual violence, was using ancient traditional rituals and beliefs which made their bodies both mediums and signs: a medium for protective qualities, and a sign to ward off the unwanted. Although, as mentioned earlier, women's bodies are particularly prone to be materialised and talked about as metaphors of countries, territories, or weapons, which is biased and simplistic. This hypothesis should be seen rather as an embodied attempt at deviating colonial projects by the means of rituals used to resist.

What is interesting here is the relation between bodily rituals and their impact on imperialist power structures. The potential of disordering structures of power through visual practice rites has been explored by Aalberts, Kurowska, Leander and Mälksoo. For them, rituals in politics have two dimensions: 'they are a specific kind of practice by their formal structure, repetitive nature and magic pull; and they can be simultaneously stabilising and disordering' (Aalberts, 2020, p.258). Ritualistic Moroccan tattoos layered with rich social and sociological markers were considered the norm, and were making sense of the world and relationships inside the Amazigh communities. To get tattooed was a rite of passage between childhood, adulthood, key life events (Mesouani, 2019, p.12), liminal moments in women's lives where they would be redefined in their role inside the group. Aalberts et al. quote Turner (Turner, 1977, p.52) who parallels rites of passage with rites or ceremonies of power structures 'during which rules, taboos and hierarchies are exposed, broken, renegotiated, played and experimented with' (Aalberts et al., 2020, p.242), which leaves room for disordering state structures. Rites of passage are the moments when communities and societies renegotiate their identity, redefine themselves and make sense of the environment around them, especially after collective trauma.

Uday Chandra, in the article 'Rethinking Subaltern Resistance', suggests that subaltern resistance should be approached 'as negotiation, not negation' of colonial powers (Chandra, 2015, p.569). As such, Schröder proposes that rituals can be gateways for allowing spaces of

transformation and resistance to colonial structures, precisely because rituals are intrinsically negotiating the status quo, the rules, and the roles played by individuals in society: 'rituals not only preserve or strengthen an established socio-religious order, they also undermine enhanced authorities and serve as spaces of subaltern action in predominant hegemonic structures.' (Schröder, 2011, p.216). While he frames the rite of hook-swinging among Indian subalterns during the British Raj as a shift from a religious purpose to a 'social practice' (p.225) of resistance, here, tattoos were already social, but turned to a political practice of opposition. To Schröder, the mere continuation of rite can be seen as a subaltern form of resistance to colonial systems (p.226), and argues that rites can be made of both 'ritual action' and 'discursive discourse' while it contributes to the 'negotiation of identity' (p. 228). According to him, while practices may encounter a shift in their intended effect, the simple continuation of rituals would be necessary to constitute resistance, if disapproved of by the dominant structures. Therefore, this definition mirrors Moroccan Amazigh women who apparently multiplied their tattoos (Jack, 2021), and might have triggered Moroccan Arab women's involvement in the practice, as in Tata's case.

These 'repetitive invocations of words or rhythmic uses of the body in ritual' (Aalberts et al., 2020, p.243), and the steady perpetuation of rites (Schröder, 2011, p.226) are at the core of everyday resistance, drawn once more from feminist theorists. Body rituals, ordinary because of their role as social markers, sacred at the same time, structured by repetitive inlays of ink and incantations on many Moroccan girls, have the potential of disrupting or stabilising rules/norms. Enloe, in her article 'The Mundane Matters', looks at the everyday as trivial, a routine, a steady rhythm through time, the unremarkable, which by definition is unexceptional. It also delves into the emotional. Seemingly pre-political, it appears inconsequential, 'causally weightless' (Enloe, 2011, p.447). It is the idea that the power is the most at work specifically where it is the least apparent, and most importantly in the private space, which in that case relates to the tattoo process which was made inside homes, between families, mothers and daughters, at least for my grandmother.

Consequently, the transformed ritual of traditional Moroccan tattoos is a practice almost lost to time. It can thus be said that Moroccan women attempted to impose their ideas and will, and participated in a form of resistance and structure disruption by meddling in colonial projects for as long as needles and amulets were pushed into their skins. This ritual, believed to trigger sacred protective powers against the evil eye according to Moroccan popular lore,

exceeded the expected role of deflecting colonial sexual violence from happening. Looking at the practice as a negotiation of power (Chandra, 2015, p.569), this tattoo mutation symbolically negotiated and confronted indigenous protective beliefs against imperialist structures. It somehow allowed ancient spiritual practices, usually disregarded, to silently meddle with international colonial projects.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

‘There’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless’. There are only the deliberately silenced or the preferably unheard.’ Arundhati Roy (2006, p.330).

The present research tried to enlighten an unsung aspect of a dying practice among subaltern women in Morocco. This rumoured body modification, deviated from its original social marker, could have had several purposes. In the first case, it could have been an instrument meant to counteract the hold on subaltern women’s bodies exerted by French imperialist and patriarchal policies and ideologies. In the second hypothesis, it is a ritual which could have facilitated a very quiet intrusion of ancient spiritual beliefs of protection into international colonial projects, in the frame of resistance as a negotiation of powers. There are many layers about the meanings of these tattoos, to the point that it can be assumed that body art easily shifts, unfolds and is used in different purposes according to the context, which explains the polysemy of this tradition. Under a colonial ‘serious game’ frame (Ortner, 2006), as explored in Chapter 3, where social rules must be observed by every individual, especially subaltern women, the resort to shift a tradition exclusive to them may have helped them regain control over their bodies, by subverting the institutional gender exploitation at the time.

However, these hypotheses which demonstrate the rebellious hallmark of these acts perpetrated by subaltern women do have their share of doubts and shadow. During the interview, Tata expressed doubts about the efficiency of tattoos: ‘she says no, she says that's what they were told, but the Berbers were tattooed, they went with foreigners. They had a lot of tattoos, the Berbers [...] she was told it was to keep out strangers, she's not convinced of that’. She was not convinced that these tattoos reached their goal of preventing unwanted male attention, even though she and other girls were told it was to keep the foreigners away. Moreover, photo archives and documents from the colonial era in Morocco put in a documentary directed by Hugues Nancy show that facial tattoos were at least not a hindrance to be involved in the sex trade, as some women living in reserved districts would display at that time (Nancy, France 3, 2021). Furthermore, prostitution aside, relationships still occurred between Europeans and Moroccan women as my grandma alluded to when she said that some Amazigh women, who were heavily tattooed, still ‘went with’ seemingly unbothered foreigners. This would mean that either the barrier of cultural differences and perceptions would be broken and overcome after a while, or that the protective properties attached to tattoos

would wear off according to the social beliefs of the time. Yet beyond attempts at subverting colonial projects and disinterested foreigners' attention, efforts can only be made this far, and tattoos did not seem to ensure complete segregation between the local women and Western settlers.

Thus, a question can be raised: can an act of resistance be called resistant if it did not meet, completely or at all, the expected results? In the present case, it seems that the effects were partially reached. Even though there is no trace of tattoo prohibition occurring at any time in Morocco, the practice most probably unsettled Western sensitivities. Indeed, and at least for the two French orientalist authors Doutté and Herber mentioned in the previous chapter, tattoos appeared to have disconcerted them, as they wrote about this practice having repulsive functions, and spoiling the creatures of God (Herber, 1947, Doutté, 1909). Either way, the singularity of such a practice for foreigners probably dissuaded some men from approaching Moroccan women too eagerly. The definite outcome of that practice is inconclusive. This interpretation falls short to what is considered resistance, the definition of it; if everyday acts can be deemed as acts of resistance, can everything and anything be called resistance then, as long as it has been decided to put the word resistance onto it? To answer the question, perhaps the qualification of resistance does reside in the act itself, its upholding as well as the formation of an intent, more than the complete achievement of a goal, for as long as its very existence disturbs or tries to disturb dominant norms (Schröder, 2011).

This study also has its own cloud to the horizon: the presence of one interview, which is not enough to establish with certainty a generalised occurrence of this phenomenon. As aforementioned, Moroccan tattoos realised under the scope of resistance against colonialism is a widespread rumour among many families; but the majority of its agents have passed away. This research needs more testimonies from elders to explore the topic further, and confirm with more certainty this aspect of the practice. The lack of records in that regard mirrors what Chrifi Alaoui wrote about her 'grandmother's lived experiences during the colonial and postcolonial period' and 'the importance of women taking control of their own narratives' (Chrifi Alaoui, 2020, p.294). Guha also warns about the scarcity and loss of discourse coming from subaltern actors, who usually saw their actions first ignored or falsified under the colonial narrative, and then reinterpreted by the same civil servants no longer working in the administration, while still decentring their stories from them (Guha, 1995). It is why collecting testimonies from

elders matters, as they help research and history by considering not just states' official discourses, but people's everyday stories.

However, what can be said about this practice today in Morocco, in a 2022 context? According to Mesouani, this tattoo tradition, this time in all its purposes and meanings, is endangered (Mesouani, 2019). The upholding of this tradition could be seen as defiant against the Arab-Islamic national identity of post-independence Morocco, which for a long time tried to suppress cultural manifestations of Amazighness. In contemporary Morocco, elderly women can even be pressured to laser off their markings, as 'women whose tattoos once worn as badges of honour are now being judged as wearing marks of shame.' (Mesouani, 2019, p.12). Shame, external pressure, national identity, a more literal religious reading and even social hierarchy are some reasons that led many Moroccan women to remove their tattoos. My grandmother confided in the interview that she became embarrassed about them: 'at the beginning it was well regarded, everyone did it, but afterwards it was a bit... not the low casts of society, but a less well regarded society. That's why she was a bit embarrassed afterwards, to keep her tattoo. [...] The upper classes didn't have tattoos, so it was a bit like the underprivileged social strata, so it wasn't necessary to show'. Another time, she told me it was because tattoos were considered *haram*–forbidden–according to current Islamic teachings about body modifications. Traditional tattoos face stigma, both under a globalised cultural homogenisation, which tends to dissolve indigenous customs in a Western mould, and more strongly in contemporary Morocco. This body practice, worn on the face at the very least, tends to shy away younger generations; however, the demand for traditional tattoos in Morocco has seen a rise in recent years, albeit on more discreet body areas (Lefébure, 2019). In this newspaper article, the resurgence of this practice is being explored through interviews. According to a young tattooed woman named Amal, the act of getting an Amazigh tattoo is a way to honour her roots: 'I told myself that this was my identity and that there was no way that Islam would forbid me to be what I am'–translated from French (Lefébure, 2019). Another woman, Aïda, took the plunge and got face tattoos. She clarifies that her respect for this tradition comes from its 'non patriarchal characteristic' and as a way to 'subvert the Western make-up standards imposed on us' (Lefébure 2019). She adds that the act of getting markings is for her a form of resistance against 'Wahhabi ideas, imported from the Gulf, which are killing our cultural heritage' (Lefébure, 2019). Finally, for her, it is an act of historical remembrance which she embodies,

her story of a resistance to ‘the patriarchy, Western supremacy and imported Islamism’ (Lefébure 2019).

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