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Preservation or Innovation: The Impacts of Colonialism and the Economy on Traditional Moroccan Crafts

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Abstract

Artisans of traditional crafts in Morocco face extreme exploitation from middlemen/resellers and are unable to make a living by producing their crafts. As a result, these strongholds of Moroccan and Amazigh (Berber) culture face extinction as artisans are forced to leave the craft fields to pursue other job opportunities. While the economic structure of the traditional craft sector plays a large role in perpetuating this exploitation, these structures stem from French colonial policies. Previous research addresses the direct impacts of French colonialism on Moroccan traditional crafts but fails to address the legacy and continuing impacts, or coloniality, of colonial policies on today's artisans. I employed document research, and informal and semi-structured interviews, conversations, and participant observation with female artisan weavers at the Anou Cooperative in Fes, Morocco, and Fatima Oulad Thami, a Moroccan-Dutch henna artist, to illuminate the connection between the French colonial recategorization of Morocco's traditional crafts and the exploitation of artisans and stagnation of craft development in Morocco today. My argument is threefold. First, the French colonial recategorization of the Moroccan craft sector led to the disempowerment and marginalization of artisans as creative forces. Second, a transfer of power within the "coloniality of being" hierarchy facilitated the exploitation artisans face at the hands of middlemen/resellers. Third, artisan-run initiatives, such as the Anou Cooperative, act as decolonial forces that grapple with ideas of preservation and innovation while creating a sustainable future for the Moroccan craft sector.

Introduction

Though traditional crafts in Morocco occupy an essential place in the nation's economy and represent strongholds of Amazigh¹ (Berber) history, culture, and traditions, these crafts face extinction because of the exploitation artisans face from middlemen/resellers. Representing most handicraft sectors in Morocco including blacksmithing, leatherworking, carpet weaving, and henna art, traditional Moroccan crafts make up 8% of the country's annual GDP (The Borgen Project 2021) and employ about 20% of Morocco's workforce (Hatim 2020). Furthermore, Amazigh women, who represent a large portion of this workforce, preserve their culture, traditions, and identities by including Amazigh motifs and designs in their crafts such as carpet weaving (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol 2023, 356). Traditional crafts also represent one of the few employment opportunities available to rural women, and by participating in traditional craft cooperatives, women create strongly bonded communities and "second families" outside of their homes (Houari, 2023). However, as of 2016, unofficial statistics reported that the number of artisans in Morocco was decreasing by 17% every year due to the exploitation artisans experience in the markets, even as sales continued to increase each consecutive year (Anou, 2016a). This project aims to investigate the impacts of the economy and its structures on the traditional craft sector in Morocco, primarily through the lens of female, Amazigh, artisan weavers at the Anou Cooperative in Fes, Morocco, and to a smaller extent Moroccan henna art. I argue first that the French colonial recategorization of the Moroccan craft sector led to the disempowerment and marginalization of artisans as creative forces. Second, a transfer of power within the "coloniality of being" hierarchy facilitated the exploitation artisans face at the hands of middlemen/resellers. Third, artisan-run initiatives, such as the Anou Cooperative, act as

¹ The Amazigh (pl. Imazighen) people are the indigenous people of North Africa including Morocco.

decolonial forces that grapple with ideas of preservation and innovation while creating a sustainable future for the Moroccan craft sector.

Literature Review

A large focus of this project centers around the economy and its impacts on carpet weaving in Morocco, but it is impossible to appreciate this relationship without understanding the legacy of French colonialism in Morocco's craft sector. From 1912-1956 Morocco existed as a protectorate under French colonial rule (Irbouh 2001, 1). While research exists regarding the direct impacts of France's colonial administration in Morocco on traditional crafts, no research focuses on the legacy and continuing impacts of French colonialism on the craft sector. Furthermore, the existing research does not account for how this legacy perpetuates colonial power dynamics that facilitate the exploitation of artisans. The lack of research addressing these connections ignores the colonial root of the economic realities artisans face and perpetuates damaging hierarchies of knowledge that stagnate the carpet weaving sector of Moroccan crafts. Thus, my research aims to fill these gaps by situating the relationship between traditional Moroccan crafts and the economy within Sabelo J. Ndlovu-Gatsheni's (2013) framework of coloniality and highlighting the decolonial work of artisans and artisan-run initiatives.

Why Decoloniality in the 21st Century?

Ndlovu-Gatsheni's article "Why Decoloniality in the 21st Century?" highlights how the impacts of colonialism do not end when the colonial administration leaves the colonized territory. As Ramon Grosfoguel, a leading Latin American thinker and theorist, states, "One of the most powerful myths of the twentieth century was the notion that the elimination of colonial administrations amounted to the decolonization of the world" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 14). This myth ignores the lasting impacts of colonial governments, power structures, and policies and

leads Ndlovu-Gatsheni to discuss the differences between colonialism and coloniality and raise the question of “how to extricate (ex)-colonised peoples from coloniality” (11). With a focus on African countries as a prominent division of this group of “(ex)-colonised peoples,” Ndlovu-Gatsheni defines colonialism as “a historical process that culminated in the invasion, conquest, and direct administration of Africa by states like Spain, Portugal, Britain, and France for purposes of enhancing their prestige as empires, for exploitation of natural and human resources and export of excess population, for the benefit of the empire” (13). Thus, colonialism is a historical event that has an endpoint in each colonized country. However, coloniality is different.

Citing Nelson Maldonado-Torres’ definition Ndlovu-Gatsheni writes:

Coloniality...refers to long-standing patterns of power that emerged as a result of colonialism, but that define culture, labour, intersubjectivity relations, and knowledge production well beyond the strict limits of colonial administrations. Thus, coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. (13)

Furthermore, race acts as an organizing principle of coloniality in that it hierarchizes people according to binaries such as primitive vs. civilized and developed vs. undeveloped (11).

Using these definitions, Ndlovu-Gatsheni postulates decoloniality as the solution to these lasting impacts of colonialism and argues decoloniality is premised on and fights against three concepts: coloniality of power; coloniality of knowledge; and coloniality of being. “Coloniality of knowledge” centers around ideas of what qualifies as knowledge as well as who generates specific kinds of knowledge and for what purpose (11). “Coloniality of being” reflects hierarchies of human value, and creates the structure in which “African humanity” was allowed to be questioned, and the resulting processes of “objectification,” “thingification,” and

“commodification” of Africans (12). He further argues existing coloniality marginalizes indigenous knowledge (11) and states decoloniality “struggles to bring into intervening existence another interpretation that brings forward...a silenced view of the event” (13). These ideas of colonialism, coloniality, and decoloniality frame and directly relate to the relationship between French colonialism in Morocco, traditional Moroccan crafts, and the economy. Specifically, the ideas and impacts of the coloniality of knowledge and the coloniality of being are clear when we examine how the French colonial administration co-opted crisis narratives to intervene in the craft sector and thus reorganized and recategorized the textile industry of Morocco.

Crisis Narratives of the Traditional Craft Sector of Fes

Orit Ouaknine-Yekutieli’s (2015) research examines the evolution of European and Moroccan narratives of traditional crafts in Fes over the 19th and 20th centuries and how narratives of crisis were employed as both colonial tools and tools of resistance. 19th-century Moroccan discourses discuss Fes’ craftspeople as intelligent people who continued to gain their intelligence through “professional proficiency” (Ouaknine-Yekutieli 2015, 114). These artisans were further thought of as “a well-organized and self-confident body.” In contrast, European depictions, particularly in works by traders and travelers, centered around propagating “the notion of a superior Christian Occident the flipside of which was a decadent, sensual, and primitive Muslim Orient” (Ouaknine-Yekutieli 2015, 116). This hierarchy of human value demonstrates how the French colonial administration employed ideas of the coloniality of being along racial lines. This then allowed European discourses to report the craft sector in states of drastic decline and claim “that only Europeans (i.e., French administrators) can protect and save the Moroccan people from their incompetence” (Ouaknine-Yekutieli 2015, 117-118). Thus, Ouaknine-Yekutieli (2015) goes on to claim that the French administration readily “adopted the

discourse of decline to justify what it deemed to be benevolent intervention [in the craft sector]” (120), or the recategorization and streamlining of the textile industry that I will discuss in the next section.

French Colonial Recategorization and Reorganization of the Textile Industry in Morocco

Throughout the colonial period, the French administration forcibly reorganized textile production, by region (Becker 2006, 177) and “deemed... whatever was not useful to the politics of the Protectorate government were unproductive, or possibly dangerous” (Irbouh 2001, 5). Thus, French scholars recorded “traditional” weaving patterns, fixed tribal districts, and categorized weaving areas throughout Morocco (Messick 1987, 219). Through this process, weavers of a particular group were required to produce carpets and blankets using predetermined colors and motifs. Under the guise of preserving Moroccan culture by streamlining what they perceived to be a messy, unsustainable, inefficient system, and “guarantee[ing] the indigenous character of Moroccan rugs” (Messick 1987, 220), the French ironically and purposefully disappeared countless indigenous designs and uprooted many others from their geographic origins (Cherif D’Ouezzan 2023). Furthermore, through this system, artisans produced work that largely embodied a French colonial notion and perspective of traditional Moroccan crafts and designs rather than designs that were rooted in the centuries of history of their land and culture (Anou 2016b). Thus, while the French administration employed crisis narratives and recategorized the textile industry during colonialism, these actions laid the foundation for the continuing coloniality within Morocco’s carpet weaving sector.

The coloniality within carpet weaving is clear when we examine the legacy of the recategorization policy within the framework of the coloniality of knowledge. First, the linking of designs to specific regions created the foundation for the link between region and design still

seen today. Second, the recategorization and uprooting of indigenous designs created a break in the chain of inherited memory concerning these patterns' meanings and backgrounds as evident in some younger weavers' lack of knowledge about the meanings of many traditional designs (Houari, 2023). Furthermore, the designs that were promoted and implemented by the French are still the designs that are presently popular, especially in foreign markets (Driscoll 2023). These designs are now internationally thought of as “authentic” or “traditional” Moroccan designs (Driscoll 2023), while, in reality, these labels stem from the decisions of French colonizers in the 20th century and not from the history of Morocco as a country or the cultures of its inhabitants (Cherif D'Ouezzan 2023). Thus, we see how the French created new knowledge and designs that disappeared Moroccan and Amazigh knowledge of carpet design. In this context, the French colonizers created new knowledge during the time of colonialism, but that knowledge and how it organizes carpet design in Morocco continues today. This coloniality of knowledge further perpetuates the marginalization of indigenous knowledge that was disappeared under French colonial rule (Cherif D'Ouezzan 2023). These white foreigners colonized a country, employed ideas of white supremacy, and took a Eurocentric approach to justify creating systems of power that reinforced the colonizers' misinformed, pre-existing prejudices and stereotypes of the colonized and indigenous inhabitants. Such policies and decisions continue to impact artisans' lives today and perpetuate hierarchies of power allowing for the exploitation of artisans by middlemen/resellers which creates the unsustainable economic realities artisans face.

The Economy

As previously mentioned, traditional crafts provide an important source of income for many rural individuals, especially women, but this income rarely constitutes a living wage (Anou 2017a). Middlemen/resellers represent the majority of shopowners selling artisans' products in

the markets of Morocco, especially in the bigger cities such as Marrakech and Fes (Anou 2017b). However, when analyzing transactions with middlemen/resellers, artisans earn an average of 4% of the price the customer pays, while the middleman keeps the other 96%. This 4% that the artisans receive is often significantly below minimum wage in Morocco² and sometimes does not even cover the artisans' cost of materials (Anou 2017a, Driscoll 2023, Ousbigh 2023). The Borgen Project (2021) claims that artisans must rely on middlemen/resellers to access larger markets because many traditional craft cooperatives are located in rural, isolated areas far away from the cities. Furthermore, initiatives and projects implemented to help artisans escape the extreme poverty they face due to their reliance on middlemen/resellers create unsustainable systems where artisans still depend on others, often foreigners, to sell their products (Driscoll 2023).

Celia Garza (2015) promotes forming cooperatives or “collective... organizations... where capital and means of production are collective” as successful ways for artisans to become empowered and gain economic power (12). In this context, cooperatives provide artisans with “increased economic security...and contributions to the economic well-being of their [artisans'] families” (Garza 2015, 6). However, she goes on to quote women cooperative members in the Rif region of Morocco who stated they would prefer a job that offered them a steady income and the only reason they had not left their cooperatives was because there were no alternative job opportunities for them (Garza 2015, 20). This lack of a stable income and alternative job opportunities shows how these women may be willing to accept jobs for below minimum wage salaries because they do not have other options which opens the door for exploitation.

² National minimum wage in Morocco is about \$10 USD per day.

Methods

As much of the existing research about traditional crafts in Morocco has been conducted by foreigners who have perpetuated colonial stereotypes and narratives, and marginalized the voices of artisans, I was very aware of my position as a white, American, foreigner while I conducted my research. Thus, centering the voices of Moroccan artisans was very important in how I formatted my project. Therefore, some of my primary methods included informal conversations and semi-structured interviews, which I supplemented with document research. Furthermore, I felt it was important to combine conversations with artisans with learning the hands-on techniques of their crafts to understand the work that goes into each product and learn more about their creative processes. Thus, participant observation was my other primary method.

My participant observation and interviews took place over three and a half weeks. I spent two of these weeks participating in a residency workshop at the Anou Cooperative in Fes in which I learned the entire process of making two styles of Moroccan rugs, including the design process, setting up the loom, the dyeing process for the wool, and weaving techniques³. At this point in my research process, I had lived in Rabat, Morocco for four months as a student studying abroad with Middlebury College. As such, I was comfortable speaking Moroccan Conversational Arabic (MCA) and my entire residency, including instruction, conversations, and interviews, took place in MCA. I spoke with a total of five people at the Anou, but my two main interlocutors and weaving partners were two Amazigh women artisans named Rachida Ousbigh and Rabha Houari who are the president of the Women's Cooperative of Khenifra and the secretary of Cooperative Nahda in Souq al-Had respectively. While this project primarily focuses on carpet weaving, I also researched and participated in henna art⁴ workshops. Through these

³ See Appendices A and B for pictures and more information.

⁴ Henna is a plant that is used to make a paste that temporarily stains the skin and is believed to contain baraka, or good blessings. Henna art "is a crucial element in the life of a Moroccan woman and is

workshops, I interviewed a Moroccan-Dutch woman henna artist named Fatima Oulad Thami who lives in Holland and whose perspectives provide interesting comparisons to those of Rachida and Rabha and my other interlocutors.

Overall, three of my conversations that took place as ongoing discussions during my residency were conducted in MCA, which I then translated into English, and my other three interviews were conducted in English in person or over Zoom. I admittedly conducted this research in somewhat of a backward fashion. I completed my fieldwork and data collection before I completed my literature review as a result of scheduling and time constraints of how long I could stay in Morocco after the end of my study abroad program. This was both a benefit and a drawback to my project. In terms of benefits, I was able to have wide-ranging conversations with artisans and gather information about many different areas of the craft sector, some of which fell outside of the scope of my project such as the environmental impacts of traditional crafts and the sustainability of materials. However, because of the diversity of information I was able to gather, finding common themes and narrowing the scope of my project was more difficult than I anticipated. Though these interviews covered a wide array of topics, common themes did run through our conversations and formed the basis for my main findings and claims.

associated with the major celebrations in her life. It is first applied when a girl attains puberty to mark her passage into womanhood. When she is a bride, it is thought to enhance her charms for her husband. Finally, it is used to celebrate fertility when she has her first child—especially when the firstborn is male” (Essaydi 2013, 63).

Findings

The Colonial Recategorization of the Craft Sector Led to the Disempowerment and Marginalization of Artisans as Creative Forces

One theme that recurred in my conversations with artisans at the Anou was the idea that “There is a fundamental assumption that artisans should just create and leave the rest of the work like design, selling, and business development to others because they cannot do it” (Anou 2016a). Thus, in terms of carpet weaving, the artisans are only able to create what has already been created and do not have the ability to innovate new ideas or engage with the selling and business development aspects of their craft. I argue the suppression of artisans' creativity stems from the French colonial recategorization of carpet design. Because the French colonial administration divided production by region and forced artisans to make specific designs (Messick 1987, 219), they created a system that discouraged what the French perceived to be potentially dangerous creativity and innovation (Irbouh 2001, 5). An excerpt from a letter of protest from carpet weavers, when the recategorization policy went into effect, demonstrates the weavers' knowledge of the detrimental impacts such a policy would inflict upon their generation of weavers as well as those who would come after them.

The weavers stated:

“We refuse to believe that the administration wants to privilege artisanal production of one considered region and assign it a single inspirational theme because this will...destroy the precious place of private initiative by disciplining the creative imagination and taste, and plunge our national artisanat into trouble, uncertainty, fear of tomorrow, stagnation, and its attendant misery.” (Ouaknine-Yekutieli 2015, 123)

Thus, the weavers knew what would occur if they were forced to give up their agency over their creativity which is exactly what happened.

As stated above, the recategorization of the textile industry limited opportunities for innovation and stagnated the development of the Moroccan carpet weaving industry by promoting French-approved imitations of Moroccan designs (Dirscoll 2023, Cherif D'Ouezzan 2023). The coloniality of knowledge of these actions is seen in the international popularity of French-approved designs that are labeled and sold as “traditional” and “authentic” Moroccan designs. This coloniality is further seen in current artisans’ beliefs that they are incapable of creating new designs. For example, just before Fatiha Ait Ouagadir of Cooperative Tifawin became an artisan leader at the Anou, she was asked to sketch out a new idea for a rug design. Struggling with the concept of a new idea, she sketched a design she had woven many times. When she was pressed to create something new by rearranging the design she had sketched, she continued to struggle and eventually gave up saying it was not possible (Anou 2016b). Artisan weavers in the colonial period foresaw the lasting impacts of the colonial power structures that limited and regulated artisan weavers’ creativity that are clear in Fatiha’s struggles. The recategorization process devalued artisans’ knowledge and skills and created power dynamics in which the white colonizers regulated and influenced the creation and perpetuation of knowledge within colonized people of color and this coloniality of knowledge continues to impact Morocco’s current and future generations of artisan weavers.

A Transfer of Power Within the Coloniality of Being Hierarchy Facilitated the Exploitation Artisans Face at the Hands of Middlemen/Resellers

As discussed above, the idea of coloniality of being reflects hierarchies of human value and allows for the questioning of Africans’ humanity and the objectification and commodification of African human beings (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 12). In terms of French colonialism in Morocco, we see a hierarchy of power that values Europeans over Moroccans in

the French colonial administration's ideas of saving the Moroccan craft sectors from its artisans' incompetence (Ouaknine-Yekutieli 2015, 117-118). We further see this hierarchy in the recategorization of textile designs that suppressed Morocco's artisans' creativity and agency over their design as the French believed their ideas and production practices were superior (Messick 1987, 219, Cherif D'Ouezzan 2023). Thus, I argue the suppression of artisans' creativity is the thread that directly connects the French colonial recategorization of carpet designs with the continued economic exploitation of artisans by middlemen/resellers.

During the colonial period, the French administrators maintained power in the system of carpet weaving production. They determined the patterns artisans wove, how and where the artisans sold their products, and to a large extent influenced the cycle of supply and demand to popularize French-approved imitations of Moroccan designs. These powers now lay in the hands of middlemen/resellers (Anou 2017b). Thus, the hierarchy of human value within the coloniality of being shifted, and middlemen/resellers replaced French administrators at the top, while artisans remained disempowered and devalued at the bottom. As stated above, artisans are not thought of as creative forces in Morocco's craft sectors today. Instead of change and progress, the language surrounding artisans focuses more on preservation and tradition while innovation and creativity are used to describe outside designers who go through the middlemen/resellers to order and buy products (Anou 2016b). Despite their enormous skill, the colonial legacy of artisans' stagnated creativity and loss of agency means many artisans must rely on middlemen/resellers to sell their products. Furthermore, as many rural artisans lack exposure to bigger markets, middlemen/resellers are seen as knowledgeable people who understand how the markets work, what products' values are, and what artisans are allowed to earn (Driscoll 2023). These power dynamics allow middlemen/resellers to spread misinformation which further allows

them to exploit artisans through extremely low wages. The middlemen/resellers hold the power to shape the type of products and designs the artisans produce based on perceptions of middlemen/resellers' knowledge of market interest. Thus, shifts in the hierarchy of the coloniality of being, in this context, continue to perpetuate coloniality and exploitation of artisans in the craft sectors of Morocco. As such, the colonial recategorization of the Moroccan textile industry resulting in the suppression of artisan's creativity and loss of their agency in part created the foundation for the exploitation artisans continue to face from middlemen/resellers.

Artisan-Run Initiatives Act as Decolonial Forces that Grapple with Ideas of Preservation and Innovation while Creating A Sustainable Future for the Moroccan Craft Sector

The Anou Cooperative

The Anou Cooperative was co-founded by Moroccan artisan and farmer Brahim Mansouri and U.S. Peace Corps Volunteer Dan Driscoll to combat the exploitation artisans face from middlemen/resellers in today's market (Driscoll 2023). Now, the Anou is a fully artisan-owned and run collective of about 90 cooperatives and over 900 artisans of many different crafts (Houari 2023) that works to empower artisans with all the skills they need to bypass middlemen/resellers and sell their products online through direct market access (Ousbigh 2023). A central pillar of the Anou Cooperative's model is that "solutions to complex problems that afflict vulnerable communities can only be developed from within" those communities because they are the experts on their situation and goals for the future (Anou 2014a). Thus, the Anou champions the importance of artisan involvement and agency in every aspect of their crafts and functions as a networking tool, resource center, and online platform for artisans to both sell their products and share knowledge. As opposed to the middleman model where artisans receive 4% of the sold price of a product while the middleman earns the other 96%, the Anou model

teaches artisans how to accurately calculate prices for their products taking into account material costs and wages for the weavers (Ousbigh 2023). This model allows artisans to make minimum wage or above and earn 100% of the price they set for the product which helps provide for their families and provides artisans with more social power as economic actors (Anou 2017a). This model further provides a path for turning the perception of careers in the craft sector from a last resort to a viable source of income for many people.

The Anou overcomes other barriers artisans face in selling their products, such as illiteracy and corruption within cooperatives, by employing a fully icon-based computer program (Ousbigh 2023, Houari 2023) and complete transparency of the Anou's finances (Anou 2015). Furthermore, the Anou's artisan leaders run trainings that educate artisans about the exploitation they face from middlemen/resellers, help artisans learn English, and run design workshops to encourage artisans to learn new techniques and be creative and innovative with their designs (Ousbigh 2023, Houari 2023, Driscoll 2023). With a fully artisan-owned and run operation, there is no need to rely on foreigners to run the business. Furthermore, by rooting the solution to the challenges artisans face within the artisan community, the Anou has developed the first generation of a sustainable nationwide network of artisans sharing knowledge and experiences to change the perception of the craft sector in Morocco from a last resort to a viable and stable source of income. As stated above, decoloniality tries to "bring into intervening existence another interpretation that brings forward...a silenced view of the event and...shows the limits of imperial ideology disguised as the true (total) interpretation of the events" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013, 13). Thus, by reclaiming agency and power over the entire production and distribution process, these artisans have reclaimed their voices and created a decolonial institution telling the silenced story of the exploitation artisans face as a result of coloniality within the craft sector.

Preservation v. Innovation - The Anou Artisans

As previously mentioned, traditional crafts, specifically the designs artisans use, represent their heritage, culture, and identity, especially in the Amazigh community (Laghssais & Comins-Mingol 2023, 356). For example, Mustapha Chaouai, one of the artisan leaders at the Anou, spoke in a promotional video about how most of the designs found in his region have been inherited from their parents and ancestors (Anou 2014b). He went on to say that when the Amazigh communities faced extreme marginalization under French colonialism and under the Arab majority government after Morocco gained independence, the weavers played a large role in preserving letters from Tifinagh (the Amazigh alphabet) by weaving the letters as designs into their rugs (Anou 2014b). Today you continue to see symbols Amazigh women used to tattoo on their bodies and letters from the Amazigh alphabet woven into textiles and carpets (Anou 2014b).

Despite the fact the French administration alienated many designs from their origins and disappeared countless other techniques and uses of patterns (Cherif D'Ouezzan 2023), the importance of preserving the patterns and designs that remain, and the craft itself, is evident in how the Anou artisans talk about their craft. All the Anou artisans I spoke with had the desire to keep pushing the boundaries of their skills and to innovate new techniques and designs (Ousbigh 2023, Houari 2023). What I found interesting was they still see this innovation as a way of preserving their craft and heritage. For example, Rachida said, “We are proud of our progress and products and want to keep improving on all fronts – and want people to enjoy what we make because what we make is part of our heritage and by making our products we keep our heritage alive... everything we make is a part of ourselves. I put a part of myself into everything that I make. That’s no small thing” (Anou 2021). Furthermore, in 2014, some of the Anou’s artisan

leaders participated in a craft exchange program with an artist from the UK who helped run a design workshop that enabled weavers to use new techniques to come up with their own designs for rugs by using their stories, environment, or ideas as inspiration (Anou 2014c). In this context, Mustapha said, “Working with a UK designer didn’t feel like our culture was going away or being ignored; no, our culture will be preserved because it is the inspiration to create new ideas and communicate them internationally” (Anou 2014b). Thus, within the Anou community, the idea of preservation is important, but they find balance in regarding innovation as a way to preserve their heritage.

The Anou artisans do not want to be stuck in the past, but they also do not want to build a future that is not based on their past. As such, by using their heritage as inspiration for their creativity and innovations, the artisans do not only fight coloniality by reclaiming their agency but also redefine how knowledge is created, who creates knowledge, and how that knowledge is shared. They acknowledge both the French colonial impact on the carpet weaving sector and concretely push against the legacies of French colonialism’s categorization and stagnation of craft designs and techniques. In doing so, the Anou paves the way for a sustainable decolonial future for Moroccan traditional crafts.

Preservation v. Innovation - Fatima Oulad Thami

I also interviewed Fatima, a Moroccan henna artist, born and raised in Holland, to learn about her perspective on the preservation vs. innovation of traditional Moroccan crafts as an artisan outside the geographic boundaries of Morocco. In terms of design style, Fatima’s focus is the 1990s style of henna fessia from Fes and her signature style which is a fusion of henna fessia, Amazigh symbols and art, and other cultures (Oulad Thami 2023). Her perspective on preservation vs. innovation is slightly different from the artisans I spoke with at the Anou.

Fatima views henna as living heritage and it therefore should evolve and change, but her issue comes when people label innovative or fusion designs as traditional henna fessia or refer to her designs as traditional Moroccan designs (Oulad Thami 2023). Fatima learned about henna art and design before henna gained popularity on social media and the internet. As such, she feels the pre-internet knowledge about henna is being lost through a lack of consciousness regarding the evolution of henna on social media with influences from the Khajeeji (Gulf) area and India (Oulad Thami 2023). Fatima expressed that her main concern is a lack of consciousness she sees surrounding the evolution of henna, how the styles started, how it is evolving now in terms of application and design, and why it is evolving like it is (Oulad Thami 2023). Thus Fatima also finds balance between preservation and, in her opinion, the natural innovation of henna art through her own fusion style, but she doesn't see innovation as a type of preservation as those at the Anou do. However, while Fatima and the Anou artisans use different terminology, they both highlight the importance of acknowledging the traditional designs that inspire their innovative ideas. As such, in her desire to raise consciousness about the history and evolution of henna that is being overlooked in modern iterations of designs, Fatima too acts in decolonial ways bringing to light a silenced historical narrative.

Conclusion

There are still many challenges that artisans face in the traditional craft sector as a result of the legacy of colonialism. As stated in the introduction, the number of artisans in Morocco has continually decreased as artisans move to other sectors of the economy that provide more stable incomes. This move toward other career options and disinterest in careers in the craft sector is further seen in the younger generation of Moroccans who have watched the struggles and lack of success of their parents in the face of exploitation of middlemen/resellers (Cherif D'Ouezzan

2023). However, artisan-run initiatives such as the Anou, and artisans themselves, are developing sustainable, decolonial solutions to revive traditional crafts in Morocco in the hopes of creating viable career opportunities for artisans, especially rural women. The Anou and this research are further working to illuminate the connections between French colonial policies and the current economic realities of artisans. While coloniality stemming from the recategorization of the textile industry continues to exist in the carpet weaving sector and facilitates the exploitation of artisans, the current generation of artisans at the Anou and their work are creating a lot of positive energy and hope for the future of Moroccan crafts. However, for this hope of a future to become a reality, resources must be invested in artisan education, agency, and power while balancing ideas of design preservation and innovation.

Appendix A - Carpet Design and Patterns



There are many different styles of carpets within the carpet weaving sector of Moroccan traditional crafts. During my residency at the Anou, I primarily learned about and made two styles of rugs: the *zarbya*/pile knot rug, and the *hanbel*/flatweave rug. *Zarbya* rugs are made by tying a series of individual knots around groups of warp strings with short pieces of yarn which give the rugs more texture and shagginess. *Hanbel* rugs are made by weaving lengths of yarn in between the warp strings which can create very complex, flat designs. In terms of patterns, because you must tie each individual knot, the *zarbya* style offers a lot of freedom in design and can range from the simple pattern I wove with Rabha, to the complicated patterns of the letters and symbols of this white rug, or a simple but incredibly meaningful design such as Rabha's green rug depicting the journey of her life through her divorce and the birth of her son. Thus, with the *zarbya* style, the designs and patterns artisans weave may contain great personal or cultural meaning.



In terms of the *hanbel* style, there is less freedom in designs and innovation. There is a set of patterns that exist with many variations, and most artisans pick from these existing patterns in various orders and sizes when they make their rugs. It is possible to make a new *hanbel* design, but most artisans choose from those that already exist. When talking with Rabha and other artisans, all of the *hanbel* designs have meanings, but many have been lost throughout history as older weavers with the knowledge of the patterns' meanings pass away, and, I would argue, as a result of France's recategorization of the craft sector in Morocco. As such, Rabha said the meaning of patterns does not play a large role in her design decisions when she works on *hanbel* rugs. Rather, she chooses patterns based on how they look and the patterns she enjoys weaving. However, when I asked about old stories about weaving patterns Rabha told me how rugs were used to send messages between villages and the patterns held the message's meaning. She also showed me a video of an old woman from her cooperative who explained the meanings of different patterns, as listed below:



The *sharbil*⁵ (women's traditional shoes) pattern represents a woman's beauty and femininity.



The *shair/qmeh* (wheat) pattern represents good luck and blessings.

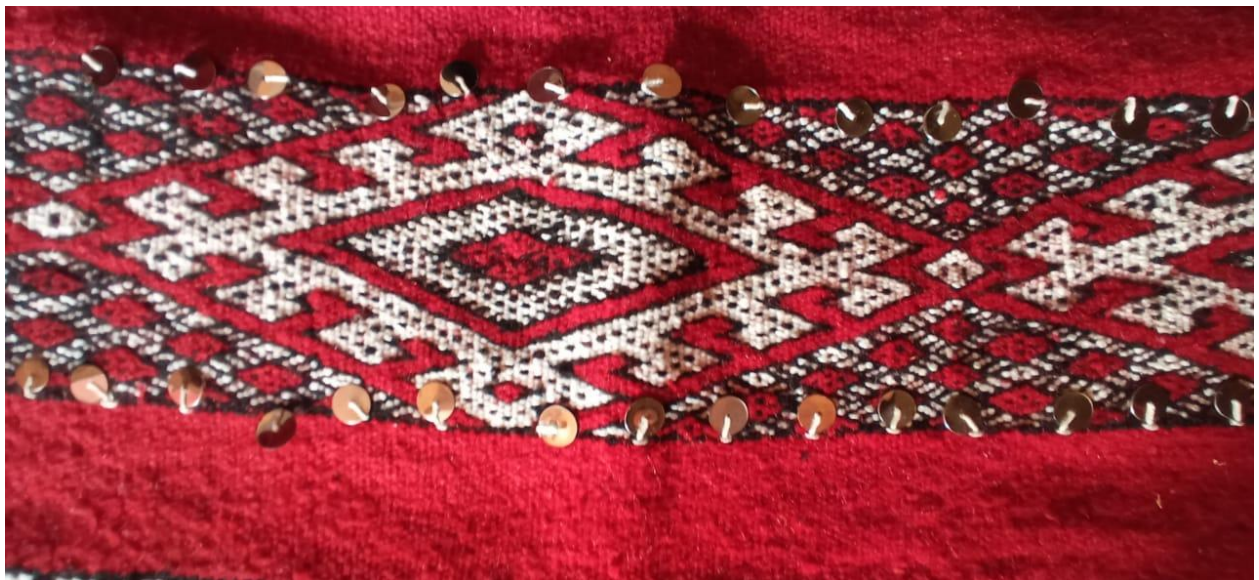
⁵ I am employing the transliteration system the Anou artisans use when writing Arabic words in Latin letters. This includes numbers representing Arabic letters that do not exist in English.



The *ras to3ban* (snakehead) pattern represents war and hostility.



The *mikhlib alasd* (lion's claws) pattern represents a strong personality or someone with a strong personality.



These final two, *almqs* (the scissors) and *solafha* (tortoise), are two patterns whose meanings have been lost over time.

Appendix B - Carpet Weaving Process

Step 1: Create the warp



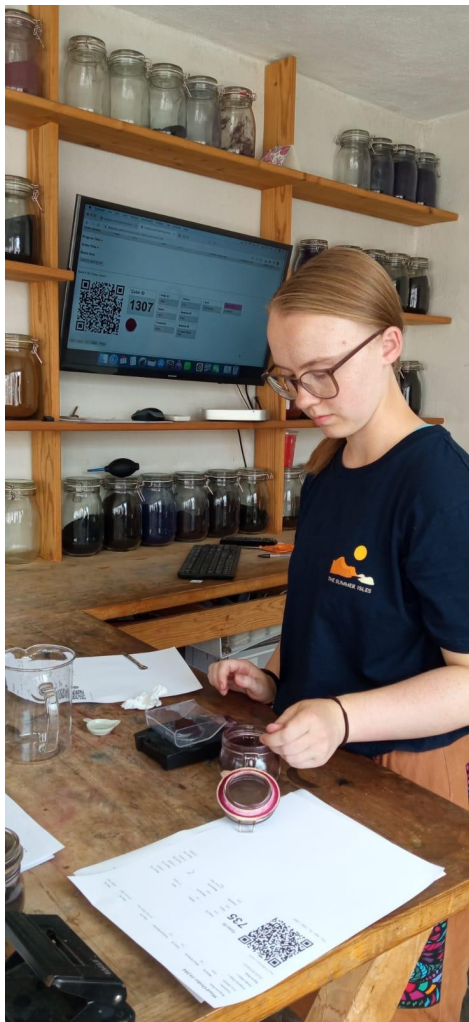
The warp of a rug represents the skeleton of the rug and is the yarns that run vertically between the horizontal bars of the loom. These are the strands through which you weave the yarns that will create the pattern of your rug. To make the warp, I worked with Rachida, Rabha, and Mustapha to set up two metal poles, the height of the loom distance apart. We then ran white

cotton yarn around the metal poles, tying each strand together, until the height of the strands wrapped around the poles measured the desired width of our rug, about 50 cm.

Step 2: Dye the Wool



The type of wool used depends on the style of rug you are weaving. For example, I worked with Rabha to weave two small rugs, one pile knot rug, and one flatweave rug. For the pile knot rug, we dyed heavier wool and for the flatweave rug we dyed lighter wool, but the dyeing process is the same. First, I chose the colors I wanted to use to create the patterns of my rug. Then, we went up to the roof of the Anou building where they have their dye studio. This studio includes big vats on burners in which we dyed the wool and a room with jars of all the pigments the Anou uses. This room also has a computer, scales, beakers, and all the equipment we need to complete the dyeing process. The Anou uses chemical dyes and has a catalog of all of their colors in which each color is assigned a unique number. They then use an electronic system that inputs the number of the colors and the amount of wool you want to dye and outputs how much of each pigment is needed to create the desired color.



Once the type and amount of pigments had been determined, we carefully measured each pigment and mixed the pigment powder with water using a magnetic spinner. After that, we filled vats with water and turned their burners on high to bring the water to a simmer. Once the water was hot enough, we thoroughly mixed the dye into the vats of water.



Next, we added the wool. When adding the wool to the vats of dye, we stomped the wool into the dye with a pole to make sure all of the wool was fully covered in dye. We then occasionally picked up and turned the wool over to its opposite side to maintain the same intensity of color throughout all of the wool. Next, we allowed the wool to cook in the pot for different amounts of time depending on the amount of wool and the color of the dye. For example, more wool and darker colors need more time to absorb the dye.



Once the dye was absorbed to an appropriate amount, we used a mechanical hook to pick up the wool and drain it while we added citric acid to the water which fixes the color to the wool. After adding the acid to the water we returned the wool to the vats and turned down the heat so the wool wouldn't burn. We then cooked the wool until the water was clear, which signaled that the dye had fully bonded to the wool.



After seeing the dye had fully bonded, we again used the mechanical hook to pick up the wool and drain it, after which we briefly washed the wool in cold water to again check if the dye had fully bonded or if there was dye leaking out of the wool. Finally, we put the dyed wool in a spinner to remove any excess water and hung the wool to dry in the sun.

Step 3: Assemble the Loom



After dyeing the wool, we assembled the loom. For my residency, we used a metal loom with big rollers at the top and the bottom that are rotated by a hand crank. One person can adjust this type of loom, however, these looms are expensive and most cooperatives use wooden beam looms that require three or four people to adjust. To set up the metal, mechanical loom, we first took the warp we made in step one and attached each end of the warp to beams that connected to the rollers on the loom. In this step, we did our best to create equal tension and distribution of the warp strings across these beams. We further used a bamboo stick to separate the front and back warp strings. Next, we connected the top beam to the top roller of the loom and cranked the roller, maintaining even distribution and tension on the warp, until the bottom beam was able to be connected to the bottom roller. We continued cranking the top roller until all of the excess warp length was rolled around the top roller and there was the appropriate amount of tension in the warp strings. Finally, we inserted the shed stick that moves the two sides of the warp strings

forward and backward depending on the row and wove the heddles which are strings, perpendicular to the warp that ensure the separation of the front and back warp strings.

Step 4: The Weaving Process



The weaving process for the two styles of rugs I made with Rabha is different, but the beginning and ending processes are the same. The first step includes using the cotton yarn used to make the warp to weave the bottom border which is then pounded along the warp strings to the appropriate height with a weaving comb. Next, we wove about five strands of weft yarn going in between each warp string to finish the bottom border.



Starting with the *zarbya*/pile knot style, each following row consisted of tying a clove-hitch style knot around a group of three warp strings with a heavier-weight yarn. The color of each knot depended on the pattern and we switched between gray and blue to create the line design I previously drew as the design for the rug. Between each row of knots, we wove a single strand of the lighter-weight weft and pounded each row tight with the weaving comb. This process continued until we finished the entire pattern.



The *hanbel*/flatweave style was more complicated and we used a consistent weight of yarn for the whole project. The process of weaving a *hanbel* rug is closer to what I think people imagine when picturing carpet weaving as, in its most basic form, you weave the weft yarn through every other warp string and then pound the rows together with the weaving comb. However, whereas with the *zarbya* style, you can sit on either side of the loom and turn your knots so the pattern emerges on the desired side, for the *hanbel* style, you sit facing the back of your rug and weave so the pattern emerges on the opposite side where you can not see.

Furthermore, it is easier to fix mistakes, and mistakes are less noticeable, in the *zarbya* style. With *hanbel*, if you make a mistake, you need to undo the entire row and re-weave it to create the correct pattern. Furthermore, if you are weaving a specific pattern with multiple colors, you weave the smaller details first and then weave the background color over those smaller details so it fills in all of the empty spaces. While I drew the pattern for the *zarbya* rug before we began weaving, Rabha and I decided on the *hanbel* pattern as we went, choosing a new small pattern after we finished the previous one. Finally, for both rugs, after finishing the pattern, we again wove about five weft strings and cotton yarn to create the top border of the rugs. We then cut the rugs from the loom, trimmed the excess yarn, and tied the border strings in knots or braids, providing the finishing touches on our two rugs.



Appendix C - Henna Fessia v. Fatima's Signature Fusion Style

Henna Fessia



Fatima's Signature Fusion Style



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