

# White Roses

## The Beni Ouarain *Handira*

### Capes or *Handiras* in the Middle Atlas

In the Middle Atlas mountains, Aït Ouarain women inherit a zealously guarded textile tradition that, when mastered, allows them to make decisions that render each of their fabrics unique.

*Handiras* are lengths of woven wool that women wrap about themselves like a cape. These garments protect them from the harshness of winter, and their patterns and colours identify the wearers as members of a particular social and ethnic group.

The visual language of *handiras* is astonishing: from a distance, a *handira* may seem like a monotonous succession of stripes, but a close and careful inspection reveals a vibrant geometry in constant motion, as the fine, intricate patterns contain a wealth of barely perceptible variations that create shifting points of interest and endless interrelations.

I own three *handiras*. They are not antiques or collector's items. Even so, I hold them in high esteem. As commodities, these *handiras* were subject to an undeniably inequitable economic exchange. I paid what the market stipulated, knowing that the market is a convention that does not take into account the fair value of labour, and that commercial transactions are not usually conducted with honest scales: what for some is an advantage they are unwilling (or unable) to decline, for others is an imposition from which they are unable to escape.

In exchange for very little money, woven fabrics and all kinds of valuable items travel far from the place where they were made, and, when they change hands, their function and meaning change as well. Heritage and youth: the most precious assets are constantly being absorbed by the dominant world.

## **The Ermine Cape, a Symbol of Royalty: The Body as a Usurped, Vacant Public Space**

In a painting by Leonardo da Vinci, a young woman holds an ermine or stoat in her arms. It is the last living ermine, at least in the history of art. Thereafter it merely served to frame the faces of various ladies, as in the portrait by El Greco that inspired the Spanish film *La dama del armiño*. It is the same title and sense used by Lubitsch in *That Lady in Ermine*. Thus, since Leonardo, all ermines have been skinned to flaunt the power and prestige of their wearers, as is also the case in fairy tales: evil stepmothers and beefy and unscrupulous varieties of King Midas.

Furs are still used today, even in mild winter climates, although ermines have been replaced by farmed mink. But lo and behold, on 30 April 2013 we received reports of the coronation of the king and queen of Holland and the return of the ermine, this time in the form of a cape—again, a fairy tale.

Oh, Holland, you who are so admired for your social progress, for your defence of human rights, your respect for the environment, your bicycles and canals! Now you offer us a monarch cloaked in ermine! Holland, seat of the United Nations' International Court of Justice, you who have efficiently separated the marijuana market from that of hard drugs! Oh, Holland, you who turned flowers into currency and Amsterdam into the city of everyone's dreams, you crown your king with ermine capes!

On-line we see a mummified image of that event. In it, the new monarchs, accompanied by a host of international royal guests, pose suspended in a fictitious instant, so long it cannot possibly exist, freezing the moment as only photography and blue blood heirs—who make have made the act of inheriting eternal—can do it. In that photograph the royalty, like so many wax figures, exhibits an active immobility that guarantees their current status. One by one, the portrayed faces clearly say, "We are the ones who avoid the battlefield of yore". Power and wealth radiate from the symbols, the stances, the garments, the jewels, from the tiara of Kashmir sapphires and South African diamonds worn by the newly crowned queen. But nothing can compare to the ermine cape in which the king finds himself doubly vested with authority.

The Internet, which sometimes raises the curtain, says that the ermine cape is an imitation, a replica of the genuine article used by a forbear at her coronation, but the king doesn't seem to

mind. Royalty isn't real either; it is a lifeless body. Something is missing from the photographs: the hieratic self-containment with which the tsars, emperors and kings of old displayed their power. The undisguised cheerfulness of these Dutch royals makes them look more like lottery winners than monarchs. We are and yet are not if we do not hold command. Cate Blanchett had it in *Elizabeth*; the command conferred by the authority of her art.

The ermine cape is accompanied by a sword, insignias and a sash, as well as by a tiara-crowned woman of undeniably overdeveloped beauty, achieved in a way that sparked controversy in her country of origin.

The lady in Leonardo's portrait holds a domestic animal which, at the time, was used to exterminate mice and rats.

On-line we read: "The little princesses are very well-mannered, and the youngest, who we must remember is only six years old, is adorable."

*Strolling through the city, experiencing the smells, the colours, soaking up the atmosphere and the closeness of people was wonderful. Residents, waiters, merchants and musicians came to recognise us, and we them. It always surprised me, when we were there sitting on the terrace of a bar, that our hearts did not break at the sight of so many cripples, many of them with operable conditions. But no, Jamaa el-Fna, the king of squares, draws you into its spinning wheel, and all you see after a while is an arena of gladiators who magnify life. And, although the pain never goes away, it is anaesthetised.*

[Teresa Lanceta, "Ciudades vividas", in *Luis Claramunt*, exh. cat. (Barcelona: MACBA and MNAC, 2012).]

## Weaving Woman, Woman Weaver: In the High Mountains

Life passes by in a profoundly forgetful interval.

### **The *Handira***

I feel it is a person—a woman who lives, shares a sky with me and is there, just as I am here.

That person has been revealed as a particular person, a particular woman with a particular life. She has been revealed as a person.

And she is like me. She was born as I was, and we have the same profound rights. Deep down, we are pretty much the same. We are all the same despite our uniqueness, our differences, and that is something I experience intensely with the *handiras*.

I feel a special bond with one in particular. In its modesty, this cape alerts me to the wisdom stored up in textile abstraction and the culture it embodies. It lacks the subtlety of more valuable pieces; its abstraction is not as rich and its technique is less sophisticated, but it exudes freshness and joy. Perhaps it was intended to be sold quickly, or maybe there were other more pressing demands on the maker's time, or it may just be the work of a very young girl. Whatever the case, I have now owned this *handira* for more than twenty years, and it still has the power to move me, for it makes me feel, not the style or the period, but the person, the woman who wove it and with whom, though we may not belong to the same place, time or religion, I have much in common. I think of that young woman weaving while she cares for her family, chats with her friends and watches the flock under the wide-open sky, amid pastures and flowers, in her quest for happiness.

Through the *handira*, I received an unexpected gift, a concise assertion: it opened my eyes to the presence of another. It informed me of the existence of a real, unique, flesh-and-blood person, not an anonymous, anodyne, interchangeable being. The *handira* does not reveal a name or specify a precise place, but it does point to a real living being and highlights the fact that collective art is

neither a uniform magma nor an enormous hand that is present in everything. These are concrete persons, individuals, unique and singular. The *handira* taught me that the artistic object is not indifferent: above all else, it relates people to one another. Oh, the myriad cultural, cognitive and emotional vicissitudes human beings anonymously inflict on each other through artistic objects!

## **Skin**

The wind is harsh, strong and relentless, giving them tough skin. When they touch mine, I think they find it raw, soft... And I can't think of a reason why they should like that.

Yesterday I had a dream. Bob Marley was walking down the aisle of the Campoamor Theatre in Oviedo: he had received the Prince of Asturias Award for the Arts. He was not alone. His fellow band members and some Jamaican children accompanied him. With their bulging hats and the musicality of their fragile, lilting gait, the Rastafarians reminded me of the aliens in *Mars Attacks!* But here music didn't splatter any brains. On the contrary, it brought happiness to all those present, sending them into raptures of joy. As the Rastafarians made their way to the front of the hall, people swayed rhythmically and the colours grew more intense. The doors were opened to the curious onlookers outside, who entered unimpeded. Queen Sofia, whose pale pink dress had morphed into a bright fluorescent red, danced with carefree sweetness and, thanks to television, the joy travelled to the most remote corners of the world, leaving no doubt that Bob Marley is actually an angel come to Earth to tell us that love is the only thing.

Whether you're hearing "One Love" for the first or the umpteenth time, the sensation is always joyous. Bob Marley and his songs strike me as a globalisation of goodness. They speak of the fullness of humility and of love. Listening to him, people know that the plain little room he offers his beloved in song is the place where happiness dwells.

His ballads are heard and imitated on every continent... But not all forms of artistic expression achieve this kind of universality. Some refer to a particular setting, to a specific culture, a history or a need; they are attached to a certain place or time, like the *handiras* and the *ahidous*, the Berber songs and dances. And this is no reason to steamroller them.

Although the cosmetic industry experiments constantly, even on animals, to find recipes for smooth, soft, raw skin, some people may be fonder of the tough, brittle skins with which they share their lives under the blazing sun and relentless wind.

## **Curiosity**

There were two humorous questions. One was about uncircumcised men—what are they like?—and the other about night clubs—what are they like? Now these questions have lost all interest. No, I can't forget all the things that have happened, nor that the situation is becoming more and more radically unbearable. That former curiosity about an alien world has been replaced by the need to survive in an alien world, which is always painful.

Innocence has two definitions: the lack of malice in intentions, and the absence of guilt in wrongdoing.

Innocence, in the sense of guilelessness, naiveté or inexperience, is part of the growth and learning process, and for that reason it is protected and cherished in childhood. The innocence of children is radiant, opening the doors to knowledge and emotions. But in adults, when it implies the absence of accountability and a disregard for consequences, innocence is a form of unjustifiable violence, because knowing is an inherent obligation of human beings.

In the 1980s, "low cost" tourism was still a thing of the future, and places like the Ramblas in Barcelona and the Santa Cruz district in Seville had not yet been turned into theme parks, into remakes of themselves. Tourists flocked to Marrakesh in droves, but that perverse practice of making reality more real had not extended beyond a handful of bazaars and restaurants, and had not even come close to reaching rural areas.

In those days, I travelled to places where the loom was the heart of the home. We were interested in and curious about one another, while each occupied her proper place. It was a time of innocence, a guilty innocence in which everything seems right.

*We foreigners only experience positive situations and suffer nothing more than a few minor incidents, which we later look back on as amusing anecdotes.*

[Teresa Lanceta, "Ciudades vividas", op. cit.]

### **Face to Face**

No would be the answer to the first question.

No would be the answer to the second question.

No to the third and fourth, and so on until a yes is reached, more devastating and despairing than the negatives that preceded it.

### **The Colour Black**

I vividly recall a specific night. The darkness was so intense... that I can truly say I saw the colour black; not darkness but black itself. From afar everything verged on black. It was impossible to see anything at all. I've never seen anything like it. Up close there was a bit of silver, but from a distance there was nothing.

In the south, chiaroscuro marks the day. The sun burns and blinds, forcing us into the shade, where we can see.

After rolling along the stony rubble of non-existent roads for several days, our car broke down. It was quite late when a family of shepherds, who lived high up on the mountain, gave us shelter.

We had supper and bedded down in a traditional elongated room. At midnight I awoke and felt an urge to go outside. The darkness was so complete that I didn't dare to move. I remained standing. A few seconds later, I felt a slight movement. A hand took me by the arm and silently guided me to a small level area opposite the house, where the corral stood. Though heavy clouds covered the sky, a few stars peeked out, bathing the objects around me in their silver gleam.

I was moved. I had seen the colour black. Not gloom or shadows, but the real colour black. Not murky darkness or the absence of light. The colour black. I was in it.

# Textile Traditions

You shall be called Fountain, and you shall be art, he said.

## Textile Traditions

Talking about textile traditions inevitably entails a discussion of endangered traditions and societies in grave difficulties. It is true that textile work is an important supplement to household income and an economic, cultural and vital mainstay for many, but it is also little more than a point of support in a world on the verge of collapse.

## The Model or the Beauty of Difference

Familiarity precludes the need for explicitness. Those who claim this can also omit it, because they know how far order and symmetry can be bent before breaking.

From tradition they inherit the possibility of modifying, the possibility of creating something unique and transforming their inheritance.

The exceptional quality of our lives is what enriches those geometric patterns: the beauty of difference.

The Court of the Inquisition was created as an instrument of repression and persecution. During the reign of the Catholic Monarchs, the political and ecclesiastical powers worked in concert, and patriotism became synonymous with the defence of spiritual purity. Hounding and harassment proliferated, and punishments were numerous and harsh.

Absolutist power was the road chosen by both the church and the Catholic Monarchs; both feared that the lengthy coexistence with Jews and Muslims and the lack of cohesion among Spain's scattered territories threatened their plans to build a modern, unified, homogenised state.



*Auto da Fe* (Pedro Berruguete, Museo del Prado, 1493–1499) is an oil on panel commissioned by Grand Inquisitor Tomás de Torquemada for the seat of the Court of the Holy Inquisition. The panel succeeded in meeting Torquemada’s demand for a “propagandistic” illustration of the unswerving determination with which all heterodoxy would be persecuted. The message is clear and unequivocal: a just cause and a deserved punishment. In the painstaking detail of the figures, we can see that the condemned man being led to the stake, rope about his neck, has curly hair and a hooked nose, features then unmistakably associated with Jews and false converts.

Today, *Auto da Fe* has outgrown the self-interested ideology of its commissioner, instead becoming a testimony of cruel events. That is what makes it art. The panel has lost its original exemplary function, blatantly and irrefutably bearing witness to the brutal actions of the Spanish Inquisition and its violent justice. That is what makes it an art piece.

At the end of World War II, the United States launched the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe. The Marshall Plan offered aid, but there were strings attached, including restrictions on European cinema to benefit the American film industry and measures designed to fill Europe’s leading galleries with American art. Abstract Expressionists, especially Pollock, held major touring shows in which European audiences were able to appreciate not only the quality of their art, but also the fact that a new era was dawning in the United States, a time in which space began to expand and action constructed the picture, bursting out of the frame. These presentations of the best American art coincided with those promoted by the United States government, eager to wield its economic, political and cultural influence and might beyond its borders.

The woven textiles made by nomadic peoples transmit art and culture while also meeting basic needs: *haimas* (nomad tents) provide shelter for herders and their families; rugs serve as both sleeping mats and flooring, protecting them from the winter cold; and *handiras* and *haiks* are coverings, as well as tribal and social symbols. In the Western world, utility is usually at odds with art, but imposing limitations such as the incompatibility of art with practical usage contradicts the universality of art and its history, which shows us that means and functions have changed over the centuries.

Is it not unreasonable to deny the creativity of people who have little to spare and whose art therefore favours subsistence?

## **Time and Hours**

How many hours does a rug have? How many hours did a woman spend making it? How many hours was she paid for her work? What needs can she meet by selling her rugs? The weaver-women are crushed by a comfortable demand that shatters the unitary time of their existence, turning it into work-hours torn out of life itself.

These stolen hours scratch away at time, rendering it useless. They are gnawing hours of detachment; hours of exploitation, of injustice. Rugs, capes and cushions—some of them very simple and modest—are created in arid zones of extreme heat or in high mountain regions with incredibly harsh winters. They are proof that there, in the midst of that impressive, unforgiving landscape, live the female guardians and conveyors of a unique, peculiar, autonomous, secretive language, the language of textiles, which speaks of a community, a culture and a form of art. Today, these weaver-women await the return of the children and grandchildren that have become the stock of big cities and foreign lands, even nourishing many of them.

I think of those women dealing with life's difficulties, with problems that at times are triumphantly overcome and at others result in humiliating defeat.

## **Thank You**

The beauty of these woven creations constantly reminds me that a balance has been upset. These women whose survival is conditioned by nature, with all the grandeur and overwhelming difficulties of an environment that determines their every act, these women have made art. On the periphery of peripheries, they have made art—useful art, an art for life—and all I can say to them is thank you.

Bob Marley's first words at the Prince of Asturias Awards ceremony were dedicated to the gypsies who had won the previous year. The audience reacted with enthusiasm, recalling that group of men and women, some of them heaven-sent, who had sung and danced, and stolen the hearts of everyone present. Moments before handing out the awards, the organisers felt a twinge of fear and more than a little regret as they witnessed the disproportionate ruckus raised, without rhyme

or reason, by the gypsies as they prepared to enter the hall: the women, chattering loudly, adjusted their bras and sandal straps, while the men checked their clothes for even the smallest wrinkle, warmed up their voices, tapped their heels and clapped their hands. Once inside the theatre, the buzzing swarm calmed down and walked the aisle with decorum, but as they approached the stage they broke into chatter, nervous, joking to attract the audience's gaze, for despite belonging to a people who prize family and collective identity above all else, individuals still vie to stand out above the rest. By the time they reached the stage, nervousness had segregated the youngest members of the group, who laughed among themselves. A few of them plucked at their guitars. On television it was a sight to behold.

To be fair, flamenco is a shared world heritage, and although it is less widely known than reggae, both types of music have the power to break hearts outside their respective worlds. Flamenco is an inner rending of extraordinary magnitude, an infinite longing. When collective art allows its individual components to express themselves, it becomes great.

When it was their turn to speak, after being introduced by the Prince of Asturias, the gypsies—La Niña de los Peines, her brother Tomás, La Fernanda, Melchor de Marchena, El Terremoto, El Borrigo—expressed themselves as best they knew how, through song and dance. That was when the people in the audience and those glued to their TV screens understood that the award was rightly bestowed and richly deserved, and although the troupe had completely taken over the stage, not one of them was superfluous—in fact, one felt the entire neighbourhood of Santiago, Triana or Utrera should have been there as well.

## **Between Rugs and Fabrics**

### **The Father**

She knew there was something very wrong, a great sorrow. Her father was grimly serious. He did not come out to speak. A curtain of silence fell...

### **The Mother**

Her mother, she and one of her sisters strode along at a very fast pace. The mother's attitude did not encourage conversation. They walked for a long time until they came to where some of their relatives lived. She didn't know what they talked about, but the walk back was much more leisurely and her mother seemed calmer.

### **The Father's Brother**

She remembers that one night one of her father's brothers arrived. He didn't even come inside, and she never knew if he had come to say goodbye for good or if he had asked to stay with them and been refused. She never knew what his offence had been. She never knew the reason for this silence.

### **Cherries**

She placed the cherries in her sister's lap and they began to eat them. Although they offered to share, none of us wanted to interrupt the dance of their hands as they ate them one by one, little by little. Later she got up and divided some among us.

No cherry was ever redder or sweeter than the ones she gave us at her parting.

## **Downhill**

Her feet were neither cloven hooves that clung to the rock nor suction cups that gripped the sand, as the children used to tell her in their games. When her husband died, she was seized with a desire to run downhill, to hurtle down the steepest slopes and feel, as she used to feel, the air holding her upright.

## **The Icy Wind, the Daughter**

Again the icy wind and the homeward journey.

When you left, she hugged the trees and pressed her face against the trunk until she could hear your voice and feel your breath.

## **The Old Cedar**

Azrou, the loveliest cedar forest, for my brother. Cedar trees can live two thousand years. He only lived fifty.

The brother watched the flock from the old cedar. He was irresistibly drawn to the irregular pattern of its branches. That morning he noticed the clustering of its leaves, persistent and needle-sharp, like his feelings ever since he had learned that the animals were falling sick.

## **The Rug**

It was impressive and spectacular. It was very beautiful—deliberately and necessarily so. The mother, and now the daughters, not only wanted to prove how industrious they were, how efficiently they worked with the livestock, in the fields and on their daily tasks; they also wanted to express the intelligence, the grace and genius that characterises works of extraordinary quality and renown.

## **Her Niece and Daughter-in-Law**

Her niece, who was now her daughter-in-law, surprised her. She had completely transformed the rug that her aunt and mother-in-law had been making and had passed on to her when she married her son. Back then, rugs took many years to make, and, although each generation added new knowledge and variations to them, they tended towards uniformity. But this girl made radical changes to her part of the rug: she completely eradicated its complexity, instead giving the pattern an extraordinarily light, airy feel. This sharp contrast lent a surprising grace to the composition as a whole, clearly illustrating how intelligently this girl would defend herself in life. The mother-in-law thought it a very smart decision, because she accepted the responsibility of continuing the rug but gave it a respite whose necessity was apparent even to her. That was what the part of the rug that her niece had made conveyed.

## **Gold**

It was just like a pendant of her mother's that had belonged to her grandmother, but it wasn't the same colour and the sensation was completely different. She knew it was made of gold because she hid it immediately. Her reaction put her somewhere she had never been before, in a position of non-innocence. It was a constant burden, having to conceal the pendant so her mother and siblings wouldn't see it. She had to change the hiding place constantly, until one day it disappeared from where she had concealed it, and she never saw it again. Perhaps the burden had shifted to one of her siblings or neighbours. She will never know, because undoubtedly whoever found it also hid it immediately, and so knew that it was made of gold.

## **The Grandchildren of Salt**

The two siblings were very cheerful, very cheerful. With their good cheer and their novelties they invaded the minds of everyone and opened their hearts to desires they had never suspected could burn so fiercely; so much that they seared their innards.

These adolescents did not long; they desired. Longing was reserved for their parents, who had known the mountains, the trees. For them, whose sky was a screen, nostalgia did not exist. Their world was a present that reinstated a mystery filled with hope.

## **The Grandchildren of Quebec**

Taninya had looked at one of her cousins and that cousin had looked at her, but they knew nothing would bring them together because everything separated them. Quebec was the cousin's red jumper that looked so lovely on her. Quebec was a lake. Quebec was something very distant. Quebec was the school where they learned computer science, which had replaced the mountains with striking suddenness.

## Warps, Knots and Wefts

Every knot is a thought. After that day, it was always the same.

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If she made a wish at the precise instant when a chickpea swelled and bounced off the pot, it would come true, but she could never be quick enough, no matter how hard she tried.

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They sent some boys, two brothers and a cousin, to a nearby village to collect some goods. “Go quickly, don’t dawdle”, said the mother... But they never arrived. The father and uncle were waiting for them round a bend in the road. As soon as they saw them, the boys understood what was about to happen to them. With the switches they used to punish the livestock, the adults beat them. It wasn’t the slaughter and sale of a wild boar to outsiders that had earned them so many blows, but the fact that the village had learned of the transaction. And where was the money?

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She works in the fields, tends the livestock and the bees, grinds the wheat, makes the bread, cooks the food, brings water from the well, spins, weaves and also cares for the children and helps the old ones. This woman, *toujours malade*, is a beloved daughter, although her slanting eyes, awkward speech and clumsy gait set her apart from her sisters and from the still remembered beauty of her mother.

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She dropped it again and again, so often that, by the time she angrily tossed it into the ravine, it was no longer good for anything. With her action she wanted to disprove the notion that the vessel had rebelled against her.



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The donkey trotted gladly to the spring. On the way back, with the drums filled with water and retracing his steps along a steep, stony path, the animal slipped and twisted his legs, but either he didn't mind or he retained no memory of it, because he always hastened eagerly back to the water, as if the return journey did not exist.

The girls also went willingly, happily traipsing under the awning of the sky, hoping to meet someone along that path. Afterwards, when they grew older, their happiness subsided. Later on they would leave.

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She heard stories of lions that had attacked some children.

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Thoughts provide consolation for the teacher's solitude.

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When the wind blew strongly in winter, the scar screamed louder than she had screamed on the day of the accident.

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In the late afternoon a neighbour, shut up in his house, let out a cry, a single scream, long and strangled. Was the cry more piercing with the full moon? She didn't think so. It always had the same tone and issued the same prophetic warning: that night was falling.

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No one said it out loud or in the light of day, but at night, huddled close round the fire, they passed on the warning: children had disappeared in the vicinity of the great souk. This time, no one spoke of witchcraft or women's spells. Some whispered: corruption kills.

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Four daughters are not four wives, she said.

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A lack of timidity set her apart, though she tried to fake it.

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And the blood gushed forth...

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The clumsiness, arrogance and abuse of the siblings ruined the family. The mother was sacrificed.

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She can't stop thinking about why she was so inflexible with her father, how she reproached him for his distress at a time when fear clouded his future and prevented him from defending himself.

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She was the queen of the streets. Shunned by relatives and neighbours, furtively she was well loved—even by her husband, who lived comfortably off the hidden desires of men.

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A disturbing, devastating rumour was circulating: a strange disease had taken hold of young people in contact with certain foreigners. There was no reprieve for those who contracted it. Doctors did their best to avoid treating them, and some hospitals turned them away. Suffering and death. A cursed ailment against which many mothers had raised their voices, demanding justice.

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Two brothers went to Rabat, and one came home to marry.

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His wife told him, "The abandonment that is my lot and which you will experience when you leave is so great that I cannot help but be afraid".

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"We'll see each other every year!" became every two years. A year is a long time, but that was the timeframe. Later, it became "whenever I can".

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Two children had come from Madrid, but the woman only bathed one. The reason could be read in the nakedness of the other: he was not her grandson.

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Farewell to wicker and wool. Farewell to weaving, to combining colours and tying swift knots, farewell to decorating a wall or assembling an intricate carved ceiling. Farewell to sowing and harvest times, farewell to chiselling iron and making bread. Now they learn quickly as they discover the habits, oddities and customs of their bosses, who express themselves clearly and peremptorily. Their orders aren't very complicated and hardly require instructions. Nothing more difficult than "Don't mix the detergents and clean behind the appliances", "Helmets are

mandatory when unloading material” or “The faster you work, the less insecticide you’ll inhale”.  
That’s just the way they are.

Farewell to the rhombus, farewell to innocence.

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She moved through the darkness, searching for garish colours and sour smells. There was joy and celebration, but also despair, injustice and abandonment.

## **White Roses**

Nothing shows off the red of blood more gloriously than white roses.

### **The Son's Mother**

The son's mother is not the same as the daughter's mother.

### **Macaque or Hyena?**

The fact that her brother would be the one to determine her future filled the young girl with anxiety.

This constant undercurrent of fear diminished when she went with her friends to find firewood or to gather fodder for the livestock. On the way, they talked and played at comparing their neighbours with certain animals. One was a goat: don't you see his chin? The gaze of another marked him as a lamb. Her brother was a macaque, her girlfriends suggested, based on his agile movements, his constant restlessness and how funny he was. She never contradicted them, but when the other girls said macaque, she heard laughing hyena.

### **Or**

"Either you do what she says or..." She could never tell if it was a choice or a threat, because the second alternative was dissolved in the conjunction that preceded it, and to her it sounded like a butcher's knife sliding across a lamb's throat.

### **Tazzayt-Tazzayt**

We focus our attention on the processes and trust them to handle the changes and the outcome, but then, suddenly, that instant appears when everything is definitively defined.

Her name had to be repeated twice before she would answer when called. The girl's stubborn insistence on multiplying her name amused everyone, and it wasn't long before they acquired the habit of calling her Tazzayt-Tazzayt, which stuck with her for many years.

The split-second delay between saying a name and repeating it was the interval that the husband used to hand the girl a brazier. Catching her off guard, the coals spilled onto her hands and dress.

In this way, he wielded his arbitrary authority over the girl, and her name was forever divided in two.

### **Seven Years Waiting**

Seven years waiting. "That's emigration for you", they said. Seven years under the mother-in-law's scrutiny and charity, because it was she, her husband's mother, who received the funds that eventually—though somewhat depleted—reached the wife and daughter. Seven years waiting to be reunited with him. Seven years to complete the journey that brought her back to her husband's side. Seven years isn't all that long when you arrive in the promised (longed-for) land. But when you arrive at a house where there is another woman and another daughter...

### **The Butcher**

With the knife he used to ritually slaughter lambs, he sliced open the woman's chest, belly and back. When the screams subsided to death rattles, he left. The three girls, aged six and five, and the youngest barely days old, accompanied their mother in silence and stillness throughout the night. The next morning, the telephone rang insistently but no one answered. Later, the aunt was alerted and came to rescue the girls.

No one in Taza remembered them, but the news reached an Internet café and spread by word of mouth over the next several days. It was said that they came from the mountains south of town, and it was probably there that the woman, and years later the man, had obtained the papers they needed to go abroad.

A tragic event in a far-off place that awakened hidden fears. At night, more than one woman mistook glints of light for the bright blade of the knife brandished in Madrid, and something that had never existed hidden in words was given a name: murder.

## Paths and Roads

Margallo War (1893–1894) / Melilla War (1909) / Rif War (1911–1927) / Tragic Week of Barcelona (1909) / Battle of Annual (1921) / Spanish Civil War (1936–1939).

He was missing a leg. A huge rock had fallen on the leg while he was digging a well. They waited for the doctor but, when he lapsed into unconsciousness and the leg became gangrenous, the brother decided to amputate it. Eventually he got used to the crutches and continued to care for the livestock. The accident brought back memories of the relatives and neighbours who, years before, had been killed or horribly mutilated by shrapnel.

Men who worked during the day crossed the River Moulouya at night and, under cover of darkness, attacked the camps of the soldiers brought over from France to protect the road and railway that were being built to connect northern Morocco with Algeria. These foreign interests hindered the free movement of flocks and brought about the ruin of entire families. Peasants and herders defended their lands, which were snatched from them time after time. These peasants and herders, young men, heads of households, were not unlike the conscripts forcibly recruited in Spain to kill and die: the former fought for their lands, and the latter for the interests of others.

Roads, railways, power lines, reservoirs, mines, growing urban centres and privatised lands shaped, among other things, the face of modernity. And from that they could not escape. On maps they are lines and tiny icons superimposed on the rivers and natural contours of the terrain, creating a more complex and varied landscape. But this new panorama was not made without tremendous sacrifices and lucrative profits: profits for a few and sacrifices for a large part of society, who would not reap even the minor benefits of those changes for years to come.

*The afternoon has been magnificent, serene, resplendent, and even without reckoning the infinite number of curious objects I have found along the way, this ride would still be one of the most delicious of my entire life, given the graciousness and beauty of the land I have crossed. The objects of which I speak were for the most part Moroccan plunder from yesterday's action: spurs, munitions bags, dead horses, saddles, corpses, bloodied garments, and a few weapons of little*



worth. All around and in every direction, the fresh footprints of broad Moorish slippers and of horses, oxen, camels and goats. The appearance of our company had sent men and herds running from that place. All had fled before us... except the land, grim and mute like the fearsome spectre of defeat.

[Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, *Diario de un testigo de la guerra de África*, 1880.]

“Yes, they’re fierce, but they bleed. They hide, but not behind a cannon. They know a terrain that aeroplanes discover. They are strong, but hunger and shrapnel will prove stronger still.” With these words, the French or Spanish captain harangued them.

*Ah! Truly war has a poetry which, at certain moments, surpasses all the inspirations of art and of nature!*

[Pedro Antonio de Alarcón, op. cit.]

### **Years Later...**

Upon hearing the news, she removed the scarf from her head and pulled her hair hard, very hard, until it stopped her wailing.

The men came to the house. They wanted to hear the news from a neighbour who had arrived the night before from a nearby village, where he had done some livestock transactions. He told them that from the souk drifted the sounds of a party underway, when suddenly the music and singing turned to screaming and weeping: a raft full of immigrants had sunk, and everyone on board had drowned. Twenty people from the village. Twenty.

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They remember him as a boy who played in the village streets for a summer or two. Those were the days of plenty, a time now past. His name is not spoken, and it’s the women who mostly talk about him; the men do it in hushed, cautious tones, although some only bring him up to relive a tale that takes them back, again and again, to the litany of the sun-drenched summer days of their childhood. Then smiling, now gutted.

Going back is not possible for a youth raised in a fast-paced, multiplying era, full of what might be and is not. An emptiness that could hold so many things! That strip of separation we can't always conceal but which outlines the contours.

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The longer the wait, the stronger the hope. But that is not how things work. Not at all. Time exacerbates problems. Stagnation and stillness are not for the living, who slip on the slopes of pretence and concealment.

They could not distance themselves. They knew the mother. They were too close: they were the same. The question hung like a cloud over the woman they had run into several times at the doctor's office, and with whom they had exchanged a few words, even about the children. For things had also gotten worse for her. Her heart had frozen solid. Her feelings were expressed so briefly that they failed to realise that nothing was or ever would be the same again. Did what she had hoped for have anything to do with what happened?

What gardens were they talking about? So that was the journey they were discussing, the reason why their horizons had been stripped of the rushing thaw-water rivers they once bathed in as youngsters, and the longing of grandparents, parents and children who grew up in summer frolicking on the steep mountains of ancient cedar forests. No one spoke of all that anymore and, what was more disheartening, no one even desired it anymore. Now they dreamed of dangerous deserts. Being part of the destruction, clinging to hope when none remained—that is what death talks about.

To kill and to die: what facile, commonplace verbs. She thought of her daughter rather than her grandson, of the pain he had caused her. First the drugs that dazed so many; later the night and the neon lights; and finally, the sibylline words they whispered in their ears. One of them was identified by a chunk of finger whose prints were still intact. She remembered that boy who fell down a cliff on Bou Nacer, tumbling head over heels, striking the stones until his body was dismembered, and how the echo kept him alive after death.

# In Search of the Future

## To Be Something in Life

*My grandmother jokingly says, "God doesn't have time for you. He's busy. Do right and make the most of it".*

[Salim Bayri]

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED IN FEZ, MOROCCO, IN 2010

## Souad

*My name is S.b.H. I'm twenty-two years old. I study Spanish at the university in Fez, and I'm also a basketball player. I like everything that has to do with sport and theatre. My hometown is Errachidia: I'm a desert girl, by birth and by principle. I left Errachidia and moved to Fez to complete my studies, to become an educated girl, to earn a living and be self-reliant and not be a burden to my family or to society, though it's very hard to live far away from my family on a scholarship that's only enough for me to buy one book... I left Errachidia and the desert because I didn't want to be like my grandmother and my mother, who spend their lives weaving. That doesn't mean I don't like woven fabrics, but nowadays everything is already on the market, so what's the point of me weaving? What I need is money, and to get it I'm not going to weave like my grandmother.*

## Ayyûb Ait Oumagha

*I have four siblings. One brother is in Casablanca, working for a company. Another is in Spain. My sister is earning her baccaureate and the youngest boy is in school. I want to study Spanish so I can have a very good future, unlike my parents. I want to study Spanish to be a teacher. My parents don't want to be weavers anymore. I want to be something in life and not be a burden to my parents.*

## **Nawal Arfi**

*I hope you understand my words. My mother and grandmother make rugs; it's something within their culture that they have to preserve. They also sell them and earn money to live. They can't give it up, it's very important for them. In my house there are antique rugs. My father is dead. I only have my mother, who earns a mere pittance from the rugs. I am studying in Fez on a scholarship and living in a student residence, but it's hard to study because I can't make ends meet. But despite the difficulties, I try to press on, to have a future and get my degree in Biology.*

## **Do You Keep the Old Ones?**

INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED IN ALICANTE, SPAIN, IN 2012

## **Amal El Mouloudia**

*It's the men who remove the woven goods from the house and take them to the market. Some are for selling and others for the house. There are some people, a handful, who only weave for their homes, because they lack the strength to work more.*

*Inherited items are not for sale. Heirlooms are kept for the home. But we sold everything. They come directly to the houses, looking for them. They like antiques, old things. People from the Arabian Peninsula.*

*In Morocco, customers come and show us a photo, and we work to order. We have to sell so we can buy more material and keep producing. We don't keep what we make. It depends on the order. Some people work to export, making things for Rabat or Casablanca, but in Spain, even if you bring the material, who are you going to sell it to? Here you need to pay the Social Security tax. If you have workers, you have to spend money, and how would we find buyers?*

*She wants something to fill her time. Instead of just sitting in front of the television... she wants to do something.*

## **In Search of a Decent Life and Future**

*As for my sister Fatima, before she had even turned fourteen she began working as a “maid” in the home of a wealthy family, where she had to do all the housework and also care for six children, working thirteen hours a day or more with one day off a week, and all for a miserable salary of three hundred dirhams [approximately thirty euros]. At fifteen, her hands were cracked and covered with sores.*

*Another of my sisters, Ikran, got a job with a foreign-owned company in the textile industry when she was sixteen; those factories mostly hired women, because they knew that, given their submissive attitude, they wouldn’t make trouble for the owners. They also knew that jobs were in high demand and took advantage of that fact to exploit the women, making them work more than twelve hours a day for a salary of 650 dirhams [sixty-five euros]. And they did all this with the consent of the top government officials, most of them corrupt, who protected the employers in exchange for substantial benefits.*

[...]

*The sea was growing more and more dangerous, becoming increasingly turbulent. As the boat went under and resurfaced amid the roiling waves, the panic grew. Prayers, wails and cries rang out. Even the ra’is was scared, but we had come more than halfway and “the die had been cast”. In other words, going back would have been just as dangerous as pressing on.*

[Mohamed El Gheryb, in *Ofrim Suplementos*, 8 (*Historias de vida e inmigración*), 2001.]

\*\*\*

*Oh, distant husband of mine, emigrant!  
Two years now have passed  
since your sad departure for France,  
in search of work,  
in search of money  
Two years now...  
Bread in our country is something impossible.*

*Bread is a constant drama.*

*Oh, distant husband of mine, emigrant!*

*And I am here:*

*Gnawing on my desires*

*licking my frost.*

*The narrowing horizons press in on me.*

*Two years without your tender love,*

*without feeling your embrace,*

*without your shower of kisses.*

*Suddenly you vanish*

*amid mines of iron and lead,*

*to make a lovely future*

*for the rest...*

*You are murdering*

*the best of your precious youth*

*too soon.*

*You send me sacks of longing and nostalgia,*

*of shivers uglier*

*than the chill of tombs.*

[Ahmed Hanawi, "Versos para la buena gente"]

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In Zienab Abdelgany's words, "Passing the Baton", 2012

(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dJKkp-XnDIA>):

*Won't it be lonely to die among strangers in a land that's not your own?*

*I don't want to die in a land of strangers. I need to know you.*

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Farewell to the rhombus.