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# “THIS IS DIFFERENT, THIS IS THE PLAZA”: SPACE, GENDER, AND TACTICS IN THE WORK OF MOROCCAN TOURIST SECTOR HENNA ARTISANS

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## ABSTRACT

*Henna, a vegetable dye made from ground henna leaves that is used by Moroccan women to create temporary designs for the hands and feet, has become a profitable tourist sector service in the past decade. The social organization and relations of tourist sector henna artisans in the Marrakesh area are closely tied to how the spaces where they work are socially constructed and re-constructed. The artisans' assertive public behavior directed at strangers is socially disapproved, and highlighted in interactions between the artisans and representatives of the state as well as guides and shopkeepers. Artisans working in public squares organize into multi-function cooperative groups in order to preserve claim to a given space, share supplies and skills, and provide a peer group in and through which reputation is maintained. Alternative spatial arrangements, such as work in herb shops and independent henna shops, correspond with greater conformity to gender norms.*

Choice in Economic Contexts: Ethnographic and Theoretical Enquiries

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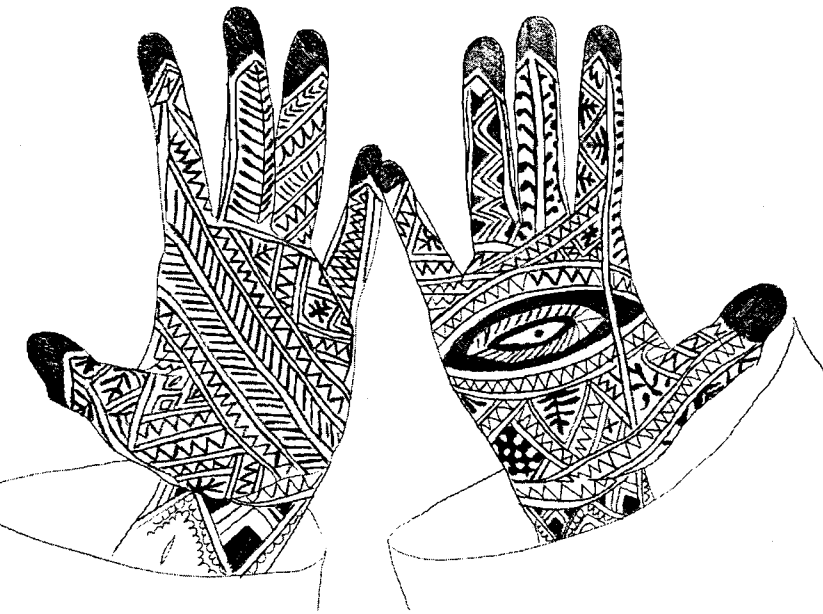
## INTRODUCTION

An early incident stands out in my fieldwork among henna artisans in Marrakech.<sup>1</sup> I was not yet well known by the Jemaa l-Fna tourist sector workers, and a young woman approached me and asked if I wanted henna (see Fig. 1). We chatted for a few moments. I introduced myself and ex-



Fig. 1. Typical Tourist Sector Henna in the *Khaliji* (Gulf) Style. Source: Drawing by Stephanie Weirathmueller, after photo by Patricia Kelly Spurles.

plained that I was doing research about contemporary Moroccan henna practices and artisans. I agreed to her proposal to do some henna for me, and also agreed that it didn't have to be black, since, as she said, she would have to get "a product" whose hazards I was already familiar with.<sup>2</sup> Zohra<sup>3</sup> immediately began to draw a line from the fingernail of my index finger down to the second knuckle and diagonally across the back of my hand to the outside wrist bone. Equipped with an 18-gauge needle whose sharp beveled tip had been removed, Zohra used a large (10ml) plastic syringe filled with paste made from purchased ground henna leaves, water, and a little paint thinner. This produces a temporary reddish dye when applied to the skin's surface and allowed to dry for several hours. Did I want tea or orange juice, she asked. "I'm fine," I said. No, she insisted, it would be from her. Finally I agreed to a glass of tea, and she asked a young man standing nearby to get us some. The young man was an herb seller who worked in one of the stalls that spring up each evening, a square 10 feet by 10 feet marked out by carpets and neatly placed bottles and bags of herbs, spices, and cures. A few boards placed over some wooden crates made a comfortable seat to one side, and a stool was pulled up next to it. We sat and chatted as Zohra worked, quickly emptying the henna syringe and asking the herb vendor again to run and ask for some. "From whom?" he asked. "Ask them, over there," Zohra said and motioned toward some artisans standing some distance off, identifiable by their characteristic face veils as much as by their intermittent interaction with passing tourists. He came back empty-handed; they would not give Zohra henna. She begged him to find someone to give her enough to fill the syringe just once more. A soldier patrolling the plaza looked at us as he walked by. Zohra said to me quietly, "Say you are buying spices." He did not approach us, but looked pointedly at Zohra. Shortly after, one of the artisans came over and, taking my hand in hers, inspected Zohra's work in progress before rebuking her in Arabic, saying that her work was not good, and then, finally addressing me, repeated her criticism in French and left. Zohra said not to pay attention to people who say the henna is not good. "Marrakshis are jealous; tell them you paid nothing." It wasn't particularly "good," in fact, according to the esthetic system that determines the quality of henna work done in the local sector. The lines were of unequal thickness, and wiggly where they should have been straight. The motif seemed lop-sided, as the repeated central elements were markedly unequal in size. There were none of the doubled parallel lines that create the negative space that characterizes local sector work (see Fig. 2). She added a few six-armed stars to fill in the design a bit more. Even so, compared to the dense and complex geometry executed by local sector artisans, this was



2. Typical Local Sector Henna in the *Marrakshi* (Marrakesh) Style. Source: Drawing by Stephanie Weirathmueller, after photo by Patricia Kelly Spurles.

ot, though not quite a scribble. When she was done, I asked how much. e million dollars." I laughed, "Oh, I am not rich." She laughed also – isively, I thought – and said, "Neither are we." Then she waited for me to e a price. "10 dirhams," I said. "You can have both hands and feet for but you did just part of one hand, so I'll give you 10. You are getting a d deal." She said, "No, but this is different. This is the plaza. Look at v detailed the work is; look, it is the best quality; it will last three weeks; k at all the designs there are."

his moment captures several of the key features that distinguish tourist or henna work from local sector. Most notably, the artisan explicitly w my attention to the unique physical and social context in which our raction took place. In fact, over the course of our twenty-minute inter- on, she reversed the customary roles of henna specialist and customer, ing out to me (rather than waiting to be engaged by a client), seating me n outdoor space (rather than coming to me at home) dominated by men erally, and by the male allies and representatives of the state specifically her than by women), offering me refreshments (instead of receiving them

as my guest), and overtly bargaining for her fee (rather than, through lan- guage and action, framing the money changing hands as a gift that confers a blessing on the giver, i.e. the henna customer). Finally, while her technical henna skills were not highly developed (or, like a few of the artisans, she chose not to do "good" henna for unacquainted customers at the plaza), she was quite competent in the valuable skill of "talking to tourists," in the words of many of my research participants. Unlike most of the artisans, however, this young woman worked alone rather than as part of an informal cooperative group. She relied on a loose reciprocity with a male herb seller for favors such as a place to sit and apply henna, especially relying on him as an assistant to fetch refreshments and extra henna when she ran out in the middle of a design. (I learned later that the herb seller received a variable but generally small cut from each sale.) Finally, groupmates would also have fended off the criticism of the disparaging interloper who tried to jeopardize the sale and, quite likely, to discourage Zohra from working again in the plaza.

In this chapter, I explore the relationship between social organization of work, gender, and space in the context of tourist sector henna work in the Marrakesh area. The distinctive cooperative groups formed by Moroccan women selling henna services to domestic and foreign tourists in outdoor urban spaces engage both economic and social functions as workers seek to resolve business challenges including competition over territory, on one hand, and conflicting interpretations of local gender norms on the other.

The cooperative group provides a medium through which the household is "translated" to the market (Seligmann, 2001, p. 3), as a durable but fluid unit of reciprocity (as well as calculation and conflict), as a location of apprenticeship and specialization (Coy, 1989), and as a location for com- munal performances of emerging interpretations of female gender roles (Freeman, 2005) as artisans assert their presence in a contested space. In its emphasis on cooperative relations within a conflictual setting, this case contrasts with Little's (2003, 2004) research on Mayan women who, as *ambulantes* or mobile vendors, sell textiles primarily to international tour- ists. Little states that cooperation between vendors may occur when eco- nomically beneficial. My case study expands the analysis of cooperation, introducing the idea of tactics (de Certeau, 1984) as female artisans, op- erating from a weak base and lacking institutional power, aim to expand and solidify their use of public space. Socially constructed space is engaged here as both a context that reveals power relations and structures women's actions and as a process in which they participate, as their actions alternately reinforce and resist it (Erdreich & Rapoport, 2006; Low, 1996).

Like analysis of the organization of women's work outside the household in other regions, studies of work among Muslim Arab women have often explicitly engaged culturally variable gender norms (Moghadam, 2003). While there is considerable cultural diversity among Muslim Arabs, patriarchal social norms tend to influence women's experience in the economy as well as in the family. Both Hoodfar (1997) and Kapchan (1996, 2001) for instance, depict women employing discursive strategies that emphasize their "traditional" identities to legitimize their unconventional public roles. In both cases, working class social norms regarding female behavior emphasize modest public behavior to a greater extent than seclusion. Drawing on research in several newly urbanized Cairo neighborhoods, Hoodfar shows how some women began to employ religious idiom in dress (adopting the "veil" or *hijab*) as they took up work outside the household. This strategy, she argues, defused criticism of their divergence from behavioral norms, and prevented husbands from decreasing their own contributions to the family economic unit by reminding them of their Islamic duty as husband to support the household. She notes, however, that this religious turn in self-representation was not otherwise accompanied by an increase in religiosity, most notably prayer. Like Hoodfar, Kapchan has studied how women engage in performative strategies that recast rule-breaking behavior into a publicly recognized and valued model. Her research on women who sell medicinal herbs at periodic markets reveals how they skillfully use the formalized style of men's market discourse in their call-and-refrain speech and rhetorical exposition of the seller's credentials, while using motifs drawn from a pool of female rather than male symbols of authority and knowledge. While male merchants display and refer to diplomas, for instance, to establish their authority, Kapchan's female herb sellers emphasize their statuses as elder, mother, neighbor, and affine, which they know are shared with their audience. Like Kapchan's and Hoodfar's, my research illustrates how women resist and reinterpret restrictive gender norms in order to maximize their social and economic options, particularly in terms of using spaces that are associated with a dense array of social meanings.

Henna artisans who offer services to domestic and international tourists are often dismissed (by Moroccans as well as outsiders) as culturally insignificant because of the dramatic differences between their behavior and techniques and those of the local sector henna artisans, whose work is located in households and whose painstakingly detailed designs are produced for local residents' life cycle and religious celebrations as well as for occasional adornment (Combs-Schilling, 1989, 1991; Diouri, 1997; Field, 1958; Kapchan, 1993, 1996, 2001; Messina, 1991; Vonderheyden 1934a, 1934b;

Westermarck, 1911, 1914, 1926). In contrast, not only do tourist sector artisans seek out customers and actively market their services, as described above, but they also respond to both the profit-driven marketplace and to cosmopolitan flows of ideas and practices by modifying social norms that regulate henna application with respect to form and esthetic, gender, and marital status. Hence, "tourist henna" incorporates new motifs (such as scorpions, though they are part of local culture in other ways, Frembgen, 2004) and forms (armbands, bracelets, anklets, stomach, back, and shoulder medallions) that are not present in local henna production (see Fig. 3). While local sector henna acts to create social dichotomies on the basis of abstinence versus participation in henna practices, separating unmarried



Fig. 3. Domestic Tourists with Tourist Sector Henna Artisan. Source: Drawing by Stephanie Weirathmueller, after photo by Patricia Kelly Spurles.

om married, male from female, non-family from family, and mourning  
om non-mourning (Diouri, 1997), these novel forms of henna separate  
early only between those who are engaging in tourism and those who are  
it.

In this chapter, I describe how Moroccan women working as henna ar-  
ans in the tourist sector employ cooperative groups as a tactic that aims to  
dress social as well as economic challenges embedded in these spaces. In  
attention to individual and collective action, this work also responds to  
itiques that tourism studies have not viewed local participants as active  
ayers (Chambers, 2000; Stronza, 2001).

These cooperative groups are part of artisans' strategies for coping with  
atIALIZED gender norms that are manipulated in particular interactions  
th representatives of the state as well as by male shop owners who are  
creasingly participating in the henna trade. The stakes are higher than  
any realize. The social organization of artisans in these public market-  
aces reflects their complex experience as individuals who value their mem-  
rship in the wider community that espouses this restricting ideology, as  
men who are economic agents with responsibilities for the complete or  
rtial provision of a household's cash needs, and as sellers in a competitive  
t highly profitable market.<sup>4</sup> While local sector artisans estimated that they  
rn 50–1,000 dirhams<sup>5</sup> each month, depending on time of year as well as  
e extent of their networks and reputation, most full-time tourist sector  
isans earned 1,500–3,000 dirhams monthly, depending on the season.

## COOPERATIVE GROUPS

ost full-time henna artisans who provide services for tourists are part of  
operative groups composed of three to five women with shared values  
ten corresponding with marital status), overlapping work schedules, and,  
a lesser extent, kin or neighborly ties. These informal groups have a stable  
mbership and recognized roles. From an economic perspective, cooper-  
ve groups introduce a degree of specialization while reducing both fi-  
cial risk and competition between vendors.

By pooling their income and dividing it equally among group members,  
isans said, they always earned something, instead of doing well some days  
d poorly on others. This structure also reduces the number of artisans  
h whom each competes for customers, while increasing the number of  
es who can be depended on for help in the frequent arguments with  
npetitors.

Cooperative groups play an important role in spatial tactics as groups and  
individuals compete with each other for access to highly valued locations.  
When newcomers move into an area, for instance, group members defend-  
ing space from an encroaching group increase the space between their stools,  
so as to take up more room than usual. As members of another group try to  
settle in these spaces, they are told they are too close, and to sit a bit further  
away. By spacing stools four or five feet apart along the edge of the flow of  
foot traffic, cooperative groups push newcomers away from desired areas.  
Because of the necessity to occupy a space (thus maintaining the group's claim  
to an area) even when there is little likelihood of getting a customer and  
earning income, group members use their participation in strategies to defend  
group space to bargain for other benefits when necessary. Layla, for instance,  
worked alone one afternoon in the blazing sun without a single customer. She  
later reminded other group members that she had done them a favor by stay-  
ing out in order to keep other artisans from moving into their space. Although  
established groups may have respected custom and recognized use patterns of  
that area, newcomers were looking for places to work and may have argued  
that Layla's group had abandoned the area. Thus, group membership allows  
women to successfully maintain their rights to a particular space while al-  
lowing them the flexibility of occasional or regular absences in order to per-  
form household and social obligations, or to enjoy some leisure time.

Other advantages are linked to specific traits of henna work. Women  
share some supplies, such as albums of henna designs (purchased from  
photo studios or shops that sell cosmetics and other beauty items) and the  
extra stools that are needed for customers who arrive in groups. Expensive  
to compile (containing 10 or more photos that cost 3 dirhams each), albums  
are used primarily to display designs before a sale is made. These albums  
also contribute to the establishment of the product's and artisan's "authen-  
ticity" (Spooner, 1986) as many of the photos show the embroidered edges  
of fine caftans, perhaps some gold rings, and often a setting of velvet and  
brocade pillows. Many potential customers ask if the artisan herself applied  
the henna depicted in the images; the artisans consistently and quickly re-  
spond yes. Since they rarely work with a picture in front of them while  
applying the design itself, three or four artisans often share an album or two.  
Other supplies, such as henna and paint thinner, are purchased in larger  
quantities than are used up quickly by one worker. Henna, in particular, is  
usually purchased as ground powder in sealed boxes of 125 grams, and loses  
potency as it absorbs humidity after opening. Once mixed with water, it  
must be used within a day or so before it loses its strength as a dye. Artisans  
share these purchases as described below.

Cooperative groups sitting together provide opportunities for learning and informal apprenticeship. The most apparent form of learning is the mastery of the henna techniques. Through asking and observing, artisans learn to prepare needles and syringes, mix henna with the proper ingredients, knead it to a smooth paste of the right consistency, and to hold the syringe steadily and draw recognized designs against the skin with threads of paste. Non-technical knowledge is equally important, and learned through observation and questioning (Coy, 1989). Group members become familiar with tourist behavior and consumption patterns, listen to each other interact with potential customers, learn the range of prices for both international and domestic tourists, and practice set phrases in French and Spanish. Trager's study of Nigerian market women indicates that social knowledge relating to sales is highly transferable. Like the Nigerian yam sellers who moved into beer distribution (Trager, 1985), several of the henna artisans had initially been basket sellers, and learned henna techniques in order to make more profitable use of their specialized skills in sales to tourists.

There are also disadvantages to group participation. Disagreements with other artisans, including group members, sometimes escalate into arguments that may become violent. One group experienced two permanent changes in membership over the course of several years, as conflicts became more frequent and serious. Each time, the group split. The three resulting groups maintained cold and occasionally conflictual relations but recognized mutual rights to the profitable space the original group had claimed. This situation highlights the durability of claims to space established by the artisans through continued use.

Cooperative groups are initially formed in several ways. Some are composed of women from the same family. In one case, a woman, her daughter, and pre-adolescent granddaughter worked together. Another daughter was part of a different group, however. This highlights an important aspect of group structure: group members share similar work habits and schedules. The daughter who was part of a different group worked much longer hours, and so joined one of the full-time groups.

With the exception of very young girls who accompany a family member (usually the mother), groups also tend to be composed of women of similar marital status. Married, divorced, and widowed women usually work together, while never-married women have their own groups. This characteristic reflects the social component of women's cooperative work groups. Possible conversation topics are mediated by the status of others present — married, divorced, and widowed women do not discuss sexuality in front of never-married women of any age (*l-banaat*, "girls"), and vice versa.

While Seligmann notes the importance of the neighborhood as a site for market women's networks (2001, pp. 12–13), the artisans in my sample only occasionally worked in cooperative groups based on residence in the same neighborhood. While this form of organization allows women to return home together late at night, many regularly walk home alone as late as midnight. By contrast, other Moroccan women frequently asserted that it was dangerous for a woman to walk alone after dark. Fatima, who worked in a local shop, warned me against returning from the plaza alone, as the artisans usually did. She said, "[After] ten, maybe 10:30, it's too dangerous. You could get killed." "There are people out there, though," I said, "I'd scream." "No one would help you," she responded.

While women often described groupmates as friends or neighbors, I slowly learned that they initially came to know each other through selling in the same area. Over time, the details of their acquaintance were replaced by a relationship of fictitious kinship or neighborliness that aimed to establish a more appropriate context for meeting. Khaddouj shook her head as she told me about one of the group members. "She just came one day," she said, "and said that she needed to learn to do henna. She was divorced from her husband." Sabira sat with the women every afternoon and evening for several months, learning how to do henna, some French phrases, and various prices for tourist sector henna. Finally, she began to work herself, and shared the daily tally.

### SPECIALIZATION WITHIN THE GROUP

Specialization within the group occurs in several forms, including cash management (making change and dividing the pool), selling and bargaining in foreign languages (as well as in Arabic), and good quality henna application. A highly functioning group has not only a pool of shared physical resources, but also one or more members who are proficient in these roles.

Henna artisans in the tourist sector have two primary customer bases: domestic tourists and Moroccan expatriates (known as MREs, or *Marocains résidant à l'étranger*) returning on vacation, on one hand, and foreign tourists, on the other. Older artisans are sought by domestic tourists and MREs, who perceive them to be more skilled, while younger artisans and those with more fluency in foreign languages focus on describing their services and prices to international tourists.

Money is managed collectively. After completing a henna design and receiving money from the customer, an artisan gives the entire amount to

e group treasurer, and obtains change from her if necessary. Money is divided equally among group members before leaving the worksite at the end of an evening or any time a member joins or leaves the group for the day. First, the treasurer pays back amounts disbursed by one member for group purchases. Then she goes around the group, first giving each the same amount of bill, going from the most to the least valuable. If a bill is left over, it is put aside, and the next kind of bill is divided evenly among the group members. The same process is carried out with coins. After these have been divided equally, the remaining bills are changed by one of the group members or taken to another person who changes it. The process is repeated until the money has been divided.

While one woman may keep the money, agreeing on a price, collecting money, and giving change, particularly to non-Moroccan customers may be a separate role. While this function relies on basic foreign language skills, the disparity between actual units of Moroccan currency and the way people use money and quote prices suggests that money handling is much more complex. The basic unit of currency in Morocco is the dirham, which consists of 100 centimes. While prices are always rounded up to the nearest dirham for tourists, goods that are purchased by most people on a daily basis are priced in a combination of dirhams and centimes. The use of such combinations of units is avoided, however, through different ways of speaking about money that persist alongside the formal currency regime. Centimes are also called francs, and so a price of 1 dirham and 30 centimes can be said to be 130 francs. However, in Marrakesh, many people think of currency in terms of riyals, equivalent to 5 centimes. Sellers may switch between dirhams, riyals, and francs in a single interaction without ever specifying the unit of currency, relying on an understanding of market values that is shared (or not) by interlocutors.<sup>6</sup> Although most women I observed are skilled at bargaining, calculating sums, and determining change in riyals, each group has one member who can give prices in French and, usually importantly, in dirhams for tourists, who are (rightly) presumed to be unfamiliar with riyals.

## OTHER COOPERATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

A second tactic links artisans to other vendors who have a more securely recognized claim to space in the tourist plazas. Most artisans establish, individually rather than in groups, another kind of informal relationship in the form of a friendly agreement with one or two (male) vendors who sell

herbs, orange juice, or dried fruit and nuts.<sup>7</sup> The vendors have stationary carts with a small amount of storage space underneath, where artisans sometimes store their stools and henna kits overnight or during breaks, as well as when they anticipate police raids. The carts, which are arranged in an established order around the perimeter of the square and display a decorative card that bears a one or two digit number, also serve as a fixed address that could be located by strangers. While these reciprocal relationships are less stable than those shared among cooperative group members, women value them and try to maintain these relationships through friendly conversation as well as the daily exchange of goods and services with the vendors or, in some cases, through neighborly exchanges with vendors' relatives. Because of the possibility of police involvement, however, and the frequency of mix-ups and missed appointments as well as the necessary and frequent shuffling through the stall, vendors sometimes aim to limit these exchanges.

## CONTROL AND RESISTANCE

Along with organization into cooperative groups and weak but valuable links with male vendors, another primary feature of the organization of artisans' work is the presence and intervention of the state, which is represented by several different policing branches. These features are linked, as cooperative groups provide members with greater resources in dealing with the police, with one member often dealing with the police on behalf of others, paying a small sum each day on their behalf and intervening as necessary.

The relationship between the state and tourist sector henna artisans in Marrakesh is moderated by the ambiguous status of the artisans, particularly in terms of their access to public space. Many kinds of street work,<sup>8</sup> including shoe shining, portering, as well as trades (such as snake and monkey handling) specific to the plaza where many of the tourist artisans work, are regulated by the city. These trades are all exercised by men. Henna work, on the other hand, is traditionally practiced at home, not in the street, and street licenses are not issued to artisans. In fact, several police officers asserted that these women were not henna artisans at all, and cited the fact that they did not provide henna services in the local home-based sector as proof. On the other hand, the artisans framed the legitimacy of their access to this space in terms of continued use, rather than the specific category of activity they exercise. The most senior henna artisans reminded me and each

other that they have been present in the square "since it was full of tents," said one, pointing to an old spice seller, who she said knew her then. Another artisan said, "She and I were here together and we sold baskets."

The tourist sector artisans operate in a gray area, subject to periodic pressure from the state representatives who are mandated to reduce crime and harassment directed at tourists. Several distinct government branches are involved in policing the area. The most significant of these is the Brigade Touristique, created to improve the city's image by reducing the number of unlicensed merchants and guides targeting tourists in the city center. Shopkeepers explain that the artisans are thieves who try to cheat tourists. It is true that prices in the tourist sector are high; they reflect, like almost all market prices, tourist sector artisans' estimation of the an individual buyer's means and knowledge (Geertz, 1979), as well as the level of financial and social risk the artisans bear as informal traders. The municipal police and members of the national guard (*l-assass*) also patrol the areas where henna artisans work. The artisans consider the guards the least helpful and the least powerful, although they are the ones most often patrolling the square and frequently harass the women. "The guards can't arrest you," Sana corrected me, after I had used the terms *boliisi* (police) and *'assass* (guards) interchangeably in conversation one day. "They have to bring the police. And if the police shut you up in jail, the guards can't help you."

Artisans' relationships with police and other representatives of the state are most regularly established through bribes. Each woman who worked in the square had a guard whom she paid off daily. "*Kul wahid andu wahid*," (everyone has one) Sana said to me after several months, when I first saw and understood what was happening after a guard came to demand his daily bribe. The usual amount was 5 or 10 dirhams daily (for a guard) to 20–40 dirhams daily (for a policeman) paid by each artisan.

Artisans cultivate relationships with the officers who patrol the square or can be called upon when necessary to intervene. One evening, I was sitting with Sana when a man came over and spoke quietly to her. "*Na'am*," she responded – a very respectful affirmative. After a few seconds, she said to me, "*Nodi*" (get up), and indicated that we would go in the opposite direction. I said, "That is a policeman in plain clothes?" "Yes," she said. "He is very nice. He told me to go for a walk and come back tomorrow." As we walked, we passed another man and Sana spoke to him briefly. She explained later that he was the police chief, and had said earlier that if he saw the officer who took her equipment the previous day he would tell him to return it. She said that she was telling the police chief that she had received her equipment.

Besides bribes, henna artisans gained the consideration of an officer in other ways. One policeman brought his wife to the square one evening and asked for an artisan to do henna for her because she was attending a wedding the next day. Khaddouj, after spending an hour doing an intricate design, complained to me that the officer was a *himaar* (donkey). She said that she was doing his wife's hands and "stinky feet" for only 30 dirhams, which was a reasonable price in the local market, but much less than tourist sector artisans charged. While this favor strengthened Khaddouj's relationship with her police contact, she resented it. Only a few women avoided paying bribes entirely. Sana said that she didn't pay bribes because she knew the policemen from when she had been in jail, and she later relied on this relationship when her equipment had been seized and she hoped to get it back by bringing them breakfast. Another woman did not pay bribes, but instead had an intimate relationship with a policeman, which assured that she would not be harassed by his peers. Others who did not pay bribes could work only on the margins of the square, and when it was so busy that they could quickly slip into the crowd and out of sight when necessary.

Bribes are part of an informal system maintained by officers and artisans in which the officers agree to tolerate the women's presence, and the artisans agree to pay daily bribes. During the period of my fieldwork, raids were periodic, however, and coincided with the height of the tourist season as authorities attempted to reduce congestion in the square. While the daily payment of cash to the officers is covert, and was for several months described to me by the artisans as "holding money" or "returning money," the raids are uncommon but visible to outsiders. Officers shout at the artisans, and in the most violent incidents, throw and break the artisans' equipment and stools.

I witnessed three forms of interaction between the officers and the artisans. The first is the unofficial tolerance of the artisans' presence in exchange for the payment of a daily bribe. At this level, actions to clear the artisans are half-hearted, non-violent, and motivated only by diffuse job requirements. Officers ignore the artisans, or tell them to leave but take no action. On some days, the general atmosphere is relaxed and humorous. Some occasionally make small talk, and ask about the artisans' children. I was sitting with Khaddouj one afternoon when a man approached from behind and tickled her on the back. Khaddouj lunged with a fist in that direction, hitting me instead, then noticed the man looking back over his shoulder as he walked away. They both laughed, and she apologized. It was a plain-clothed policeman, she explained.



The second form of action against the artisans occurs when pressure on the guards and tourist police increases as their superiors demanded that the square be cleared. A raid begins with a demonstration of aggression by one or two guards, who reach for the stools or photo albums of one of the women. Other artisans circle, usually with one of the women trying to negotiate with the officer. If this fails, the artisans take their equipment and leave. On these occasions, they prohibit women from working, although they often allow them to return several hours later, the next day, or rarely, after several days. These interactions are not violent, and are sometimes almost apologetic in tone, as they explain that the women have to leave. The women cooperate reluctantly, and sometimes refuse to pay on subsequent days since they had been unable to work. The artisans' refusal to pay bribes provokes the third kind of interaction, which is characteristically violent as the officers resent their lost income.

When artisans are banned entirely from the square, they either retreat to the perimeter, or stop coming to the square all together. Those who move from their habitual work areas to outlying areas work in spaces that are otherwise occupied by drunks and drug addicts. These places – dirty and poorly lit – receive no pedestrian traffic, and are used only to apply henna after finding customers in the central area and bringing them outside. Customers, however, recognize these areas as potentially dangerous and are generally reluctant to go. Moroccan customers who have already agreed on a price and are looking for a particular artisan have difficulty finding the artisans during these periods. Furthermore, the presence of artisans in these seamy, seedy areas that are otherwise used only by hashish smokers and alcohol drinkers contributes to negative perceptions of the artisans, regardless of their lack of participation in such activities. Another effect of official harassment is price inflation. Tourist sector henna artisans argue that they have to charge more than local sector artisans because they have to pay bribes, and because there are many days when they cannot work because of problems with the police.

## CHANGING THE RELATIONSHIP TO SPACE

The interplay of gender and space draws not only officials and orange juice merchants into the lives of the henna artisans, but also other actors. Several times per hour in the afternoon, large groups of international tourists follow their state-licensed guides, almost exclusively male, through the square. As they pass henna artisans, some tourists slow down or stop to look. This is

discouraged by the guides. Several times, I heard guides remind the group that they would stop later at a place where they could have henna done in a nice atmosphere, by better henna artisans. Another guide, speaking French to his group, said, "Look how they are! Real Moroccan women are not like that, sitting outside. They are prostitutes, practically." His group stared, but walked quickly by. The trope of "real Moroccan women" was frequently invoked by those who wished to express their displeasure with women's public behavior.

While tour guides' subtle control over tourist purchasing power represents an obstacle for artisans in the public squares, it directs business to other tourist sector henna artisans whose work is controlled by male patrons. Many of the guides brought their groups to medicinal herb shops that have been set up especially to accommodate large tour groups. Here, henna artisans work as independent contractors, earning cash directly from customers, and giving a portion of their sales to the owner.

Nassima told me that she had been working outside, on the plaza, when her present boss came to her and said that it would be better for her to work in his new shop. I asked how. She said that she was too modest to work outside, and that there were lots of arguments among the women and with the police. While Nassima said that working inside was more pleasant, both because it was more private and because it was cooler and there were comfortable places to sit, she lost some of her income as a result. In Marrakesh, where two of the primary field sites were located, these shops are all owned by men, who draw profit from the general belief that it is inappropriate as well as uncomfortable for women to work outside. A discussion among several artisans of Hurriya's decision to begin wearing the face veil (only while working, as is typical of the tourist sector artisans) highlights these factors: Hurriya said that she started to wear it "because people take pictures," while her groupmate said, "No, it's because it's summer and she doesn't want to get black."

While working on commission in a comfortable shop decreases women's income, in a small town near my primary research site, a small number of women – all with considerable family resources – have opened their own henna shops where they do henna inside and keep the proceeds themselves. In each case, they work in shops that belong to their natal or affinal families. The legitimacy of their access to these valuable spaces is undisputed. These shops had previously been run by male family members, but when the henna market emerged as a new high-profit sector, women asked for and received shop space. Two of five artisans have converted the shop entirely to henna use, while three have acquired space for henna in a shop that continues to

sell other tourist-oriented goods. These artisans have professionalized. They have business cards, and shops with unique signs. Some dress in new European-style suits without a *jellaba* as outer garment. Several have their own cell phones. Several engage in a formal division of labor, where they assign customer scouting and henna application to different workers hired specifically for these tasks. In these cases, they emphasize their managerial labor as an aspect of their professionalization: these women do not “do” henna work, instead they organize it.

Sihame, who has a university degree and works in her father’s shop, sees herself as a businesswoman and an artist. She resists stereotypes of henna artists as marginal women, who are divorced, badly married, or poor, and rebuffed my argument that henna provides a resource for women who have few others. “No, it is an art,” she said. She conceives of herself as a smart entrepreneur whose earnings buy luxuries for her family, and a new motor scooter for herself. Sihame’s activities in her father’s shop represent an alternate form of organization that attempts to meld the profitability of the tourist sector with the respectability of private work. She washes her hands with bleach in the evenings to get rid of henna stains that would turn her palms and fingertips maroon or black, turning her hands rough and raw instead.

The capacity to draw on family resources is not the only marker that distinguishes the shopkeeper artisans. While all the twenty outdoor artisans for whom I had this data are illiterate, two of the five shopkeeper artisans in the secondary site have university diplomas. The low-status associations of henna work are not entirely eclipsed by their income-earning capacity, yet these larger-scale artisan-entrepreneurs are proud of their work, and of their status as businesswomen. These cases are atypical and few, but important as outlying cases in which capital (both cash and social resources) has offered increased flexibility and legitimate access to space. Yet concerns remain. Umm Hani told me one day that neighboring shopkeepers, men, sometimes gossiped about her, insinuating that she could be receiving strange men in her shop. She said to me, “What can I do here, with customers coming in? Really – if a woman wants to have a boyfriend, he should come to see her in her home while her husband is out and they will have some privacy.”

Also atypical but noteworthy are two male henna artisans in this town. Both apply henna occasionally, inside small herb shops on which they have inexpensive long-term leases. Abdelghani, who was also an unlicensed guide, said that the female henna artisans were making so much profit that they were “manufacturing money.” Having learned about henna from his mother, he said that he knew more than the young women who were doing it

in the street outside his shop. Although both of the men had freshly used henna syringes in their shops on different occasions when I visited them, they attracted far fewer customers than the female artisans. These men are low status and, compared to the officials who collect daily bribes and the large-scale herbalists who take a percentage from the sales of women operating out of their shops, much less successful at diverting profits from the female artisans. Increasing male participation (in these different guises) in highly gendered and highly profitable henna work is located within a widely reported general trend for lucrative trades to be dominated by men (Chant, 1997; Lessinger, 2001).

### MOBILITY AND MORALITY

I have described henna work as an activity that moves through time and space. I mean by this that work is mappable physical activity that changes, often in a patterned way, over time on micro and macro levels, such as in terms of daily and seasonal cycles and fluctuations. Like other tourist sector workers, henna artisans are conscious of tourist flows, commenting on them constantly, and deploying saving and spending strategies that take these fluctuations into consideration. The flow of traffic through the plaza also orders women’s work throughout the day. Some groups of artisans are displaced from the center to the periphery when their places are taken over each afternoon by male merchants and entertainers. Other groups move throughout the day according to a predictable schedule, sitting in one spot then moving to another as different locations in the square are occupied by succeeding groups, and as the patterns of tourist traffic shift away from the *souq* entrances and toward the temporary stalls. This scheduled movement through and ownership of locations/territories that are bounded and conceived in time as well as in space recalls the “tribal road” of the Basseri nomads described by Barth (1965). These spatial and temporal movements are undertaken not singly, but by groups.

The physical setting has bearing on the actions and strategies of women who work within it, as well as on the attitudes of those who observe and interact with them. At my primary research site, these outdoor artisans worked primarily in two locations, both open market-like plazas permanently occupied by vendors and ringed with shops. During the day, when the area is much less congested with pedestrians, mopeds and bicycles cross the square willy-nilly, emphasizing how local traffic flows across the square as residents go to and from daily chores in this densely populated area of the

ity. Tourists also cross the square as they travel a well-established route that takes them from one popular site to another, and finally back to their motels or buses after an afternoon of shopping in the *souqs*, whose entrances are located along the square.

Several groups work in adjacent locations near one of these entrances, where shoppers, workers, and tourists pass through a gap at the corner of the square, placing their stools along the initial stretch of this stream of tourists, which is also close to the shade and conviviality of the carts with their awnings and umbrellas. When the square is sparsely populated in the afternoons, artisans respect the territory close to established groups, and do not approach tourists who walk near another group without asserting a prior agreement with the customer. In the evenings however, when the square is more crowded with tourists and space is limited, artisans work much closer to each other, in the spaces between and around other vendors. Groups collectively maintain an area that has been transformed by the addition of several low stools and a few bags of equipment, but also by the sedimented actions of the artisans who regularly occupy this space, turning it into a named and identifiable area. They arrange their bags of equipment and stools to exclude competitors and strangers, and speak of each other's habitual area as "theirs" – saying, for instance that someone has gone to Khaddouj's place" as *ind Khaddouj*, in the same fashion whether they are referring to her home or to her place on the pavement.

Women enjoy being in groups and talking among themselves. Being alone, even to work, is described by many of the Moroccan women among whom I work as unpleasant and likely to bring on bad health. Thus, women who are the sole female members of their household seek the company of friends, neighbors, young family members, or household employees; similarly, visiting is considered a good deed performed by the visitor to the benefit of the one visited.<sup>9</sup> Work life is no different, and women seek company to pass the time, either talking, or just sitting together. In addition to the desire for amusement and company is the advantage of having a witness to one's behavior. Since women's reputations are constantly put into question, the presence of a reliable witness to one's actions can be used when necessary. Khaddouj often called attention to this, saying that different people could testify to what she did all day, and to how "reserved" she was in her relations with others. Meneley's (1996) study of women's visiting patterns in a Yemeni community contends that women establish social identity and status through practices of hosting and visiting strategically selected others. The full-time henna artisans in the present study, generally deprived of regular opportunities to engage in neighborhood-based

networks of this kind because of their absence from the household, instead employed their work-based contacts in much the same manner.

While most of the artisans considered in this chapter would be considered mobile in the sense of not working from a shop or stationary cart (Little, 2003), the artisans themselves distinguished between those who walked and those who sat, getting up and walking over to customers but always returning to the same place. While a small number of artisans walked about, scanning for clients, and working quickly and standing up after concluding a sale, most of the full-time artisans were "sedentary," by contrast, moving their stools throughout the day along a known trajectory. Emphasizing the extent to which their daily activities were regularly observed by workmates and neighboring merchants, they often contrasted their behavior with that of the mobile artisans. Amal, a "sedentary" artisan said, "How can I be dishonest, when everyone knows where to find me? The ones who are always going in circles, no. If someone has a problem with them, they run. Fsst!" Amal's comparison demonstrates a strategy through which artisans recognize and deflect criticism of their business practices as well as their moral standing.

## CONCLUSION

Like male tourist sector workers, tourist sector henna artisans adopt a mode of behavior that is active and assertive in its attempts to capture a portion of the global flow of capital that makes its way through Morocco's historic cities. While men's interactions with tourists were rarely subject to criticism, a recurrent theme in my interviews with male research participants was the artisans' behavior, and particularly their unchaperoned and unregulated presence in these market- or carnival-like plazas, was inappropriate for Moroccan women. Three suggested, in nearly identical terms, that it would be better if the artisans wore lab coats and worked in a distinct area, together on a platform. The notion that women's transgressive use of space can be rectified by simultaneously marking them and adding another external covering is reinforced by similar practices in other arenas. Moroccan schoolgirls, for instance, must wear short-sleeved smocks over their dresses or pant outfits (boys do not), and many (though not all) working class women employed in indoor formal sector jobs where they have contact with the public choose to wear their *jellaba* (an outer garment) while working.

Engaging in practices that draw attention to the body and the intimate life cycle events henna is most often associated with, offering henna services

out-of-doors clashes with conventional understandings of Moroccan women's behavior. Much like the female herb sellers in rural Moroccan markets (Kapchan, 1996, 2001), tourist sector henna artisans engage in performances that entwine gender, national identity, tradition, and public space, affirming the continued salience of these ideas as networked symbols that engage multiple meanings and statements of value, and contributing to the development of new possible interpretations. These new-style henna artisans, however, who earn a significant income from doing henna for domestic and international tourists, exist in uneasy relation to Marrakesh's public spaces, whose official allure is their timelessness.

The tactics engaged by tourist sector henna artisans to maintain and solidify their capacity to carry out business in these places include creating social relationships. The cooperative groups in which most artisans participate are alliances that offer financial security, resource sharing, companionship, training, and protection. Relationships with representatives of the state reflect both the tension that underlies women's contested access to a space that has both economic and ideological value, as well as possibilities for maintenance of access.

## NOTES

1. This research is based on 18 months of participant observation in Marrakesh and several smaller towns between May 1998 and August 2001. During this period, semi-structured interviews with henna artisans in the tourist (30) and local (15) sectors were also conducted in Moroccan Arabic and French. See Kelly Spurles, 2004.

2. Zohra could have used one of several methods Marrakshi artisans employ to achieve black henna on skin. Most popular is a two-step process in which a cement and ammonium chloride (*shnadr*) mixture (both available at hardware stores) is applied for several minutes to the design after removing the dried henna paste; a rapid chemical reaction quickly turns the dyed skin black. The cement mixture is fairly caustic, and repeated exposure causes irritation of the skin. A one-step method using prepared black henna containing PPD or paraphenylenediamine was gaining significance in Morocco in 2000 and 2001 as a one-step method for achieving "black" henna, however. This product relies on a highly allergenic black dye that is added to the henna paste; it is considered unsafe because of reactions that include blistering and scarring of the immediate area as well as a delayed systemic allergic response (Ashraf, Dawling, & Farrow, 1994; Marcoux, Couture-Trudel, & Riboulet-Delmas, 2002). Formulas that aim to make henna darker if not actually black and more durable are widespread in Morocco. Very dark henna can be safely achieved on highly keratinized or calloused skin through repeated henna application with no other dye or catalyst. In this process, henna is applied, left to dry overnight, scraped

off, and reapplied one or more times. A simple mixture of lemon juice and sugar (*sqwa*) repeatedly applied to partially dried henna is the most common. As a very weak acid, this mixture works by increasing the duration of contact between the paste and the skin. This step is omitted by most tourist sector artisans. However, both local and tourist sector urban artisans add a small amount of paint thinner to the paste, supposedly to make the color deeper and more durable. The slight burning when the paste is applied to the skin is said to indicate the strength and efficiency of the paint thinner. Paint thinner is, in theory at least, omitted from henna mixed for children – whose skin is considered too tender – and for brides, for whom the desired color is not deep brown but rather ruby red which is described as joyous. Before having henna applied to children, domestic and expatriate Moroccan tourists diligently ask if paint thinner has been added; the artisans duly respond, "Just a little" before proceeding. In fact, in households, the presence of paint thinner in the henna was cited in negotiations with young children who wanted more elaborate henna designs than the adults desired.

3. All research participants are referred to by pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

4. While women can legally and morally rely on male kin for economic support, unemployment often nullifies this claim. The US government estimates Moroccan unemployment at 24 percent in 1999 (<http://www.cia.gov/publications/factbook/fields/2172.html>). Official Moroccan statistics are much lower, placing overall unemployment in 2002 at 10.8 percent, urban overall unemployment at 18.4 percent, and urban female unemployment at 24.3 percent (<http://www.statistic-hcp.ma/>).

5. In 2000–2001, 1 dirham was roughly equivalent to US\$0.10. Three thousand dirhams is approximately a teacher's or policeman's monthly salary, about US\$300.

6. Buyers and sellers also shorten numbers when it is understood that they are multiples of a hundred. For instance, 70 dirhams may be stated as *'arbatash* or "fourteen," that is, fourteen hundred (1400) riyals.

7. Like Chennai market women described by Lessinger (2001), younger henna artisans often addressed unrelated men as *khuya*, "my brother." This is a common practice among young men and women alike, as it invokes mutual rights and responsibilities as well as the legitimacy of interaction noted by Lessinger.

8. See Salahdine (1988) for more on men's informal work (*petits métiers* or "small trades") in Fez.

9. Kanafani, 1983; Meneley, 1996; and Hoodfar, 1997 report similar attitudes among women in the UAE, Yemen, and Egypt respectively. My neighbors and research participants frequently asked if I was lonely or upset from spending time alone in my apartment. After I mentioned one day that several families offered to "lend" me a child to keep me company, Hind explained that it was common for newly wed brides to ask for a child to stay with them so that they would not be lonely during the period before they had their own.

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