

## IDRA Technical Report

# *Henna for Brides and Gazelles: Moroccan Women's Work in the Traditional and Tourist Sectors in Marrakesh*

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## Introduction

Customary Moroccan body practices include both temporary henna decorations, of reddish brown to almost black, and last between several days and several weeks depending on the method of application and the quality of the dye, and permanent blue and green tattoos.<sup>1</sup> While tattoos are declining in popularity in Morocco, and henna is increasingly perceived as an old tradition rather than a current practice, henna designs have been adapted for the tourist market.<sup>2</sup>

The application of henna designs is traditionally a lower-status trade practiced in private homes; however, with the popularization of "tribal" or "ethnic" body art practices (that include tattooing and piercing, in addition to henna) in North America and Europe, the performance of this ritual has moved into public areas where women and girls offer rapidly executed designs to tourists. The presence of growing numbers of artisans offering henna services to tourists in public areas attracts the attention of those who visit or live in Moroccan cities on the international tourist circuit. Carrying a blunt-needled syringe filled with henna (a temporary vegetable dye that is applied in decorative styles to women's hands and feet on festive occasions), many of the artisans dress in a loose hooded robe [*jellaba*] with a distinctive face veil [*ngab*]. In Marrakesh, where this research was carried out, they are highly visible actors in the tourist sector, as they approach virtually every male and female

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157

tourist who crosses through Jmaa' I-Fna, the spectacle-filled marketplace that is the focus of tourists' evening entertainment in Marrakesh.

The goal of this research was to examine the impact of tourism on marginal populations from the perspective of these tourist sector henna artisans. In its attention to individual and collective action, this research responds to critiques that tourism studies have overlooked local participants as active players (Stronza 2001). From its inception, the project was framed to highlight participants' roles and strategies, and to provide insight into how future tourism development will affect this segment of the population. In its largest sense, this research asked, "How do low-income urban women in Morocco respond to the opportunities and challenges posed by international tourism?" The following objectives were addressed:

1. Examine impact of tourism on low-income urban women and families, especially relating to employment opportunities, social and other related costs, factors which promote women's capacity to benefit from tourism, distribution of income from women's employment; and

2. Examine structure of traditional and tourist-oriented henna industries, including acquisition of skills (including managerial and technical), acquisition and management of capital and supplies, marketing practices, competition and price setting.

In order to highlight the significance of this research for tourism impact studies in other regions and for studies of women's status generally in the Middle East, two additional objectives were considered:

3. Increase integration of gender into anthropological perspectives on tourism and development; and

4. Increase integration of female-headed households (especially those headed by very young and post-menopausal women) into anthropological studies of Middle Eastern societies.

## **Methodology**

### **Sites**

Preliminary data and analysis discussed in this paper are based on participant-observation carried out at several locations in and around Jmaa' l-Fna, a popular tourist attraction in Marrakesh, a Moroccan provincial capital that attracts domestic and international tourists. A secondary site was initiated in another town located a short distance from Marrakesh where the tourist henna industry has emerged in a different fashion, and hence offered a productive comparison.

### **Sample**

Research participants were selected using a non-random combination snowball-stratified sampling method. The snowball sample was multi-centered, deriving from a large number of initial contacts that produced additional contacts. Eventually, many of the contact networks linked up, as relationships became evident over the course of my fieldwork. This sampling strategy reflected the social organization of henna work, which divided women into small self-selected cooperative groups. Positive contact with one group member usually led to acceptance by other group members, and links with additional groups that tended to work in the vicinity. Furthermore, as my presence became established, some individuals actively sought me out in order to present their opinions and life stories, while others volunteered to introduce me to members of their network who were involved in different aspects of the tourist economy. Several research assistants aided in locating and introducing me to

traditional sector artisans, and in collecting information on contemporary henna practices in the surrounding neighborhoods and rural communities.

A stratified grid (age, marital status, household composition, education, ethnicity) established prior to the fieldwork was re-evaluated on several occasions to highlight data on emerging categories (male artisans, advanced language skills, exceptional education, exceptional family status). The second field site was added for this reason, in order to provide an understanding of male artisans and middle class (female) artisans. Both of these categories were exceptional in the Marrakesh sample but well-represented at the second location.

Although infrequent participant-observation allowed me to have less intensive though long-term contact with almost the entire pool of artisans, I carried out extensive discussions and frequent participant observation with more than 30 of the tourist sector artisans (including all of the regular workers). Formal and informal interviews and participant observation were carried out with a sample of 15 henna artisans from the traditional sector.

Statistical information on tourism employment was obtained through searches of the relevant literature, and through contacts initiated at a conference on tourism and development in Morocco. Male and female tourist sector workers in other trades (hotel and restaurant, retail, unlicensed tour guides, souvenir-producing artisans) as well as housewives and workers outside the tourist sector were also included in my sample in order to establish a baseline of attitudes and practices. Individuals in this category were mostly low-income earners, those who would be considered peers of the henna artisans in my primary sample. Also contacted were a number of middle to upper-middle class individuals associated with the tourism sector as licensed guides, police, civil servants, and proprietors and employees of

stores, travel agencies, and restaurants. These individuals constituted the background of the henna artisans' social worlds.

## **Data collection**

Preliminary contact with henna artisans in the tourist sector was established easily, since the artisans approached all male and female foreigners who entered Jmaa' l-Fna. As women addressed me, asking if I was interested in a "henna tattoo," I responded in Moroccan Arabic, which aided in immediately establishing that I had a peculiar status for someone whose physical appearance clearly marked her as a foreigner. Each time I expressed interest in their work, and explained that I was a student and wanted to learn about the kinds of ways women make money here. Over time, I gave more detailed explanations, describing how I wanted to understand the differences between doing henna for tourists and doing henna for weddings, and also what it is like for women to do business in a busy public place like Jmaa' l-Fna. Many of the henna artisans took for granted that I would be interested in sitting and talking with them, and encouraged me to sit and talk with them several times a day.

Initial visits were short, not much longer than fifteen minutes or half an hour several times a day to different groups. By mid-September, however, I was staying for three to four hours at a time and felt that I had entered into their work-based networks as a participant. The women questioned any absence of a day or even an evening. I began to bring ~~fresh~~ fruit or water (cooled in an earthenware jug) each time I came, and I shared whatever homemade food others had brought – fried sardines, eggplant, or potatoes.

On the other hand, I did not receive invitations to the henna artisan's homes the same way that I was constantly invited to visit middle-class people I met in other contexts – male taxi drivers, dry goods merchants, hotel keepers, shop workers frequently asked me to

meet their wives and families and join their social circle. One reason the women did not invite me to their homes was that during the high season they were almost constantly present in the square: many worked from nine in the morning until midnight, with a break of only an hour or so in mid-afternoon. Another reason was that my closest relationship was with a widowed woman who lived with her son-in-law. With her daughter away on an extended visit to another city, my friend's situation was very precarious.

As I expanded my network to include close relationships with women who were household heads themselves, I began to visit other women at their homes, though not without some tension between them and this woman, who had been my first regular contact. As she heard increasingly that I was visiting others, she began to say that her son-in-law would invite me to their home the next time there was a circumcision, a specific date in the distant future. She also invited me to come along with her when she participated in other events, such as visiting the mosque (which I didn't do) and attending another friend's circumcision (which I did).

Contact with traditional sector henna artisans was established through inquiries in my growing network beyond the artisans of Jmaa' l-Fna. Having established to my satisfaction that there is no considerable cross-over between the two sectors, I asked people, men and women, if they knew women who did henna for parties and weddings. In this way I was invited to social events, and carried out interviews with men and women about traditional henna practices and about their feelings and experiences related to tourism, and with local sector artisans about their careers and their home-life.

A problem that I feel I resolved satisfactorily was managing contacts with members of different cooperative groups. My choice to establish relationships with women of different groups was challenged at first, and resulted in my being shunned by some and

welcomed warmly by others. Chance meetings with some women while in the presence of their sworn enemies were difficult, as I would have to explain on the spot that I did, inconceivable as it seemed, visit the other too. I suspected that cliques were formed on some significant basis and I was reluctant to exclude myself from groups or individuals that my first informants sometimes described as degenerate (literally, "hippy-like"). Marginal to mainstream Moroccan society, these women may represent the key to understanding problems of integration faced by the larger group whose tourist-sector activities pull them out of traditional patterns of female behavior.

I persisted in spending time with different groups, though at different times of the day. I would greet each person that I knew but tried not to leave one group and directly join another. Instead I maintained a schedule of spending mornings with group A, afternoons and early evenings with group B, and late evenings with group C. A secondary tourist area fifteen minutes north of Jmaa' l-Fna (Rahba Qdima) allowed me to set up another rotation with several more groups. Visits to different groups always ended by my return home or to a nearby cafe for a meal and a rest during which I was able to write up brief notes. Returning to the site later, the group I had sat with earlier would have moved on, and I would join another group. Each visit began, however, with the examination of my hands for traces of new or old henna designs that I would have to explain: Who did each one, who traced the lines, what quality is the henna dye and the design itself? When the reaction to my answers told that I had spent a morning with a member of an unfriendly clique, I held my ground and refused to engage their criticisms or answer their questions about others' behaviors or news. After several months, most of the women seemed to have accepted most of the time that I was going to maintain a number of relationships.

## Triangulation

As projected, observation was a useful tool, and yielded data that differs markedly from direct questioning. Direct questioning was useful to supplement or clarify my observations, yet did not replace daily routine participation. Direct questioning, as I anticipated, provided information that is most relevant to how people wish to be perceived, as well as their understanding of their interlocutor's expectations. For instance, in the early stages of the fieldwork, as I was trying to understand the actors and dynamics of the tourist arena, and particularly the role of the police (which I initially perceived as a single undifferentiated corps) in the economics of tourist henna, research participants told me that there were no problems with the "police," that they were there to make sure that there were no fights between the men. Not until the police became accustomed to my presence and eventually approached the henna women while I was sitting with them did people's explanations of the police's role gain more detail and shift from normative explanations of the state's positive leadership role to more nuanced descriptions of interdependent relationships of exploitation incorporating henna artists, tourist police, national guard, and tourists, in which each actor seeks to maximize his/her take from the other. Relationships between police and henna artisans are described in more detail below.

I found direct questioning to be useful for eliciting information about henna techniques and traditions, as well as about attitudes toward tourism, women's work, and other topics in which my interest is in an initial appreciation of local norms. In each case, I tried to maintain an awareness of my interlocutor's role and the factors that shape his/her worldview. In most cases, I discussed the same questions with a number of others from similar and different statuses, hoping to triangulate data as well as to identify factors that are correlated with particular attitudes and experiences.

## Obtaining consent

While some people — henna artisans and others — were eager to tell me what they thought were the major issues and themes of contemporary Moroccan society, others were reluctant to develop relationships that extended beyond a brief though friendly greeting. In one case, a young henna artist had agreed to talk to me about her work, although I was only once or twice been able to talk to her for more than several minutes before she said “waxxa, bisslama” (“okay, goodbye”) and walked away. In the context of other women’s habits of urging me to stay longer each time I suggested that I should go, I interpreted this young girl’s behavior as a refusal of consent that overrides whatever verbal agreement she had given earlier. In response to such conflicting verbal and physical expressions, I adopted a culturally embedded understanding of consent that it is continuously negotiated (rather than definitive) and diverse (incorporating physical as well as verbal communication).

## Method of analysis

Because so little research has focused on the social relations of tourism workers, and none at all on Muslim women working in tourism, I favored the inductive approach of grounded theory. The attention to directing research in the field that is the hallmark of grounded theory helped me to explore new suppositions that arose from the data, and to repeatedly ask myself about the content of what I considered relevant — what was relevant, and hence data, and what was extraneous.

Grounded theory, a paradigm which views generating theory and doing social research as intertwined parts of a single process (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Miles and Huberman 1994), provided the framework for an ongoing process of moving back and forth between data collection and analysis. The essence of grounded theory is that while the

researcher approaches the field with a question and a loose framework of assumptions about likely variables and operating principles, theories and conclusions ideally emerge out of the data in an ongoing process of investigation, reflection, and comparison. Table 1 depicts some of the theories that were engaged during the research, and indicates how theories were tested through describing them in terms of observable data events.

In several instances, assistants conducted interviews with Tashelheit (Berber)-speaking individuals using interview guides and observation keys that I prepared and discussed with them. All interviews in Moroccan Arabic and French were carried out by me, when possible, alone with the individual or with trusted peers. One interview was carried out in English because the male participant wanted to discuss matters in confidence without provoking curiosity or suspicion by meeting alone with me. Two series of interviews were carried out in Modern Standard Arabic, which several young university-educated men used when speaking with me.<sup>3</sup>

I employed several note-taking techniques. Life histories were gathered in structured interviews, often tape-recorded or minutely noted during the interview itself. Less formal questioning was sometimes recorded at the site, however most times I returned home or went to a nearby café where I sat and wrote up notes after observation periods of several hours. Notes were initially taken in a mixture Moroccan Arabic, French, and English, and later transcribed to a computer file. Field drawings and sketches were used to map group behavior, to provide costume details, and to illustrate henna techniques. Photography was used (with the permission of subjects) to record henna techniques, and to record the physical setting. Research participants were happy to have copies of posed photos.

Additional material was generated during the analysis of fieldnotes and images. Second and third readings produced additional questions, marginalia, underlined themes, and

short texts that aimed to develop themes that were emerging from the data. During the later period of the fieldwork, after my first computer was replaced following an electrical malfunction and the second one had a hard drive failure, I began to make these observations on audiotapes.

**Table 1: Operationalization of key variables**

Variable / Theoretical supposition	Observation keys
Commoditization / Henna girls adapt traditional practice for a Western market primed by its own myths of Arab/Oriental exoticism.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Adaptation. Observation: Distinction between traditional and tourist henna practices.</li> <li>2. Interaction with tourists. Observation: verbal and non-verbal communication (dress) between workers and tourists. Interview: norms relating to interaction with tourists.</li> <li>3. Tourists' expectations. Observation and interviews: tourist motivations, expectations.</li> </ol>
Marginality / Henna girls are, like other culture brokers, marginal members of their communities. Marginality furnishes both motive and means for participation in tourist sector.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ethnic marginality. Observation: links to Berber village (visits, exchange of goods), languages spoken. Interview: links to Berber village (affect).</li> <li>2. Social marginality. Observation: daughter of single mother or widow, participation in visiting and cooperative networks.</li> <li>3. Economic marginality. Observation: consumption levels (household inventory, visible consumption). Interview: consumption levels (e.g. engagement, wedding, and circumcision party narratives).</li> </ol>
Rule-breaking / Henna girls' activities in the tourist sector violate existing norms of acceptable female behavior.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Tourist sector activities. Observation, interview: verbal and non-verbal interaction with tourists and locals, organization of work.</li> <li>2. Norms of female behavior: Observation, interview: behavior patterns of women of similar age, education, income level.</li> </ol>
Integration / Henna girls, like other low-income women, depend on a complex network of reciprocal help. Status within networks demonstrate extent that rule-breaking behavior is successfully integrated.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Network participation. Observation: participation in visiting and cooperative networks. Interview: network composition and exclusion rules.</li> <li>2. Status. Observation: location within hierarchy of informant's vertical network, size of horizontal network, value of goods/services that can be mobilized by network. Interview: location of others within their respective networks.</li> </ol>
Visibility / Elements of mobility and enclosure may be manipulated in order to diminish loss of	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Status. Observation: food sharing, socializing at worksite, visiting, level and form of</li> </ol>

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status from tourist sector work.

participation in celebratory parties, comments about others.

2. Avoidances. Observation: behaviors that are practiced by artisans said to be low-status, and avoided by those said to be high-status.

3. Location and mobility. Observation: location and characteristics of worksite, degree and form of physical mobility while engaged in business.

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## Findings

### Impacts of tourism on low-income urban women and families

Through participant observation and structured and unstructured interviews, descriptive data on the impacts of tourism on low-income urban women and families was gathered. The primary benefit that women mentioned was spending. "They spend a lot" [*Taykhalsu bezzaf*] was a very common response to initial questions about how people felt about tourism in the local area. Increased spending by tourists resulted in a stronger local economy, epitomized by international-class hotels on Avenue de France. An unexpected finding was the capacity of low-income earners to participate in and experience the affluence introduced by international tourism. In fact, young people spoke of spending an evening on Avenue de France using the expression "We went to France" [*Mshiinaa lil-faransaa*].

Although only well-to-do people ate in the fancy hotel restaurants or rented out rooms for wedding celebrations, men and women with less income participated through dressing up and strolling along the boulevard, or sitting in the green space during hot evenings. Throughout the city, public touristic spaces (such as the re-developed commercial area near Jmaa' l-Fna) are used extensively by locals. Access to private spaces, including pools and lobbies, is restricted to hotel guests. Improvements in urban spaces and free access to these new facilities were linked to positive feelings generated by tourism.

Tourist spending has increased employment in the well-remunerated modern sector that includes travel and car rental agencies, restaurants, and hotels. Tourist sector salaries are high (1500 – 4000 dirhams monthly), and offer the possibility of additional revenue through tips (offered by tourists in the form of cash or gifts) and commissions (paid in cash or kind by businesses in return for bringing customers). However, women are excluded from many jobs through hiring policies that specify that the search is open to male candidates only. In any case, women from low-income families are often employed at the lower end of this sector, as cleaning women and kitchen helpers in the lowest-paying establishments, since, as many said, it is necessary to have a connection that can be manipulated in order to get hired. Although there was evident social mobility as people in higher positions told me of their modest origins, middle-class and poor people often stated that upward mobility was impossible without the aid of an important benefactor, or the payment of significant bribes. Young people who obtain college certificates in order to move into a higher job category find that it is necessary to do one or several unpaid internships in order to gain the experience and connections necessary to compete in the job market.

Not all tourism-related employment is prestigious or well remunerated. Female artisans who produced tourist-sector goods were paid 10 dirhams a day, while male artisans were paid up to 15 dirhams. Construction workers (men) working steadily on the development of new tourist-oriented facilities were also paid 10 to 15 dirhams each day. Although people working in these trades were grateful for their jobs in an economy where many of their peers were without work, they did not enjoy the benefits that tourism brought to those with language skills, education, and social connections who worked in more lucrative jobs.

Low-income urban women often spoke of tourism's benefits in terms of what the family as a whole could draw benefits from. Many were not eager to work outside the home in the jobs that they perceived were open to them, and hence spoke of tourism employment in terms of opportunities for their male kin who shared their household.

Disadvantages of tourism were not a major topic of conversation among low-income women, and my attempts to draw out responses on this question invited joking responses that the only problem was jobs. Nonetheless, tourism in other regions has been linked to diminished quality of life for local residents who bear the brunt of rising prices.

Prices of apartments in certain neighborhoods had increased dramatically, and some landlords no longer rented to Moroccans. Strong tenant protection laws limited rent increases during tenancy, though rent increases to new tenants were not regulated. Hence, not only would tourists pay higher rents than locals, but landlords also had frequent opportunities (between tenants) to adjust rents as market prices increased. Low vacancy rates for unfurnished apartments in the downtown neighborhood made short-term leases to tourists more profitable than long-term leases to local families. Modest furnished apartments were rented by the day, week, or month for twice the rate of similar non-furnished apartments, making this strategy another profitable avenue for landlords.

This housing shortage was offset by the dissatisfaction of young people with traditional urban housing. Marrakesh has growing suburbs where new housing with modern features (kitchen, toilet and shower, bedrooms, access to public transit and parking spaces) is within reasonable distance of commercial and industrial areas. The demand for traditional housing in the central urban area is diminishing as new housing is constructed away from the core of the city.

Many low-income families live in shanty-towns located in these peripheries. Other families live in a multi-family dwelling [*funduq*], where they rented a single room with shared water faucet and toilet facilities for 200 – 300 dirhams a month. These are being increasingly emptied of tenants in order to permit their conversion into luxury homes or inns. During the period of my fieldwork in Marrakesh, there was a new shortage of cheap rooms, which coincided with the phenomenal growth in unlicensed hotels and guest homes (called *riyads*, after the central gardens typical of these homes<sup>4</sup>) run by foreigners. By 2000, following reports on European television of cheap palaces available for purchase in Morocco, more than 300 *riyads* in the Marrakesh medina had been purchased and converted for tourist use.

Moroccan newspapers discussed the negative environmental effects of the growing number of *riyads*. Tourists use significantly more water than locals, for instance, because adapted accommodations feature flush toilets (rather than squat) and showers (allowing for daily washing rather than weekly visits to the hammam). This decreases water available for other uses, and burdens the central sewers to the extent that waste is only inches below floor level. Yet I heard little complaint about this from people who lived in these neighborhoods, except from those who were actively seeking cheap housing and found none. Others were proud of the interest outsiders took in their city and traditional neighborhoods, and regarded the renovation and construction of luxury homes as a point of pride. Only complaints from tourists who described occasional verbal harassment indicated the level of discomfort with the increasing presence of strangers in domestic areas.

Other spending categories are not limited by supply the way real estate is, and the flexible pricing of groceries and many consumer items meant that Moroccans paid one price, while tourists buying from the same merchant frequently paid more. However, not all goods were subject to flexible pricing. Inexpensive food shops in some areas, for instance, catering

to local workers who cannot return home for lunch during the two-to-three hour afternoon break, have been sold and replaced with sit-down restaurants that do not offer affordable meals.

Alcoholism, drug abuse, prostitution, and vagrancy are problems that have emerged in Casablanca as well as tourist centers such as Agadir and Marrakesh, and are not popularly associated with tourism. However, there are indications that international tourism in some areas is associated with pedophilia and prostitution. Several male acquaintances in Marrakesh spoke about parties they had attended where gay tourists selected young heterosexual men for sex. Since homosexuality is defined socially in Morocco as male desire to be penetrated, young men who did not identify themselves as homosexuals were encouraged to participate in these parties. The cash involved in these transactions ranges from a hundred dirhams to several thousand per person. In Agadir, tourists from the Arab Gulf have reportedly spread AIDS among school-age girls who engage in occasional prostitution. There is little coverage of these issues in the government-controlled press; one magazine that addressed the issue was reprimanded and the issue was withdrawn from circulation.

### **Henna work in the traditional and tourist sectors**

The second set of objectives related to the structure of henna work in the traditional and tourist-oriented henna industries. Although the crafts are similar, there was no overlap between henna artisans [*nqasha*, singular; *nqashat*, plural] in the tourist and traditional sectors. Observation and discussions with tourist sector henna artisans and with other contacts made it clear that there was very little cross-over between the two markets. Most noticeably, Moroccans (men and women) constantly remarked on the henna designs which frequently decorated my hands and identified it as "from Jmaa l-fna." The tenacity and color of the dye, the thickness of the lines, and the density and style of designs used by the tourist sector

artisans distinguished their work from the work of traditional sector artisans employed for parties and weddings. Notwithstanding a high level of variation in skill among the tourist trade artisans themselves, tourist trade henna work was generally characterized by thick lines that may, at an extreme, be wavy and of uneven width, little variation in design motifs, wide spacing of design elements, and weak pigment development. No tourist trade work approached the high density and fine lines of traditional sector henna production.

As my circle grew to include all the regular henna artisans at Jmaa l-fna, I realized that not one had discussed a particular instance of doing henna for a wedding — even though all had initially said that they did so to me, and frequently told potential customers that they worked for weddings as well. Tourist sector artisans carried a collection of photos, minimally one or two, but in most cases 12 or 15, which depicted hands and feet decorated in a variety of styles and designs. Although photographs invariably show only a woman's hands and/or feet, other details, such as an embroidered green velvet pillow supporting the feet on a table covered with a matching green cloth, or the embroidered hem of a green velvet dress, suggest that the photo was taken at a wedding or engagement henna party, since the embroidered green velvet accessories are generally rented for the occasion. Potential customers frequently asked if the artisan had done the design shown in the photo, and with only one exception, the artisan always answered yes — if another woman did not answer yes in her place. It was clear from these responses that applying henna at traditional occasions added to the authority of the tourist sector henna artist. I gradually became accustomed to the women's photo collections, and began to recognize the same photos appearing over and over; eventually I learned that women bought them at perfume shops and photo processing laboratories for several dirhams each.

Traditional sector artisans worked in the homes of the customers, and usually entered the profession after an apprenticeship of several months or years during which they acquired technical and business skills as well as the imprimatur of the established artisan. Through family and neighborhood networks, they gradually built up a network of clients who called them to provide services.

Traditional sector artisans were paid according to two scales. Regular work was paid at a fixed rate of 30 to 35 dirhams for hands and feet; additional designs done on a single hand for onlookers (children and neighbors) were done for free or for a gratuity of several dirhams. Wedding henna was more elaborate, and artisans who worked with a wedding professional [*ngaffa*] were paid much more, and received gifts of milk and sugar in addition to cash. In the social circles where my research was conducted, the henna artisan was paid several hundred dirhams for weddings, where close family members placed cash on a large tray while the artisan decorated the bride. Money offered during the bride's henna application was noted by guests, and reflected the closeness of the relationship between the families, and the status of the giver.

In addition to the henna artisan was the wedding professional who provided accessories and clothing for the bride, and was paid considerably more for her services. Although henna artisans sometimes aspired to become wedding professionals, the necessary investment and impressive network required for success in this trade limited entry.

The typical occupational trajectory of a traditional sector artisan was several years of work as a young woman, during which money was invested in goods and clothing and increased her value as a potential wife. After marriage and the establishment of a household with children, some artisans withdrew from work because of child- and home-care demands, while others continued. Physical ailments from bending over for three to four hours at a

time and eye strain from detailed work were common reasons artisans gave for reducing their activities, generally by refusing some customers and retaining others. Popular artisans worked several times a week during the summer months, while many worked much less. Most retired completely from henna work by middle age.

The tourist sector was structured very differently. Despite negative connotations attached to working in public, this sector was highly attractive to some because of the much higher earning potential. Furthermore, because customers were drawn from a constantly renewed pool of strangers, financial success in this sector was independent of reputation or prestige. This dynamic appeared to contradict general knowledge about social success, and encouraged artisans to continue their trade despite neighborhood criticism. They often repeated the maxim "There are bad ones and good ones," explaining that there are bad people and good people from every walk of life.

Most tourist sector artisans were de facto household heads or subordinate members of female-headed households. While some were widows, others were divorced or separated. Some of the divorced women worked only temporarily as henna artisans, leaving the trade when their husband revoked the divorce. A few were married. Some were married to men who were habitual gamblers, drinkers or hash smokers, and who worked little or not at all, never earning enough to support their families. Other women were second wives who were unable to claim a sufficient portion of their husband's earnings. One artisan told me one day that she had been going to court to get a divorce, and would finally be free. Some of the henna artisans were married to men who worked at low-paying jobs nearby. Hlima was 42 and had four children with her husband, who worked in the chicken market. "It's dirty," she said, "but it's work. He isn't paid by the month — he's paid by the day. And so sometimes it's 30 dirhams, sometimes 50, sometimes nothing." Her income contributed to the cost of

sending their oldest son to Italy. The process of obtaining papers and passage (through a Moroccan mediator) had cost them 70 000 dirhams, almost two years' salary (3200 dh/month) for a government worker and nearly twelve years' salary (500 dh/month) for women who worked as household maids, commercial cleaners, or laundresses in the local sector.

A large group was composed of young unmarried women aged between 16 and 20, all of them living with a divorced or widowed mother. A very small number of women were already financially secure, married to wage-earners or possessing a family home themselves, and engaged in henna work occasionally or for a few hours a day on a more regular basis. A small but significant number were young girls, aged between 8 and 15, who are daughters of tourist-sector henna artisans, street children, or run-away maids.<sup>5</sup>

Many artisans worked only occasionally, and often on the hottest nights when it was unpleasant to be in the small one-room apartments poor families rented.<sup>6</sup> For them (as for the others), Jmaa' l-Fna provided an opportunity to make money while enjoying its entertainment and fresh air. Henna work was also a strategy that enabled low-income women to cope with large or sudden expenses. The morning of 'Eid l-Kbir, I walked across the empty square at 9 am to get a place in one of the collective taxis going south of the city so that I could spend the holiday with a family I often visited. I was surprised to see one woman sitting on a stool, dressed in her dirty work clothes, when such few others as were in the street were dressed in their holiday best and going off to celebrate. She kissed me, and we wished each other a happy 'Eid. She was going to work only a few hours, she said, just until one in the afternoon, then she was going to go home and celebrate with her children. There were still tourists in town, and because of the holiday there was almost nothing else for them to do but walk around, so she thought she would be able to make some money. "I

spent all my money on the ram for my children's 'Eid," she added, "I have to work now. But it's no problem."<sup>7</sup>

Many life histories demonstrated how women broke with customary practices in order to improve their family's standard of living. For instance, one woman, very religiously devout and divorced with a small child, celebrated a second marriage during my fieldwork. Her new husband was one of the snake charmers who worked in the square. They came to know each other there, and he saw that she was a good Muslim and wanted to marry her, she said. Another woman was married and lived in a house they owned. My friend shared this information with me one afternoon, criticizing her. "You see all those keys she has? Why does she need to do henna? I have no husband, and no house," she complained. My friends (of several social classes) whose lives gave them less contact with Jmaa' l-Fna workers insisted that these stories could not be true, since they disputed locally accepted ideas about gender roles within marriage.

### **Status vs income**

Tourist trade henna work was low on the social scale of women's employment, even in the sub-sector of the informal economy that is characterized by low incomes and little training. Some informants suggested that it is less desirable than the half-naked physically-demanding bathhouse work of hauling buckets of steaming water, traditionally the lowest status respectable occupation open to women. One indication of the low status attached to this occupation was the face veil (*ngab*) worn by almost all Jmaa l-fna henna artisans between the ages of 15 and 40. Henna artisans wore the *ngab* only while working. The *ngab* is worn by other women engaging in what informants sometimes described as shameful occupations, they too taking place in the street: begging and selling used gold jewelry on consignment.<sup>8</sup>

Seeming to contradict the low status of tourist sector henna work however, were surprisingly high earnings. With daily incomes ranging from 50 to 100 (and exceptionally 200) dirhams a day, henna artisans in the tourist sector earned much more than other jobs of comparable access: adult maids earned 30 dirhams a day (or 70 if they worked for foreigners), while hammam workers often earned less than 20 dirhams daily.<sup>9</sup> Hence, many of the women showed pride in being independent wage earners. A small number of women stated that henna work had allowed them to move up the social ladder from public begging.

### **Skill acquisition and access to trade**

Access to the trade was fairly open. Many artisans had a low level of skill that could have been acquired within days, if not hours. Others carried out an apprenticeship where they sat with working artisans for several weeks, observing the construction of designs and practicing at home on a piece of cardboard. Although most women knew how to mix henna paste from watching neighborhood artisans, the techniques used for tourist site work were adapted to reduce time, equipment, and effort. Artisans learned these techniques on-site, where henna paste was prepared. Knowledge of where to purchase and how to prepare needles and syringes was also shared between artisans and newcomers.

Most important was learning the phrases necessary to approach and bargain with potential customers. While many customers were Moroccan tourists visiting from other cities, the most profitable customers were foreigners, who were more likely to pay higher prices. With more disposable income and less knowledge of the local market, tourists were more likely to pay an inflated price. Hence, apprenticeship focused much more on business practices and language learning than on henna techniques. Artisans learned necessary foreign phrases from each other, and practiced phrases that were useful. A few artisans with

advanced skills conversed more easily with tourists, and learned more phrases that could be introduced into the shared corpus.

Bargaining was an important skill that was often left to a more experienced group member. Moroccan tourists were cognizant of standard prices for full hand (20 dirhams for both hands), half hand (15 dirhams for both hands), and wedding designs (30 dirhams for both hands), and bargained very little with the artisans, choosing instead on the basis of appearance (they preferred older women who were sitting rather than actively approaching customers). Anticipating foreigners' ignorance of local market prices, some of the artisans suggested very high starting prices to foreign tourists — between 2 and 20 times standard rates — and bargained downward. Extensive bargaining in French was beyond the grasp of most artisans, though almost all knew numbers and several relevant phrases in French. Artisans who lacked adequate language skills to converse with an interested customer called on a friend who was later given a tip for her help. One woman acted only as a broker. She was very fluent in French and English but had no skill at all for henna application, specialized in getting customers and then finding an available artisan to do the work. The amount was split evenly between the artisan and the broker.

## **Investment**

Minimal equipment — a small amount of henna, a syringe with a large needle, and several photographs — could be purchased for 15 dirhams, a small amount easily raised through a savings club or by putting one or several days' groceries on credit.<sup>10</sup> More established artisans had little additional equipment: one or two stools (10 to 17 dirhams each, depending on the quality and size), a second syringe and needle (5 dirhams), a larger supply of ground henna (5 dirhams for 250 grams), and a larger number of photographs (2 to 3 dirhams each) collected in a small album (7 to 10 dirhams). Even though they worked late

into the night and competed for access to well-lit working areas near the restaurants, none of the henna artisans owned or rented their own gas lights (7 dirhams a night).

### **Social organization of work**

The predominant aspect of henna artisans' work at Jmaa' l-Fna was its informal organization into small cooperative groups. Groups had a stable membership of women who pooled their earnings on a daily basis. Although membership remained the same, group members didn't necessarily work identical hours. Members of cooperative groups gave what they earned from customers to one member who acted as cashier, who divided it equally at the end of the evening, or when a member joined or left the group at some point during the day. For instance, two women who worked together during the morning would divide their receipts equally when the third regular member joined them later in the day, beginning a new tally. Some short absences, such as to pray or visit the hammam, were considered necessary and unavoidable, and were not occasion to begin a new tally. By pooling their income and dividing it equally among group members, women said that they always earned something each day, instead of doing very well on some days and very poorly on others. This structure also reduced the number of artisans with whom each competed for customers, while gaining a number of strong allies who could be depended upon for help in the frequent arguments with competitors.

*Functions of cooperative groups.* Membership in a cooperative group also allowed women to collectively "defend" a space from outsiders, and assert collective ownership of the space at times when conditions (i.e. demand for henna services) would not support a larger number of artisans. By cooperating with several others, women also managed to successfully defend their customary rights to a particular space while allowing them the flexibility of

occasional or regular absences in order to care for children, carry out housework, attend a wedding, visit a sick friend, or enjoy some leisure time.

When newcomers moved into an area, group members defending space from an encroaching group would increase the space between their stools, so as to take up more room than usual. If members of another group tried to settle in these spaces, they were often told they were too close, and to sit a bit further away. By spacing stools four or five feet along the edge of the flow of foot traffic, cooperative groups could push newcomers away from desired areas.

Because of the necessity to occupy a space even when there was little likelihood of getting a customer and earning income, group members used their participation in strategies to defend group space to bargain for other benefits when necessary. Meriem, 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 staying 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 could have argued that Meriem's group had abandoned the area.

There are other advantages to working in cooperative groups. Women enjoyed being in groups and talking among themselves. Being alone, even to work, was perceived as uncomfortable and likely to bring on bad health. Women who were the sole female members of their household sought the company of friends, neighbors, young family members, or household employees; similarly, visiting was considered a good deed performed by the visitor to the benefit of the one visited. Work life was no different, and women sought company to pass the time, either talking, or just sitting together. In addition to the desire for amusement and company was the advantage of having a witness to one's behavior. Since

women's reputations were constantly put into question, the presence of a reliable witness to one's actions could be used when necessary. One friend often called attention to this, saying that different people could testify to what she did all day, and to how strict she was in her relations with others.

Other benefits of being in collective groups were linked to specific traits of henna work. Women shared some supplies, such as albums and extra stools used by customers. Expensive to compile, albums were used only to display designs before a sale was made. Since the artisans didn't work with a picture in front of them while applying the design itself, three or four artisans usually shared an album or two. Other supplies, such as henna and paint thinner, were purchased in larger quantities than were used up within several months by one worker. Dried powdered henna, purchased in sealed boxes of 250 grams, lost its potency if it absorbed humidity. Henna paste also lost its potency after a day or so. Women often shared these purchases, each one chipping in a few dirhams to pay for the paint thinner or henna bought by one member and shared by the group.

Cooperative groups sitting together provided opportunities for learning. The most obvious form of learning was henna techniques: preparing needles and syringes, mixing henna with the proper ingredients, kneading it to a smooth paste of the right consistency, and finally holding the syringe steadily and drawing recognized designs against the skin with threads of paste. Yet other aspects of tourist sector henna work were equally important, and learned in conscious ways. Group members listened to each other interact with potential customers, and asked how to say set phrases in French or Spanish.

Despite the considerable advantages of working in cooperative groups, there were disadvantages. Disagreements with other artisans, including group members, sometimes

escalated into arguments that could become violent. These notes recount how Tamou and Meriem argued one day, as they often did.

When the women counted up the other night Tamou was sitting alone. Halima said to come over, she said no. After a while I asked her what she was thinking about, it was clear that she was in a bad mood. She said "la ilaha illa la" [There is no god but God, the Muslim profession of faith, and in this instance, a meditative prayer.] "Good," I said. She still seemed perturbed. After a while it came out. Meriem said that they should give her less because she takes time to go to pray — the prayer at 1, at 4, at 7, and at 10. All the daily prayers except for the morning one. Tamou didn't comment on that. Meriem said why did you say "the hammam"? Meriem said that Tamou had said that Meriem shouldn't get money for a customer who came while she was at the hammam. Tamou began to tell her part, then, and said that Meriem didn't go directly to the hammam, but went home and got her things and then went to the hammam and went home again. Meriem argued back, and said that she worked hard, and that Tamou sat in the shade in the afternoon but she (Meriem) sat in the sun. So each argued without contradicting what the other said. Meriem kept repeating, then why did you say those words, "she went to the hammam." Obviously Tamou had implied earlier that Meriem should get less because she took time off. The women divide the money according to who was there when a customer came, but some absences are clearly considered legitimate and others not. Tamou and Meriem were arguing over what was considered legitimate.

The conflict was resolved when each agreed that the other was not abusing the group's plan to share the income equally among Meriem, Tamou, and the two other group members who had not been absent at all. Another day, the conflict between Meriem and Tamou was not successfully managed, and escalated into a fistfight. Onlookers called the police, and Tamou was taken to the station for questioning. When she returned to the square several days later, she said that she had gone to Casablanca to visit her daughter. She worked with another group after that.

*Formation of cooperative groups.* Cooperative groups were formed in several ways. Some of them were 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 highlighted an important aspect of group structure: group

members shared 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.

Groups tended to be composed of women of similar marital status. Married, divorced, and widowed women usually worked together, while never-married women had their own groups. This characteristic reflected the social component of women's cooperative work groups. Possible conversation topics were mediated by the status of others present — married/once married women did not discuss sexuality in front of never-married women of any age (*l-banaat*, "girls"), and vice versa. Never-married women enjoyed discussing potential husbands and sexual norms, topics on which they were expected to profess disinterest or ignorance in the presence of married women.<sup>11</sup>

As I was trying to learn about how groups were formed, I asked about relationships between group members. Often, the relationship was a longtime friendship between women from the same neighborhood. This had the convenient advantage of allowing women to walk together home from the square late at night. Many people considered that it was dangerous for a woman to walk alone after evening prayers (indicated by the muezzin's call around 8:30 at night), while many of the henna artisans worked far later into the night.

When I asked about one artisan, Naiima, Tamou shook her head. "She just came one day," she said, "and said that she needed to learn to do henna. She was divorced from her husband." Naiima was a stranger, but established her membership with the group through her skill for pleasant conversation. Her kindness and goodwill were evident, and Tamou said she was *meskina*, a good person in a poor situation. She sat with the women every afternoon and evening for several months, learning how to do henna, some French phrases, and what the tourist sector prices were. Finally, she began to work herself, and shared the daily tally.

*Money management within cooperative groups.* The financial management structure of cooperative groups served the needs of women who not all accustomed to dealing with larger sums of money than were needed to purchase the day's vegetables, flour, and yeast.<sup>12</sup> The disparity between actual units of Moroccan currency and the way people counted money, quoted prices, and made change, made it much more complex than simple numeracy.

The basic unit of currency in Morocco is the dirham, which is broken down into 100 centimes. During the period of my fieldwork, prices were always rounded up to the nearest dirham for tourists, and larger items for local consumption were usually priced in round figures as well, food items and inexpensive goods that were purchased on a daily basis were almost always priced in a combination of dirhams and centimes. However, a common currency system avoided the use of these fractions.

As a result of the various colonial histories of different areas of Morocco, there were several ways of speaking about currency. Centimes were sometimes called francs, and so a price of 1 dirham and thirty centimes were sometimes quoted orally a hundred and thirty francs instead. However, in the Marrakesh area, most people thought of currency in terms of riyals. Each rial was equivalent to 5 centimes. A five-centime piece, the smallest unit of currency, was one rial. A dirham was twenty riyals. Five dirhams was a hundred riyals. In fact, in most circumstances, sellers didn't actually say whether they were quoting prices in riyals or dirhams.<sup>13</sup> Women with little or no formal education rarely learned to convert, or add and subtract, in dirhams and centimes, although they were aware of the dual system. When I asked one friend to identify various coins and bills, she gave me their values in riyals. When we shopped together, she could calculate what change was due in riyals, but not in

dirhams. When shopkeepers told us prices in dirhams, she would ask me how much that was (in riyals).

Because riyals were not part of the formal currency regime, and values indicated on bills and coins were in dirhams and centimes, tourists expected prices to be quoted in dirhams and henna artisans working in cooperative groups needed to be able to bargain prices when necessary in these terms. Women sometimes relied on one group member to discuss prices with tourists in dirhams.

*Cash handling.* Money was managed collectively. After completing a henna design and receiving money from the customer, each artisan gave the entire amount to the group cashier, and obtained change from her if necessary. Artisans had to account for each person for whom they had applied henna, and groups sometimes argued over individual decisions to lower the price or do henna for free for a friend or a child.

Money was divided at the end of an evening, after paying back amounts paid out by one member for group purchases. The treasurer would go around the group, first giving each the same kind of bill, going from the most to the least valuable. If a bill was left over, it was put aside, and the next kind of bill was divided evenly among the group members. The same process was carried out with coins. After these had been divided equally, the remaining bills were changed by one of the group members or taken to another person who changed it. The process was repeated until all the money had been divided.

## **Legal status**

Women's relations with the police (that is, municipal police, whose mandate is very broad, as well as the tourist police, who regulate most commercial and non-commercial relations between residents and foreign tourists, and the national guard, whose mandate is to maintain public order) were complex. Most frequent were dealings with the uniformed

national guard, three or four of whom patrolled Jmaa l-fna during the day. The relationship between the police and the artisans was moderated by the ambiguous status of the artisans. Many kinds of street work, including shoe shining, portering, as well as trades specific to Jmaa' l-Fna, such as snake and monkey handling, were regulated by the city.<sup>14</sup> These trades were all exercised by men. Henna work, on the other hand, was normally practiced at home, not in the street, and street licenses were not issued to artisans. In fact, several policemen told me that these women were not henna artisans at all, and cited the fact that these women did not provide henna services in the local home-based sector as proof. As a result, the Jmaa' l-Fna artisans operated in a gray area, subject to periodic sweeps by the police who had been mandated to reduce crime and harassment directed at tourists. The roots of opposition to women's work in Jmaa' l-Fna are discussed in more detail in chapter 4.

Sweeps to clear artisans from the square were periodic, and coincided with the height of the tourist season as authorities attempted to reduce congestion in the square. The sweeps began with a demonstration of aggression by one or two guards, who would reach for the stools or photo albums of one of the women. Other artisans would circle, usually with one of the women trying to negotiate with the officer. When it was clear that the sweep was a serious one, they would simply take their equipment and run for the fringes of the market.

Cooperative groups provided members with greater resources in dealing with the police. One member often dealt with the police on behalf of others, paying for them and intervening as necessary. I noted:

I was sitting with Mbarka's group when Mbarka got up and ran after a policeman who had been harassing one of the members of her group. The girl came by and spoke quickly, throwing her henna gear into Mbarka's lap. Mbarka asked the other women [in her group], What is his name? And ran after the [girl and the policeman] as they left the square. Is that man a policeman, I asked. Yes, they said, he is going to cause her trouble.

Artisans who worked alone were not able to call on this resource.

Women maintained relationships with the officers who patrolled the square or could be called upon when necessary to intervene, as in this except from my notes:

A man came over and said something very quietly to Hafida. She said "Na'am" (yes, but in a very respectful way) and waited a few seconds, then she said to me, "Nodi" (get up). I said, That is a policeman in plain clothes? Yes, she said. We walked east, in the direction opposite to the policeman. She said, "He is very nice. He told me to go for a walk and come back tomorrow." On our way into the *qissaria* (covered shopping area) we passed another man. Hafida went over and spoke to him for a few seconds, then came back. She said that he is the "*chef*" (police chief). She saw him earlier and talked to him, she said, and he said that if he saw the man who took her things at prayers he would tell him to give them back. She said that she told him just now that she had got the things.

These relationships were most often established through bribes. Each woman who worked in the square had a guard whom she paid off daily. "Everyone has one," Hlima explained 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 paid by each artisan, depending on the status of the officer with whom they had the agreement.<sup>15</sup> The minimum wage for a civil servant such as a policeman was 3200 dh a month, hardly enough to support a family without the income from these sources.<sup>16</sup> Several middle (merchant)-class people I spoke with argued that bribes were an understood component of police and soldiers' salaries, and hence very few didn't participate in such schemes. Henna artisans, on the other hand, disagreed with this and said that the police had enough advantages, such as regular pay, access to housing loans, and health benefits.

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. My friend, after spending an hour doing an intricate design, complained that the officer was a *himar* (donkey, perj.)

because she was doing his wife's "stinky feet" for only 30 dirhams, which was a common price for local henna, but less than tourist sector artisans generally charged.

Only a few women avoided paying these bribes entirely. Hafida said that she didn't pay the police because she knew them from when she had been in jail, and brought them breakfast one day when she needed to recover items that had been taken during a sweep. Another woman didn't pay bribes, but instead maintained a non-exclusive sexual relationship with a policeman, which assured that she would not be harassed by his peers. Others who didn't pay bribes could work only on the margins of the square, and when it was so busy that they could slip out of sight when necessary.

Officers and artisans cooperated in the maintenance of a system in which the guards agreed to tolerate the women's presence, and the artisans agreed to pay daily bribes. This formed a contract of sorts that Tamou commented on one day when a guard walked by and told her to leave:

'Assass walks by Tamou and says "Go away," Tamou says, "*Hadi l-kariya diyali!*" (This is my apartment! i.e. I am renting this, why should I go?)

There were three forms of interaction between the 'assass and the artisans. The first was the unofficial tolerance of the artisans' presence in exchange for a daily bribe. At this level, actions to clear the artisans were half-hearted, non-violent, and motivated only by diffuse job requirements. Guards would ignore the artisans, or tell them to leave but take no action. On some days, the general atmosphere was relaxed and humorous. Some of the officers occasionally made small talk, and asked about the artisans' children. I noted one afternoon:

While I was sitting with Tamou a man approached from behind and tickled her on the back, kept walking with his friend, but looked back over his shoulder. Tamou reacted quickly without looking and hit me on the shoulder with the full force of her fist, then saw him walking off. They both laughed,

and she apologized to me. "*Spektor*," she explained, a non-uniformed policeman (inspector, Fr.).

The second form of action against the artisans occurred when pressure on the 'assass and tourist police increased as their superiors demanded that the square be cleared. On these occasions, they prohibited women from working, although they often allowed them to return a short time later. These interactions were not violent, and were sometimes almost apologetic in tone, as the guards explained that the women had to leave. The women cooperated reluctantly, and sometimes refused to pay on subsequent days since they had been unable to work.

The artisans' refusal to pay bribes provoked the third kind of interaction, which was characteristically violent as the guards resented their lost income. My fieldnotes describe one of many such incidents that arose after the artisans had refused to pay:

The 'assass — two of them — started buzzing around again. First just one man. Tall gray-haired one that looks American — started throwing wooden orange juice boxes that no one was sitting on in our direction. ... Tamou was with a customer and neither of them moved. ... That went on for a bit, then he started harassing the girls who were sitting on boxes at Tamou's usual spot.... A few times the 'assass came over and stood right next to us — me still on the ground — and said get up. Tamou would say *iyeh*, (yes) but with little conviction and didn't look at him and didn't move. ... Two big motorbikes come in fast and stop by Tamou's right side. Drivers are off duty police — tourist police. They just sit there and talk with 'assass (in uniform) who have been harassing us. Slowly things seemed to calm down but everyone still seemed nervous. Finally, one comes with 2 stools and gives them to two of the women.

On another occasion:

Tamou was doing henna for a customer. Just as she began the palm of the first hand, we saw three policemen grab one of the women by the neck and push her out of the square between two orange juice stands. I noticed Khadija and Hanan standing, then Hanan walking away quickly looking from one side to the other. Tamou waited a moment, then she stood and picked up her stool and walked out of the square without saying a word to the customer — a Moroccan woman — who looked slightly surprised but followed her. The women went to the spot by the trees first, very dark there, then quickly moved to a second spot around the corner — facing the kitchen

goods stores — where there was more light. Malika was already there with a customer too.

Besides ignoring the police as long as possible and fleeing to the perimeter when necessary, women employed other strategies against harassment by the guards and police. One of these was to alter their outfit, abandoning the nigab and workday jellaba that identified them as henna artisans, and sit on the steps of a closed boutique where they might be mistaken as shoppers or visitors taking a rest.

Problems with the police had several effects, most of them problematic for the artisans. Because their stools and photo albums were frequently taken and destroyed, artisans often argued over the shortage. Women were reluctant to invest too much, because of the likelihood of losing the stools every few months. Borrowing stools from another artisan, and especially from another group, frequently caused arguments when the owner returned and couldn't find something to sit on, or lacked a stool for her own customers or friends.

When artisans were banned entirely from the square, artisans either retreated to the perimeter, or stopped coming to the square entirely. Those who moved from their habitual work areas to outlying areas worked in spaces that were otherwise occupied by drunks and drug addicts. These areas received no pedestrian traffic, and were used only to apply henna after finding customers in the central area and bringing them outside. These areas were poorly lit and dirty, and customers suspected they were dangerous. Moroccan customers who had already agreed on a price and were looking for a particular artisan had difficulty finding them during these periods, since the women left their habitual work areas and walked around the perimeter of the square.

The most significant effect of police harassment was women's attitude toward inflating prices. They argued that they had to charge more than traditional sector artisans

because they had to pay bribes, and there were many days when they didn't work because of problems with the police.

## Drawing boundaries

The theme of drawing boundaries emerged during data collection. Boundaries of several types were important: boundaries between henna artisans and other women; boundaries artisans drew within their lives, between work time when they play the role of *nqasha* and other time, when they played other roles; boundaries that enclosed (or failed to enclose) female workers. I explore these ideas in the following paragraphs.

Essential to the idea of drawing boundaries was the distinctive dress that many henna artisans donned while working. Many Jmaa' l-Fna artisans wore distinctive clothing while working. A diaphanous black veil, worn over the bridge of the nose and covering the face below the eyes was considered to be the identifying badge of tourist sector henna artisans. Although in effect not all artisans wore this style of *ngab*, few women who were not in this category wore it. Post-menopausal women in this area wore face veils as well, however of a different style that was drawn below the nose, not over it. Only henna artisans and female beggars wore the diaphanous black full *ngab* that covers most of the face and corresponds to the veil that many Westerners associate with the Middle East. While henna artisans wore the *ngab* with a colored *jellaba*, many beggars wearing the *ngab* dressed in mourning clothes (white slippers, white socks, white dress, white *jellaba*, white headscarf). Other women who wore this style of *ngab* were the merchants who gathered at a busy corner each afternoon to sell used gold on consignment.

Although related to the traditional *ngab* that was recently worn universally by urban Moroccan women, the modified *ngab*, in general usage, now signifies (though it doesn't really provide) the anonymity necessary to carry out shameful activities carried out in the

public eye. Worn with the raised hood of the jellaba covering the hair and part of the forehead, the ngab leaves the eyebrows and eyes exposed, while the jellaba does little to disguise the size and shape of its wearer. Women recognize each other from behind, whether a ngab is worn or not.

A sub-set of tourist-sector henna artisans worked in a very different setting from the bustling aggressive saleswomen of Jmaa l-fna. Dressed in white lab coats, these young women were based at modern tourist-sector spice and perfume shops. These stores were large and uniformly newly renovated, with bright lighting, freshly painted walls and ceilings, and spacious displays. Key to their use was the unusual presence of interior seating adequate for guided groups of 15 to 20 people. These shops were patronized uniquely by tourists, and employed young people who were fluent in several foreign languages to describe the uses of various herbs, spices, minerals, and dried animal matter. Young women offered not only henna decorations but also massages with some of the medicinal oils sold by the shop. This setting, they told me, was "better" than standing in Jmaa l-fna all day, since they were inside and didn't have to approach tourists. The cost of working in such a setting is the loss of a significant portion of their income, about a quarter according to some artisans, and as much as half in other cases.

Interviews with officials in the ministry of culture as well as with tourist police and male academics involved in the study of tourism suggested similar changes to the structure of women's henna work in public spaces. On many occasions, male officials suggested that the henna artisans should be in one area, wear white coats, and have people come to them rather than have them walking around.

In a neighboring town, the tourist henna trade reflects these concerns, particularly the tension between potential profit and loss of status. Women with advanced foreign

language (French and English) skills acquired through university education have set up shop-based henna businesses. Unlike the spice-shop artisans who give a portion of their earnings to a shop-owner, these women engage in advertising and manage their businesses independently as entrepreneurs. The distinction between their work and that of the artisans who sit in the street or walk around looking for customers is strenuously argued. Sitting in small shops leased by their families, they argue that their work is different since they perform henna services inside, despite being visible through large doorways.

In the same town, several men have begun to offer henna services. Like the shop-based female entrepreneurs, they work in small boutiques. Although the presence of male henna entrepreneurs was extremely limited in 2000 and 2001, the profitability of the trade may well encourage others to take it up, just as it encouraged women to bear public scrutiny and work as street artisans.

### **Preliminary conclusions**

Henna artisans are marginal in many ways, not least as women in a society where women are legally subordinate to male kin and burdened with a disproportionate share of responsibility in the maintenance of family honor. As poor women, they could expect few of the privileges their society accords to women in return for successfully managing their family's reputation. In families where male wage earners earned sufficient income to support the household, women expected to enjoy the freedom to decide whether or not to work outside the home, and expected to keep their earnings to spend as they wished. Women whose husbands were very poor had no choice but to work, and used their earnings to buy vegetables and household staples. Moroccan women are legally obliged to care for their families and home, and cash earned through additional work is their private property. Poor

women, whose households depend on their capacity to work the double shift of home and market, do not exercise this prerogative. Through individual and collective strategies, women who became henna artisans often managed to overcome this marginality.

The poverty of most Moroccans deprives them of opportunities to benefit in a meaningful way from international tourism, even when they live in an area that receives large numbers of visitors. Poverty correlates with lack of education in Morocco, since young people leave school because of their family's inability to purchase proper clothing and school supplies, or because their labor is needed to earn cash outside the household, or to compensate in the household for other members who are working outside. Although lack of education is a certain barrier to formal sector work in the tourist sector, even university-educated young people find that they are blocked from well-paying jobs if they are unable to mobilize networks to secure a position. Interviews with educated young people from modest backgrounds indicated that significant cash payments to well-placed contacts were the only way that they felt they could obtain the jobs that their education had qualified them for.

One participant said that unless she was able to pay bribes, she could not hope for a job that paid more than 500 dirhams a month. Her job at an internet café that catered to international tourists paid "the women's wage" of 500 dirhams a month, she said. The college education she had financed through doing housework in the evenings would allow her to improve her chances of marrying a man from a family in a somewhat higher social group (she and her family lived in a cinder-block and corrugated iron house on land to which they lacked title), but it had not helped her to find respectable work and immediately improve her family's standard of living.

The tourist sector has allowed some enterprising women to increase their economic stability by offering products and services to the ever-new supply of consumers. The

necessary skills and investment are within even limited means, although increased language and technical skills are reflected in increased income. In a context where civil status laws enable men to divorce and take additional wives with little legal effort and seemingly at whim, this occasion to earn an independent income increases the autonomy within marriage and the household for some of the most disadvantaged women. Indeed, several of the women were undertaking or had undertaken their own divorces and were supporting themselves and their children. Other women looked on this work as an opportunity to increase their level of consumption, buying motor scooter or television with their income, simultaneously increasing their status within the household as producers (rather than lower-status "reproducers" in a Marxist conception of household hierarchies, for instance).

Notwithstanding neighbors' opinions and occasional attempts by police to reduce the number of unlicensed entrepreneurs in the market, henna artisans decided when and how they would work. They arrived after caring for household duties, took time off when necessary to attend family or neighborhood functions, worked longer hours when they had greater cash needs, and chose to sit in a shaded area or stay home when the heat was great and there were few customers. The artisans had this freedom because they worked independently, each one owning her materials outright. This freedom also allowed artisans to employ strategies to improve their working conditions and maximize their profits.

While negative attitudes are strong enough to prevent many poor women from working as tourist sector henna artisans, nonetheless, a number of women whose independence as household heads or primary income earners challenge these negative attitudes through earning a substantial daily income as tourist-sector henna artisans working in the public eye. The cost of this increased economic independence is not yet known, although there are some indications that their earnings are expropriated, at least in part, by

power figures — male police officers, shopkeepers — who are critical of the legitimacy of this form of work.

### **Further directions**

The field research yielded data that can be grouped into two categories: the impact of tourism on low-income urban women and their families, and the comparative structure of the traditional and tourist henna trades. These questions addressed the first two objectives of the study, and constitute the subject of several articles (in preparation) and a doctoral dissertation (expected defense, January 2003), were summarized in the preceding section.

The third and fourth objectives of this project, to increase the integration of gender into anthropological perspectives on tourism and development, and to increase the integration female-headed households into anthropological studies of Middle Eastern societies, will be achieved through the dissemination of these results in a format that places them in dialog with research from other social, cultural, political, and geographic perspectives. An important finding that has emerged from this study is that loss of status through tourism work has not impeded women in particular situations from taking advantage of tourism opportunities. It has been expected that in Mediterranean societies where women's participation in economic activities is regulated by calculations of status loss, tourism's social polluting connotations decreases women's engagement. In this context, it was found that women in socially and economically marginal positions were eager to take advantage of these opportunities.

An additional proximal objective will be treated here: the application of this research to urban planning and tourism policy development in the area where the research was conducted. Municipal, provincial, and national governments in Morocco continue to place tourism in a privileged role in development strategies, and to develop the tourism potential

of target areas through construction and renovation projects. In the past, the renovation/improvement of Jmaa' l-Fna has resulted in the disruption of certain categories of economic activities. Informal food shops, for instance, were replaced by licensed sit-down restaurants that provided more revenue to the city. Since the informal shops were run by women, however, and the new restaurants were owned and run almost exclusively by men, this increased the marginalization of those families who depended on female food sellers. Although their presence is relatively recent, it is important to recognize the scale and sophistication of this economic activity and to preserve the access of henna artisans to this area.

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<sup>1</sup> Susan Searight conducted a national survey of Moroccan tattoo practices in the 1970s, and found that they were already waning at that time (Searight 1978). By 2000 and 2001, very few women in Marrakesh under 50 appeared to have tattoos, although there are indications that tattooing is still common practice in remote rural areas (see Pierce and Pierce 1988). Three

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of my informants had visible tattoos, while two others had had them removed by excision (surgical removal of the tattooed skin). All were over the age of 40.

<sup>2</sup> In their pitches to customers, artisans tended to describe henna as a tattoo, using the French word *tatouage*. However, in spoken Moroccan Arabic, the terms are distinct. *Ushma* describes a tattoo, while *binna* and *nqish* refer to henna and henna designs respectively.

<sup>3</sup> Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Moroccan Arabic are upper and lower registers of Arabic used in Morocco. MSA is used during most formal occasions, including university lectures, television broadcasts, and political speeches, while dialect is used universally in conversation. Moroccan Arabic and MSA differ substantially in vocabulary and grammar, although there are many shared structures and roots. The henna artisans and their peers had a limited understanding of MSA, which is learned in school (or in the mosque) and perfected after years of practice.

<sup>4</sup> In fact, *riyads* were of several architectural types. Some were originally well-appointed 2-story merchants' homes with a central garden, pool, or fountain, flanked by rooms on all four sides. Others were less spacious and luxurious, with fewer rooms and a central area (sometimes little more than a light well) that served as an outdoor kitchen and workspace. A third type was the commercial travelers' hotel known as a *funduq*, where merchants housed animals, goods, and set up offices while conducting business in the city. It has a large central area, and resembles the first type except for its large passageway (able to accommodate loaded animals and wagons) and typically more utilitarian fixtures. However, since many more luxurious homes have deteriorated significantly before being converted into multi-family dwellings, the distinction is often neglected.

<sup>5</sup> The existence of child artisans is linked to the precarious situation of "little girl maids" who live with their employers and do household labour in return for board. Child maids are

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employed by many families to help with child care, shopping, and housework. An honorarium is paid monthly and on festive occasions to the girl's father, the girl herself frequently not touching a salary until she has married. Physical and sexual abuse of live-in maids is relatively common, and many girls attempt to leave their employers, returning to their family or in some cases, living on the street. The situation of little girls is in this respect analogous to that of young boys apprenticed (often as young as 7 — shortly after their circumcision) to tailors, tinsmiths, carpenters, and other tradesmen. In both cases, the children issue from poor families who view the child's employment as training for an economically productive future. Families of this social stratum can often ill afford the costs of schoolbooks and supplies (and uniforms for girls) and consider practical training more secure than formal school given the high unemployment rate even among high school and university graduates.

<sup>6</sup> Other women and girls often spent the evenings socializing in the courtyard of the Koutoubia mosque adjacent to and within view of Jmaa' l-Fna. This was a respectable practice according to my neighbors. Boys and men were free to visit other quarters of the city as they liked. Avenue de France, a grassy boulevard near the four star hotels outside the medina, was a popular late-night meeting place for unemployed or unmarried brothers and male friends of young women in this social group. Male household heads often worked until ten at night, then visited a café to smoke and socialize with male friends, or returned home for a light evening meal.

<sup>7</sup> This holiday commemorated Abraham/Ibrahim's obedience toward God in preparing to sacrifice his son. Moroccans of all social classes sacrificed a ram, and aimed to purchase as large an animal as possible, and sometimes several, in order to show the family's religious and economic status. Amina, one of the artisans who was a divorced mother of three, spent

950 dirhams (three times her monthly rent) on her ram. A newspaper article about the increasing price of rams in March 2001 was illustrated with a picture of a man on a spit, being roasted over a fire as a ram stood on its hind legs smiling and turning the spit's handle. A joke demonstrates the anxiety people felt about this purchase: A merchant bought four sheep, saying there would be one for his family and three to give to the poor. His neighbor heard this, so on 'Eid l-Kbir he went out to his yard, and held a knife to his son's throat. The merchant saw him, and yelled over, Get your own sheep!

<sup>8</sup> In contrast, however, women who sell cigarettes in the street — a startling phenomenon for Moroccans visiting from smaller towns — do not wear a ngab. I suspect that these women are placing themselves outside the traditional framework in which nigab connotes respect for family honor which might be infringed by their activities. Along with an emerging category of young women who engage in door-to-door sales as distributors of new household products (such as facial tissue and air freshener) for which Moroccan manufacturers are trying to create markets, cigarette sellers reject the value system that makes them responsible for maintaining the family's honor. Many of these women are young divorcées.

<sup>9</sup> For the sake of comparison, shop attendants (who often have several years of high school) may earn hardly more than 15 dirhams a day, although the status benefits associated with indoor modern sector work are tremendously higher.

<sup>10</sup> Two types of savings clubs were found among the research participants. The first was the list-lottery [*l-qur'a*, bottle]. Participants made weekly payments to a group member who administered the savings club; each payment day, one group member's name was drawn from a bottle and received the money. This procedure was continued until each member had received her turn to receive the weekly collection. The other form of savings club was the

musical party. Each week, a different member hosted a party at which participants gathered to sing and play drums. The host received money collected that week.

<sup>11</sup> Unmarried women in their twenties sometimes approached me with questions about sex (Do American women like it? Do American women go on top when they sleep with men? Is anal sex as common in American as it is in Morocco? Did I have sex with my husband before we married?), but only when they could speak to me alone. Their questions revealed much more knowledge about sex than society generally acknowledged. The sexual attitudes and experiences of young Moroccans are the subject of large-scale qualitative studies carried out by Moroccan sociologists Abdessamad Dialmy (2000) and Mounia Bennani-Chraïbi (1994).

<sup>12</sup> In many households, durable goods and expensive grocery items such as fruit or meat were purchased as necessary by the male wage-earner.

<sup>13</sup> In marketplace conversations I observed, sellers often switched between dirhams, riyals, and francs in a single interaction without ever specifying the unit of currency. Interlocutors relied on a shared understanding of market values. During the early months of my fieldwork, I spent several afternoons in the rug souq observing how currency was represented by men in local market transactions, especially auctions. Auctioneers often shortened numbers when it was understood that they were multiples of a hundred. For instance, a price of seventy dirhams would be discussed (or announced in an auction) as *'arbatash* or "fourteen," that is, fourteen hundred riyals. Many of the henna artisans used these shortened forms with ease.

<sup>14</sup> Salahdine (YEAR) provides a useful and detailed study of men's small trades in Fez.

<sup>15</sup> Bribes are paid in many situations, either to persuade someone to overlook the infraction of a law or rule, to influence a decision, or to speed up the process of getting a paper. Fifty dirhams was a common amount suggested by my friends, although a well-to-do professional

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paid 200 dirhams for a traffic violation. Ten thousand dirhams is said to be the price of a teaching assignment in Marrakesh rather than a rural village.

<sup>16</sup> This salary would support a poor standard of living, but not a comfortable one with the consumption patterns desired by the new urban lower-middle class. For example, couples seeking a new lease on a two-room apartment with kitchen and bathroom in the central medina neighborhood where I lived would pay 1200 dirhams in rent, plus a key deposit of at least 5000 dirhams.