

MOROCCAN WOMEN EMBROIDERERS: TECHNICAL AND ETHICAL RECONFIGURATIONS

Claire Nicholas
Princeton University

Historically, embroidery demonstrated a Moroccan woman's worth as potential wife and homemaker. In recent decades it has come to serve as a widespread income-generating activity with the potential to upset normative notions of Moroccan womanhood even while it maintains a residual affiliation with proper feminine activity. The transitional statuses of Moroccan womanhood, on the one hand, and embroidery work and its objects, on the other, are interdependent. Both are linked to the intensified circulation of embroidered objects in markets throughout the twentieth century and into the present, and to women's increased participation in a formalized labor market. The marketization of women's labor and its products necessarily entails remaking producers, their work practices, and their orientation towards "work." Thus, ongoing status transformations of Moroccan embroidery and embroiderers give insight into neoliberal reconfigurations of gender and work, and ambivalent recodings of their values today. (Morocco, embroidery, development, gender, work)

It is by now an anthropological truism that economic relations are always already cultural, social, and moral relations. It follows, then, that the process of making markets for products that previously circulated outside the formal economy necessarily entails remaking producers and their work practices. This "re-making" involves modifications of technical practices and the transmission of knowledge, and in the context of integration into a global capitalist economy, the rationalization of production, and its organization. But it also comprises the transformation of ethical orientations towards work as such, which implies a broader unsettling of notions regarding the proper ordering of life as a whole. In the case examined in this article, Moroccan embroidery, practiced in the confines of the home, was formerly of a piece with the broader category of women's domestic labor. It was therefore integrated with housework and child rearing duties. Accordingly, the process of ethical reconfiguration may threaten norms that specifically concern gender roles and notions of womanhood. From this perspective, this article examines the micro-relations of rationalizing Moroccan embroidery labor, a traditionally domestic feminine practice, in one handmade-textiles company in Marrakech.

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notions of Moroccan womanhood even while it maintains a residual affiliation with appropriate feminine activity. This article considers this ongoing process of status transformation in relation to the way Moroccan women negotiate the balance between embroidery work and expectations of their role in the home and family. My claim is that the transitional statuses of Moroccan womanhood on the one hand, and embroidery labor and its objects on the other, are interdependent. Furthermore, both are linked to the intensified circulation of embroidered objects in commercial markets throughout the twentieth century and into the present, and women's increased participation in a progressively formalized labor market.

After sketching the socio-historical context of Moroccan embroidery and early efforts during the French Protectorate (1912–1956) to structure training, production, and commercialization of embroidery, this article describes a contemporary French-Moroccan handmade textiles company, focusing on the rationalization of production and attempts to instill a new work ethic vis-à-vis embroidery labor. Finally, it explores how shifting labor practices and perceptions of work articulate with Moroccan notions of womanhood through the choices of two embroiderers with regards to work and marriage.

A STITCH IN TIME: THE PRE-COLONIAL EMBROIDERY ECONOMY

Prior to the early twentieth century, embroidery was almost exclusively a domestic activity, practiced especially in wealthier urban households where women were confined primarily to the home.¹ An appropriate activity for idle hands, embroidery was a skill thought to be part of a proper feminine upbringing. Most young and older women embellished a variety of household and sartorial articles for their own homes and trousseaux, including bedding, mirror coverings, table and tea-service linens, cushions, *hammām*² (public bath) scarves, handkerchiefs, and *tekka* (sashes for *serwāl* trousers). Girls between the ages of 6 and 13 were encouraged to learn the craft from either experienced practitioners in their own family or from the semi-professional services of the *ma'allma* (master craftswoman), who in some cases might be a neighbor or relative (Ricard 1918:90). The *ma'allma* (pl. *ma'allmāt*) rarely received monetary payment for her teaching. Instead, students' families compensated her in the form of donations of food, household provisions, or gifts during religious holidays. In Rabat, experienced students were expected to "pay back" their education by completing work for the *ma'allma*'s clients (Denamur 2003:20).

Given that the *ma'allma* instructed the apprentices in her own home, learning and working conditions were quite variable. Conditions at one *ma'allma*'s 1913 workshop in Salé had 30 girls hunched over their needlework in a badly lit and

poorly ventilated room, working silently from morning to evening with one break for the lunch they had brought. Besides strained eyes and sore backs, several suffered from inflamed eyelids caused by rubbing tired eyes with dirty hands (Irbouh 2005).

According to historical accounts from the early twentieth century, the title of *ma'allma* refers to a spectrum of more and less experienced embroidery teachers and practitioners from various socio-economic backgrounds (Ricard 1918; Goichon 1939; Denamur 2003). Thus some affluent girls, upon completion of their training, might take the title of *ma'allma* and continue to embroider at home for their own account, or train younger members of their families. But “*ma'allma*” also describes women from the lower and middle classes who taught apprentices in their homes and took commissions from local merchants, artisans, and other families who needed their skills. The multiplex signification of the term points to the informal organization of both the production and the exchange of embroidered articles. Unlike male artisans working in urban settings, the *ma'allmāt* were not organized in guilds (*h-anta*) and they paid no taxes on their earnings (Goichon 1939:50).

Other than commissioned work for families or merchants and artisans, women did not produce embroidered pieces explicitly for the market. Aside from the quasi-occupational status of the lower- or middle-class *ma'allma*, who was often obliged to supplement household finances, most women did not view embroidery as a regular source of income. The primary value of embroidered objects lay in demonstrating the talents of the maker, and therefore her worth as a potential wife and mother, and of course in their aesthetic value—the woman’s way of beautifying her home.

In the broader scheme of women’s productive activities, embroidery was practiced in moments between other household responsibilities. As Rodary (2007) notes for pre-colonial Morocco, though women’s domestic work (including childcare, cleaning, and food preparation) required long hours of sometimes hard physical labor, it was not recognized as “work” in the sense of an occupation. Even in the case of rural women who contributed to household finances through agricultural labor, remuneration was appropriated and managed by the male household members (Rodary 2007). Paid work for women was stigmatized, as the husband was expected to provide financially for his family. For example, in the pre-colonial and colonial periods, society regarded those women who did exercise an occupation outside the home—among others, the *neggāfa* (master of ceremonies for weddings), *shīkha* (singer/dancer who sometimes doubled as a prostitute), and *gellāsa* (public-bath attendant)—as women of questionable character (Le Tourneau 1949; Rodary 2007). More recent ethnographies attest to a residual stigma attached to certain women’s occupations, especially those

which trespass into male-dominated spaces (Kapchan 1996; Davis 1983; Rausch 2000; Rodary 2007). It should be noted, however, that the stigma derives from a confluence of cultural and moral valuations assigned to factors like proximity to the supernatural, presence in public spaces, and associations (historically valid or purported to be) with prostitution and slavery.

Though embroidered objects tended to circulate within and between families and neighbors, on occasion women did convert the aesthetic and personal into market value. In times of economic need, or with the purchase of jewelry or European goods in mind, women sold their work, often through intermediaries or *belghāzāt* (less affluent women) (Ricard 1918, 1917; Denamur 2003). French colonial officials complained of embroiderers' lack of commercial sense, as women sold embroidery for modest or below-market prices to merchants, who in turn sold the item to customers for five or six times his purchasing price (Marion 1914:2; Ricard 1917). But as these women were often selling their work in desperation, it is not surprising that they were obliged to accept whatever price the merchant might offer. Even the *ma'allmāt* who regularly worked on commission fall under criticism in early French reports for ignoring the "true" value of their labors:

She gives her work away at a very modest price, unable to appreciate the real value since she does not hold herself to continuous work. Raw materials are only estimated, and for the labor she adds an approximate amount which varies with the dimensions of the object, without taking into account the time employed in its production. (Bouillot 1914:3)

Again, this critique seems unfair in light of Moroccan embroidery's social and cultural significance and its only partially marketized circulation. The in-between status of embroidery labor and its objects would seem to explain the approximative costing of production, which lacked a precise calculation of labor, time, and the price of materials. What is perhaps more interesting in these French accounts is how colonial officials were laying the ideological groundwork to justify intervention into the feminine milieu. Before giving the specifics of this intervention, we can say that the picture emerging from admittedly sparse pre-colonial and colonial sources is one of an active but loosely structured training, production, and commercialization system for Moroccan embroidery, partially hidden from public view.

ECONOMIZING EMBROIDERY: COLONIAL VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

The French Protectorate period (1912–1956) marked a gradual departure from the pre-colonial embroidery system. The goal of the colonial administration

was two-fold. First, it sought to rationalize and develop embroidery production and commercialization, thereby rehabilitating what it perceived to be a dying art; and concurrently, it hoped to gradually transform and “educate” (in the French sense, which connotes a moral education or upbringing) Moroccan women, making them aware of their labor capital and mitigating the cultural stigma attached to paid work (Irbouh 2005). The most significant change introduced by the French was the establishment of numerous girls’ vocational schools in urban centers, the first of which was founded in 1913 in Salé. The curriculum included embroidery, sewing, carpet weaving, hygiene, and childcare. Irbouh’s *Art in the Service of Colonialism* recounts the efforts of three French vocational school directrices (female directors)—Louise Bouillot, Renée Bazet, and A. Bel—to reform embroidery instruction and production, and expand the market for embroidered products through government intervention. Notably, for practical and ideological reasons, French women were recruited almost exclusively to handle the reconfiguration of Moroccan feminine crafts in these institutions, revealing concurrent stereotypes of gendered labor operating in the French metropole.

At the outset, these schools were grafted onto existing embroidery workshops, where Bouillot, Bazet, and Bel served initially as “consultants” and “friends” to the ma‘allmāt, and progressively positioned themselves as directors. They ultimately assumed control over the spatial organization of the workshop, pedagogical reforms, the distribution of monetary compensation to the ma‘allma and her apprentices, and the allocation of embroidery commissions channeled through the schools. These refashioned schools introduced better working conditions: well-lit and aerated workshops, sinks for frequent hand washing, and recreation time. At Bouillot’s request, the ma‘allma and senior apprentices in Salé’s vocational school constituted a catalogue of past and present embroidery motifs to serve as models for work and to preserve nearly forgotten designs. In her 1914 year-end report, Bouillot brags of the successful completion of these models, executed according to technical improvements she had implemented, most notably the use of a measuring tape (Bouillot 1914:3). By the 1930s, the vocational schools focused increasingly on embroidery and carpet weaving as a potential source of income for girls and young women from the lower socio-economic strata of society. But the craft was increasingly abandoned among the more affluent, partly due to girls’ expanded access to formal education.

EMBROIDERY FOR ALL: CRAFTS AND
SOCIO-ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

After a period of relative decline in the mid-twentieth century, embroidery experienced a renaissance of sorts in the 1980s and '90s. This resulted in part from the use of traditional embroidery motifs by prominent Moroccan fashion designers like Tamy Tazi, the emergence of a collector's market for older pieces, several published works and museum exhibits valorizing the craft (Tazi and Viola 1999; De Soie et d'Or 1996; Vivier 1991), and the widespread training centers established by L'Entraide Nationale (National Mutual Aid, an umbrella institution for social development, currently attached to the Ministry of Social Development, the Family, and Solidarity). These training centers targeted (and continue to do so) underprivileged women and youth, offering free literacy courses and diplomas in various handicrafts, including embroidery. Many contemporary embroiderers have passed through the doors of the *nādī* (literally "club," the term commonly used for L'Entraide Nationale training centers) to learn embroidery.

The continued flourishing of embroidery activities reflects the demand of the tourist and expatriate markets and the pairing of embroidery with development initiatives such as craft co-operatives and associations. In the context of a nation increasingly connected economically, politically, and culturally to the world, "traditional" Moroccan handicrafts have emerged as a promising domain of poverty relief and economic growth. Handicrafts artisans and their products, considered to be storehouses of Moroccan traditions, are thus important anchors for ongoing social and economic development projects. Cultural tourism, one significant axis of national development strategies, presents a particular challenge in negotiating cultural and economic openness without losing sight of these traditions. In 2001, the Moroccan Ministry of Tourism launched a policy plan whose goals included the annual servicing of ten million tourists by the year 2010, 70 percent of whom were projected to be foreigners (<http://www.tourisme.gov.ma/francais/2-Vision2010-Avenir/1-en-bref/enbref.htm>). Twinned with an ambitious nine-year plan drafted in 2006 by the state handicrafts agency (part of the Ministry of Tourism), this plan clearly indicates that handicrafts will continue to play a major role in reaching the stated goals of economic growth and job creation supported directly and indirectly by cultural tourism.

A central concern is how to maintain the aesthetic and culturally specific properties of craft practices and their objects while rationalizing production processes, enforcing quality control, and meeting international norms and standards. Moreover, all of this must take place while resolutely orienting handicrafts towards integration into a global economy aimed primarily at foreign or affluent

clientele with a different set of consumer habits and tastes. Artisanal labor practices and relations of production thus emerge as critical scenes of encounter between “techniques” and criteria for evaluation drawn from scientific expertise and economic models of rationalization (Weber 1930; Foucault 2007) and artisans’ own materially oriented practical knowledge (Lévi-Strauss 1966; Sennett 2008). The case of Moroccan handicrafts development would seem to be another illustration of the way international development projects engage ostensibly universal concepts (i.e., human rights, the liberal subject) and neoliberal paradigms to construct objects of intervention and stake moral claims (Elyachar 2005; Ferguson 1994; Mitchell 2002; Tsing 2005; Goodale 2009).

Efforts to capitalize on the social and economic development potential of hand embroidery, as well as other handicrafts, extend into the private sector, though a much larger percentage consists of non-governmental organizations or for-profit co-operatives working in close partnership with the government. Indeed, in the last decade Morocco has witnessed a veritable explosion of civil associations and co-operatives, following more progressive laws favoring nonpolitical associations in the 1990s (Cohen and Jaidi 2006:24). King Mohammed VI’s National Initiative for Human Development (2005–2010), an agency funding a broad spectrum of non-governmental development initiatives, has intensified this phenomenon, given that aid goes almost exclusively to co-operatives and civic associations. Handicrafts co-operatives and associations figure prominently in this field, and the vast majority of women’s organizations are devoted to historically feminine domestic practices, especially embroidery and carpet weaving. The long-term effectiveness of initiatives working to formalize parts of the handicrafts sector that previously operated informally and through kinship ties remains to be seen. My research experience indicates that for every functioning, active co-operative or association, there are five that exist in name only or were cobbled together for the sole purpose of accessing government grants. However, regardless of concrete material success, Moroccan embroidery has successfully been discursively recast as a viable source of income for disadvantaged or illiterate women, while retaining its character as a suitable feminine activity. In other words, embroidery as a potential income-generating practice does not overtly challenge existing gendered divisions of labor, though it may undermine these divisions in more subtle ways.

EMBROIDERY AS TECHNICAL AND ETHICAL TRAINING

Throughout the twentieth century, the economy of Moroccan embroidery has undergone a progressive shift from a predominantly urban upper-class decorative hobby to a vital and socially respectable source of income for socio-economically

marginalized women, and from a market constituted through informal and kin-based ties to new customers and commercial relations channeled through vocational schools and craft co-operatives (closely shadowed by the State). Interwoven with the aforementioned reconfigurations, a third aspect of this shift involves new ways of organizing embroidery training and production, implying new formulations of craft knowledge and the privileging of something akin to a Protestant or Puritan work ethic (Weber 1930; Thompson 1967). In some respects, this process reprises earlier colonial models, though the actors themselves do not draw this comparison.

With regard to new ways of organizing embroidery training and production, I will focus attention on the micro-relations of rationalizing production methods and craft knowledge in one hand-woven textiles workshop in Zitouna,³ a small town located about 20 kilometers outside Marrakech. My objective is to articulate the concrete relations of craft development, especially as it relates to cultural understandings of a practice transitioning from “women’s work” to “work,” tout court.

Marrakech has been a cosmopolitan, tourist, and bohemian mecca since the latter half of the twentieth century and enjoys a privileged place in the annals of pop culture and literary references. In recent decades this trend has only intensified with the creation of numerous international cultural events, including the Marrakech international film festival, the 1985 designation of the old city as a World Heritage site, and an explosion of international tourism and real estate development generated for and by a growing Euro-American expatriate community. Though the intensity and nature of this economic growth has exacerbated certain social problems, including child prostitution and the displacement of local communities, it has also stimulated rapid but volatile growth in the handicrafts sector, including new forms of cross-cultural enterprise with mixed Moroccan-European labor, financing, and management.

In this boom-town atmosphere, one small French-owned hand-woven textiles company stands out for its commercial success and implementation of a “socially responsible” business model. Founded in the mid-1990s by Jacqueline, a former Parisian fashion designer, the company caters to high-end local and international clients like Calvin Klein, local guesthouse refurbishers, and Moroccan luxury hotels. Under Jacqueline’s managerial and design guidance, a Moroccan team of ten male weavers and eight female embroiderers fabricate exquisitely crafted, hand-woven and hand-embroidered made-to-order interior fabrics. Working in two separate workshops, the male and female employees have little contact with one another. This spatial organization fits seamlessly with social conventions governing the spatial and gendered division of labor, which continues to obtain in handicrafts production more so than in the service and government labor

sectors. While this discussion foregrounds processes of rationalization with respect to the female embroiderers, the forms and strategies described apply similarly to the re-disciplining of male weaving labor and production.

Burned out on the Parisian fashion scene, Jacqueline came to Marrakech in the early 1990s with an idea for an ambitious social and economic development project she hoped would cut transversally across local crafts and agricultural products. After initial attempts to co-ordinate her plan with the relevant Moroccan government agencies yielded no forward motion, she decided to scale back the project to a field closer to her professional expertise: textiles. Following the recommendation of a Moroccan friend and neighbor, she approached the male handloom weavers of a local *fonduq*⁴ with the idea of collaborating to revive traditional Moroccan weaving, a trade which had suffered greatly in the course of the twentieth century due to imports of cheap machine-woven cloth and the disintegration of the guild system. This led to the creation of her luxury interior fabrics company in the mid-1990s, relying exclusively on local weaving labor.

By the end of the 1990s, Jacqueline had set her sights on integrating Moroccan embroidery into her designs. This coincided with an effort by a local association in Zitouna to develop the historical, cultural, and economic assets of the town, a project which appealed to Jacqueline and which motivated the partial transfer of her production operations to Zitouna in 2001. The economic interdependency between Zitouna and its nearest metropolitan neighbor has continued to accelerate in tandem with the exponential growth of Marrakech in recent decades. Founded in the 16th century by a prominent religious figure, Zitouna has its own illustrious history of olive and olive-oil production, and is the site of an important *Kasbah* (a kind of fortress belonging to the descendants of the founding *zawiya*, or religious brotherhood). Today the most prominent features of the town include plumes of black smoke billowing out of the potter's kilns (due to the persistent burning of old tires despite recent legislation forbidding this practice), toxic odors from the open sewers, and stretches of empty land awaiting new residential construction where olive groves once stood.

By 2008, Jacqueline's workshops and business structure had undergone significant modifications. Before opening her embroidery workshop in 2001 she collaborated with local leaders and women of the town to form an embroidery co-operative with the express purpose of associating its work with her company. At its zenith, the co-operative consisted of 120 Zitouna women who took piece-work commissions from Jacqueline, though it was Jacqueline and not the co-operative administration which determined who would complete particular orders. But the co-operative was short-lived, torn apart by infighting, internal jealousies over the distribution of work, mismanagement of the finances, and, as one former member described it, confusion and power struggles over symbolic

authority, such as who had the right to place the co-operative's "stamp" on official paperwork. The co-operative dissolved after a year and a half, with Jacqueline selecting a core group of embroiderers (between 15 and 20) for continued work. She encouraged these women to obtain a *patente* (a license to exercise a particular trade), and today these women continue to work exclusively with Jacqueline on a freelance or subcontractor basis.

RATIONALIZATION AT WORK

In the Zitouna embroidery workshop, Jacqueline implemented work practices and policies with the intended effect of assuring quality control, the accurate costing of labor and finished products, and close regulation of materials inventory. This set of regulatory parameters that emphasize ongoing calculation and efficiency can be grouped under the rubric of "rationalization," though I would argue that the logic underpinning these processes is not solely oriented towards the increase of capital. Indeed, the motivation behind Jacqueline's efforts to rationalize the work of embroidery verges on something resembling a goal of inculcating an ethic of work as a "calling," a sense of moral obligation towards the masterful and methodical practice of one's labor. Thus technical discipline and conscientious attention to one's labor in the workshop invoke an integrated ethical and epistemological architecture meant to scaffold practice in work and life.

Though, at first glance, the reforms introduced in Jacqueline's workshop resemble the capitalist disciplining of women and workers in various factory settings described by Ong (1987), Fernández-Kelly (1983), Collins (2003), and Dunn (2004), they also differ in important ways. Specifically, the scale of operations, the type of labor employed, and the character of the objects produced distinguish the Zitouna relationships and indeed destabilize the successful actualization of Jacqueline's "rationalizing" project. Furthermore, where Ong (1987) and Fernández-Kelly (1983) focus their studies on women incorporated into work contexts outside traditional household domains, with Moroccan embroidery the commodities produced and the primary work setting for the most part uphold historically and culturally sedimented conventions. But, unlike the situations in Malaysia (Ong 1987) and Mexico (Fernández-Kelly 1983), where factory work reinforces and capitalizes on existing gender subordination found in kampung society or conservative Mexican families, one flavor of Jacqueline's mission is most decidedly emancipatory. The fact that this goal is to be attained through the cultivation of pride and devotion to work, from within the categories set by Moroccan social norms, makes this case all the more interesting.

The foundational basis of work collaboration between Jacqueline and the embroiderers involves the signing of a “partnership contract.” The use of a legally binding contract to mediate the work relations of embroidery economic partners is essentially unheard of in Morocco. In a conversation with a Moroccan textile expert who frequently leads government-sponsored training workshops for artisans, the expert revealed that he typically worked under a consulting firm (which did have a contract with the government) without a contract. He further explained that because of a long-standing close relationship with the firm’s president, to insist on a contract would be *hshūma* (shameful, disrespectful). The only situations requiring a contract were those where a previous relationship of trust had not been established. This perspective contrasts with that of Jacqueline. For Jacqueline the contract is evidence of a commitment made in good faith; it also ensures that her business remains transparent and within the law, should questions ever arise. Furthermore, it gives her legal protection against the widespread practice of design copying and counterfeiting among artisans.

For Jacqueline’s employees, the meaning of the “contract” is less straightforward. The document itself specifies only that the freelance employee agrees to ensure a high-quality standard in executing the work, to not reproduce the models and designs elsewhere without authorization of the company, to compensate the company for damages should she violate the previous rule, and to maintain records of the raw materials and work in progress and make them available to the company at any time. Though the contract specifies the responsibilities of the embroiderer towards the company and its intellectual property, it does not reciprocate with any concrete obligations towards the embroiderer. In practice, the regularity of work was not equally guaranteed for all the embroiderers: some worked more than others, and some were given more complicated and challenging assignments while others tended to perform more redundant tasks. Nonetheless, all the embroiderers professed to me an absolute trust in Jacqueline’s honesty and fairness, qualities proven on a daily basis over the past nine years.

The nature of their relationship bridged the professional and the personal. On numerous occasions, Jacqueline had intervened in an embroiderer’s personal health crisis, going so far as to mobilize a group of friends to have one young woman operated on for a serious heart condition, transporting expensive medications from Europe to Morocco, and arranging for a woman to see her homeopathic doctor to receive a long-term treatment for kidney stones (and intervening when the herbal medicines were too expensive). This trust, reaffirmed through actions over a long period of time, extends beyond the bare-bones articles of the contract. For instance, prior to investing in the joint-purchase of a tract of land in Zitouna (to which I will return later), two embroiderers came

to Jacqueline to discuss the prospect of regular work in the future. Assured that work would continue to be plentiful, they took out a real-estate loan and bought the land. Thus, while the embroiderers' *patentes* and contracts formalize the legal basis of their professional relationship, the thickened ties of mutual obligation and responsibility for one another's well-being exceed purely legal terms.

THE "METHODOLOGY": FROM EMPIRICISM TO PRECISION

The central element of Jacqueline's project to rehabilitate and rationalize embroidery practices consists of what she refers to as the "methodology." She describes it as a tool to transform an "empirical" work approach to one ordered by a rigorously applied set of rules. When asked to elaborate on her understanding of "empirical," she pointed to the use of conventional rules of thumb regarding the choice and placement of certain motifs, and rough estimates instead of exact measurements. The methodology, then, privileges precision, advance planning, and sampling, with the aim of making a design and its execution a predictable and replicable technical process. In some ways, this restructuring echoes themes of the Protectorate-era vocational schools, especially with respect to the emphasis on exact measurement and cleanliness. Jacqueline enforces an almost obsessive attention to hygiene in her workshop, and demands that the embroiderers carry this over to their work at home. The daily accumulation of dust, exacerbated by the open-air patio of the workspace, must be wiped away every afternoon before the embroiderers sit down to work. The worktable must be covered with a clean tablecloth, and she asks that the embroiderers store and transport their work in a clean plastic bag, doubled in a specially made muslin drawstring sack and an additional thick canvas tote. Food and drink are to be consumed away from the immediate workspace, and clean hands and plastic-wrapped embroidery hoops ensure that the work remains pristine.

The start of any new project commences with a carefully drawn-out technical spec sheet drafted by Jacqueline. The plan includes a grid with the central axes and diagonals of the composition drawn out. The embroiderers are expected to trace this grid with a large running stitch on the fabric to be embroidered. To do this they must adhere to the precise measurements indicated on the spec sheet, using a measuring tape to transpose the written plan to the cloth. The emphasis on this preparatory step is meant to guarantee flawless, perfectly placed motifs in conformity with Jacqueline's design. This preliminary groundwork represents a departure from traditional work patterns, where the repertoire of common articles (cushions, handkerchiefs, tablecloths, etc.) exhibited fairly standard dimensions, and motifs were placed by convention in the corners, the center, along the borders, etc. In the past, given that remuneration for embroidery work

was significantly lower than Jacqueline's rates, the experienced embroiderers had prioritized working quickly. Thus, rather than adding time to trace a grid, they used approximate measuring techniques like folding the cloth to find the center or a visual assessment of design symmetry.

In Jacqueline's workshop, some of the embroiderers felt they could bypass the gridding step, preferring to move directly into the embroidery motifs proper. They were sometimes able to get away with "skipping," but only on certain repeat orders with very simple compositions. For new work and large pieces, Jacqueline insisted on first approving the traced layout—she would not offer the spec sheets for the next step until satisfied with the accuracy of the grid. On one occasion, a group of embroiderers was working with a particularly complicated layout plan, which Jacqueline expected them to transpose uniformly onto their cloth. Sana', a competent but sometimes impatient woman, tired by the third day of endlessly thread-marking lines across her fabric, mentioned to the other embroiderers that one set of grid-lines was actually unnecessary. Gesturing to the plan, she explained that all they needed to do was trace two axes, then measure from the axes to find the starting point for the individual motifs. Commenting to no one in particular, she claimed she would mention this to Jacqueline, "I'll explain it to her." No one responded, and in the end she said nothing, hunching over to continue her work.

The second step of the methodology consists of "sampling," which often begins with the embroiderer drawing out the motif in a gridded notebook. This enables mapping out the stitch numbers and the precise configuration of the motif on paper before once again going to the cloth to test the desired thread-weight and the size of the counted stitch (in the case of Fez-stitch embroidery). Once the specifics have been approved by Jacqueline, the embroiderer is allowed to start stitching on the actual piece; and with the completion of the first few motifs, she is timed to determine an estimate for total labor time and the ultimate cost of the completed piece.

In terms of imposing the "methodology," the importance of regular surveillance or "checking in"—for quality control or moving forward with the development of an embroidered work—cannot be underestimated. Most of the embroiderers come in to the workshop once or twice a week, and in periods of urgency, Jacqueline asks that they work "full time" (up to six hours a day) in the workshop. For the most part, then, each embroiderer sets the pace of work according to her schedule, which usually includes household chores, and childcare in some cases. If someone is making very little progress, however, Jacqueline may put some verbal pressure on her to speed up, and those embroiderers who work quickly and carefully are consistently given more work as a sort of reward for their diligence.

Hasna in particular was a gifted embroiderer, and Jacqueline frequently described her as having hands of gold. She was one of the only women who was adept at doing the *Rbatī* stitch (a flat stitch used to fill carbon traced figures on cloth), but her work rhythm was irregular and weeks would pass with little progress. Jacqueline remarked on one occasion, “You pay her and then she disappears, she doesn’t know how to manage her freedom; it’s a lack of professionalism. It’s irresponsible.” The paternalistic tone of this comment demonstrates Jacqueline’s attitude toward “the girls” as pupils of sorts. It also points to a core difference in perspective on the importance of embroidery work with respect to other domains of life, notably familial relations and obligations. For example, in the spring of 2010, with a deadline fast approaching, Hasna informed Jacqueline of her intention to visit her sister, who had just had a baby. Jacqueline strongly discouraged the trip, asserting that her work should take precedence. She continued to make her case, noting that since part of Hasna’s earnings went to support her family, someone else should make the trip. In the end, Hasna stayed to complete her embroidery work and her parents went to see after her sister.

THE TEMPORALITIES OF RATIONALIZATION

The efficient management of time is central in the attempts, more and less successful, to pace work rhythms through regular surveillance techniques. But calculations of time, especially labor time, emerge as key operations for the rational management of the company. However, among the various women of the business (i.e., Jacqueline, her administrative assistant Mouna, and the embroiderers), it seems that quite different orientations and calculations of time coexist. For Jacqueline, calculating the labor time for a particular order is crucial for costing purposes and for estimating delivery dates for her clients. These calculations also determine the profitability of potential products. An example illustrates this point. In the summer of 2009, Jacqueline briefly considered the fabrication of a hand-crocheted *hammām* glove (a sort of exfoliating loofah for use in the bath). Nadia, one of her employees, worked up several sample gloves for Jacqueline’s review. When asked what price she thought was fair for the glove, Nadia quoted 15 Dh (about US\$1.75). Upon questioning, she estimated her labor time per glove as two days. Mouna, Jacqueline’s assistant, weighed the glove at 100 grams, and based on the reported price of 40 Dh/kilo for the nylon yarn, she calculated the cost of raw materials as 4 Dh per glove. Some quick arithmetic determined Nadia’s prospective wages as 5.5 Dh per day. This was a paltry profit margin, even for Morocco. However, Jacqueline took issue with the estimated fabrication time, claiming that this probably included break time,

cooking and cleaning time, nap time, etc. In other words, she suspected Nadia had not distinguished between work time (eligible for remuneration) and time that might involve work of another kind. She asked Mouna to time Nadia for 15 minutes to see how many crochet rows she could complete while working uninterrupted. After time was up, Nadia had made little progress; however, based on the timed sample, Jacqueline claimed that Nadia could probably finish two or three gloves per day, working without distractions. But even at 33 Dh profit per day (assuming three gloves per day), the loofah glove did not provide a living wage, either by national standards (10.64 Dh/hour is the minimum wage) or by Jacqueline's (who starts at a base wage of 100 Dh/day). The glove project was abandoned.

In speaking with the embroiderers at Jacqueline's about their attention to time, I asked if they looked at the clock while working or kept informal accounts of time spent embroidering. In most instances, the women responded that they did not pay attention to the hours, since embroidery labor and household chores were intermixed. They reported to generally working "all day" and sometimes into the night, though on any given day there might be an interruption, like a visiting relative, a visit to the doctor, or a shopping trip to Marrakech. If, as these answers seem to indicate, the embroiderers do not typically maintain a precise accounting of "their time" versus "the employer's time" (Thompson 1967), in some circumstances they are very aware of work time and the precious passing of the hours. Malika, one of the more diligent embroiderers, related how she once raced against the clock to finish an order by an urgent deadline. In the fall of 2009, Hasna and Khadija met at the workshop over a period of one month, devoting around six hours a day, five or six days a week, to complete a complex embroidered curtain for an important client. These instances evince a flexible orientation towards time: in periods of need, time awareness and time management sharpen to privilege concentrated stretches of intense embroidery labor; otherwise, the day progresses without precise accounting or close attention to the clock.

For all Jacqueline's careful figuring of labor time for each embroidery job, a closer look at wage determination betrays a fuzzy calculation at work. Labor time is indeed the main factor, but other variables, including the level of difficulty and the embroiderers' skill level, are given some weight. The latter two elements, as best I could determine, are simply judgment calls, based on an accumulated history of performance. Furthermore, unlike the salaried employees (the weavers and a few cleaning staff) who receive their checks at the end of the month, the payment schedule for the embroiderers features a flexible and progressive wage disbursement. Depending on the liquidity of the company, the amount of work accomplished, and the time since the last pay installment,

Jacqueline decides when and how much to give to each embroiderer. While this arrangement resembles the historical putting-out system for embroidery (still quite common today in the handicrafts), in a sense it is also tailored to the individual rhythm and needs of each woman. It requires an inordinate amount of record keeping, which is managed primarily by Mouna by way of over-stuffed three-ring binder work/payment logs for each embroiderer.

In considering the different components of Jacqueline's re-disciplining project—time management and calculation, the formal legalizing of work relations, and the implementation and surveillance of the "methodology"—I have signaled the incomplete nature of systematization. This is not to say the project is a failure, but rather to accentuate what else might be contributing to the company's continued existence: the strong personal ties and feelings of obligation and concern for one another, which exceed the minimum requirements of impersonal work relations.

EMBROIDERY "WORK" AND "WOMANHOOD"

The account of two young Moroccan embroiderers illustrates the inconsistent ways that market-driven embroidery labor destabilizes normative notions of womanhood and the social value of this particular feminine activity. Since 2001, Malika and Khadija, close friends and maternal cousins, had been employed as embroiderers for Jacqueline's hand-woven textiles company. At the outset, both women were illiterate but possessed prior experience and knowledge of Moroccan embroidery. By 2008, they had completed a basic literacy course sponsored by the company, and trained according to the methodology developed by Jacqueline to produce extremely complex embroidery for high-end interior fabrics. Both were unmarried and living at home with their parents—Khadija with her mother and sister (her father having passed away) and Malika with her parents, four sisters, and one unmarried brother.

On a ride to Zitouna in the summer of 2009, I asked Jacqueline to reflect on the past eight years and on the extent that working with the company had changed her female employees. To illustrate her view, Jacqueline shared her recollection of a specific event. A few years ago, she assigned a particularly difficult project to Malika, which Malika initially refused to attempt, saying it was beyond her abilities. Despite her misgivings, she eventually completed the embroidery work, and in presenting the finished cloth to Jacqueline, declared that she would never again claim that something was impossible; anything was possible. Jacqueline was clearly moved by this incident, and viewed it as proof that her collaboration with the women had resulted in building up the self-confidence and autonomy of her employees.

A conversation with Malika in the fall of 2009 confirmed the significance of this incident for both women. In describing the way that Jacqueline introduced innovations to traditional embroidery designs (*ketbtekr fih*), Malika spontaneously narrated the same story mentioned by Jacqueline:

One time when I wanted some work, she [Jacqueline] changed around the embroidery and told me to work at it. I took the piece home but I didn't understand how to do it, and I started to cry. I went to her, crying, and told her I didn't know how to do it. She told me, "I know you can do it, that you can succeed." That's how she answered me. So, it was like when she said these words to me she convinced me. I went home and fought with the embroidery, and I learned it. That's it. Now for me, nothing is impossible. She gives me something and I finish it.

TYING THE KNOT, CUTTING THE CORD?

Just before Ramadan in August 2009, both women announced their engagements to men of whom they had no previous knowledge; in Khadija's case, found through a neighbor's contacts, and in Malika's case, through the director of her brother's language school. Throughout the engagement period, Jacqueline encouraged the two women to engage in serious discussions with their future husbands regarding their embroidery work and the possibility of continuing this work long-distance. As the months passed, in speaking with Malika and one of her sisters, it became increasingly evident that Malika's fiancé was the controlling type, closely monitoring her comings and goings at a distance from his home in El Jadida on the Atlantic coast. Malika related that the conversation with her fiancé about work was not promising. When she raised the issue, her fiancé brushed it aside, saying that they would see about "that" later. She did not push the point, perhaps in fear of jeopardizing the engagement which, given her relatively "advanced" age (36), was not to be taken for granted. After her wedding and the couple's departure from Zitouna, Malika's sister informed me that Malika was forbidden to leave their apartment without her husband and that he had decided not to permit her continued employment. Furthermore, he instructed Malika to leave her cell phone with a friend in Zitouna on the condition that he would buy her a new one, effectively cutting her off from all her friends and contacts.

At the same time, Khadija was making wedding plans for her second marriage. Her first husband had fallen ill and passed away only six months after their wedding. She and her fiancé, unlike the other couple, did discuss her future employment, and her fiancé was supportive. In their marriage contract they included a clause that allowed Khadija to work, and to make the necessary trips to Marrakech for this purpose.

In numerous conversations before and after the weddings, Jacqueline bemoaned what she perceived as Malika's bowing to social pressure, enforced more or less overtly by her family. Referring to incidents like the aforementioned conversation, Jacqueline expressed confusion and disappointment with Malika's decisions, which seemed to go against what Jacqueline took to be Malika's newly empowered disposition. Conversely, in Khadija's case, Jacqueline felt that the eight years of energy invested in developing her technical abilities correlated with a strengthened sense of self-worth, responsibility, and time management skills, and that this investment had been respected and valued by Khadija.

At this point, it may be useful to clarify the conceptual framework that I perceive to be inflecting Jacqueline's aspirations for, and interpretations of, the work ethic and work relations in Zitouna. As previously noted, her mission, as she articulated it, is explicitly emancipatory. By this I mean that it bundles together a set of understandings about the subject and her capacity for action, the relationship of the individual to society, and an assumed goal of gender parity. Post-structuralist feminist writers, including Butler (1990), Mahmood (2005), and Joseph (1999), have problematized the liberal conception of the subject and its concomitant understanding of agency, especially insofar as it privileges a dichotomy of subordination/resistance and the notion that the individual is only agentive to the extent that she goes against social norms and conventions. Mahmood (2005) instead emphasizes the varieties of ways women might inhabit and embody social norms, and consider themselves to be acting in accordance with them. With respect to Morocco, studies of the local notion of personhood also offer an alternative model, notably Geertz's (1974) and Rosen's (1984) idea of "contextualized persons"; that is, individuals who bear and construct relations according to public identities constituted by setting and origins-based associations. But as Geertz (1974:42) asserts, these associations only plot the approximate coordinates of persons, lending a certain ad hoc quality to interactions between them. Thus, turning back to Jacqueline and the actions of Malika and Khadija, it seems crucial to be attentive to both the open-ended character of particular relations and the multiple ways of abiding by social norms, which in turn creates the possibility for their modification.

STATUS TRANSITION FROM THE INSIDE OUT

In considering these parallel stories, two interrelated issues are relevant: first, the relationship between normative notions of Moroccan womanhood and the value within this framework of outside employment versus other kinds of women's activities, especially domestic; and second, the status of embroidery as a product and as a particular kind of labor. One possible interpretation of

Malika's and Khadija's stories would assert that conceptions of Moroccan womanhood are currently in flux, and therefore characterized by contradiction, ambivalence, and tension. Recent ethnographic research on gender relations in Morocco supports a thesis of a progressive reconfiguration of gender roles, especially in the public and legal spheres (Kapchan 1996; Mernissi 2004; Newcomb 2008), but also points to a continued patriarchic division of labor and authority within the household, especially in rural contexts (Crawford 2008).

A woman's status and identity in rural Morocco and to a great extent in the broader society are firmly bound to her marriage status and motherhood. This applies more or less across the economic spectrum, but is also tempered by factors like educational level and the specific nature of employment activities. Particularly in rural Moroccan society, the ideal of womanhood includes marriage and the founding of a household, with the husband at its head. Children are assumed to follow marriage, preferably sooner rather than later. Older single women, divorcees, and widows are "out of category" in the sense that they do not easily fit into the normative roles attributed to adult women. In addition to being an extra material burden on their family, they tend to be viewed with some mistrust. By emphasizing the resiliency of conservative notions of womanhood, I do not refute research demonstrating the myriad ways women wield power (both formal and informal) and authority, especially in the domestic sphere and increasingly in the marketplace, civil society, and professional domains. I merely assert that Moroccan cultural understandings of womanhood still privilege marriage and motherhood as central, though increasingly rivaled by other capacities or attributes.

In these particular examples, the unsettling of conceptual models might be explained, in part, by Malika's and Khadija's long-term encounter with more or less radically different models of womanhood in the form of Jacqueline, Mouna, and numerous European and American professional photographers, journalists, and students passing through the doors of the workshop with some regularity. Jacqueline presents the most extreme example of difference: she lives by herself in the village, owns several residential properties, and owns and manages a successful business. Furthermore, with an almost missionary zeal, she takes an active interest in the well-being of her employees, seeing that they consult with doctors when needed, providing temporary loans and salary advances in times of crisis, and sharing her opinion and advice about how they should manage their time and relationships (advice which is not always welcome or taken into consideration). Mouna offers a more moderate example of a Moroccan woman with a full-time profession, who, even after marriage and a subsequent move to Zitouna, kept her job.

The second part of this account must situate Moroccan embroidery, in relation to other forms of labor, as a contemporary remunerative activity. Despite Jacqueline's best efforts to reframe embroidery as a noble and serious profession, for her employees it remains somewhere between an occupation and a second category harder to define, including the notion of "pass-time," a part-time job, and a supplement to discretionary spending. Indeed, few women at Jacqueline's, despite receiving better monetary compensation than most Moroccan embroiderers, consider it as a career or a full-time job. Several recounted how the money earned from their embroidery work goes mostly into personal purchases of clothing and accessories, and household items like kitchenware, linens, and decoration. However, in some cases the women use their personal finances to assist with the medical expenses of family members or in times of need, as in Malika's case with her brother's language-course tuition. Perhaps the most important exception to traditional uses of personal finances, and one that indicates the transitional status of embroidery as a kind of labor, is Malika and Khadija's joint purchase of a plot of land in Zitouna, which they intended to develop and resell for a profit. This investment in land differs from previous investment strategies for women, which tended to take the form of gold jewelry acquisition, and continue to do so in many cases. For the most part, women's earnings are not assimilated into the household income, and male family members still handle purchases of provisions at the market and housing costs.

The occupational status of embroidery, then, is in transition. It is not yet viewed as central to a woman's social status or a path leading towards equal financial participation in the household economy. This may explain Malika's willingness to give it up according to her husband's wishes. But Khadija's marriage contract and the joint land purchase indicate a shift underway.

Considering these examples in the broader context of gender and handicrafts development in Morocco, I propose that projects foregrounding traditional feminine practices like embroidery are quietly but insistently pushing the boundaries of local normative frameworks with respect to gender roles and the division of labor within and outside of the household. Though the products of their labor have been circulating in the commercial sphere throughout the twentieth century, the value of the work itself was not thought to replace or rival the primacy of male labor and male income. The recent wave of female craft co-operatives, associations, and businesses like Jacqueline's is altering this relationship. These institutions encourage women to think of their work as an occupation, to organize themselves by this shared practice in order to improve their success in the market and cut out the traditional middlemen, who are often male relatives. However, the creation of self-sufficient and lucrative female-run commercial structures would seem to imply the unsettling of the primacy of kinship ties on both

economic grounds and in terms of privileged allegiances, an issue that is rarely recognized in development discourse. Their ultimate realization would also entail a transformation in the relationship between a woman and her labor, in the sense that her work would come to be more central in her sense of self and in how she organizes other aspects of her life, like child-rearing, domestic duties, and family obligations. Malika's and Khadija's stories might then illustrate the tension inherent in these ongoing transformations as embroidery practices and products straddle the home and the market, and the notion of womanhood comes to include "wage earner."

POSTSCRIPT

Several months after Malika's wedding, I received news from both Jacqueline and Malika's sister Sana' that Malika had convinced her husband to permit her continued embroidery work with the company. According to Sana', Malika, unhappy with her restricted existence in El Jadida, had employed a number of techniques to plead her case. Some combination of crying, pleading, and complaining about her husband's long absences and the monotony of watching television all day finally won him over. Jacqueline subsequently put Malika on the most challenging pieces of her latest major order, and regular shipments by the postal service and communication by phone seemed to be working smoothly. Both women were satisfied, and Malika had managed to accomplish her goal of leaving Zitouna for the big city and continue to embroider for Jacqueline. But she did it in her own way, adroitly, with patience (*es-sabr*), from within the expanding possibilities for garnering respect as a woman.

NOTES

1. A notable exception is gold-thread embroidery (*sqalli*) executed in workshops by men and in the home by women, sewn for women's shoes (*sherbīl*), saddlery, and women's belts (*mdamma*). Massignon (1924) indicates that guilds in Marrakech, Rabat, and Salé had Muslim and Jewish male embroiderers. Gottreich (2007:100) lists 246 (male) Jewish slipper (*sherbīl*) embroiderers and an almost equal number of female embroiderers in 1902 Marrakech. Despite evidence of this special case, historical sources and contemporary interlocutors by and large characterize Moroccan embroidery as a feminine practice performed in domestic settings.
2. Due to font limitations, certain diacritical marks from the standard Arabic transcription alphabet are absent.
3. The names of people and locations, other than Marrakech, have been changed to protect the anonymity of my interlocutors.
4. One of the old caravanserais in the Marrakech *medina*, or historic city center. Most serve today as extremely low-cost housing and handicraft workshops and boutiques.

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