

Morocco

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The virtual wholesale migration of post-pubescent males from the Igherm region of the Moroccan Anti-Atlas mountains to northern Moroccan cities and to Europe leaves women and young children to inhabit the mountain villages for most of the year. Migrants retain strong emotional and economic links to their home villages, which they reaffirm during the annual summer return. This scattering of people makes it difficult to circumscribe the boundaries of any given local community. But people try to do just that through collectively-produced song: poetry sung in the local Berber vernacular, Tashelhit. Both the implicit rules that govern which individuals sing out and what they literally say articulate ideas about where community boundaries begin and end in the Anti-Atlas, and about how people make sense of the emotional and social ramifications of human movement.

Although some migrant men take their wives and children to Casablanca with them, most women experience migration from their remote mountain villages, watching people and goods come and go, which constantly remind them of their ruralness and the combination of disdain and nostalgia with which city dwellers perceive their way of life. More immediate concerns are tending the sparse, rain-fed barley fields and the animals which provide the staple of their diet, and ensuring peaceful social relations. The work of maintaining community in these unforgiving hills involves ensuring coherence within social groups, establishing where alliances begin and end, and carefully overseeing movements in and out of the villages. This constant monitoring helps ensure a level of comfort within volatile social and economic constraints.

Remittances from migrant workers have been subsidizing the females who stay behind and keep Anti-Atlas traditions alive since at least the first quarter of this century, when French colonial ethnographers began documenting village demographics. One local oral tradition is the call and response genre of *tizrarin* sung poetry, which is sung in four to six-part verses. The *tizrarin* are not flashy; they require bare voices with no accompanying drumming, musical instruments or dancing. They will probably never make it into the 'folklore' circuit performed in package tour hotels in Moroccan cities. Instead, the verses are performed by village females off-stage, so to speak, marking liminal moments and spaces: when people are sitting waiting to be served meals, riding in the back of a pickup truck from the bride's village to that of the groom, or welcoming guests into a village.

These sung verses are never the explicit focus of attention, yet they perform the important function of suggesting cohesion in potentially messy situations, which inevitably characterize gatherings of 300-500 people. Women, both through the practice of singing *tizrarin* and in the words themselves, reaffirm the bonds linking villages and tribes by articulating communally-held norms. Interdependence may be articulated explicitly, such as in the verse sung by a grandmother sitting with the bride's fellow villagers at the home of the groom ▼

**a yen anga nkki dun yen shur nsherik
nsherik idek yuta d li'yun arsan nit
u le tagwwa inagh nswa nsu winun**

*We are one, me and you, we share walls
we share with you boundaries, springs, they remain as they are
and the sequias that nourish us, we drink from yours.*

There are significant differences between themes treated by females of a younger generation. Unmarried girls, who presumably have little experience managing inter-village social relations, are more likely to sing about the pain

Singing the Distance Gendered Experiences of Migration in Anti-Atlas Community Song

that accompanies parting, whether due to marriage or to migration to the cities ▼

**allahu akbar adunit takufremt
ar ukwan taTat mdden wakha suln**

*By God I swear, the world is a heathen
it divides people although they're still alive.*

**allah ihanikum a tamdakult a rbbi bdanagh
ighkm tektir ar talagh ighkm tugh henagh**

*Farewell oh my friend, God divided us
If I remember you I'll cry, if I forget you I'll be fine.*

Females who spend the year in the city without hearing these verses cannot produce them even if they understand and can speak Tashelhit, which is not the case for many contemporary schooled city-dwellers, despite their mountain origins. Females who divide the year evenly between city and village tend to have a passive familiarity with the verses but remain quiet. This leaves the year-long mountain residents to sing out. Appropriately enough, the lyrics of their verses reflect very local experience.

The significance of locality takes on a different meaning for migrant villagers estranged from their lands than for the year-round residents. In the Anti-Atlas, this corresponds roughly to a gender division. One recurring theme illustrates this division: that of the *tamazirt*, a word that could be glossed as 'homeland,' or 'countryside,' as well as the more generic 'place.' Both Arabic and Berber-speaking Moroccans presume that for Tashelhit speakers, the homeland is the countryside. At an earlier historical moment this may have been true, but generations of rural-urban migration have complicated such an elision.

Male migrants and female villagers dwell differently in the *tamazirt*. Experiences of place are reflected in song as well as everyday terminology. For urban dwellers, the *tamazirt* is a concept, an almost fictive land, a place that in reality they visit about once a year – hence the kind of objectification that leads them to celebrate the concept of the *tamazirt* homeland and its accompanying *amarg*, that is, its 'mood' or 'music.' These two concepts inspired the refrain of one performance of Igherm-area men's collective song and dance (*ahawash*), in which the chorus juxtaposed the terms, singing '*tama tamazirt, amarg amarg, ay.*' Although the lyrics merely accompanied the group dance and drumming, and arguably were not the highlight, it is notable nonetheless that the lyrics were sung by men back from their jobs working in corner grocery stores in Casablanca. Urban dwellers are familiar with mass Moroccan media which posits rural collective song as a symbol of Berber custom; some men taking a break from their *ahawash* even asked this foreign researcher what she thought of their '*folklore.*' It is precisely such objectification of what

constitutes local community and customs that can lead to a song refrain which draws on the experience of reflection itself.

In contrast to objectification of the homeland, year-round mountain residents use the term *tamazirt* to mean an inhabited land or a place which can be as small as a hamlet or as large as a nation-state. What migrant men talk about as the *tamazirt*, is for year-round residents a highly-diversified conglomeration of multiple *timizarn*, multiple inhabited places. Women talk informally about how much they want to flee the hard labour of the *tamazirt* for urban conveniences and a break from agricultural work. But their public use of the term *tamazirt* does not imply an urban counterpoint.

One example comes from a grandmother in her mid-50's who refers to the *tamazirt* ('*tamazar*', altered to fit the song metre) as a place, assuming the voice of the bride. She sings ▼

**a haii fkiqh y timizar ur khaliDagh
ur iyi gis baba ur gis imi qanDgh
ur iyi gis id dada magh imalan**

*Here I am I was given to a tamazar I'm not familiar with
my father isn't here, my mother isn't here, I'm lonely
there's no older brother to show me how to behave.*

In another verse, a woman articulates the widespread Anti-Atlas norm of respecting the boundaries of places that are not one's own ▼

**igh ilkem yen imi n tamazirt irard aDar
ardas nan ait tamazirt marhaba serk**

*If you arrive at the edge of a tamazirt pull back your foot
until the people of that tamazirt welcome you there.*

Regardless of whether they spend the bulk of the year in cities or mountains, people attached to the Anti-Atlas are hyper-aware of movement. Men move from the countryside to the city to earn a living. For many women, the most significant move they will undertake is from their parents' home to that of their groom. Marriage in rural Morocco is more about this move than about romance. The common Tashelhit way of saying 'she is going to marry a boy in a place called Tililit' (*tra Tililit*) means 'she is going to Tililit' or literally, 'she wants Tililit'. The theme of movement is reflected in wedding verses, their lyrics reinforced by their being sung while moving and in liminal moments ►

**zayd aoudi zayd ukkan ima lrzq ad gan dar moulay rbbi
ar tawin yen silin ur itm**

*Go on, my dear, go on still fate is in the Lord's hands
it takes one to places we never would have dreamed.*

**arja ditawin ay aman arJa jalnas
ad saram yawigh a tamazirt igan darnagh**

*The hope that you have for finding water that runs from you,
brings you to a land that is ours, that you haven't seen.*

**wallah amkd usigh aDar a ilih nsen,
is ur inkhalaf ghid d lmkaniinu**

*By God, you won't put down your foot
until we know that this place isn't different from my place.*

The grandmothers who act as gatekeepers between the mountain hamlets are the ones authorized to call out such verses. Girls are less interested in maintaining community boundaries than they are in crossing them – whenever possible – to visit saints' tombs or relatives, attend weddings, or any occasion that will broaden their familiarity with the social and geographical landscape.

Migrants are an integral and crucial component of village communities and economies, providing the necessary revenue to sustain the rural population as well as the widely-valued symbolic capital of urban familiarity which they share with villagers during their annual return. The two poles of what sustains the concept of the *tamazirt* – men in the cities who make money and women in the countryside who work their men's fields and maintain family honour – are the people whose voices are heard in collectively-produced community music. Women's singing of the *tizrarin* genre of sung poetry in liminal moments solidifies ties between rural communities and expresses normative emotional aspects of the ways villagers and urban migrants alike experience the displacement of migration. Life for year-round residents of the Anti-Atlas mountains is a balancing act between two extremes of human existence: *temara*, 'hard labour' and *laab* or *lhwa*, 'playing,' which often implies music. 'Playing' brings together the different components of Anti-Atlas communities, but their differential roles in musical production reflect their social roles in maintaining the idea and tangibility of the homeland. Participating in the singing signals adherence to a group with

which members share daily labours and simple joys. Just like with words in these communities, it is perhaps less important what one says than the fact that one says something. ◆

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