



Learning to Weave the Threads of Honor: Understanding the Value of Female Schooling in Southern Morocco

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This article is concerned with the role of formal education in the upward social mobility of women in the Sirwa, a marginal Berber region of southern Morocco where carpets are produced by women, and marketed by men. To explore why girls' education in weaving takes precedence over formal education, the article considers the place of women's education in the livelihood strategies of the household and the significance of marriage in women's social mobility. [gender, economic activity, social capital, community of practice]

This article is concerned with the role of formal education in upward social mobility for women in the Sirwa, a geographically marginal Berber region of southern Morocco, situated at the junction of the High Atlas and the Anti Atlas mountain ranges. Here women produce carpets for the international market, and men market them. To understand why weaving is preferred to schooling in the Sirwa, I propose to explore the significance of gender for learning (Brickhouse 2001; Paechter 2003), using the notion of community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991). A community of shared learning and practice implies that learning is not limited to a simple acquisition of knowledge but extends to the construction of an identity through participation in a social group. This article argues that the reasons preventing women from accessing formal education are found in the way women come to learn and develop locally valued performances of femininities. Theories of gendered performance (Mahmood 2001, 2005; but see also Butler 1990) and subjectivation (Foucault 1987; Warnier 2001) are helpful in exploring how identities, practices, beliefs, and values can be reproduced but also changed. I will show how through their participation in weaving and domestic activities girls and young women in the Sirwa come to desire the norm assigned to their sex and become recognized as legitimate members of "female" groups.

The article will start by examining how the participation of Sirwa women in domestic activities is seen as an education that shapes women into moral subjects. It then considers two factors in this choice of education for women: first the place of women's education in the livelihood strategies of the household, and second the role of marriage in their social mobility. The fourth and last part of the article concerns the significance of social connections for women's social mobility.

The entry of the Sirwa weavers into the global economy started during the colonial period when the commodification of carpets was planned as part of a larger economic scheme in which the tourist industry was to play a central role. Since the 1980s weaving production has intensified, this activity occupying most of the households in the region. The production of carpets constitutes a major livelihood option complementing subsistence agriculture. Other sources of income are the cultivation of saffron, which in a good year may correspond to the income of weaving combined with remittance from family members in cities or abroad.

In the mountain area, formal primary level schooling was introduced in the 1990s, and the level of education is relatively low, with most women over 25 not having attended

school. Most boys also received some education in the Qu'ranic schools (*msid*). Livelihood opportunities for men outside agricultural work are limited (grocer, taxi driver, carpet dealer). Women are overwhelmingly weavers. Secondary education up to "A" level standard is only available in towns in the valley such as Taznakht and Taliouine, where formal education for girls is more valued in comparison with the mountainous areas; there, girls tend to go to school up to "A" level and sometimes even to university more than 200 km away. There are more diverse livelihood options, although these remain very limited in comparison with the Arabic-speaking cities. Since the early 2000s, literacy classes have been sponsored by the Moroccan government. In Taznakht these are well attended by adult women.

This article draws on 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork (2003–2004) among the mountain dwellers of the Sirwa region, and particularly in two ethnic groups known for their connection to weaving production: the Ayt Waghrda and Ayt Ubiâl. In the region, Ayt Waghrda women are generally considered the expert weavers. Ayt Waghrda men are the most successful and active carpet dealers. I spent most of my fieldwork living with an Ayt Ubiâl family and its extended family in the Ayt Waghrda area and valley towns. I also spent some time in other areas in the mountains and in the towns of Taznakht and Taliouine. Sirwa dwellers speak mainly Berber tashelhit and, when educated, some Arabic, the official national language of Morocco. In my host family and in urban areas, I relied on young women who spoke Arabic and could serve as translators from Berber.

As an urban educated Moroccan woman living abroad, I was often deterred from trying to learn to weave on the grounds that the kind of knowledge I knew (writing and reading) had a higher status than their weaving knowledge, which was in their eyes associated with poverty and necessity. Why an educated and wealthy woman would waste her time among poor people in uncomfortable conditions was a question that was regularly asked. In addition, the presence of a Moroccan woman without the protection of a father or husband was frowned upon and puzzling. A recurrent interpretation of my presence was that I intended to become a carpet trader. In this vein, a man once inquired whether my father or husband had sent me there with the motive to prepare the field for his own career in carpet trading.

A Feminine Domestic Education: Learning to Weave the Thread of Honor

This section is concerned with how being engaged in a community of learning, being a moral woman, and being a skilled practitioner are one and the same thing in the eyes of Sirwa dwellers. It explores how weaving (and domestic) education is seen as an education in morality.

Unlike in many cases of male apprenticeship or informal education in African contexts (e.g., Coy 1989; Dilley 1989; Marchand 2007), there is no master and no fame attached to an individual practitioner. Weaving is a knowledge shared by women. Its transmission is "ethnically matrilineal": when a woman from the Ayt Waghrda ethnic group marries into an Ayt Ubiâl group for example, she "produces" daughters with the skills of Ayt Waghrda weavers. Nevertheless, newly married women are also expected to learn the local techniques in their new families.

This economic activity takes place in the domestic sphere, between close kin such as mothers and daughters, sisters or cousins, mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, or close neighbors. Today, girls learn to weave later than their mothers did, learning between the age of 13 and 17 rather than at age 10 or earlier. This does not seem to affect the level of expertise of weavers. Learning usually occurs with a more experienced weaver, sometimes an elder sibling, who supports the others or corrects technical problems during practice. Learning does not necessarily happen in a supportive environment and may be imposed

on the girls. Biya from an Ayt Ubiâl village, 18 years old, remembers the humiliations she was subjected to and her moments of despair when she doubted that she would ever reach her sisters' level of expertise. After a prolonged stay with an aunt in the city, she was not keen to learn weaving. But under her parents' pressure, and wider social pressure—she was the only girl aged 16 in the village who did not know this craft—she felt compelled to comply, despite the lack of patience that her sisters showed her. Eventually her mother intervened in her education, criticizing the sisters for not showing the same understanding that they received when they learned with their mother or sisters. Biya managed to become as skilled as them, and now she enjoys challenging herself with the building of new intricate motifs. Her pride and her refusal of her subordinate relationship to her sisters motivated her to learn fast.

Weaving knowledge is shared by all, and the sources of this knowledge are available at all times in the material environment (tools, carpets) and the bodies of others through observation and imitation. The view that one learns by simply being around weavers is pervasive. This became obvious to me when, for my benefit, the youngest daughters of my host family, aged 10 and 13, who had never woven before, were ordered by their sisters and cousins to sit at the loom and weave with no preparation or instruction. They were given no time to think before acting or to analyze their movements during the process of passing the weft threads; they were pushed and criticized whenever they paused or slowed down. It was as if their elder siblings believed that observation and exposure since childhood was enough to internalize the relevant body techniques. The one girl who did not manage to react to pressure and produce a few nice lines of weft was described as unintelligent. Here, intelligence was thus interpreted as the capacity to rapidly take in a repertoire of potential actions and understood to rely on the reactive dimension of perception and action.

When working together with a more experienced weaver on the same carpet, the apprentice can grasp the object from the same standpoint as the expert weaver and thus "integrate" the gestures of the expert as if they were her own. She continuously shifts between an automated performance of tasks and a more conscious appropriation of complex repertoires of movement, an appropriation that relies on visually and kinesthetically available information displayed in the bodily practices of more experienced weavers.

In addition, competition is extensively used as part of teaching. When a mother trained two of her daughters to make the heddle rod system (which traps the warp threads alternately on every other thread allowing the weft to be passed through in an alternate manner), she placed one girl at each extremity of the loom with the goal to meet in the center; this lightened the workload but probably created *de facto* competition between them as to who would finish first. In this vein, in one family a father also encouraged competition between two teams of weavers working on two separate carpets.

Moreover, coercion may be used to obtain compliance. Mothers are unanimous in emphasizing how bright their daughters are and say that their daughters indeed have greater knowledge than themselves. Yet, it is common to hear the same mothers stating that they had to exercise physical violence on their daughters to teach them weaving. Corporal punishment at home as well as in formal education and Qu'ranic schools (*msîd*) is commonly used because of the belief that without coercion there is no learning. An Ayt Ubiâl proverb says: "When you hit the head, whatever you tell it, it will remember."

In this context, it is useful to consider one of the theoretical implications of the notion of communities of practice, encapsulated in the term "legitimate peripheral participation," which conveys the idea of a double process of (technical or livelihood) skill acquisition and socialization. Through legitimate peripheral participation, members come to appropriate and construct the goals and values, knowledge and meanings of a community. As

they read each others' gestures and intentions to produce a coherent and harmonious object (see Marchand 2007), often without verbal exchange, practitioners acquire familial and cultural ways of doing things. They learn local aesthetic conventions, what constitutes a good weaving, and also the moral meaning of what is a good weaver. Imitation dissolves the boundaries between one's own gestures and those of others. This means that young girls and women working and living together all share a communal repertoire of forms and techniques but also of feminine values. The repetition of gestures characterized by "precision," "care," and "attentiveness" (Ingold 2000) entails the perfection of the finished object but also ensures the maintenance of the virtue of the weavers. If the value of women is read in their practice and material production, in the quality of their gestures and their carpets, it is because in the Sirwa, weaving techniques, morality, and femininity are inextricably interwoven. Indeed some women see weaving as a sort of religious activity, and they identify with the figure of Mullaṭna Fatima, the daughter of the prophet Mohammed, who is said herself to have been a weaver.

One might thus say that through their engagement in weaving and domestic activities, women in the Sirwa come to desire and seek to acquire and develop valued performances of femininity that allow them to become recognized as legitimate members of the female groups. The Foucauldian concept of subjectivation (Foucault 1987; Mahmood 2005; Warnier 2001) allows us to understand the complex ways in which Sirwa women appropriate the prescriptions and conventions assigned to their sex but at the same time gain self-realization.

Weavers do not just master the weaving technology. Instead, the technology "acts on them" and is manifested in bodily aches and pains. A Sirwa proverb collected in the village of Tinindar (Ayt 'Atman) illustrates the belief that visual pain is inherent in learning weaving: "Girls learn to build the selvage through observing until their eyes ache." Craft production implies a work on the self inherent in mastering matter: one's own body and mind. Imposed discipline becomes internalized as women craft a moral and valorized self. Weaving is a feminine technology that fosters sensory-motor and moral dispositions such as self-mastery, patience, and the determination to complete an ambitious endeavor despite the slowness of progression and the sustained physical effort it requires. However, that is not to say that there is no pleasure and pride in self-mastery and in setting new technical and cognitive challenges such as working out how to compose an intricate pattern. In the eyes of weavers, feminine qualities and mastery of the self—including mastery of sexuality, acceptance of confinement, and intensive labor—demonstrate their capacity to shape themselves as honorable women, in harmony with the social values of the patriarchal ideology of their community.

The moral performances of practitioners are a "form of communication" (Marchand 2007:193) through which they demonstrate their value. However, if she is seen as lacking morality, the technical expertise of a weaver may not be recognized. Farida, a young woman of 22, was symbolically denied participation in the community of weavers because she subverted the norm of feminine morality: not only did she refuse to contribute to the family welfare through weaving after her widowed father remarried, thus showing a lack of respect for the father figure, but she was accused of being too promiscuous with men. In my eyes she was as skilled as any other weaver of her age, but to them she lacked weaving competence because she lacked virtue. In addition, participation in a community of practice also depends on wealth and social status. Indeed, Farida challenged power relations that restricted her access to the village's wealthier and better-connected families of weavers. Because she was rejected by the members of her own extended family (the Ayt Abdallah) that produced carpets for the niche market, she offered her free labor to a group of Ayt Waghrda women who were in competition with the Ayt Abdallah. She further provoked the Ayt Abdallah's anger by managing, like the Ayt Abdallah young female kin

had done, to become the maid in their extended family in a nearby urban town, thus lowering the prestige the Ayt Abdallah daughters had gained from their own stay there.

“Tarbiya” (Formal Education) Versus “Zarbiya” (Carpet)

This section considers the significance of weaving knowledge and education in the livelihood strategies of the households. Although the Moroccan government aims to eradicate illiteracy and seeks to have at least 90% of children completing primary education by 2015, with special attention to girls in rural areas, the literacy rate in the population aged ten and above was 28% for women in rural areas (compared with 61% in urban areas) in 2006–2007. The primary school enrollment ratio for girls was 87.7% (94.6% for boys) in rural areas against 92.1% (95% for boys) in urban areas. The secondary school enrollment ratio for girls (aged 12–14) falls to 15.6% in rural areas against 65.6% in urban areas (Royaume du Maroc 2008a). There seems, however, to be an increase in the primary school enrollment ratio for girls in the area of study, where 63% of girls attended primary school in 2003–2004 and 86% in 2007–2008, while the corresponding figures for boys declined from 98% in 2003–2004 to 96% in 2007–2008 (Royaume du Maroc 2008b).

In 2003–2004, most of the mountain girls I met had gone to school for less than five years, in contrast to the towns of Taznakht and Taliouine where secondary school attendance is more prevalent. Several had dropped out to avoid corporal punishment by their teacher, a practice accepted by parents. Some also stopped on their own initiative due to lack of interest or motivation; in each case, parents did not mind them not attending, either because they thought it would not affect their future prospects or because their family thought it was time for them to contribute to its productive work. Attendance at school also depends on the number of female members in the household able to undertake domestic and other income or subsistence-related activities. For instance, in one Ayt Ubiâl family consisting of five young unmarried women supporting two adult married women, the children could go to school and spend time playing. No pressure was put on them to help with domestic activities or to participate in agricultural labor, and it was only at the age of 17 that they learned to prepare food. In contrast, in one Ayt Waghirda household with only two adult women, both girls aged 8 and 13 had never attended school and already assumed domestic responsibilities (making bread and cooking lunch in addition to weaving and spinning).

Mountain families who have regular contacts with their extended urban family seem to be more open to girls' formal education. Urban dwellers (often first-generation migrants to urban areas) distinguish themselves from their rural relatives on the grounds of education, highlighting their modernity in opposition to what they define as the “backwardness” of rural dwellers. The notion that an educated woman will be able to support her children's education is often conveyed by urban women. Their influence on female rural relatives may also affect their religious practice and beliefs, and extends to matters of contraception. On the other hand, further education in secondary school is rarely an option that is encouraged. One of the reasons secondary school is not encouraged is that pupils living in the mountainous areas have to go to the state-owned (free) boarding school, located two hours' car journey away. Another problem affecting pupil school attendance is the lack of food available at the canteen due to staff corruption. One 16-year-old girl from an Ayt Ubiâl village who was keen to carry on studying and was hoping to become a teacher finally gave up going to boarding school in Taliouine because she claimed that the canteen personnel stole the food that was intended for the pupils.

Nevertheless, the most oft-cited explanation for not sending girls to school is the value given to the performance of productive and reproductive work. Some parents

stated that “weaving is school” and called this education the school of “astta” (*weaving* in Berber). Nader, a male Taznakht teacher, criticized the fact that some parents favor economic income at the expense of girls’ education. He ironically placed the Arabic terms “tarbiya” (formal education as well as bringing up) and “zarbiya” (carpet) in opposition. This neatly describes the perception that some parents have of school as a competing drain on female human resources for the household. Indeed, in comparison with their male counterparts of the same generation (brothers or cousins), the young weaver’s contribution to the welfare and status of the household is potentially far greater. It often starts at adolescence, whereas men’s contribution in cash may only become significant several years after they migrate to the city. For example, the women of my host family produced one carpet a month all year round, whereas their brothers and cousins who worked as waiters in the cities only sent a few commodities back once a year. In Taznakht, the women in one family who had lost their father and thus no longer had any income earned enough through the production of carpets to provide for their own subsistence and pay for their brother’s formal education, which eventually led him to get a good job. The value of women’s weaving work for the survival of the household was often highlighted to me through noting that, when carpets sold for a good price, the monthly income from this production corresponded to the monthly wage of a public-sector worker. This sums up the belief that weaving knowledge can be more profitable than formal education in terms of economic resources for the household. Paradoxically, despite this, weaving knowledge today is not recognized in terms of increased power for women and higher payment for carpets. This is due to the fact that weaving is still perceived as manual female work performed out of necessity. Another factor is that traders keep the price of carpets at the lowest possible level in order to increase profits.

Central to understanding Berber village life, as Crawford has rightly highlighted in his research in the High Atlas, is the concept of the household (Berber *takat*, pl. *tikatin*). He defines it as “an economic association, an assemblage of people who work a certain set of resources and share its rewards” (Crawford 2007:331). He shows how the contribution of rural girls who are sent to the city to work as maids is vital to the survival of the rural household. In my host family, although they regularly resisted performing agricultural and weaving work and repeatedly expressed feelings of unfairness or fatigue, women were very loyal to their household, but they were also regularly reminded of their own dependence on it. In their understanding, respect and love for the parents, survival of the household and their individual well-being, and their social status were inseparable concepts (see Portisch, this volume). Such understandings were fostered by their parents who appealed to the young women’s reason, their sense of duty, and their feeling of pride to convince them to carry on weaving: “Do you want to have nice clothes or do you want to end up begging at your neighbors’ doors?” The elder son of the family, however, did not share these feelings toward the household, and his desire to leave the countryside and the obligations of supporting his aging uncle in agricultural work led him to migrate to the city. His access to education, and a certain fluency in Arabic, gave him the possibility to opt out of this duty, to marry an urban Arabic-speaking woman, and to find work in the city.

The significance of daughters for the survival or well-being of the family is such that some men have jested that having daughters is better than having sons. Some fathers postpone the age of marriage of their daughters because they do not want to part early with the income generated by their daughters’ weaving work. A new trend is that marriage with a Sirwa weaver becomes an appealing livelihood strategy for unemployed men from other regions who are aware of the significance of weaving knowledge as an economic resource.

Women's Marriage, Education, and Physical Mobility

This section looks at how women see marriage as the best avenue for social mobility, with the status of housewife as an ideal. This appeal of domestic work is connected with the negative connotations of geographical mobility for women but also with the feeling that women's education prepares them for less heavy responsibilities than men's education.

The Sirwa culture establishes an ethos for women that emphasizes marriage and motherhood as the main source of self-worth. Becoming proficient in domestic activities is part of the general domestic training that most women receive to prepare them for their future as married women (see Froerer, this volume). Parents and daughters invest a great amount of time and energy in this informal education, which includes instruction in cooking, weaving, cleaning, child care and care for other household members, water and wood provision, and agricultural work. The sense of femininity and womanhood, of "apprentice women" (Paechter 2003), also emerges in leisure activities such as beautification or singing, and sometimes in forbidden practices such as wearing makeup (which is restricted to married women) or flirting with men.

Often, initially at least, the learning of weaving is tied to the desire to be part of a group of female practitioners. After several years of daily practice all year round, weaving may become abhorred as it is a physically demanding activity that can be associated with loss of beauty and health. If the subjective physical cost of weaving situates it above agricultural outdoor activities, weaving is nevertheless at the bottom of indoor activities. Women in the Sirwa are torn between two contradictory ideals of femininity: that of the moral and industrious woman and that of the plump and idle housewife. The first model corresponds to their mothers' example, who suffered from hunger, worked hard in the fields, and did not have gas, running water, washing powder, and machine spun wool.

Being plump is the prerogative of wives of wealthy men: unlike most women in the mountains, they do not need to perform work that leaves a physical mark on the body, such as the darkening of the skin associated with outdoor work and the loss of weight due to physical work such as weaving. As many mountain dwellers have noted with envy, housewives have concrete and tiled houses, their husbands buy them bread, white flour, and ready-made couscous; gas ovens and washing machines; and they do not work in the fields. Increasingly, the position of housewife is seen as an ideal, usually associated with the comforts of modern urban life as well as with the local ideological value attached to confinement. Many women aspire to a life where their duties would be reduced to those of a housewife who keeps an immaculate and well-functioning household and who cares for her children but who has plenty of leisure and time for herself (sleeping, grooming, watching television). In this light, working as a maid in the city may provide an education in the duties of a housewife and also give a taste for this life. This attraction to modern life and the city has been underscored by many researchers (Alahyane 2004; Hoffman 2008), but a new focus in Morocco is on women's interest in migration and how it can increase their social mobility through marriage. Crawford (2010), who argues in favor of a complex approach to child labor in Morocco, notes that girls may benefit in two ways from working as a maid in the city: they avoid the toil of agricultural work, and they may also increase their chances of marrying outside the countryside.

In 2004, Khadduj, a Berber woman of 28 with a secondary education, who runs an NGO with her family selling the carpets of local women in Taznakht, told me half jokingly, half hoping I could help her, that she would rather go abroad than marry. Yet, most women see marriage as the normal route to social mobility, including Khadduj, who recently stated that perhaps traveling abroad would allow her to find a husband there. Khadduj weaves less than most Taznakht women as her activities also include marketing carpets, communicating with international visitors to the region, and dealing with commissions. Her

weaving knowledge becomes useful as a means of demonstrating her skills in front of a foreign audience. Still, she states that if she marries well she will stop weaving altogether or only weave a few carpets to decorate her house. She, like many women, believes that a woman's place is in the house and that men prefer a housewife (*tamghart n-tigemmi*) to a wife working as a state employee. The latter may bring in a regular income but she will not be able to care for her husband and children as a housewife should. Moreover, the introduction of a maid into the household is seen as a source of trouble or discord between the spouses.

For women who carry on weaving intensively after their marriage, weaving is perceived as a proof of the failure of their husband to provide sufficiently for the family and is read by others as downward social mobility. Despite ironic comments on their high contribution in labor and resources to the household in comparison with men, women of my host household and their friends believe that because men are supposed to have economic responsibility for their families, formal education is more important for men than for women. Ambitious 18-year-old Biya often reflects with regret that her father had not gained any formal education that might have helped him become a wealthier man. She also transferred her hope for the future of her parents onto her brother. As for her personal aspirations of social mobility, she hopes to find a husband capable of providing her with a comfortable house. Many women thus consider themselves less laden with obligations than men because they are not responsible for the future of their parents and are expected to care for rather than provide for their parents-in-law.

Men's obligations, however, come with rewards and advantages to themselves because, unlike women, men are very mobile, manage money, inherit land, and have direct access to the market. Nevertheless, most women dislike and fear the activities and the responsibilities of men. Participation in their community of practice shapes women's perception of the male world as hostile, dangerous, and soiling, entailing physical and psychological sacrifices. They consider men to be better prepared than themselves to deal with the difficult or intimidating public sphere because men's responsibilities are related to public affairs (weddings, issues, and conflicts) and selling or marketing carpets. Most women see travel as work, which is incidentally also the original meaning of the word in English: the term *travel* comes from the French *travail*, first used in Middle English as bodily or mental labor or toil. For example, the carpet traders leave their village in the mountains on a Saturday and travel in the back of a truck over 200 km to Marrakech where they will stay, sleeping in uncomfortable conditions, until Tuesday when they will come back by the same means, battered, dirty, and hungry. In Marrakech they will have to transport their carpets and deal with unfriendly and often contemptuous Arabic-speaking dealers and officials.

Nevertheless, in a context of high unemployment, women's weaving work provides men with an economic opportunity to occupy a relatively important and honorable position as carpet traders. In addition, in the Sirwa as elsewhere, young men are attracted by urban modern life and seek to flee the drudgery of agricultural work by emigrating to the city. Unlike in other areas in Morocco where women find themselves running the household on their own, this trade allows households to keep their men present. Through the crafting of carpets, women shape themselves and their society. They maintain their family honor and status through their contribution to their family's material quality of life and status.

Unlike other rural regions where the practice of sending girls as maids to the cities is prevalent in many households, the physical mobility of women is not looked upon positively in the mountain area. There, most women do not travel outside their village before married life and sometimes not until their daughters' marriage, unless they need to visit the hospital in Taznakht. Female formal education, when associated with geographical mobility, has a social cost because of its link with sexuality and knowledge. It is seen

as opposed to valued domestic skills, which become idealized as guaranteeing the production of "good" wives. Indeed in the Berber-speaking countryside, the vast majority of men see formal education as fostering less subdued, more inquisitive and assertive women who are perceived as "trouble makers." This view is shared by relatively educated and wealthy men. As I was told quite candidly by a Taznakht carpet trader, such a wife is too assertive and would want to know his whereabouts and how he spends his money. Agnaou (2004) partly attributes the low level of literacy of women to men's negative perception of education as associated with freedom and independence. This is in contrast with the attitude of some educated middle-class men in Arabic-speaking cities who may seek women with diplomas for their potential financial contribution to the household. Yet, according to Sadiqi (2003), the negative perception of women's education and mobility is also prevalent among the Moroccan urban, educated classes.

From this perspective, in undoing the good work of the "school of weaving," formal education could be said to lead to a "moral deskilling" of women. The "school of weaving," in disciplining the body to be able to bear long periods of immobility in the confined space of the house and to perform repetitive gestures, is also understood to discipline and occupy the minds of women, thus giving them valued feminine qualities of self-control. In Taznakht, women who care to maintain their status may indeed spend their free time weaving, even when they are wealthy enough to afford not to weave. They refuse to visit the weekly market, still seen as an impure space. Those women give as a counter-example the unmarried women, younger and older, who are promiscuous or become pregnant outside marriage. In Taliouine, in a middle-class family who did not need their female members to contribute with productive work, Hafida, the youngest daughter, nevertheless wove while waiting for her wedding, her mobile phone by her side in case the fiancé, whom her parents had chosen for her, contacted her. Rather than a pastime, weaving was used by her father as a way of keeping her occupied physically and mentally, indoors and away from the influence of TV soap operas. Hafida did not seem to mind this situation: after all she was going to leave the rural world to enjoy a bourgeois life in Casablanca, the largest city in Morocco, and she would have plenty of opportunity to watch TV there. Although she would never weave again, she would have the material proof of her skills and how she spent her time usefully before marriage.

In fact some educated Berber men living in modern cities seek an "arranged marriage" with a rural Berber woman because of the "morality" associated with what they perceive as "traditional" life and relative confinement. This romantic attraction to a "morally unspoiled" rural world is opposed to a vision of urban modernity where changing female roles and practices are seen as threatening men's sense of identity. Such an educated man may seek a wife educated to the equivalent of "A" level, and therefore able to follow the school curriculum and support their children (see Froerer, this volume). In addition, the prevailing perception of rural Moroccan women as the guarantors of traditions (Sadiqi 2003) may also be a motivation because a rural Berber wife will transmit the Tashelhit language to their children.

Opting for self-realization through higher education may be seen by local men and women as a form of resistance to the norm of self-fulfillment through motherhood and marriage. Through studying at university, Amal from Taliouine was exposed to and sought several communities of practice. She built a rich nexus with multiple memberships (Wenger 1998) of several circles: intellectuals, development workers, feminists, and pro-literacy workers. By moving away, she was able to pursue interests that were unavailable in her own village. Amal came back to her village with a master's degree but no job prospects, having lost the opportunity to become a state teacher because the age limit for acceptance to teachers' college was 23. She had to go back to weaving. She felt she "owed" that to her family, who had paid for her studies, but she resented the everyday monotony

of the activity and the limited topics of conversation. In the countryside, she was also less likely to meet a husband who would accept or appreciate her level of education. A couple of years later, her education put her in a position to take on a job that required her level of qualification and met her hope of fulfillment through work. When the Moroccan state changed the law limiting entry to teachers' college, she finally managed to become a teacher, a long-desired position. Despite prevalent perceptions concerning highly educated women, she nevertheless later married a local man who admired her personality and her thirst for knowledge.

Social Capital and Learning Strategies

This section explores the significance of social connections and capital (Bourdieu 1987) for women's education and social mobility. The term *social capital* is understood to indicate social relations or networks that confer benefits or enable individuals to translate such capital into other forms of capital (see Bourdieu 1987). As we have seen with Amal, in a context of few job opportunities, formal education for women has to reach a university level to translate into greater social mobility opportunities. Yet, social capital also often plays an important role in women's ability to gain a good position. For example, the few jobs available to women in Taznakht are taken by women who obtained them through family connections rather than on the basis of their educational merit. Taking up such professional opportunities in turn may lead to further learning and knowledge acquisition. Khadduj, who became involved in selling carpets in the NGO her family set up, took on this role very successfully. Through contact with tourists she improved her foreign language skills. She gained subtle marketing skills that she used in combination with her weaving skills to sell carpets (her own and those of others). Her position as a mediator between tourists and weavers meant that she gained not only the power to choose to whom she gives weaving orders but also to some extent the level of payment they will receive. Despite the power and financial resources gained, she aspired to marry a man who would be able to provide her with a standard of living where her duties would be limited to those of housewives.

Social capital also plays an important role in the learning opportunities of weavers. In several cases, the initiative to learn weaving in a given community was connected with the high status of its members. Farida persisted in visiting her adult neighbor to learn weaving techniques despite having been hit by her on several occasions when she made a mistake. She was happy to get away from her stepmother but also sought the company of higher status women, whose family she was hoping to enter through marriage.

In mountain villages, the upper part of the social hierarchy is occupied by the class of carpet traders and their families who are often related by lineage and by client relationships. This group normally supplies a large dealer in Marrakech with luxury carpets. The female members of this social group use their weaving knowledge as a resource that can be transformed into economic capital. Knowledge about aesthetic trends is the object of fierce competition between peers of this social group. As mothers rarely visit each other's houses, their unmarried daughters actively seek new ideas, practicing a form of "industrial spying" as they visit their friends while these work at their loom, exchanging the latest local news, joking, and gossiping (see also Gowlland and Prentice, this volume).

Although all weavers in principle know the full range of local weaving techniques and share a common repertoire of designs, those women who belong to this community of carpet traders and their families are exposed to a wider range of designs, through carpets brought home by their male kin or from visiting the daughters of other traders. Local

traders indeed not only buy and commission luxury carpets in their own and neighboring villages, but go to stock up at the weekly market in Taznakht, where producers from the surrounding mountain and the valley come to sell their weavings. They also bring new designs commissioned by Marrakech's big carpet dealers. By deliberately maintaining a relationship with the daughters of carpet traders and by excluding others from it, the group of niche weavers keeps abreast of new trends in the market, thus maintaining their family's income and exclusive status.

As we have seen, weaving implies the construction of a moral self, which cannot be separated from the attempt to work toward achieving a higher status for one's own family. The competition between families takes various forms: technical skills read as moral dispositions are often a cause for pride for weavers. Technical skills show that these women have been properly educated, that they maintain the prestige and honor of the family. Competition is often expressed in practices and discourse related to envy (*hasada*) and the evil eye and in the practice of "stealing" ideas from each other.

In addition, the skills and labor of weavers is translated into material forms that are signs of the higher status of their family gained through the work of the weavers. In my host family, a tiled kitchen with a tap was built, the ultimate prestigious feature in the house. This kitchen made the daily life of the women in the household easier and more enjoyable, but it also gave them great pride, which was illustrated by the request of the female members of this family (and their friends) to be photographed in their best outfits standing in front of the sink. Such a financial investment in building these facilities also sent a message to prospective husbands about the family's expectation for a marriage above or equivalent to their own status. Hence, it accrued symbolic capital (status and honor) to the family and its daughters.

The prestige gained from being a skilled weaver becomes detrimental to the weaver's aspirations of a "good marriage" when they marry into a household that relies on the weaving labor of its female members. This happened to Zubeyda, whose father, a carpet trader, gave her in marriage to a cousin. This meant that he carried on selling her weavings and still benefited from her labor after she married. In contrast, Biya, an 18-year-old Ayt Ubiâl weaver, used her family connections outside the mountain area to escape rural life. She went to live in town for several years with older female relatives who had no daughters or daughters-in-law to help them. This contributed to Biya's exposure to several communities of practice and to the role models of urban modern women. Biya felt that life in Casablanca was more appealing even as a maid than back in the village where she would have had to spend seven hours a day at the loom. The taste of a more "bourgeois" life raised her aspirations for marriage, and she hoped to get away from rural life through marrying in town. At school she was motivated to learn Arabic thanks to an encouraging male primary school teacher. In learning to inhabit different identities in different places and institutions, Biya learnt to adapt to various settings, people, and situations and to deal with people of power. When she came back to her village, her fluency in Colloquial Arabic gave her prestige. She also brought back new ideas and skills (henna drawing, Berber songs, and cooking recipes) and stories about real life or from TV as well as exchangeable goods such as clothes, make-up, and perfume.

However, Biya's popularity with her peers in the village also has a reverse side: her reputation was tarnished by her relative mobility. On the other hand, her trajectory and education meant that she had higher marriage expectations than those of her peers who were less mobile and less well educated. Her possibility of marrying in an urban setting, however, depended on her ability to use the social networks (or social capital) of her extended family to find a suitable husband and to accept the power relations inherent in them.

Conclusion

Despite the significance of women's labor in the livelihood strategies of the Sirwa households, the ideology of men as breadwinners and sole providers for their aging parents prevails. In poorer families, education strategies tend to focus on domestic education for girls because parents believe that any investment in formal education should be limited to the sons. Women who eventually leave the household to marry are trained in the kind of knowledge, values, and behavior expected of wives. For the vast majority of women, marriage rather than education is seen as the most attainable and easiest route to social mobility, and the social capital of the family may help secure a good marriage. In addition, domestic education not only ensures the reproduction of the household, it also allows for the generation of cash income, vital for the survival of the household and its status. This is one of the reasons why schooling is seen as a drain on the valuable human resource represented by young women. Although it does not necessarily prevent girls from learning domestic skills and weaving, formal education with its associated physical mobility can be perceived in opposition to morality and honor.

There is a hierarchy of sorts, in the types of domestic knowledge valued by Sirwa women: household work is preferred to weaving, in turn a less physically demanding activity than agricultural work. Marriage where the duties of women are limited to those of a "housewife" running a household and caring for its members is often seen as the best sign of social mobility, but for the vast majority of rural women, marriage options usually imply agricultural and weaving work. Formal education has to reach secondary or university level and be accompanied by social and financial capital to become a means for social mobility, but even in these cases, marriage and motherhood remain the most valued position for most women.

The ideology of men as breadwinner and of domestic education as constructing moral women in a context of very high unemployment is being challenged by the fact that women are increasingly becoming the main income providers through their weaving labor. The appeal of an urban modern life can also mean that younger generations tend to reject the value of industriousness and aspire to leave the drudgery of agricultural and weaving work.

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