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## **Unearthing Amazigh/Rifi Female Identity through Oral Poetry in Colonial Morocco: An Examination of Izlan**

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In the Riffian society of northern Morocco, Izlan play a major role.<sup>1</sup> These are verse lines chanted exclusively by women, and are deeply rooted in tradition. Rifi women use Izlan-making not only for singing and dancing, but also as a social custom and way of life. While performing everyday tasks such as weaving carpets, working in the fields, raising babies, feasting, or passing time, they express their feelings, emotions, and experiences through Izlan. Verse-making has become an ontological dimension, and has transformed into a constitutive presence over time. Furthermore, Rifi women’s Izlan have recorded and archived the local native experience with the colonizer. Since Spanish colonialism settled the Moroccan Rif region from 1921 to 1956, Rifi women invoked its presence and effects on their lives in general. Later on, since the cities of Ceuta and Melilla remain a Spanish enclave until now (2023),<sup>2</sup> Izlan continue being relevant to our days.

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<sup>1</sup> See David S. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif: Abd El Krim and the Rif Rebellion* (Stanford: Stanford university Press, 1968), PP. 01-30.

<sup>2</sup> Jose E. Alvarez, in “Between Galipoli and D-Day: Alhucemas, 1925,” says:

In other words, thanks to the factor of time and accumulation, Rifi female anti-colonial Izlan have become, through time, an archive. This archive's function, whether it is consciously recognized or not, is to record and conserve, in the form of well-versed Izlan, the daily activities and most important events of society in the Rif, mainly during the past and present colonial era. One of the most important characteristics of Izlan that should be highlighted is the fact that women can both construct and display their identities as Rifi women through it, and resist colonial hegemony. This paper, therefore, looks at female identity-construction through Izlan in the Rif and its effect on colonial systems of hegemony in the specified area, with concrete translated examples from Amazigh local poetry to Arabic and English. It does so by looking back into the colonial era, specifically Spanish colonial settlement in the north of Morocco between the years 1912 and 1956, and examining Rifi women's reactions to such an unwanted presence. As Rifi women used to lead a conservative life and could not go out and participate in war, they reacted in resistance to the settler's presence in their own ways. It is these ways, as well as the kind of reaction they portrayed, which this paper attempts.

## Morocco, Imazighen of the Rif, and Izlan

Chanted poetry (Izlan) plays a major role in the construction and consolidation of identities of any community;<sup>3</sup> thus, the Rif region of Morocco is no exception.

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It is important to note that, at this juncture, the region west of Melilla held special interest for Spain due to its mineral wealth. By the early years of the twentieth century, Basque millionaire don Horacio Echevarrieta's company was actively involved in exploiting iron ore located in the Rif, mining the iron in the Spanish zone of the Protectorate and exporting it through the port of Melilla. Iron ore mining would prove profitable for those involved in the enterprise. In 1925, for instance, these mines yielded about 800,000 tons. Moroccan iron ore had a high ore content and was found in good deposits easily accessible by open pit mining.

Jose E. Alvarez, "Between Galipoli and D-Day: Alhucemas, 1925," in *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 63, N. 1. (Jan., 1999), pp. 77. See also Ross E. Dunn, "Bu Himara's European Connexion: The Commercial Relations of a Moroccan Warlord" in *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 21, N. 2. (1980), pp. 235-253.

<sup>3</sup> Izlan are supposed to be either repeated for their wise and significant meanings, chanted by groups of women during domestic occasions and ceremonies, or sung. The latter form of Izlan has been adeptly lately as many Rifi singers used Izlan as lyrics for their songs.

Historically, Izlan shaped the Rifi identity from both near and far. Regarding the role of music in North Africa, Tony Langlois states:

Music provides a medium for the expression, open or obliquely, of shared sentiments and normative values. At the same time a range of social elements, compete for ownership of musical genres as potent symbolic property. Whether looking at performance or more general forms of social use, musical activity involves specific cultural restraints and possibilities.<sup>4</sup>

Part of the most important events and actualities that Izlan recorded are those related to the lives of women. As pioneers of Izlan creation, production, and versification, Rifi women not only reflected and portrayed the events taking place in front of them; they could also link to universal issues and matters beyond the boundaries of the village. Thus, they produced Izlan that are universally humanistic. David Hart, an American anthropologist who visited and studied the Moroccan Rif closely, says in his book on the Rifi tribe of Beni Ouaryaghel:

The Moroccan tribal world was and still is very definitely a man's world in which women took and take little or no part, at least externally or overtly. Nonetheless, they often have a great deal of influence behind the scenes, although it should also be stated that the division of labour by sex is very unequal, as women tend to work far harder and longer hours than men do.<sup>5</sup>

She also made, in very subtle ways, her own concerns, feelings, emotions, and realities speak. In plain words, the Rifi woman, as a maker of Izlan, both portrayed the self and the other. This fact, which is peculiar to Rifi Izlan, is of great importance. It is valuable because many of the ancient Rifi communal modes of

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<sup>4</sup> Tony Langlois, "The local and global in north African Music," qtd in Miriam Gazzah, *Rhythms and Rhymes of Life: Music and Identification Processes of Dutch-Moroccan Youth* (Isim & Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2008), p. 28.

<sup>5</sup> David M. Heart, *Tribe and Society in Rural Morocco* (London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 2000), p. 15.

life can be explored and introduced through Izlan. Furthermore, the issue is of value because the Rifi female self is present in there. Thus, Izlan, understood as a process of identity construction and reflection, becomes a source of information, especially regarding the Rifi woman as a veiled social and individual constituent whose presence is strong, yet indirect. Miriam Gazzah, on Rifi diaspora and the role of music in identity construction in the Netherlands, tells us that:

Music is a multifunctional system to which can be assigned different, sometimes conflicting meanings, emotions and social values simultaneously.<sup>6</sup>

This study suggests a reading of the various aspects of Izlan content. The aim is to show that Izlan in the Rif are a mirror that reflects life as it is and questions it. Its main purpose is to demonstrate that Izlan, as a literary/artistic mode, are identity-related, and that Rifi women's identity is deeply interwoven into the represented issues, behind which a female self and identity are present. The focus is mainly on Izlan that have been produced during the colonial era. The relationship between Rifi women and colonialism is the one being explored. Therefore, and this is justified, the rest of the paper will be divided into two sections. The first one deals with Izlan that do not address colonial issues directly, but issues that existed during the colonial era as the Rifi community lived through and led a normal life. The second part looks directly into Izlan that are directly related to colonialism and express Rifi women's position toward the colonialists. The Izlan that constitute the core of this study are those chanted by women.<sup>7</sup> It is important to distinguish between Izlan chanters (those who make Izlan) and the

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<sup>6</sup> Miriam Gazzah, *Rhythms and Rhymes of Life: Music and Identification Processes of Dutch-Moroccan Youth* (Isim & Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2008), p. 28.

<sup>7</sup> One of the important observations is that Izlan making is a pure woman's matter in the Rif. A female produces almost ninety percent of the existing Izlan. Males, on the other hand, produce and write poetry but seldom make Izlan. If they do, their number is very limited. The Rifi society's social construction and distribution of roles does not permit a male to be an Izlan maker or chanter. Those who do are not many and are most of the time social outcasts. The Rifi society has no archetype model for a male Izli maker. Males had other roles to perform.

women-makers of Izlan behind them, as the conservative nature of society in the Rif region cannot assume their authorship of the Izli nor allow the name of the female author to be mentioned. In other words, Izlan are a female-made product, yet the authors of the Izli are not to be mentioned.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, in Rifi culture, the Izli itself matters, not the author. Oral tradition in the Rif is a tradition that reflects deeply rooted societal matters, travels unrestricted, and speaks on behalf of the whole community. Each experience, as we will discover, is both personal and collective, whether it is related to a social affair or a political one such as colonialism. The Izli, as a socio-cultural expression, represents both the individual and other individuals who are undergoing the same blessing or plight.<sup>9</sup>

### **The Portrayal of Rifi Women's Daily Life Issues in Izlan**

The Amazigh Rifi woman lives a normal life. Like women everywhere, she has a purpose. Her main reason, and daily concern, is to live and help sustain the lives of those around her. In cities, towns, villages, or households, the Rifi woman's role is to fulfil a number of acts on a daily basis. She loves, cooks, raises children, socializes with family and neighbours, learns, teaches, works, farms, etc. She is a full and complete participant, alongside the males, in building and sustaining the social order. Therefore, culturally, socially, economically, or politically, she

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<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, many singers sung Izlan in public and recorded songs that sold everywhere. Names like *Mimount n Sarwan*, *Milouda EL Hoceimia*, *Farida EL Hoceimia*, *Malika El Farkhania*, and many others, are famous Rifi female singers of Izlan. Yet, these, to a later time, were considered a disgrace and dishonourable women. However, they are accepted now that the fashion of Izlan making and singing is dying and the need to safeguard one's collective identity..

<sup>9</sup> Yolanda Aixela-Cabré, in her “Colonial Memories and Contemporary Narratives from the Rif. Spanishness, Amazighness, and Moroccaness seen from Al-Hoceima and Spain,” tells us about some socio-economic areas in which Rifi women engaged with colonialists. She writes:

Before that period, only a minority came daily to work in subaltern tasks for the Spaniards, or to sell their agricultural products. Among the Riffians, there were many women who came to sell eggs, vegetables, or fruit.

See Yolanda Aixela-Cabré, Yolanda Aixela-Cabré (2018): “Colonial Memories and Contemporary Narratives from the Rif. Spanishness, Amazighness, and Moroccaness seen from Al-Hoceima and Spain,” *Interventions*, DOI: 10.1080/1369801X.2018.1558093, p. 8.

affects and is affected by any changes or implications that involve the society she is part of. Therefore, when the Spanish colonial powers invaded the North of Morocco, women were at the heart of the incident and were involved and heavily impacted by the distress of war. Yet, and this is a topic to come back to in the coming section, let us take a look at her life as a social agent away from war. The following lines of verse explain the situation and pave the way to the coming one on colonialism.

- *Kikh sado watho / Hsbakh tifrāy nass*<sup>10</sup>
- *Msrqikh ak lif / Min iro wor nass*
  1. I walked under the fig tree / I counted the branches
  2. I met there my lover / If you only know how much he wept
  
- *Ayor ino yigin / Tazith amo ydim*
- *Arabi mad yi ganfa / Ma yamo gha yi qim*
  1. Oh my bleeding heart / Its injury is as deep as a groove
  2. Oh dear God / Will it cure or never
  
- *Abrid n tononbin / Yghmid days rhander*
- *Khazakh I sa3d ino / Man tamouath I yander*
  1. Oh cars' way / where bitter melon grows
  2. Oh find me my luck / in which land it is entombed
  
- *Nach ija ydjan / D zit n zitouna*
- *Yarayi sabakhi / War sukkikh mozona*
  1. Oh me who was / the olive oil of an olive tree
  2. Telling someone good morning / I became valueless
  
- *A yazzkon o dir / Yoyar gha tisith*
- *A wannī ikhsen zzin / A dyagab tafasith*
  1. Oh bunch of grapes / hanged to the mirror
  2. He who wants beauty / should go Tafarsit (name of a village)
  
- *Nyikh di tonobin / Wa gha thdji thowath*
- *Allah yhnik a yemma / Allah yhnik a thamouath*
  1. I got on a car / It has no doors
  2. Oh farewell mother / farewell homeland
  
- *Ewa rah ewa rah / Omi zayi tskhed*

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<sup>10</sup> The English translation of the lines is written right below each two lines of Izlan. The translated lines are numbered.

- *Seb3a idora na rif / Ogha dayi tjid*
1. Oh go, just go / Since you no more care about me
  2. Seven mountains of the Rif / To whom you are leaving me?
- *A tadat tamqrant / A tmuydat n rbni*
- *Inuqar am tlechent / Araman d safri*
- *Ssuar nam iga3ad / Babb nem da hemmi*
1. Oh big house / that whose walls are medium
  2. You're surrounded by / oranges and Safri (the best ypre) pomegranades
  3. You're wall is tall / the owner is manly
- *Wa sesekh bo atay / Wa siridkh rkisan*
- *Tterekh arebbi / Adrahekh aliman*
1. I won't drink tea / I won't clean the cups
  2. I am asking God / Help me go Aliman (Germany)

Although the lines quoted from the Rifi female Izlan are quite short, the meaning is satisfyingly complete. In fact, the nature of Rifi Izli (singular) is two lines. The poem, therefore, is not long; everything that is to be said is usually condensed in two lines. Hence, every two lines are an independent poem standing in full meaning and structure by itself. Reading the lines whose meaning and intention differ from one to another, we meet a number of lexical terms that refer, in fact, to particular realities. Among those, we find:

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| ✓ <i>Tabiaa</i> : nature                   | ✓ <i>Zitouna</i> : olive tree            |
| ✓ <i>Atho</i> : fig tree                   | ✓ <i>Sbahrkhi</i> : good morning         |
| ✓ <i>Lif</i> : sweetheart                  | ✓ <i>Atai</i> : Tea                      |
| ✓ <i>Arebbi</i> : God                      | ✓ <i>Naanaa</i> : menthe                 |
| ✓ <i>Allah</i> : God                       | ✓ <i>Chiba</i> : Artemisia               |
| ✓ <i>Aganfi</i> : healing                  | ✓ <i>Adir</i> : raisins                  |
| ✓ <i>Taddat</i> : house                    | ✓ <i>Zin</i> : beauty                    |
| ✓ <i>Lachin</i> : oranges                  | ✓ <i>Tafarsith</i> : village name        |
| ✓ <i>Arman</i> : pomegranades              | ✓ <i>Memmi</i> : my son                  |
| ✓ <i>Bab n taddat</i> : house owner        | ✓ <i>Lmosiba</i> : an evil strange woman |
| ✓ <i>Lhimma</i> : fortune and social class | ✓ <i>Layhannik</i> : farewell            |
| ✓ <i>Abrid</i> : the road                  | ✓ <i>Yemma</i> : mother                  |
| ✓ <i>Tonobin</i> : vehicle (car)           | ✓ <i>Thamourt</i> : land                 |
| ✓ <i>Zit</i> : oil                         | ✓ <i>Rkisan</i> : tea cups               |

- ✓ ***Raknad***: grief, despondency
- ✓ ***Assari***: travel and joy
- ✓ ***Aliman***: Germany
- ✓ ***7 idura narrif***: 7 Rif mountains
- ✓ ***Fuss***: hand
- ✓ ***Tamsaman***: the name of a mountainous village
- ✓ ***Tighoufawin***: sadness
- ✓ ***Lhayat***: life
- ✓ ***Tilwizin***: neck bracelet made of golden coins
- ✓ ***Talak***: divorce
- ✓ ***Daawa***: good will
- ✓ ***Lwalidin***: parents
- ✓ ***Tawwat***: the door
- ✓ ***Rbit***: the room
- ✓ ***Tassaat***: Watch
- ✓ ***Our***: heart
- ✓ ***Tayouth***: fog
- ✓ ***Anzar***: rain
- ✓ ***Idamrawen***: mountains
- ✓ ***Imttawen***: tears
- ✓ ***Abrid***: the road
- ✓ ***Tonobin***: the Car
- ✓ ***Llemania***: Germany
- ✓ ***Amsram***: the Muslim
- ✓ ***Arumi***: the Christian



The Rifi female has her own world. She leads a life that is largely social. Her environment is familiar, normal, and invaluable. As can be seen from the aforementioned lexicon and the verse it stands in, various aspects of life make up the lifelong Rifi female concern. This is evident from these five core words, which are essentially categories, concepts, and realities.

- *Family*
- *Home land*
- *Religion*
- *Peace*
- *Love, and Truth*
- *Happiness, joy, and fun*
- *Immigration*

Everything in the Rifi female life falls within the scope of seven constituents: Family, Home land, Religion, Peace, Love and Truth, Joy and Happiness, and Immigration. When combined together, they form a straight and clear line of human reasoning. This line is: Family comes first, followed by a house on a land that is protected by religion. Once a family is established, peace should follow, which helps provide the needed love and truth. Immigration, too, can be seen as a desire for movement and change of place. Furthermore, Amazigh Rifi women wanted a relationship based on affection: no second wife and no violence.<sup>11</sup> When all of these things are established, happiness and joy reign, and life is full of warmth and fun. Richard C. Pennell, the author of *A Country with a Government and a Flag: Rif War in Morocco 1921-1926*, describes the Rifi marriage lineage accordingly.

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<sup>11</sup> Richard C. Pennell, *Morocco since 1830: A History* (London: Hurst and Company, 2000), p. 350.

In structural terms, however, and in the Rifian view of the situation, women, handed around in marriage from one lineage to the next within a given community or section, or, more rarely, to another section or another tribe, provided crucial links of alliance in which they themselves, being passive instruments of policy, had little or no choice or voice.<sup>12</sup>

The presence of family in the female Rifi Izlan is very suggestive. The presence of the mother (Yamma) and father (Baba) is very common. The lover as a savior is always present. Life is called for at every moment. Religion also has a share, and God, Allah, and Sidarbibi are mentioned frequently. Whether talking about love, complaining about the greedy, or asking for help, God's help is sought. Peace, love, and life are the three main concerns when attempting to establish a family. Luxury items such as cars, watches, time, travel, names of places and shrines like Tamsaman and Sidi Chaaib, doors, rooms, windows, trees...are all part of the world of the Rifi female. Richard Pennell explains the optimistic view of the Rifi woman towards life here.

Women's wants were rather different. Even in the early 1960s in remote parts of the Rif Mountains, women who had never even met a foreigner longed for the better life that they believed existed overseas.<sup>13</sup>

In songs, as a metaphor for life, the Rifi woman calls forth everything she has in mind, everything that is part of her world. She utilizes the things she sees, lives, goes through, and experiences in order to create a world in which she can either celebrate her life or, in other cases, grieve the loss of a life she is either awaiting or has lost forever. Like any woman from any other culture, the Rifi woman constructs and reconstructs herself through the poetic verses of Izlan she produces. What she does with Izlan is not only a reconstruction of the self; it is a

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<sup>12</sup> Heart, *Tribe and Society in Rural Morocco*, p. 15

<sup>13</sup> Pennell, *Morocco since 1830: A History*, p. 350.

form of mapping the self. It is a way of framing one's identity, deciding what it is and making it seen and heard, and, in some way, building it through the Izlan she produces. Izlan are bearers of the Rifi woman's identity. They are, in fact, her identity. As they are not only songs, but also realities reflected in sung verse, Izlan stand out as an identity framed through multiple shapes and lesser identities played out through Izlan in hundreds of pieces of verse that have, throughout history, resisted corrosion and remain as illuminating as when they were initially produced.

### **Colonial Resistance in Amazigh Rifi Women's Izlan**

Izlan, as explained in the previous part of this paper, reflect the way of life Amazigh Rifi women live through. Family, land, religion, love, happiness, subsistence, and immigration, are the major occupations women live for.<sup>14</sup> The rest of the tasks they perform are closely linked to one of these life sides. Yet, since the Moroccan Rif has been occupied by Spain from 1912 to 1956,<sup>15</sup> women have reflected issues of the other, war, colonialism, and decolonisation in their

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<sup>14</sup> See Yolanda Aixela-Cabré, continues telling us about the limits of interaction between Spanish colonialists and the natives. She argues that:

Mixed intimate relationships were also limited. Pepe remembered that before 1956 there were no mixed marriages, but after that year three young Spanish women married Moroccans: a policeman, a merchant, and an owner of trucks. He said that the people of Al-Hoceima strongly criticized them: "las pusieron verdes." Spaniards were not supposed to maintain intimate relations with Moroccans. For Spaniards of both sexes, the answer was clear: "With the Moors, no!" Prostitution was an exception because it was accepted with Moroccan women. As Maria explains: "The whores knew everybody. They did not do anything, they did not mix, they did not bother us."

See Yolanda Aixela-Cabré, Yolanda Aixelà-Cabré (2018): "Colonial Memories and Contemporary Narratives from the Rif. Spanishness, Amazighness, and Moroccaness seen from Al-Hoceima and Spain," p. 11.

<sup>15</sup> David S. Woolman explains the fundamental drives that grounded the Protectorate's relationship between Morocco and Spain:

Whereas the relations between Spaniards and Moroccans cover several hundred years, the origins of the Spanish Protectorate in northern Morocco are to be found in modern European imperialism.

See, David S. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, p. 1.

Izlan.<sup>16</sup> This part of Izlan, meaning that which deals with resisting colonial powers,<sup>17</sup> is very important as it tells us much about the culture and identity of women as a social class and their position within the Rifi community. The following Izlan verse lines will introduce us to the topic:

- A Ya dhar o baran / A ya suss n ikhsan
- Wannu zayi gharran / A zays I gharr zman
  1. Oh mountain Abarran / Oh my killer
  2. He who sold you / May Time sell him too

Mount Abarran is the mountain where the crucial battle of Annual took place. In 1921, Spain suffered one of its major defeats of the twentieth century here. The tactics and resolution of Riffi guerrilla warriors defeated General Sylvstre and 13000 other soldiers. In Rifi women's calls (poetry), the mount assumed a

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<sup>16</sup> Yolanda Aixelà-Cabré continues speaking of Riffian jobs during the colonial era this way:

The jobs for Riffians in Al-Hoceima during colonization were adapted to their knowledge and the needs of Spanish citizens. Thus, jobs in fishing, caring for farm animals, and agriculture continued, with new work for Riffian women in bars, private residences, and guesthouses.

See Yolanda Aixelà-Cabré, Yolanda Aixelà-Cabré (2018): "Colonial Memories and Contemporary Narratives from the Rif. Spanishness, Amazighness, and Moroccaness seen from Al-Hoceima and Spain," p. 09.

<sup>17</sup> Jose E. Alvarez, explains, again, the specific beginnings of the Rif War. He relates them to a 1909 attack that unfolds this way:

On 9 July 1909, a force of Riffian tribesmen attacked a military outpost protecting Spanish workers building a railway to serve the mines. Four workers and one sentry were killed. This was the chance that Spanish colonialists had been anticipating. On 13 July, six thousand Riffians attacked a force of two thousand Spaniards, and on 23 July, the tribesmen engaged Spanish forces for a third time. In reaction, the Spanish government decided to reinforce its meager colonial forces with peninsular troops. At the time, only fifteen thousand soldiers could be called upon for combat in the presidios, so the call went out for forty thousand reserves in Spain. This call-up of troops for a colonial conflict led to antiwar protests which took a particularly violent form in Barcelona. These were harshly suppressed by the authorities, and the period of conflict in late July and early August 1909 came to be called the "Tragic Weeli." This episode visibly demonstrated the government's commitment not only to remain in Morocco for political purposes, but also to expand from its presidios towards the interior. Moreover, it brought to light the deep divisions that existed in Spain between those who advocated overseas colonization and those who were opposed to it. The call-up of metropolitan conscripts, in this case Barcelona's working class, to fight in Morocco sparked great anger and bloodshed in Spain's most industrialized city.

See Jose E. Alvarez, "Between Galipoli and D-Day: Alhucemas, 1925," in *The Journal of Military History*, Vol. 63, N. 1. (Jan., 1999), pp. 75-98.

mythological position. For, for years later, it represented the place where Rifi liberty was gained back from Spanish colonial powers. Yet, in the second line, the mountain is addressed in another way. He is addressed as follows: “he, who sold you, may time sell him too.” This happened later on. By knowing that the Spanish colonial machine revenged itself in the year 1926, we know and understand why the two lines bear two different meanings, which are, however, complimentary somehow, as they tell the history of mount Abarran in the Kabilla of Temsamane.

- A Ya dhar o baran / A ya suss n ikhsan
  - Mani inham rbouaqi / dahchan iyhsan
  - Mani imoth rqayd / 3allal do torjman
1. Oh mountain Abarran / oh my killer
  2. Where the bomb exploded / Horses laughed
  3. Where the mayor died / Allal and the translator

Mount Abarran is remembered also as a place of special war events. In the second two lines, the woman chanter, who calls on Abarran, refers to two important events. The first one is related to “the place where bombs fell.” This tells us something about the way Spanish troops fought their wars in the Rif. They used poisonous bombs that are thrown from planes beyond Riffi villages and souks (markets). The second one is where the woman chanter is being ironic; she explains that at mount Abarran, where bombs fell, horses laughed. In other words, even the horses knew that Spanish bombs would not help them win the war. In the third line, she mentions the name of a Caid (Allal) and a translator. These were traitors; Caids, most of them, represented local authority, and some of them, for material purposes, collaborated with the Spaniards. As for the translator, he is someone who knew the language of the enemy and translated for him. Yet, the two died in Dhar Abarran and the sacred mountain had them in its bottom out of sight forever.

- As akhinto mouh / A sakhinto qabo
- Awar nas i3adda / am ssaf n doro
- 1. Oh sergeant Moh / Oh stiff sergeant
- 2. Your words go / as the change of a cent goes

Some Rifi soldiers had ranks within the rifi army (Harka). Moh is the name of a sergeant (Sarjento). This sergeant is praised by being mentioned in a chanted verse line. He would not be renowned with his name if he had not been someone with bravery, which everybody recognizes and is talking about. To celebrate his courage and his skill, talent, and ability to control the war as brilliant sergeant, his words are portrayed as being clear, well heard, and loved. His orders' flow is compared to coins change.

- Makki mara imouth / Ndranth ghar ozomua
- Akhaz dik o romi / D wuday a thizua
- 1. If Makki dies / Bury him away
- 2. Let the Christian pay him a visit / let Jews be the first

Makki again is a treacherous person. He is one of those Rifi Moroccan who gave a hand to the enemy. In this woman's chant of verse, she wishes him death, or that he died indeed. What is most striking about the lines is the fact that his secret is revealed as a traitorous unfaithful member of Rifi community. By saying, "let the Christians visit his tomb, and may the Jews come before them," he is declared an apostate renegade who cheated his Muslim brothers and sisters. The call to Christians and Jews to visit his tomb is a reference to his closest friends whom he helped and supported. Religiously speaking, he does not belong to the Rifi family's religion and, by implication, society. He is a friend of colonial Christians and Jews who seem to be hated as colonialists.

- Sidi ch3ayb adahekh / Ad munakh ak inahbas

- Wakha day gha chafen / Di sraser n nehhas
- 1. Oh Sidi Chaaib ( a marabout) / I will go with prisoners to jail
- 2. Let them shackle me / in copper strings

Sidi Chaaib is a marabout. He is believed to be one of the most respected and referred to Rifi sacred shrines. Located on the boundary between the tribes of Temsaman and Beni Ouaryaghel, it overlooks the Mediterranean Sea. The chanter calls upon him for help. She informs him that she is going to with her home soldiers who were imprisoned by the colonial powers to jail. To her, being put in jail or even shackled using copper chains is of no consequence. She is willing to sacrifice herself for those who defended land, women, children, and the elders, and is ready to accept whatever punishment awaits her even if it is death. That is why she is telling Sidi Chaaib the marabout: let that sort of punishment be.

- A ralla yemma / A yemma ino hna
- Nanay atamthad / Nach qaghassan la
- 1. Oh mother / Oh lovely mother
- 2. I have been told I will die / I told them never

In this call to the mother, there is a sort of repetition. The first mother is specific, which is the one who bore the child and parented him as a child. The second mother is more general; it stands for all mothers, for land, for a psychological entity that is mother anyway, or the mother anybody calls when in pain, severe suffering, or facing death. The second part of the lines makes a confession: “I have been told I will die, I told them never.” The woman chanter defies death. She believes in her cause and eternity. She is afraid of nothing and death is nothing to her. Her spirits are high; she knows her cause is just, and plainly declares that she will never die, that she will survive. In fact, the Rifi woman, community, culture, and man did survive the colonial era no matter what were the hardships they went through.

- Tsrikh I chan driz / N tchdacht n yichsan
  - Omi ghar saqsikh / Di qaqachan iy i3dan
1. I heard footsteps / of horses saddles
  2. When asked about / I was told the blonds passed by

In these lines, the woman speaks of an experience she went through. She tells us about hearing the noise of horses' saddles passing by their house, and when she asked about the newcomers, she was informed that they were the "yellow-haired." They were Spanish army members who were unwelcome; the expression of their being unwelcome is implicitly understood as the verse line finishes with the pejorative word "blonds." In the local culture, "yellow-haired" is used in a pejorative way to refer to someone who is so, and they are not welcome. Otherwise, if they were welcomed, the author would have used a different term that does not necessarily target one of their negative traits.

Generally speaking, the Riffian people, although their war against Spain culminated with the armies of both Spain and France joining forces to crush them, fought the colonialists to the last. The Berbers, in fact, represented one of the major Moroccan forces that faced colonialism. As Woolman says:

The proof of Moroccan resentment of the French intrusion was borne out by the persistence with which the tribes – the Berbers in particular – fought France throughout much of the time she held her Moroccan Protectorate.<sup>18</sup>

Men and women, everyone in the colonized Amazigh community did their job as required. Women were fully involved in the affairs of their tribes and families. Their representation of war affairs against the colonialists reflects a deep understanding and interest in war and its issues. Woolman continues saying that:

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<sup>18</sup> David S. Wollman, *Rebels in the Rif*, p. 14.



Though outnumbered or beaten temporarily, the Berbers of the Rif had never been subjugated before the time of the Spanish Protectorate. Proud, brave, hardy, calling themselves *imazighen* – “the people” – they preferred death to alien domination.<sup>19</sup>

In another place, he quotes Azerkan<sup>20</sup> who survived the war and was exiled from Rif. He said of resistance and its driving line of ethics:

Would you submit to the invaders because they claimed certain rights and asserted their pretension? I think that you, and even your women-kind, would defend yourselves and refuse to accept the humiliation of submission.<sup>21</sup>

Rifi women were “women who had lost men to the colonial wars.” Their anger and rage would certainly come out in chants, songs, stories, and myths. As bereaved women, they had the right to mourn their lost loved ones and peace as they wished. Chanting verse lines, which is a deep portrayal of the psychological effect that war events had on them, comes out in a way that is engraved in the public memory. If we are decolonially celebrating Rifi women’s resistance and identity construction through Izlan today, this could only be possible because those women had the audacity to participate in the colonial war, bear its effects, survive, and artistically produce eternal verse. David Woolman, quoting Rudyers Pryne, cites a story that explains the extent of atrocity the Rifi warriors, their women, and their children faced. He writes:

Rudyers Pryne says that houses, fields, and orchards were burned; that Caid who rejected the Rifians had their eyes burned out with hot irons, or were soaked in gasoline and burned alive; that still others had their genitals cut off in front of their horrified womenfolk—all very rare

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<sup>19</sup> David S. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, p. 30.

<sup>20</sup> Azerkan is Ben Abdlekrim’s brother in law, right hand and advisor, and appointed minister of war.

<sup>21</sup> David S. Woolman, *Rebels in the Rif*, p. 118. This speech is reported as being Azrkan’s in a letter.

tactics for Rifians, who usually rid themselves of enemies by simple shooting and did not resort to torture.<sup>22</sup>

The war gave birth to local conflicts as well. As some Rifians were in dire straits and worked for the Spaniards, others considered it a betrayal to the cause, to the dead, to the torn families, to the rising children, to the growing resistance (Harka), and to religious principles. Consequently, the number of misunderstandings, fights, and even deaths increased significantly. David Hart explains the situation in this way:

They ate and slept with their guns close to hand while their women, who of course were exempt from feud or vendetta, would precede them in going out of doors, in order to make sure that the coast was clear and that a well-armed enemy was not lurking behind a lentiscus bush ready to ambush them.<sup>23</sup>

With the help of shots from the life of a male Rifi, which gives us a glimpse into the reality of Rifi women, we can imagine the barren life they had to endure, empty of joy and happiness. As death was always looming in the village, women lived in fear, losing husbands, sons, and family, and had to endure the impossible. The coloniser only seemed to make the situation worse. This means that self-expression, as we discovered in the Izlan provided above, may not be fully reflecting the situation as Rifi women expressed themselves frankly, yet kept many things unsaid. Therefore, studies in the field, which are up until now very few and unable to delve into the depths of the realities of the Rifi colonial society, must arise and be given both academic and material support. Otherwise, the plight of Rifi women, their identities as they unfolded historically, and their present state and future will be lost to oblivion and the archive will vanish. Richard C. Pennell

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<sup>22</sup> qtd in Woolman 148

<sup>23</sup> David Hart, "Murder in the Market: Penal Aspects of Berber Customary Law in the Precolonial Moroccan Rif," in *Islamic Law and Society*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (1996), p. 352.

argues in his “How and Why to Remember the Rif War (1921-2021)” about the importance of the archive:

Although this included uninteresting material such as the very extensive veterinary records of the camel section, which mostly consisted of blank pages, the real wealth of the archives lay in the detailed intelligence reports collated from Spanish agents, Moroccan men and women who crossed, sometimes every day, from the Rifi-controlled areas into Spanish territory. They brought news of political developments, the movements of Rif troops, the prices of food in the markets, how daily life was regulated by Ibn ‘Abd alKarīm’s officials and the state of morale in the population.<sup>24</sup>

It is, in fact, the archive that this study is all about. Therefore, Rifi women's identity construction through Izlan is one main facet. The findings show that women were at the heart of society's engagements and matters. Rifi women, as mothers, sisters, wives, daughters, etc., participated fully in their village and family life. Their presence is noticeable, their role is substantial, and their trace and effect on the events is marked. Hence, all throughout, Rifi women constructed an image of the self and recorded part of it via Izlan. Therefore, Izlan seem to not only be verse lines that outlived the past, but also artistic products that carry with them very rich and important data and images from bygone days. When it comes to women, Izlan is a mirror that helps us look back into the past with accuracy and depth, as they mirror that life in beautiful and incomparable exact details.

## **Conclusion:**

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<sup>24</sup> C. R. Pennell (2017) “How and why to remember the Rif War (1921–2021),” *The Journal of North African Studies*, 22:5, 798-820, DOI: 10.1080/13629387.2017.1361826

Whether in the Atlas, Souss, or Rif region, there is an urgent need to collect and study the vast number of verse poems before they get lost. In academia, researchers have to help establish research units whose focus is the retrieval, collection, study, and preservation of a vanishing poetic local culture. This culture, in fact, would certainly help us understand our roots and, likewise, the way our ancestors shaped and constructed their identities. Women, for instance, have used verse to make a voice heard. As an outlet, a way out, and an allowed form of art and thus speech, the Amazigh woman, as is the case with Rifi women studied above, portrayed her world, raised questions and issues, and more importantly constructed her identity as a female.

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