

Tunisian Berber weaving: a form of educational tool

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ABSTRACT

The term "cultures" refers in a global sense to all cultural goods and refers also to the practices and discourses that underlie them. As for the word "popular", it evokes both a widespread and shared culture, but also a marker of belonging to certain social groups. Thus, their association "popular culture" could allude to a common practice determining a social belonging such as Berber weaving practiced in Tunisia. These practices specific to certain societies can ensure various functions such as the establishment of a social cohesion, the manifestation of a cultural belonging, the establishment of a particular pedagogy. Thus, like so many others, they do not only represent the material manifestation of a tangible need but, in fact, allow the transmission of knowledge that initiates the younger generations. The commitment to the design of Berber weaving in a new light is elaborated through the scientific research made here. This article will first introduce the village of Chenini which is the spatial framework of the survey. Then, it will demonstrate how initiation to weaving can represent a pedagogical mode. Finally, it will discuss the implication of poetics of weaving in the feminine initiation. Thus, washing, carding, spinning, coloring, warping and weaving will be treated. To search for answers, theoretical research was carried out and associated with a field survey established among the Cheninian population.

KEYWORDS: Weaving, Berber, Tunisia, poetics, pedagogy.

I. INTRODUCTION:

The term 'cultures' generally refers to all cultural goods but also to the practices and discourses that underlie them. The word 'popular' refers both to a widespread and shared culture, but also to a marker of affiliation to certain ethnicities. Thus the combination "popular culture" could refer to a common practice determining social belonging, such as Berber weaving in Tunisia. These specific practices can perform various functions such as the establishment of social cohesion, cultural manifestation, the development of a particular pedagogy. Like so many others, they do not only represent the material representation of a tangible need but in fact allow the transmission of knowledge initiating the younger generations. This phenomenon leads us to ask the following questions: How is the art of weaving transmitted and what are the teachings transmitted through this practice?

A survey among the inhabitants of the village of Chenini Tataouine will allow us to answer the questions raised above.

Presentation of the village of Chenini: Among the peoples who have crossed Tunisia, the Berbers represent the central civilization. "The Berbers developed a civilization that still marks rural Tunisia.»(BETTAIEB, 2010, p. 179) Moreover, weaving evokes a figurative testimony of this civilization. A so-called (primitive) art that is still used in many Tunisian regions such as Chenini, Tataouine. Chenini is located 20 km from Tataouine. This hamlet belongs to the first generation called "Peak Ksour " or "les citadels" which appeared before the 11th century. The presence of the Chenini in this region is partly revealed by the account of Saint Augustine dating from the 4th century quoted in the work of Gabriel Camps, Berbers on the margins of history: "Ask our peasants who they are: they answer in Punic that they are from Chenani. Doesn't this form corrupted by this accent correspond to chananaeci (Canaanite)?Already in the 5th century, the region was occupied by a group of nomads and Zenets "spread out on the edges of the plateaus, from Tripolitania to Djbel Amour in Algeria, sharing their time between pastoral life and occasional agriculture" (LOUIS, 1972, p. 110).

The initiation to weaving in the Berber village of Chenini: Weaving has persisted via technical transmission in pastoral filiations. Weavers begin their apprenticeship at the age of ten to twelve. This work becomes second nature. It remains so deeply rooted in the memories and so prevalent that it resists the influence of the city.

From then on, the act of weaving materialized the memory of the past. It is also the prerogative of women, as the works are exclusively executed by women. Women have fought hard for the protection of this age-old skill.

This is probably because it makes visible and palpable this often hidden part of history, their history, the history of these nineteen women met in their homes, near their jobs. Illiterate women master the complex art of weaving. This fact seems enigmatic, given that the entire weaving process is governed by mathematical formulae. It is also intriguing that old weavers with no formal education are better at weaving than the younger educated generation. This esoteric phenomenon is identified in different cultures and disciplines. Like the Berber weavers, the Eskimos, the Salish Indians of British Columbia and many other societies practice string games based purely on mathematical equations without having benefited from schooling. Thus, an opposition between practical and theoretical knowledge is revealed in favor of the practical because the latter seems to be pedagogically more effective. It would be relevant to combine practice and theory to preserve the art of weaving or any other cultural creation. The effectiveness of this alliance is further revealed in Jean-Marie Barber's book entitled "theoretical knowledge and action knowledge" published in 2011. The performative contribution of practical learning is revealed by our old weavers. They design their works from memory, while the younger literate generations rely on models drawn in their notebooks. "Literally, the ragm is the cipher, that is to say the primordial sign par excellence, capable of being combined according to infinite, almost mathematical orders. Such is the genesis of the klim decor...

It is the diversity of the combinations that draws clearly recognizable regional styles. "(BEN MANSOUR, 1999, p. 8) It is noteworthy to reveal that the interviews all took place with a group of female weavers, excluding any male presence. Even if men were in the house, they were not allowed to participate in the conversation and to know the secret of the weaving ritual. During my interview with Madame Aycha Msehel and her daughter Sarra, her son was asked to leave the room. This is indicative of male exclusion in the weaving world. Nevertheless, throughout the survey, it was necessary to deal with the men first in order to be able to talk to the women of the village. Interviews showed us that weaving is also seen as a tool for female socialization. It also represents a means of social recognition. For example, the bride's trousseau made up exclusively of woolen objects (carpet, blanket and clothes) allows her to mark her territory (the house). The carpet is not a veil or a cloth designed to conceal women by confining them to their homes, but it represents a window open to the world providing them with an ex-voto. This is how the role of protector of Berber customs and intangible heritage is assigned to them. This responsibility allocated to women is attested to by the words of Khadija Benyeder:

"I feel directly involved in the preservation of weaving, which is a heritage from my mother. This fight must be led by women through education and initiation. This is why I teach the art of weaving at the Higher Institute of Arts and Crafts in Tataouine" (BENYEDER, 2018)

It is clear that the weavers show power and determination in their struggle for heritage preservation. Through her art, "Berber" invests in the transmission of a craft skill and thus preserves her cultural heritage. Through these vestiges, it demonstrates the evolution of civilizations. Weaving, an essential criterion, allows women to ensure a marital union. For the Amazighs, it represents a means of learning, offering the opportunity to study mathematics and logic through the calculation of the points necessary for the reproduction of the design. The bride-to-be then acquired skills to help her manage her home. The status that the art of weaving holds within Berber communities is further evidenced by the centrality of the carpet in the bride's trousseau. The most important piece of her trousseau is her wedding blanket. This feminine possession will serve to protect them from misfortune through its symbolic ornaments. The blanket is made of spiral-shaped lice thread, which gives it its fertilizing properties. It is woven according to a very specific poetic. It is now interesting to look at the stages of the creative process of weaving in order to answer the following questions:

How can the poetics of Berber weaving represent a form of initiation and what does it form?

The Poetics of Berber Weaving :

The harvesting of the wool and its treatment (cleaning, spinning, framing): The cycle of weaving begins in the first days of autumn and continues through the winter with a break on the first night of the solar year called (Ennayer). These correspond to the wet seasons. It is also interrupted during three events: Aid el Kebir and Achoura, two festivals of Berber origin, or on the occasion of a death. The preparation of the wool (*tadzouft/suf*) begins with its extraction. It comes mainly from a breed of sheep called barbarine in reference to Berber. It contains keratin or sulfur protein which makes it waterproof. (BEN MANSOUR, 1999, p. 93) The wool, *tadzouftis* either obtained from the skins of dead animals or it results from shearing. In the first case, a plucking process is carried out following the fermentation of the skin with the help of chemical products or by a thermal method called sudation (BEN MANSOUR, 1999, p. 93). In the second case, it is said to be "virgin" and symbolizes a guarantee of quality.

Shearing (*zez*) is practiced with traditional iron scissors by men and takes place in spring, between April and June. During this event, songs are chanted and codified gestures and attitudes are applied. Shearing is surrounded by many customs that give it a divine blessing. This ritual takes place either in the ancient Ksourien village or in the courtyards of the houses. Once the wool is obtained, the women go into action. They all get together to wash, card and spin the wool. Each participant brings her own tools and contributes to the production of the yarn. It is clear that "the techno-economic relationship between men and women is one of close complementarity" (BADINTER, 1986, p. 28). "(LEROI-GOURHAN, 1970, p. 214). The sexual distinction of activities does not exclude their complementary nature. After shearing the sheep, the women begin by washing the wool (*tooma/ wey oulmen*). This takes place on Friday, a sacred day in Islam. In order to protect the women, certain songs, gestures and incantations animate the worker (BEN MANSOUR, 1999, p. 96). The weavers begin by meeting around a basin of fresh water (*mejil*) in which they immerse the fleeces.

Once the fleeces have been cleaned of their sebum and dried, the women proceed to extract the impurities embedded in the organic matter. The raw wool (*tadzoufti*) is once again beaten with the Kernef (BEN MANSOUR, 1999, p. 95) and sorted, separated according to the size and colors of the fibers. The long wool fibers are taken from the mature and fattened sheep. They are used for spinning warp yarns (*Jeded/ wey oustou*). The short threads are used to obtain the weft thread (*tooma/ wey oulmen*). A quantity of wool intended for the weaving of Berber graffiti is lightly moistened on a perforated bell. In the centre of the bell, called Sakhan, is placed an earthen pot filled with embers and coated with sulfur. The whole is covered with a cloth to prevent the release of sulfur vapor. This process gives the wool a brilliant whiteness and prevents the dye from fixing. (BEN MANSOUR, 1999, p. 96) Once the wool is clean, the women store it in their domestic reserves called (*khzin*). These exclusively female activities require specific tools such as the comb called (*tamchot*) in Berber and (*mocht*) in Arabic, the frame called (*Tadguecha*) in Berber (*kardech*) in Arabic, the spindle¹ called (*maghzel*) and the spindle² with a low vertex called (*Azdi/ maghzel jeded*). It is important to note that the tools of the spinner are strictly personal and often passed on to subsequent generations.

Fig 01 :The comb (*Tamchot / mocht*)

[Source : Yvonne SAMAMA, Le tissage dans l'atlas marocain, Miroir de la terre et de la vie, Paris, Ed Ibis Press, 2000. P 18]



Fig02 :Image of a low-vertical pin (*Azdi/ maghzel jeded*)

[Source : Neila RHOUMA. Maison d'une artisane. 2018]

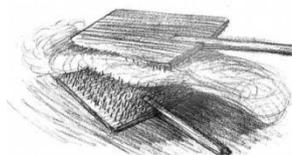


Fig03 :Time zone (*Tizdit / maghzel*)

[Source : Yvonne SAMAMA, *Op.cit.* p19]



Fig04:The carding comb (*Tadguecha / kardech*)
[Source: Yvonne SAMAMA, *Ibid.*]



¹The spindle is a rod that is always shorter than the cattail. In the North, it is most often made of olive wood. It is finished at one of its ends by a massive disc, four to five centimeters in diameter, which acts as a wheel; it is itself surmounted by a small hook (called *shabbana* in Bou Saada) around which the end of the thread is tied.

² The cattail is a rod of circular cross-section, made from a light turned wood, or a simple reed or cut from a palm pole. One end is slit to hold the carded wool flecks which are wound into a figure of eight.

"For the old spinner the spindle is more than an object of utility, it is an accessory to her divinatory science. The different phases of the work of the wool are, in fact, caught in a very tight network of traditions and customs. The spinners sing while invoking the spindle whorl, which is generally made of wood but which they would like to have made of glass; they also invoke the fish, which has prophylactic and fertilizing virtues and which will be represented in the weaving. From there, the various allusions contained in these spinning songs are translated by J.-L. Combes and A. Louis". (CAMPS, 1998, p. 5) Through the investment of its spiritual beliefs, wool is transformed into a prophylactic and fertilizing symbol. This utensil allows the spinner to change the wool into a weft thread symbolizing life and named (*tooma / weyoulmen*). The name (*tooma/weyoulmen*) comes from the root (*ta/ aa/ ma*) meaning to feed. Hence it is possible to consider the weft thread as food, a source of life. "The thread itself was formed by a rotation (called Z or S depending on the direction). Through this spiral movement, the spinning took part in the spiral of energy that gives shape to the universe. The spun yarn was analogous to life, which is produced by the action of this energy. The spun yarn had, like every human being brought into the world, a soul. This was supposed to be related to the soul of its creator." (VANDENBROECK, 2000, p. 92) Thus, the weft thread associated with the soul of the spinner is very valuable. The importance is palpable in the songs they hum:

"Hevi ouizra tenfah kima yekber el ghali y gib il semha l'ommo. Wazret el hamrafik el hagahezouk el deleljebti naga. "This is a wizra (woolen garment for men) that is beneficial as the precious one that will grow and bring a valuable wife to his mother. When we brought it to the seller the cloth; he brought us back a camel." (Naziha, 2018)

Thus, for women, spinning with the spindle and the distaff represents an allegory of fate. Yet the destiny of the thread does not stop at spinning but is animated by many other actions such as warping.

The warping technique: Warping is a unified series of operations. It begins with the distribution of a dish (the *bsissa*) and ends with the assembly of the loom. During the warping, the activity prompts a female gathering. The women of Chenini declare:

"Nsid iili ji y tghavi" i.e.: "I warp the one who participates is fed". (Naziha, Proverb, 2018)

Warping takes place on Tuesdays or Saturdays and lasts about four hours. It is forbidden on Wednesdays and Sundays. This prescription is found among other Berber tribes such as the Ghardaïa, in the Mزاب (DELHEUR, 1979, pp. 18-19). Today, many weavers no longer restrict themselves to these beliefs, which are a form of paganism. Warping is carried out in the inner courtyard of the house. It begins with the distribution of *bsissa*. This traditional dish is the condition for the beginning of the technical operations. It is also distributed during the first days of the wedding, seven days after the birth of a newborn child and at the circumcision of a child. A ritual analogy emerges between the beginning of warping, weaving and marriage. It reveals an institutional and ceremonial relationship between marriage and weaving. (PARDO, 2003, p. 228) It is considered a symbol of wealth, fertility, pleasure associated with taste, and hardness linked to its fortifying and protective effects. Thus, it ensures the fusion of opposites (man/woman). In addition to its use symbolizing the alliance between man and woman, this dish evokes the union of opposites in its preparation. It is first moistened with water and oil, two heterogeneous entities, and then placed in a mould in the fire. The sequence of these preparations evokes the representation of the inner/outer and woman/man relationship.

Indeed, the water and oil are stored and handled inside the house just like the woman who generally remains at home, while the fire is fanned and manifests itself outside like the man moving outside. (PARDO, 2003, p. 227) A paradoxical duality that is the very source of the concept of creation present in Amazigh thought. It represents a substratum of cosmogonic beliefs. According to them, 'some believe that the history of the cosmos is divided into three eras. The first is perfect, a golden age where gods, men and animals live together in total harmony. Then during the second of these three periods, the age of creation, the creator god brings forth the earth, men and animals. It is a period of differentiation, for God created life using him as matter and model, thus attempting to create the golden age... It is a period of chaos and order, of fear and hope, of mitigation of the past and promise of a new future. This order-chaos dualism is sometimes seen as the very nature of the creator god." (Collective, 2004, p. 248) Thus, the notion of duality is indispensable for creation and production in a view that considers the other as indispensable for the accomplishment of the same task. This fact is manifested throughout the ritual. It also attests to the presence of this common thread between the ritual of weaving and the theme of creation analogous to procreation. The dualism is not only revealed during the weaving celebrations, but is also present in the way of warping, of placing the loom.

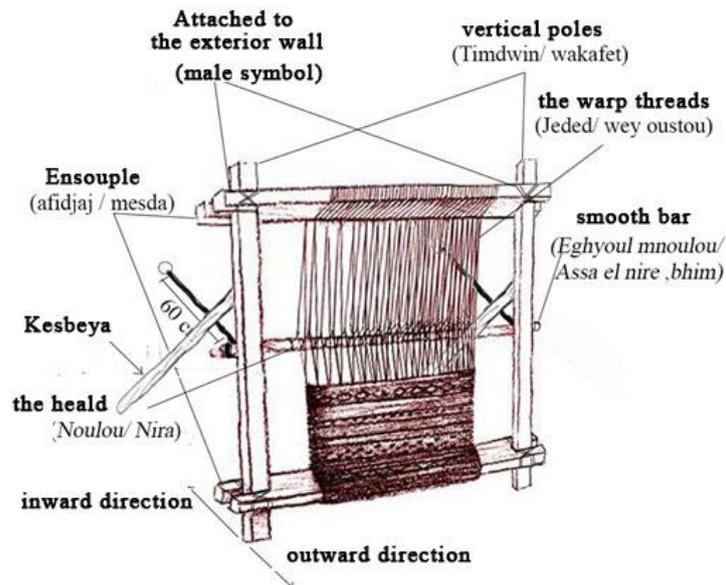


Fig07 : Image of the weaving loom being assembled
 [Source : Yvonne SAMAMA. Op.cit. p 10]

The male/female, external/internal relationship is revealed in a vertical/horizontal form. The vertical poles (*Timdwin/ wakafet*) are associated with the mountain man (*jbelya*) whose uprightness evokes a character of cultural belonging (PARDO, 2003, p. 232). This observation is further confirmed by the fact that the posts are attached to the outer wall, the exterior evoking the man. As for the beams (*afidjaj / mesda*), they represent the seated woman. The seated position may refer to childbirth. Both the beam and the woman are linked to the interior of the house, which affirms the analogy between them. The link between the verticality of the posts and the horizontality of the warp beams creates a balance that is necessary for the creation of the carpet, just as the balance between the male/female relationships is essential for the conception of a child. The wooden columns support the warp beams in the same way that the beams support the standing beams. Thus, "both symbolise the collaboration of man and woman in the home. " (VANDENBROECK, 2000, p. 179) A union that abstractly materializes marriage. As soon as the loom is upright, the women begin to conceive the heald (*noulou/ nira*). This stage indicates the completion of the installation of the loom (*mensej*). The formation of the heddle is associated with the formation of the soul (*rouh*) of the carpet. Thus, it breathes life into the carpet through the movement of the warps. The movement being a sign of life, allows the weaver to transmit her vital energy to the carpet.

At the end of the weaving process, the woman cuts the heald (*noulou/ nira*) and burns it, believing that it can be used to bewitch her, because the soul of the carpet materialized by the heald is linked to the weaver's soul. Thus, the heald is used for evil purposes. It is also used in a magical ritual called *el tasfih*³, which is performed at the beginning and end of the warping process. Applied to women, it is considered to be white magic as it preserves the chastity of the girl. When applied to a man, it would make him sterile. Hence the prohibition on the man being present at the beginning and end of the warping. Once the assembly of the loom (*mensej*) is finished, the woman must weave even only two weft lines (*wey oulmen/ tooma*) because according to Amazigh beliefs, the carpet must be fed: "y aachiweh". It is clear that the loom does not represent a simple common object. It is associated with "a living being that should be honored for the benefit it provides to mankind. "(AKLI HADDADOU, 2000, p. 151). It is considered by the craftswoman as the matrix, the mother carrying a

³ The term *tasfih* means 'shoeing', i.e. the protection of horse hooves by shoes, and refers analogously to a method of preserving the virginity of young girls. This protection is the subject of a first ritual phase, which takes place before the puberty of little girls (between 6 and 10 years old) and is based on two precautions affecting both women and men. Under her action, the girl becomes impenetrable. Any man approaching her loses his sexual power. A second phase consisting of undoing the curse is implemented before marriage so that the woman or man regains her fertility.

growing and maturing soul, in need of protection. This offers her an affective and familiar power that imposes attention and respect towards her. This esteem is manifested through various actions: For example, the woman greets him every morning. She forbids hanging clothes on it or sitting on the lower beam. Further evidence of the importance of the loom is the fact that only one loom can be present, in the same time frame and in the same house. Thus, only one weaving process can take place in the same household, the creative process of which is presented below.

Weaving the wool carpet in Chenini : As soon as the loom is set up, the women of the family can begin the weaving stage. They start by designing the cordline representing the border, a simple weave called (chief) adjoining the lower beam. At this point the women pass the weft thread (*weyoulmen/ tooma*) inside the warp threads (*Jbed/ weyousto*). Then, the craftswoman begins the weaving, alternating several colored bands decorated with geometric figures in the case of the kilim margoum. A ritual cradled by the concept of duality manifests itself in this technique. In Chenini, the weaving is carried out by two women of the family. This four-handed weaving is characteristic of the Chenini carpet called (Kilim). The intergenerational work allows the legacy of this art. This know-how solicits the technique of the partial dute also called technique of the kilim. The use of the pick was invented to be able to alternate the colors and integrate the patterns. In Chenini, this process is also used in the manufacture of monochrome works.

According to tradition, two weavers sit side by side. They first lift the reed between the heald and the upper beam. This movement allows the warp threads (*mmeyara*) associated with the heddle to be advanced. The weavers then push the thread to one side of the warp with their fingers. The act of pushing (*bizzo*) is analogous to sexual intercourse and male penetration. "All these concepts have in common a movement from a pole to a destination" (VANDENBROECK, 2000, p. 228). During this action, the craftswomen make several successive, repeated and partial back and forth movements until the entire width are filled. Gestures from the right to the left and in a reversed direction are applied. This choice of route amplifies the power of the baraka, the blessing of the alliance between the warp thread (the woman) and the weft thread (the man). These operations are seen as a means of capturing the beneficial forces, namely fertility and life, which are essential principles of the concept of creation. Once the full width has been obtained, the woman passes her fingers between the warp threads in order to compact the weft threads. Finally, she compacts them with the help of the reed previously integrated into the loom, surrounding the even-numbered threads and separating them from the odd-numbered threads of the warp. The reed, which is integrated at the beginning of the warping process, symbolizes the life produced by the carnal union of the warp and weft threads. It thus accentuates the notion of union with otherness.

In her gesture, the weaver can also use utensils such as the comb (*Khlela*). The iron comb has the technical function of compacting the strands of knots and the symbolic and spiritual function of ensuring union. The verb khala designates the fact of (penetrating into) emphasizing this principle of association. These magical utensils, passed down from generation to generation, further amplify the notion and power of intergenerational union and sharing. This sharing is omnipresent in the way of weaving in Chenini. It allows the women to unite both in the temporality, in the materiality of the support and in the philosophy of exchanging their know-how. Living together, here on earth, is indissolubly associated with weaving. According to Marcel Mauss, it is this character of cohesion that gives birth to the art of weaving as a total social fact because it links up with many other social activities and allows links between generations. The women who share their craft are usually from the same family, i.e. mother/daughter, cousin, sisters, aunt/niece and in some cases friends. They need to demonstrate a certain bond in order to share their intimacies. The notion of sharing also manifests itself in another way in the Berber weaving of Chenini. Indeed, the method of ras weaving or saw tooth weaving resulting from the dualistic union produces a carpet with two sides. The front of the carpet is directed outwards, while the back is directed inwards. The duality of man/woman, vertical/horizontal and exterior/interior is now manifested in a front/back aspect. Indeed, the front side associated with the outside symbolizes man and is revealed to the world. The reverse side of the carpet, linked to the inside, designates the hidden and secret world of the woman. The weaver faces her own world (the reverse side) and does not see the external male world, visible to society. The principle of duality can also be seen in the regular to-and-fro movement that gives rise to partially regular designs on both sides. It allows the warp to cross the weft. Thus, Chenini's weaving makes explicit, through the dualistic concept applied to the technique, the ideology of its inhabitants, manifesting itself in the sharing and complementarity of otherness in the manner of the masculine/feminine, the horizontal/vertical, the interior/exterior and the recto/verso unveiled throughout the ritual. Binarity is universal, "everything will be distributed in two and assigned to one sex and the other according to two poles that will be arranged in opposites," (SULLEROT, 1978, p. 400) and in complementarity.

The concept of duality emerges thanks to female living conditions that are favorable to the distancing of the sexes and their complementarity. This binary vision was implanted by the animist belief through which the animal world presents itself to man under a complementary gender distribution. Binary humanity thus becomes intertwined to form a unity through collaboration. Hence the concept of duality can be seen as a product of behavioural science. Indeed, the 'Other' was the focus here. The responsibility of the individual began with pregnancy and the mental processes that accompanied it. "(VANDENBROECK, 2000, p. 223) The emergence of the theme of procreation and creation is thus reflected in the principle of union. A union that produces a carpet, perceived as a small being in perpetual evolution.

It is common to hear women say: "*It's a child and if I leave it for a day, it's as if I haven't fed it. Even if I work the next day, he will have been hungry the day I forgot him. He is a living being who does not speak, who has no blood but who has a soul.*" (SAMAMA, 2000, p. 67)

The weft thread would represent the life source of the carpet and the nourishment of its soul. This analogy between the thread and life or weaving and the act of creation is present in the Old Testament which says in Hebrew-verse 15 of Psalm 139: "*I was made, embroidered (r-q-m), in secret.*"

In the weaving, the loom, the weaver and the smith are manifested through the use of the comb that captures souls. This is how a soul binds itself to each interstice of the warp and weft allowing the cellular multiplication of an entity living outside of materiality in different forms. It manifests itself in all that surrounds us like a divine spark, a cosmic life force. In the carpet, the soul is formed at the knot resulting from the crossing and meeting of the two threads. "In the 'chaotic' organization of ancient Maghrebian society, power is located at the points of intersection of the different groups or segments" (VANDENBROECK, 2000, p. 147). The weft thread that continuously penetrates the warp of the loom while crossing each other is considered by the artist-craftswoman as the formation of cells giving life to her carpet. This art of the knot produces the work by evoking cell multiplication through the proliferation of its nodules. In this case, the multiplication of the knots on the carpet is comparable to the tenfold increase in cells during fetal mutation. A metamorphic process is triggered and takes the form of a textile work of art. The carpet undergoes a mutation and maturation process that results in the formation of the body of the work.

When the women approach the end of their work, they only start the last frieze on condition that they finish it all by night. They cannot leave the work with a half-finished frieze, as this could lead to the death of the weaver and her carpet. Once the work is finished, the weavers begin by emptying the room of all male presence. This attitude is similar to the birth of a woman, which takes place behind closed doors. With a knife, the weaver cuts the thread of the heddle symbolising the soul of the carpet. The knife, called a harba, symbolises the course of life. By cutting the thread, a double action takes place. On the one hand, it interrupts the course of life when the heddle is cut and on the other hand it symbolises the cutting of the umbilical cord when they cut the warp threads. Death is thus staged. After cutting the thread, the weavers fold the carpet three times over the lower beam, chanting:

"starnek fil denya. ostorna fil ekhra", i.e.: "We have protected you on earth. Protect us in the hereafter." (MSEHEL, Paroles, 2018)

Among the Berbers of Tunisia, a white, raw woollen cloth called 'ouizra' is made by the weaver to wrap him at his funeral. Thus, the woollen cloth envelops the dead as it envelops the lower beam. It is clear that through this gesture the weavers evoke the death of the loom, a loom that will later be dismantled. The weavers quickly dismantle the loom and clean and sponge the floor on which it was placed before the men arrived. This attitude also occurs following a death or childbirth. Indeed, after a woman has given birth, the people around her hasten to clean the place where the new mother stood before her husband arrived. It is therefore possible to consider the cutting of the warp thread as a gesture associated with the delivery of the loom (mother) from her child (the carpet). This consideration of the loom as a mother is evoked in verse 13 of Psalm 139 of the Old Testament which states: "*Yes, you have woven me (sh-k-k) in my mother's womb*".

Thus, the cutting of the heddle's thread symbolizes the death that will lead to a new life. This action is "seen as an ordeal, an unceasing effort that requires a lot of courage and conviction" (VANDENBROECK, 2000, p. 226). This gesture seems similar to mourning. The section forms three, six or seven openings that represent a portal to another world. These openings will allow the carpet to transfer from the supersensible world to the sensitive and tangible world of humans, like the birth of the first humans. The arrival of the carpet in the world, considered as a child, necessarily evokes for Man the primordial question of the origins of the being and its metaphysical

existence, which refers to the immaterial components of the person and to its destiny during its earthly passage. According to Berber cosmogonic myths, the universe is made up of a fertile human world and another sunken and sterile world, the antithesis of the human world. In the latter, the first women and men were born and then passed into the earthly world through portals.

The carpet as well as the "child" is always considered as an arrival from the Other World. The conception of the latter presents many constants that define it as a parallel or double world in which invisible powers evolve in the image, often reversed, of the community of the living. "(WALENTOWITZ Saskia, 2003, p. 191). The passage of this new being into the terrestrial world would be through a gesture applied at the end of the weaving. The latter would thus open an inter-universal portal allowing communication with other mythical creatures. Genies (*Jnun*), giants, ogres and dwarfs could communicate with the human world through weaving. These creatures hold both beneficial and evil powers towards humans who maintain continuous links with them through spiritual and ritual practices such as weaving. This practice uses many rituals to repel or attract them in order to preserve the continuity of life that is intrinsically associated with death.

Beliefs about communication with extraterrestrial creatures are attested to by canteens sung by the women of the village of Chenini to their children. A lullaby tells the story of "a woman who was weaving in the evening, singing lullabies to her baby. She found that her kilims were moving unusually fast and she wondered if someone was weaving for her. One day in the semi-darkness of the paraffin lamps, as she entered, she saw a woman with red eyes and red hair weaving on her loom. She often saw this woman sitting next to her, weaving, and her kilims were coming along. She told her eldest son about it, but he did not believe her, because every time he came in, he only saw his mother. So she invented a little song in chelha and they agreed that when she sang, he would try to see the famous woman from a distance. This they did and the son had to face the facts." (PARDO, 2003, p. 228) The woman with red hair and red eyes evoked in this lullaby is a genie. This shows that weaving represents a process that allows the two worlds to be linked. This passage is thus protected by the set of rituals applied by the woman and mentioned above. The crossing of this inter-universal portal causes the death of the carpet and its rebirth. The rite applied to the carpet is in analogy with the ritual of () intermediary between the feminine rites that engender the child and the sacrificial rites that sign its death. This association of death and life through natality and sexuality can be seen as a figure of the dualism of Eros⁴ and Thanatos⁵.

This is how Berber weaving manifests a sensitivity to life and death called "the art of dying well". The Amazighs want to be "in search of the good life in the light of the good death" (TENETI, 1997, p. 62) As SPINOZA states, "The free man thinks of nothing less than death, and his wisdom is a motivation, not of death, but of life." (GAY-PERRET Gérard & COLARDELLE Michel & CHAKER Salem & JACOTIN Mireille, 2008, p. 147) It is this concern for death as much as for life that engenders a creation that allows the woman to bypass death, to become immortal. Death thus evokes her passage from the metaphysical environment in which she acted as a spiritual mediator to a concrete world where she will represent the materialization of past memories and recollections. The symbolic death and birth of the carpet reflects a cyclical vision. "The end of one journey/movement is the beginning of another, in an upward spiral that finally leads to fusion, emptiness and nothingness." (VANDENBROECK, 2000, p. 260) This cyclical representation corresponds to the vestige of a pagan belief in the Libyan Goddess Neith, preceding Tanit and homologous to Athena but wearing a goat skin. It is later found in Egyptian mythology. This belief dates back to the Neolithic period. It is the product of transformations in the human way of life. This transformation is due to the discovery of agriculture by women, which changed daily human life and redefined the social status of women. (BADINTER, 1986, pp. 64-65) Since the Neolithic societies, only the creative power of the mother-female counts. A fanaticism that is integrated into the religious and economic system of this air. "Even if maternal and feminine sacredness was known in the Paleolithic period, the discovery of agriculture must have significantly increased its power" (BADINTER, 1986, p. 77). Since then, earthly fertility has been associated with female fecundity. Thus, the woman who holds the mystery of creation becomes responsible for the abundance of crops. The fertilizing power associated with agriculture gives value to women. As a result, society appropriated the female figure and elevated her to the status of Mother Goddess/Mother Nature. According to the writings of Plutarch, she was the source of the universal essence. Her power "governed everything: life and death; growth and decay, the forces behind these phenomena." (VANDENBROECK, 2000, p. 70) Indeed, the death of certain creatures allows the survival of

⁴Among the ancient Greeks, Eros was the god of love. He is seen as one of the creative powers of the cosmos. Eros literally evokes sexual love and reproduction, hence the adjective "erotic". In this case, sexual pleasure becomes a goal, whereas it was a goal that facilitated procreation. This stems from a vital impulse that drives every species to transmit its genetic heritage and perpetuate its existence.

⁵Thanatos is the Greek figure, the personification of death.

others, hence this relationship between life and death governed by Neith. She thus represents the mother of the world. She is considered the source of self-generating life. She alone designates universal unity, as well as the cohesion between life and death linked like two sides of the same coin. It is considered to be the original Berber cosmogony and thus represents the eternal mystery of birth, death and the existential cycle, i.e. the whole of creation. "At the beginning of time, Neith took the shuttle, stretched the sky on her loom like warp threads and wove the world. The weaver-goddess was at the same time a creative goddess, a 'womb-goddess'. "It is clear that the agricultural cultural system sets up "a cosmic religion" (MIRCEA, 1983, p. 53) inspired by and drawing its origins from a belief in "the Goddess Neith" whose principle revolves around the theme of female creation; a principle, necessarily, initiated via weaving.

II. CONCLUSION:

The popular practice of Berber weaving outlined in this article is not a simple form of claim or cultural manifestation responding to a material need. But it represents a way of ensuring social cohesion and transmitting primary notions revolving around the female figure such as marriage, natality, fertility and maternity. It is a form of initiation into the female social code. Thus the old weaver initiates the young woman into mathematics, logic, sexuality and all the elementary principles that make up the cycle of life. She reveals to her the difficulties of life while offering her the means to face them. She passes on to her the standards necessary to become a virtuous wife, according to the expectations of Amazigh society.

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