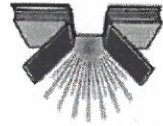


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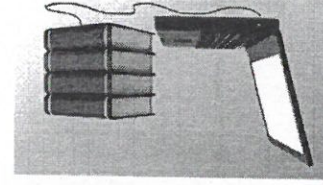
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Readings in Culture

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The Ancient Arabs: The Code of Honor

2

Like most peoples, the Arabs cherish a memory of times of glory, halcyon days when the world paused to allow men to aspire to the fullness of their bravery, strength, and refinement, and which, ever after, set a banner on the pinnacle of their achievement and a seal on their aspirations. Ancient song and story, in its content and form of expression, forms the core of a classical tradition, the quarry of artistic endeavor, and the repository of national ethic. The Arabs call these *Ayyamu'l-Arab* or "the Days of the Arabs." For all those who speak and relish the richness of the Arabic language and who call themselves Arab, the Days of the Arabs are an ideal past.

Such a period in Western civilization was the Age of Pericles, or, in a slightly different form, the England of the Arthurian Legends. Americans, even with our short history and variegated backgrounds, have already begun to make of the early years of the Republic—or of the Wild West—an idealized past in which men stood straighter, strove more nobly, and reached more surely for glory.

An idealized past, even one with which a person can identify only by great stretch of imagination, is a mirror for the present. However dimly it may be related to a real past, it provides a clear and bright picture of the aspirations and values of the present. What then has come down to modern Arabs from this dim, distant, and wild past? The traditions and values of the ancient Arabs are not simply of

antiquarian interest. Ancient Arabic poetry is today the syllabus of linguistic and literary study in every Arab school. Poetry to the Arabs is what folk stories, drama, legend, and epic are to the West. Few indeed are the Arabs, even those who are illiterate, who have not memorized hundreds of lines of poetry, and few are the political discussions, social gatherings, or entertainments in which poetry does not figure prominently. On its poetry Arabic civilization has lavished all of the inventive genius which in other cultures has been spread over the whole range of the arts. Study, memorization, and repetition of ancient Arabic poetry tie the modern age to previous ages and on this string is hung that sense of continuity which makes those who live in the modern Middle Eastern Arab states think of themselves as Arab. It is not only a living tradition, it is the essence of tradition.

By their British and French rulers and by many Western visitors, the modern bedouin nomads, and so by extension ancient Arabs, were regarded as the "good Arabs," a wild, childlike people, indolent perhaps and unproductive of social well-being, but whose courage and simplicity one could admire in contrast to the superficially Westernized, devious, difficult "town Arabs." Others, including their Turkish governors under the Ottoman Empire, have thought of the bedouin as gypsies, a people wandering aimlessly through the deserts, or pirates who, living in the vast inner sand sea of the Middle East, raided and plundered the coast and then retired, out of reach, to their distant "islands" and "fishing grounds." Arab philosophers have thought of the bedouin in terms similar to the eighteenth century European philosophers' "Natural Man"—the bedouin were the simple, pristine, children of God, uncorrupted and untamed by civilization, a bloodbank of new vigor for jaded urban society.

These attitudes have led, of course, to different policies. The British attempted to police the bedouin while protecting them from the city Arabs. Transjordan was to be their state, and in Iraq they were to have a strong voice in parliament. The French were less protective but, if anything, more appreciative of *la civilisation du désert*. The Turks generally sought to destroy the bedouin as others have sought to destroy pirates. Punitive expeditions were tried repeatedly but succeeded only against the settled or semi-nomadic tribes, who, having invested in lands and houses, could be caught. The true nomads vanished before the slow Turkish infantry only to reappear before isolated garrisons. Few were those governors wise enough to lure the bedouin to settle so that they might be controlled.

The attitude of the urban Arabs themselves was and still is ambivalent. The Arabs glory in the traditions and art of the bedouin as ancient Arabs, and nobility is claimed by descent from the bedouin.

Historically to say of a student of Arabic that he studied with the bedouin was to accord him the best of credentials. Classical Arabic was the language of the bedouin of the Arabian highlands. Yet, the bedouin are feared and even hated, for if they have infused new vigor into society they have also drained off the old life and have overthrown existing orders of society. Today in the Arab World there is no government which can be said to be sympathetic with the bedouin. All seek to convert him into a settled peasant and all have upset the administrative arrangements which set him apart from other citizens.

Actually, nomadism has been in decline for at least a half a century. Settled peoples have not needed the meat and wool of the bedouin camels, for they could get them elsewhere cheaper. They have found cheaper and faster means of transport. And, with the use of the airplane and the truck with a machine gun mounted on top, they could prevent the nomads from raiding one another and the settled lands as never before. As the high commissioner of Iraq wrote in 1924 in his report to the League of Nations, "now, almost before the would-be rebel has formulated his plans, the droning of the aeroplanes is heard overhead." Always bedouin life has been fragile; now the delicate balance of conditions which sustained it has been upset. The bedouin, like the knight and the cowboy, is rapidly passing from the scene, but like all heroic figures he leaves behind a legend which dwarfs reality.

As we have seen, the harsh realities of desert life shaped bedouin society and thought. The bedouin never lived under government, and even their own tribes were loose federations in which every man was an equal. The shaiikh was little more than a respected arbiter and generous host, never a ruler to his people. Burckhardt, one of the great observers of bedouin life, wrote in *Notes on Bedouins and Wahabys*, "the shaiikh has no actual authority over the individuals of his tribe; he may, however, by his personal qualities obtain considerable influence. His commands would be treated with contempt; but deference is paid to his advice . . . thus the Bedouin truly says that he acknowledges no master . . . and in fact, the most powerful chief dares not inflict a trifling punishment on the poorest man of his tribe."

But, if the desert gives scope for such democracy, it also puts a heavy premium on social cohesion. Life in the desert is and must be a team effort. The clan or qawm is the group of kindred which lives, herds animals, fights, and makes peace together. The qawm was the effective social unit—it was, in reality, the nation-state of the bedouin. No larger or more elaborate social gathering had more than transitory existence and none had real authority over the clan. Since there was no "international" law and no supraclan institutions, the

identity and protection of the individual were derived from membership in a clan. It was the certainty that a man's clan would protect him where possible and exact retaliation when he was harmed that gave him security of property and person.

Pride in folk and boasting of their qualities is one of the common features of the Arabic poem. The poet, the propagandist of his day, finds many ways to enhance the reputation of his folk, detailing their bravery, their wisdom, their generosity. As an-Nabighah sang,

... a people are they whose might in battle shall never fail
 When goes forth their host to war, above them in circles wheel batal-
 ions of eagles, pointing the path to battalions more:
 Their friendship is old and tried—fast comrades in foray, bred to look
 unafraid on blood, as hounds to the chase well trained ...

Of steeds in the spear-play skilled, with lips for the fight drawn back,
 their bodies with wounds all scarred, some bleeding and some half-
 healed.
 And down leap the riders where the battle is strait and stern and spring
 in the face of Death like stallions amid the herd;

Between them they give and take deep draughts of the wine of Doom as
 their hands ply the white swords, thin and keen in the smiting-edge.
 In them no defect is found, save only that in their swords are notches a
 many, gained from smiting of host on host.

(translated by Lyal)

Behind the boast of his folk is the poet's implied and, at the end of the poem, explicit boast of his own virtues.

Most of the poet's virtues could be shown in performance of the duties of the tribe but the ultimate in personal bravery was to pit oneself against all mankind and all nature. If a man were expelled by his qawm he was literally an outlaw against whom the hand of every man was turned, living as Hobbes said in "continuall feare and danger of violent death." Since the ideal of rugged individualism always clashed with that of corporate subordination, some Arabs, including some of the greatest of the poets, were expelled from their clans and tried to "go it alone" by feats of almost superhuman endurance. As the greatest of these outlaw poets, Shanfara, sang,

By your life, the earth is not so narrow that a man cannot find elbow room,
 As long as he uses his wits and by desire or fear travels in night's black gloom.

3

In supreme irony, the poet expels his own folk, choosing wolves for his qawm, since wolves do not break confidence and live by a sterner code than fickle men. He fears nothing as, accompanied by his three companions—a stout heart, a glistening sword, and a long singing bow—he moves through deserts so awesome that before them even riding camels panic and in weather so hellish in the "dog days" of summer that the very mirages melt and vipers writhe on the stones, "prolonging my hunger so long that it is the *hunger* I kill and I become unmindful of it." But the outlaw-poet wants his audience to know that he does not punish himself for masochistic reasons. "Were it not to avoid a shameful action, no drinking bout or feast would be found without my being there."

But a proud and bitter soul will not uphold me in the face of wrong, except as I plot my vengeance.
 I am the master of patience draping its gown over the heart of a wolf
 and tenacity I wear for sandals.

Such stark and unbending glorification of egotism, violence, and hatred led to lives that were often, as Hobbes put it of *his* man in nature, "solitary, poore, nasty, brutish and short."

The centrifugal forces of individualism limited the centripetal forces of clan cohesion. In the last resort, at terrifying personal sacrifice, the individual could save his own honor even at the expense of loss of his folk. In this direction lay heroism and poetic ennoblement. In more normal circumstances a family quarrel could be ended by a split of the qawm into two parts, each of which could live normally, or by grafting the weaker group onto another clan in the same tribe much as one might migrate and become naturalized in another nation. In this direction lay salvation.

Westemers—and most Arabs—may find the content of this poetry of bravery, as the Arabs called it, objectionable, but its grand gesture, its eloquence, the flow of its language, cannot but sway men's emotions. No one who has watched an Arabic audience can fail to have noted the extent to which linguistic virtuosity hypnotizes the people. It is this which has given to the radio station in our own time such extraordinary influence throughout the Arab World and which allows even vitriolic and vile propaganda, if well said, to be accepted. Ironically, even in the poems which express hatred of one man for others or one folk for another, and which are, therefore, divisive propaganda at its most effective, there is a force for cultural unity. Over the years, as names and events were forgotten, the poems lost their political sting and came to be a common heritage of all Arabs. It was,

indeed, the sharing of the classical literature which provided the common cultural experience of the ancient Arabs.

The contrary sentiment to a rugged individualism bordering on suicide is the intense emotional attachment to one's clansmen, right or wrong, and the personal acceptance of responsibility for any and all of their acts. The Arabic word for the sentiment which bound together the clan is the same as the modern word for nationalism, *qawmīyah*. In one of the most widely quoted poems in Arabic, this sentiment is summed up by a bedouin poet of the clan of Ghaziyah. The clansmen have been on a raid and foolishly stop their retreat before they are out of reach of their enemies. The poet Duraid bin Simma, having warned them and realizing their folly will probably cost him his life, stays to fight for, as he said,

When they spurned me, I was still with them, having seen their folly
and my own imprudence

For what am I apart from Ghaziyah—if the clan goes astray, so I,
And if Ghaziyah is rightly guided, I too am rightly guided.

Then he fought the

Fight of a man who nurses his brother with his own person, knowing
that man is not immortal.

Failure to protect one's kinsmen or, if they are killed or wronged, to retaliate against those who inflicted a wrong would destroy the meager protection the individual could find in desert tribal life. It was the categorical imperative of bedouin life and honor. To fail or shirk was a cowardly action which stained the individual and his kindred with the "stain of shame." Only the blood of the enemy could wash away this stain. And virtually every Arabic poem has some reference to the fear of blame for not acting as a man should.

This duty was incumbent upon a clan not only for its own members but also for those they undertook to protect. Annoyance at the "protected stranger" often showed through the lines of the poems. As Urwa bin Ward sang:

God curse the starving thief who concealed by the blackness of night
steals behind the tents to suck the marrow bones in the refuse heap.

Who counts as the riches of his lot to be every night where he can demand hospitality from a luckier friend.

4

But each poet boasts of his folk's generosity and protectiveness toward the guests or dependents. And no more bitter reproach could be made of a qawm than that it had failed in this duty. In the earliest of all known Arabic poems, the Basus Cycle, the poetess taunts her protectors by warning a friend that she is in "the encampment of such a folk that even when a wolf attacks he always seizes my lamb." Her protector, insulted beyond all compare, prepared to take vengeance on those who have harmed her after begging mankind not to blame him for "My protected one, know you one and all, is of the closest of kin." And so, like the Trojan War, began, poetically at least, a war of honor. For the Arab, said one of the greatest of Arab poets, must be a "spring pasture to the protected strangers." This is one of the deepest of obligations which has been rooted in Arabic civilization and nurtured by the tradition embodied in Arabic poetry.

The wise man is not foolhardy. Patience, cunning, and reserve are so much the attributes of the perfect man that they even spill into Islamic thought. Indeed, in the Koran God is described as the "best of the Plotters" (iii.54). But the final and greatest quality of the perfect man is generosity. The arbitrator is "one above the fray, possessed of such a generosity as leads him to aid others to show their generosity."

Generosity is not a virtue among the weak. For them the proper road is retaliation which should lead to the status quo ante. Other ways, however, could create a new balance of power. If the wrongdoer offered to pay recompense, the wronged could, after a decent interval, accept, and peace could be made. The strong, on the other hand, could be generous and could make peace without loss of face. One of the seven "Golden Odes" of ancient Arabia celebrates the peacemaker, who by his personal generosity and wisdom manages to stop war between two clans.

... If we set our hands to Peace, base it broad and firm by the giving of
gifts and fair words of friendship, all will be well.

"Yea, glory ye gained ... the highest—God guide you right! who gains
without blame a treasure of glory, how great is he!"

(Translated by Lyall)

Otherwise war to the knife was not only sanctioned but demanded by the social ethic. Even if it meant death, no man could with honor or pride shirk his duty of retaliating, goaded as he was by his women-folk and the very ghost of the slain and wracked by a "burning fever"—"Hearts are cured of rancour-sickness, whether men against

us war, or we carry death among them: dying, slaying, healing comes."

To Western tastes some of the value system embodied in classical Arabic poetry is not appealing. The boasts of the poets, the thirst for vengeance, the hunger for fame, and the fascination for the wounding of the foe, though not unfamiliar to readers of classical Greek literature, are not attractive. But to understand their impact on modern Arabic thought is vital to an understanding of politics in the Arab Middle East. For the imperative of preserving or achieving dignity, the fear of reproach as being unworthy or impotent people, and finally, the importance of the form of action and the word of communication as equal to or surpassing that of the content, greatly influences Arab political behavior. To outsiders who would understand, whether condoning or opposing, this is the beginning of knowledge.

and ethnic group; weavers of a particular group were told to weave carpets and blankets using predetermined colors and motifs that would supposedly represent their group and standardize textile production.¹ Not only did the French thus influence indigenous arts, like textiles, but the French protectorate government also opened art academies, where Moroccans studied European painterly techniques and a European-based history of art. Although painting existed prior to the arrival of Europeans in Morocco, as noted by Toni Maraini (1990: 213), it was primarily restricted to architectural decoration, manuscript illumination, and ceramics.

After Morocco gained its independence from France in 1956, a generation of Moroccan painters who studied European painting abroad grappled with issues of identity, attempting to create a painting style free from European influence. These artists worked according to nationalist ideas promoted by the Moroccan government and created an artistic style influenced by Morocco's rich artisan industry (Ibough 1998: 50). They were invited to exhibit in Morocco's museums and galleries and were commonly featured in books about Moroccan contemporary art. By sharp contrast, painters who incorporated Amazigh motifs and designs on their canvases with the intention of consciously promoting their Amazigh heritage were marginalized and rarely invited to exhibit.² Their art was considered political and taboo, since any distinction between Imazighen and Arabs was viewed as politically charged and reminiscent of the French colonial attempt to divide Arabs and Imazighen by institutionalizing differences between them. After independence in 1956, the Moroccan government suppressed public expressions of Morocco's Amazigh heritage and instead promoted a homogeneous Arab identity for the nation. Ironically, artists without distinctive Amazigh names or those who did not use their art deliberately to promote their heritage freely incorporated Amazigh motifs into their paintings, achieving considerable fame both within Morocco and beyond. One such painter is Farid Belkhal (b. 1934), one of the most prolific contemporary Moroccan artists, who has been inspired by Amazigh tattoos, jewelry, and textiles. Between 1954 and 1962 Belkhal studied in Europe, returning to Morocco in 1962 and becoming director of the École des Beaux-Arts in Casablanca. Rather than teaching his students European artistic techniques based on three-dimensional representations of the human body and objects from nature, however, he had them study indigenous Moroccan artistic forms such as Amazigh carpets, jewelry, calligraphy, and metalwork techniques. Belkhal himself began to work with indigenous media such as copper leaf, creating dynamic forms that burst out of the conventional four-

Contemporary Amazigh Arts

GIVING MATERIAL FORM TO AMAZIGH CONSCIOUSNESS

Amazigh arts in many areas of Morocco have drastically changed since Moroccan independence from French colonization in 1956. As discussed earlier, by the 1960s the majority of Ait Khabdash had abandoned their nomadic lifestyles, settling in towns where Arabic is widely spoken. The result was a dramatic change in Amazigh women's lives and the transformation of Amazigh aesthetic expression. While many forms of Amazigh women's arts, such as tattoos, gradually disappeared, at the same time these arts have been given new life by contemporary Moroccan painters. The painters, both Imazighen and Arab, have turned to the artistic heritage of the Imazighen to create a new painting style that embraces Morocco's cultural and ethnic diversity. These mostly male artists have appropriated indigenous Amazigh art forms and motifs intimately connected to women in their desire to express their postcolonial Moroccan identity, a national identity that is increasingly tolerant of its Amazigh population. These painters pay tribute to the artistic legacy of Amazigh women.

This chapter distinguishes between Amazigh and non-Amazigh contemporary painters because contemporary Amazigh painters remain virtually unknown even within Morocco. Their anonymity is tied to the country's colonial heritage and governmental politics of the Moroccan nation. The French protectorate government, in order to monitor Moroccan economic activity and encourage economic independence from France, restructured Morocco's arts and craft industry (Clancy-Smith 1999; Ibough 2001). Concerned that artistic production was in decline, they established standards of production to regulate indigenous artistic activity. For example, between 1926 and 1956 Moroccan textile production was reorganized by Prosper Ricard (1923–1927) by region

sided rectangular canvas (Benchemsî 1995: 15). Eventually Belkahia turned to animal skin, stretching the skins over amorphously shaped wooden frames and then painting and dyeing the skin with natural pigments such as saffron, henna, and sumac to create dynamic compositions as large as six feet tall and five feet wide.³

Through his choice of materials, colors, and forms, Belkahia intentionally tried to challenge the dichotomy between artist and artisan. In 1980 he created a series of canvases in the form of a hand decorated with black, deep red, and orange geometric motifs reminiscent of Moroccan women's henna designs. In his *Main* (Hand, featured in Fig. 7.1), Belkahia expressly incorporated the Tifinagh script, using six Tifinagh letters to write a Moroccan Arab woman's name (Saâida) immediately above the centrally placed eye motif.

The Tifinagh script is an Amazigh writing form believed to be related to the ancient Punic script and used primarily by Tuareg women and blacksmiths to write short, intimate messages on household objects and jewelry. The Tuareg are an Amazigh population who live in the Saharan and Sahalean regions of Mali, Algeria, Libya, Burkina Faso, and Niger. It is believed that all Imazighen used Tifinagh in the past; but the Tuareg, the least Arabized of all the Imazighen in Africa, are the only Amazigh group to have retained a written language. Tifinagh letters consist of circles and geometric forms reminiscent of Amazigh women's textile and tattoo motifs (Fig. 7.2 shows the logo of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture, using its version of the Tifinagh script). Although the script has not been used for hundreds of years in North Africa, Amazigh activists in Morocco and Algeria adopted Tifinagh to write poetry, songs, and political slogans promoting their Amazigh heritage. Until recently, the public display of Tifinagh was considered to be a politically charged act of aggression against the Moroccan government. In fact, one of the reasons the government gave for arresting members of the group Tilelli in Errachidia in 1994 is that their political banners featured the Tifinagh script.

I would argue that Belkahia certainly realized the political volatility of the Tifinagh script. He confounded this by camouflaging the Tifinagh letters with similar geometric and circular forms, such as repeating triangles, diamond shapes, spirals, arrows, and oval shapes reminiscent of eyes. Hence the Tifinagh letters were reduced to pure decoration, removing the script from its historical and cultural origins and distancing Belkahia from the potential political implications associated with the Tamazight language and Tifinagh. He further did this by spelling out an Arab woman's name rather than an Amazigh one. This is one of the only works where he consciously copied letters from



Figure 7.1. Farid Belkahia, *Main* (Hand, 1980), henna on skin, 152 cm × 124.5 cm. Collection of the artist. Photo by Abigail Rolland.

the Tifinagh alphabet onto his skin canvases. Belkahia believes that the geometric symbols and signs that he commonly uses, while similar to those found in Amazigh textiles, ceramics, and tattoos as well as in Tifinagh, are in fact symbols common to many cultures.⁴ In other words, Belkahia does not place the motifs that adorn his leather canvas in any particular historical, cultural, or temporal context but uses what he feels are universal artistic symbols that transgress culture and time. As an artist, he sees himself as an intermediary

who creates a sense of continuity between the past and the present, bridging and connecting cultures.

Belkahlia appropriates an artistic form typically associated with Moroccan women: the henna-decorated hand. He uses henna to adorn his skin canvas, with the goal of using precolonial Moroccan artistic media. These factors coupled with his utilization of leather and Amazigh-inspired motifs represent Belkahlia's attempt to create Moroccan art free from colonial influence. His interpretation of Morocco's postcolonial identity as a multicultural pluralistic society does not confront the vision of nationhood created by the Moroccan monarchy, because he reduces Amazigh artistic influence to decorative surface pattern. The Tifinagh script is presented as nonthreatening, apolitical folkloric decoration.

The Moroccan artist Mohamed Nabili (b. 1972) also adorns his canvases with Tifinagh. Nabili, who now lives in Morocco, spent more than twenty years living and working in France. He identifies himself as a "true" Moroccan with a mixed Amazigh and Arab heritage but also considers himself a universalist, who borrows symbols common to many indigenous cultures. Nabili spent numerous years researching Tuareg art. The rough texture of his sand-covered canvases (such as *Untitled*, 2001) evokes the landscape of the Tuareg's Sahara homeland, and the blue suggests their indigo-dyed clothing (Fig. 7.3).⁵ Tuareg men are often referred to as the "blue men" because they cover their faces except for the eyes with a twenty-foot-long indigo-dyed turban (called a *tagelmoust*), which stains their skin blue (Fig. 2.11). Nabili uses

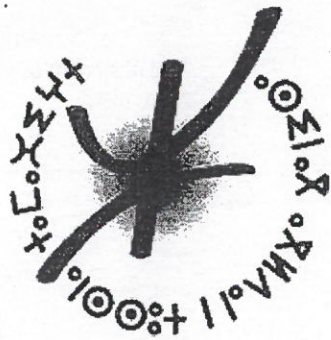


Figure 7.2. The official logo of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM). Image courtesy of IRCAM.

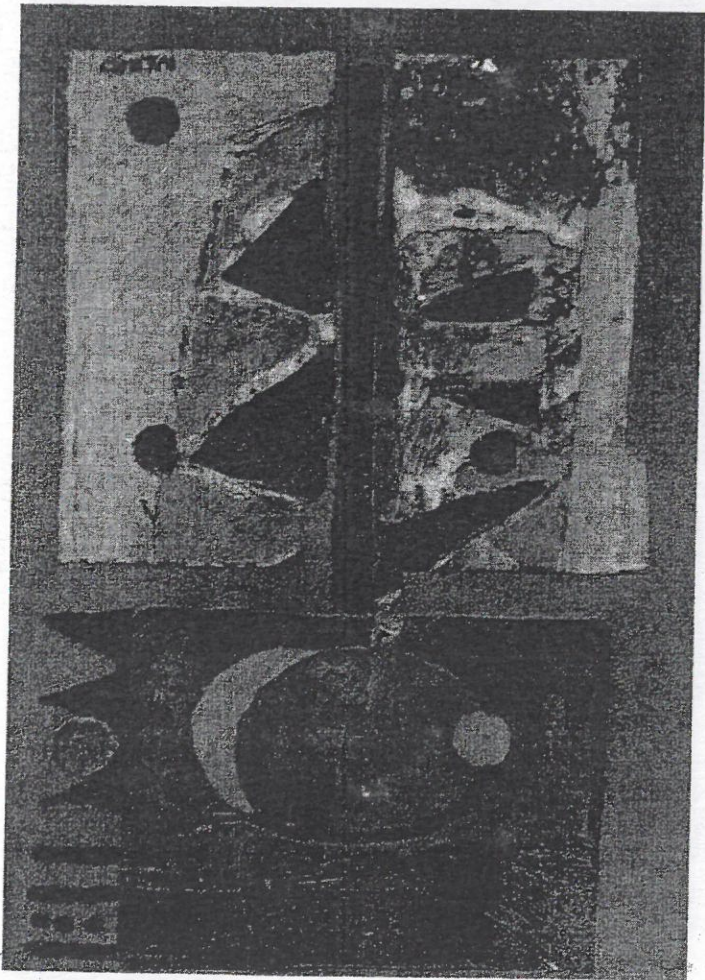


Figure 7.3. Mohamed Nabili, *Untitled* (2001), mixed media, 100 cm x 71 cm. Photo by Abigail Rolland.

thick lines created from black sand to re-create a design inspired by the Tifinagh script. Rather than use Tifinagh to write words or phrases, he breaks the Tifinagh letters down into their basic elements, such as the triangle, the zigzag line, the circle, and the dot. The Tifinagh letters are fused and intermingled to create an abstract surface pattern. The circle painted on the top half of the canvas appears to have a full moon on one side and a crescent moon on

the other, suggesting the cycle of life. This circular form with its long black stem is at the same time anthropomorphic and is evocative of Tuareg silver jewelry. The long vertical black line has two round dots on either side, however, reminiscent of an Amazigh woman's chin tattoos (Fig. 2.5). Nabili's use of Amazigh motifs formed from sand also implies a metaphoric relationship between women and the earth.

An examination of the art of Belkahia and Nabili reflects the paradoxical situation of Amazigh art in Morocco today. Moroccan artists who freely appropriate Amazigh imagery from its original context and turn it into decorative folkloric surface patterns are invited to exhibit in Morocco's museums and art galleries. Artists who use their paintings to promote their Amazigh heritage, however, remain virtually unknown. This contradiction is slowly changing due to the political actions of Amazigh artists and the creation of the Royal Institute of Amazigh Culture (IRCAM) in 2001 by King Muhammad VI. This royal declaration was the first official recognition of Morocco's Amazigh population and played an important role in enhancing public visibility of Amazigh issues. Amazigh painters have recently discovered new political freedom to express their Amazigh identity in Morocco.

Amazigh painters, writers, and poets are feverishly working, turning to the Amazigh visual and performing art forms once commonly found throughout Morocco for inspiration. By appropriating Amazigh women's visual vocabulary to give material form to their own conceptions of Morocco's Amazigh heritage, contemporary Amazigh painters recognize the association of women, art, and Amazigh identity. This is especially the case for artists in southeastern Morocco, who have been engaged in aggressive political activity to promote their Amazigh heritage. For example, Omar Taws, a male poet and political activist from Goulmima who had both friends and relatives arrested during the now infamous 1994 protest held by the group Tilelli, valorizes women in his poetry. He pays homage to the intimate connection between women and Amazigh identity in his poem entitled "Mma" ("Mother"):

*Iqli-nw da t-tiniy s wul
S wul-inw izeddigen agensu-nw
Ad iriry ad iniy isefra
S wawal netted g uyu n mma
A mma-nw a tenna yi-yurun
A mma-nw a tenn' ay issegman
Tusimt anezgum a-nemyur*

*Temdint tamara yherran
Ussan nnem tarezzift ayd gan
Mar ad di-nxitr mar a-nili
Guyenn'akw ihlan tgid-ay amur
Guyenn'akw illan tgid-ay ili
Udem nnem amezduy agensu nney
Idammen nnem d wininney yuwen
Tasa t-tayri nnem gant-ay afud
Nedda g ubrid tgid-ay asidd
Ad iriry ad iniy isefra
S wawal netted g uyu n mma
Ussan nnem is nra ad hlun
Aybalu n tudert ayd ay-tgid
Xef wakal g di-temmyid a yemma
A nezzu digs iledjigen ad jjun
T-tirrugza neddu s afella
Xeftmazirt a-nili tawuri
Afud nney ayd tgid a yemma
Asidd nney ayd tgid a yemma
Awal nney am mma ayd gan
Akal nney am mma ayd gan
Tarwa nnem ayd nga a yemma
Tayri nney ur tedrus, a yemma!*

[I sing my songs from my heart.
With my pure heart inside of me.
I sing and recite poems . . .
With words we nursed from our mother's milk.
Oh mother who gave birth to me.
Oh mother who raised me.
You carried the responsibility to help us grow.
You tasted the bitterness of life.
Your days are a gift to us.
So we would grow and exist.
From everything you gave us a portion.
In everything you included us.
Your face lives inside of us.

Your blood and ours are one.

Your liver and your love are our knee (support);

We are on the road, and you are our light.

I sing and recite poems . . .

With words we nursed from our mother's milk.

Your days, we want them to be good.

You are the source of life for us.

Oh mother, on our land . . .

We plant flowers to smell good.

Courageously we advance.

For our Amazigh heritage we work tirelessly.

Mother, you are our knee (support).

Mother, you are our light.

Our word is like our mother.

Our land is like our mother.

Mother, we are your children.

Our love for you is not small!]

(Taws 1996: 6)

This poem by Taws appears in his collection of poetry titled *ledjgen n yigena*, meaning "Flowers of the Sky." When he wrote this poem in 1992 using the Amazigh language, the social climate in Morocco was such that the poem would have been viewed as politically charged. He raised the funds necessary to self-publish his collection of poems, another political action.

Taws not only valorizes women as the keepers of the Amazigh culture; he also demonstrates the primacy of language in the construction of Amazigh identity, reflecting the goal of preserving and recognizing Amazigh languages. Taws writes that the Imazighen metaphorically receive the Amazigh language while breast-feeding, creating a link between women (specifically mothers), language, and Amazigh identity. He prefers to use poetry rather than prose because poetry is an artistic form historically familiar to the Imazighen. His poem draws from the oral poetry typically performed at Amazigh weddings, circumcisions, and birth ceremonies in order to demonstrate that Amazigh culture is "not only something touristic or something for museums." Amazigh poetry and art, he states, "need to be seen as a living culture and a culture of the future."⁸

Taws, who lives near the rapidly expanding city of Errachidia, is acutely



aware of the rapid urbanization influencing the Ait Khabbash and other Amazigh people's lives. Drought and the construction of a dam outside of Errachidia in the 1970s blocked the natural flow of local rivers. The resulting decline in grazing land caused many Ait Khabbash families to sell their livestock and move to Errachidia, the economic capital of the region.⁹ Many extended families have been broken up when men moved out of their parents' homes with their wives and children, something that rarely happened in the past. Public education became readily available in the 1970s, resulting in the education of Amazigh children in Arabic. Children speak Arabic on a daily basis at school and to their new neighbors, who are often Arab rather than Imazighen. The result is that many children do not speak Tamazigh at all.

As economic subsistence changed, a woman's status became less dependent on her ability to help the family economically through her labor. Women have come to work inside their homes, relying on their male relatives to shop for them in the market, buying vegetables and meat.¹⁰ Women do not fetch water from wells or firewood for cooking; men pay for the running water and bottled gas used in their homes, as Ait Khabbash men find paying jobs in the Moroccan military and elsewhere.¹¹

As the Ait Khabbash have become more urbanized, everyday dress has also changed. Men no longer wear handmade wool hooded gowns, instead buying them from the local market. After Moroccan independence from France, Jewish silversmiths moved to urban areas in northern Morocco or to the newly created nation of Israel. In the last decade, most Amazigh women have sold the silver jewelry and the amber necklaces that their mothers and grandmothers wore to European collectors and tourist shops, preferring to wear gold jewelry. Tattoos that were once important symbols of Amazigh identity have disappeared except in the case of the elderly. The Ait Khabbash women who left rural areas to settle in Errachidia or other large towns have assimilated with the Arab population by remaining secluded in their homes, if they do go out, they often wear unembroidered black coverings or the hooded gown (*jellaba*) instead of their embroidered head coverings.

The political activist, artist, and art teacher Muhand Saidi firmly believes that Amazigh women must not forget the traditions of the past; but as a high school teacher in Errachidia he has firsthand knowledge of how rapidly young Amazigh women's lives are changing. He often teaches women in his local Amazigh association how to embroider Tifnagh letters on white cotton cloth. Saidi recognizes that most young Amazigh women today prefer embroidery to carpet weaving, and he hopes to persuade them to embroider Tifnagh let-

ters rather than using the popular Arab styles of embroidery from northern Morocco.¹²

Despite such changes in the arts of everyday life, earlier chapters have shown that arts associated with weddings are slow to change. Weddings are a time when sexuality and reproduction are central concerns, essential to the survival of their ethnic group into the future, since the preservation of one's ethnic group continues to be a concern. An Ait Khabbash bride, even though she may live in a concrete house in the city of Erfoud, still stays in a tent during the three-day wedding ceremony, covering her face with the red headdress for those three days. She also typically wears the amber and silver jewelry (once worn by her mother and grandmother on a daily basis) during the wedding ceremony, although she may remove it on the third day to wear a European-inspired white wedding gown. The comparison of two wedding photos, one from the 1950s (Fig. 3.6) and the other from 1996 (Fig. 5.11), demonstrates how little bridal attire has been modified in more than fifty years, while daily dress (compare the women flanking the brides) has significantly changed. Because women no longer wear silver and amber jewelry after they are married, the groom borrows it from friends and returns it after the wedding is completed. As previously discussed, *ahidous* performances, however, are often sung in Tashelhit, the Amazigh language of southwestern Morocco, rather than in their local language, Tamazight. Ait Khabbash girls often dance to popular music cassettes sung in Tashelhit. The Ait Khabbash still conceptualize their identity on a local scale and desire to maintain their ethnic purity; however, they are at the same time linking themselves to other Imazighen and creating a more global identity.

Mohamed Mallal, a painter, singer, poet, art teacher, and Amazigh activist living in the southern Moroccan city of Ouarzazate, argues that such changes are a necessary part of life. His fear is that Amazigh culture is increasingly viewed as an ancient folkloric culture isolated in remote mountain villages without any usefulness in the contemporary world. He feels that if the Amazigh language and culture can reach a larger population and be commonly featured on the radio and television, for example, then it can become more readily integrated into contemporary life.¹³

Mallal's art reinforces his political views, suggesting that the Amazigh people need to touch a broader audience and recognize their kinship across national boundaries. His paintings promote a transnational Amazigh identity that connects to other Imazighen groups in northern Africa. For example, he often paints images of the Tuareg and refers to them as his brothers in his

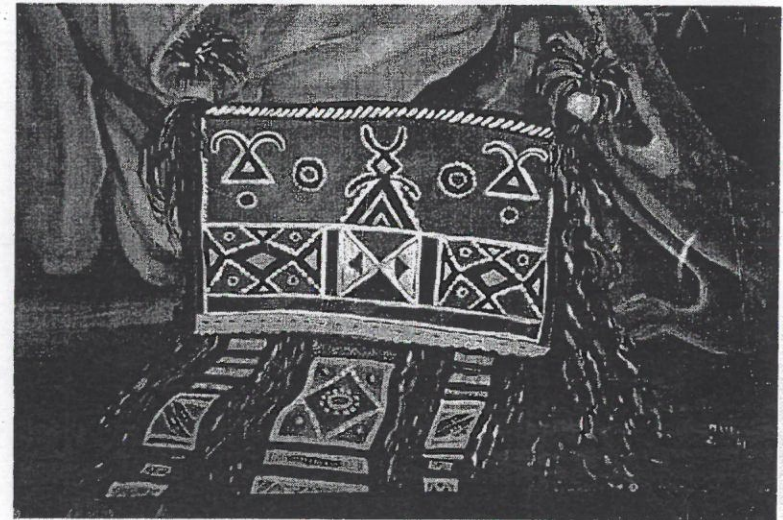


Figure 7.4. Mohamed Mallal, *Untitled* (2004), acrylic on canvas, 92 cm x 80 cm. Collection of the artist.

poetry. In Figure 7.4, he depicts a leather bag immediately recognizable as Tuareg. Mallal perceives himself as part of a large Amazigh community that crosses national borders.¹⁴

Mallal's painting reinforces the kinship he feels with the Tuareg, who are a minority population within the countries where they live and are struggling for cultural survival.¹⁵ He typically includes the faint letters written in the Tifinagh script on the top right corners of his canvases. Although the Tifinagh letters chosen by Mallal do not spell out particular words, they symbolize his Amazigh identity. The presence of an indigo blue cloth draped behind the leather bag further reinforces his association with the Tuareg. Tuareg leather bags are made by women, and the motifs that he uses to adorn the bag further evoke women's arts, such as the large central triangle common to Amazigh women's arts throughout Africa.

Mallal, like most Amazigh activists, recognizes that Imazighen living in rural areas must be educated in order to increase their political visibility and access to Morocco's economic resources. In the past Amazigh children often began school with no knowledge of Arabic; because classes were taught entirely in this language, students often felt frustrated and abandoned their education. Amazigh activists fought tirelessly for the introduction of Tamazight

into Moroccan classrooms, so that their language would be given equal status with Arabic and to help Amazigh children make a smooth transition into school. In September 2004, 317 primary schools began teaching Tamazigh to first-year pupils, and the Moroccan government's aim is to teach Tamazigh in all schools at all levels within ten years.¹⁶ Amazigh activists feel that the introduction of Tamazigh into schools is the first step to ensure the survival of their culture into the future.

Amazigh painters typically incorporate Tifnagh into their canvases, but for them Tifnagh represents more than abstract patterns and folkloric decoration. This is the only form of writing that some Amazigh artists know, and it allows them to express their Amazigh identity. For example, Mohammed Mallal taught his sister, Fatima Mellal (who never attended school and only speaks Tamazigh), how to write Tamazigh using Tifnagh. Mellal, like most women in her natal village of Tamellalt in southern Morocco, was a carpet weaver. When she initially learned Tifnagh, she began to weave Tifnagh letters into her carpets. In 1998, at the age of thirty, she turned from textile weaver into painter (Fig. 7-5). Mellal turned to painting because she felt that her paintings could touch a broader audience than her woven carpets. This was

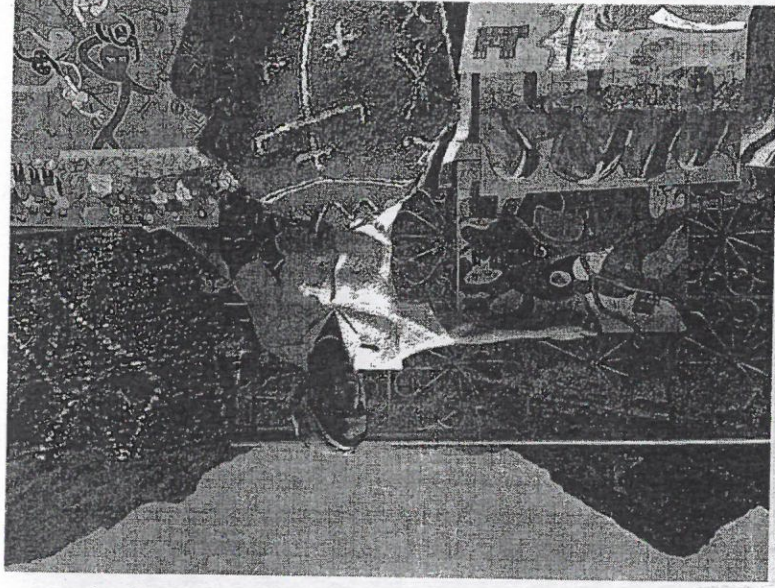


Figure 7-5. Fatima Mellal with her art. Photo courtesy of Fatima Mellal, 2002.

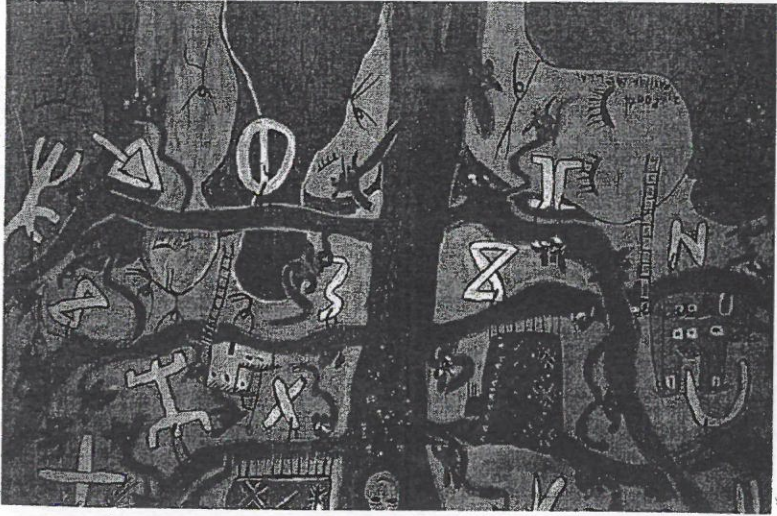


Figure 7-6. Fatima Mellal, Untitled (2004), acrylic on canvas, 92 cm x 80 cm. Collection of the artist.

indeed the case; she left southern Morocco for the first time in 2002 to travel to Switzerland, invited to exhibit her paintings in a Zurich art gallery.¹⁷ Fatima Mellal typically paints her rural village, with its unique rock formations, fortified mud-brick and stone farmhouses, and young children playing in the nearby river. Mellal incorporates images derived from the surrounding landscape as well as colors and motifs from woven textiles (Fig. 7-6). A tree is featured in the center of the composition, topped with a female head wearing a black scarf, with silver sequins dangling from its ends. Bright red carpets with Tifnagh motifs and other geometric designs hang from the tree's branches. She specifically includes the Tifnagh letter Z, the central character in the word "Amazigh." This letter has been adopted by the Amazigh movement to symbolize freedom and is also found on the Amazigh flag first presented at the Amazigh World Congress in the Canary Islands in 1997. The same letter is the central character of the IRCAM logo (Fig. 7-2) and one of the thirty-nine letters of the Tifnagh script adopted by IRCAM. Mellal also incorporates a triangular form inspired by a woman's brooch that floats in the bottom right of her mystical landscape.

Mellal's art provides some insight into the future of Amazigh women's arts; however, female painters like Fatima Mellal are rare. Most Amazigh painters

are male, but they also pay tribute to Amazigh women on their canvases. Mellal paints a tree with large overhanging branches in the middle of her canvas and transforms it into a woman to express the central role that women play in giving birth to and maintaining Amazigh culture.

Mohamed Ziyani, a self-taught male artist living in Tinghir, also pays tribute to Amazigh women in his canvases. In his acrylic canvas from 2004 entitled *Tudert* (meaning "Life" in Tamazight), Ziyani divides the face of his anthropomorphic triangular figure into two halves: male and female (Fig. 7.7). He paints the female side with a brooch or fibula on her shoulder and rain falling behind her, making a connection between women and fertility. Additionally, the female half is accompanied by women's tattoo designs floating above blue waves of water at the bottom of the canvas. On the male side, Ziyani draws inspiration from the motifs that adorn the region's mud-brick architecture, which he paints on the bottom left of his canvas.¹⁸

This discussion of Amazigh painters in Morocco illustrates how artists look across national borders yet remain regionalized at the same time, drawing inspiration from the ancient and the contemporary as well as the local and the global. Hamid Kachmar, an Amazigh artist transplanted from Goulmina to the United States, demonstrates the multifarious nature of contemporary Amazigh identity. Kachmar, who has been studying art at Howard University since 2003, expresses his heritage through his paintings. He incorporates motifs and symbols reminiscent of his deceased mother to represent the collective Amazigh visual memory. Kachmar dutifully promotes the Amazigh culture in the United States, explaining that he paradoxically "had to travel to the occident in order to come back" and return to his Amazigh origins.¹⁹

In his 2005 painting *Imi n war imi* (Mouth of the Mouthless), Kachmar covered the canvas with pieces of African barkcloth that he sewed together with exaggeratedly large stitches to create the sense of an aged and restituted surface, suggesting the antiquity of the Amazigh culture and its struggle to survive (Fig. 7.8). He dyed the barkcloth with natural pigments made from henna, madder, and ground walnut root to create warm red and ochre hues reminiscent of the earth tones found in southeastern Morocco. Kachmar transformed the canvas into the door of a *qsar* (mud-brick village typical of southeastern Morocco, called *ighrem* in Tamazight) and added a metal panel at the bottom left with the words *tagurt n tilelli* (door of freedom) engraved in Tifinagh.

The center of the painting features a large oval face. The face, which has one large elliptical eye and one small circular eye, pays tribute to his much-

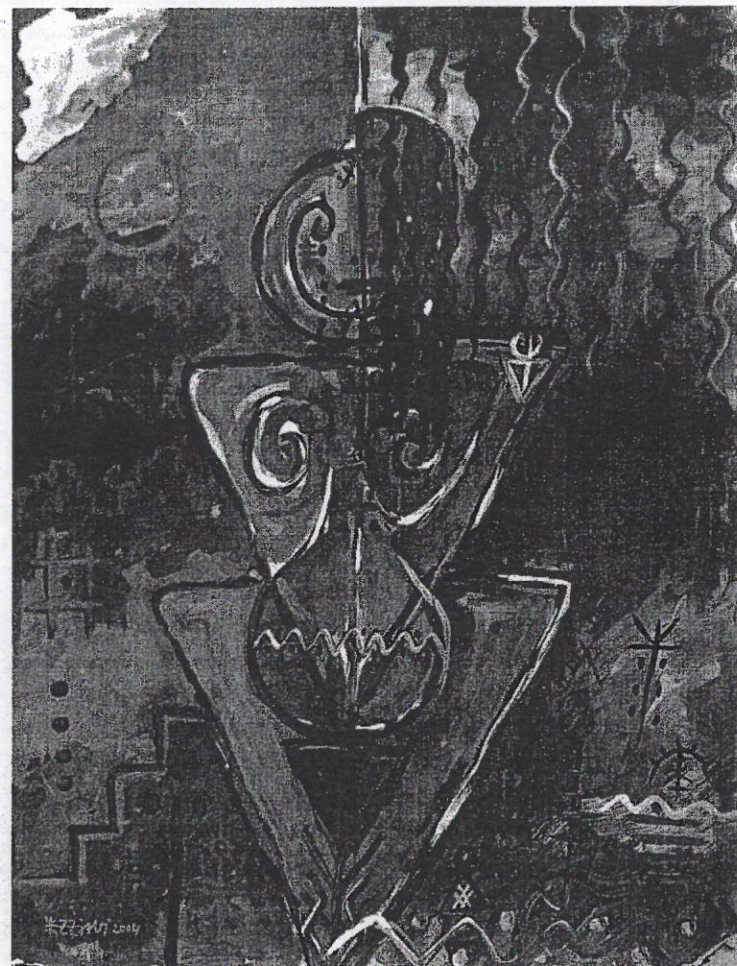


Figure 7.7. Mohamed Ziyani, *Tudert* (2004), acrylic on canvas, 65 cm x 50 cm. Collection of the artist.

loved mother, who was blind in one eye. The two sets of three parallel dots running vertically at the bottom of the face (where her chin would be) further indicate that this figure represents a tattooed Amazigh woman. Her face is covered with various Amazigh symbols inspired by both Tifinagh and the textiles that Kachmar watched his mother weave when, as a small boy, he rested his head on her lap. His use of balance and symmetry in the visual composi-

tion suggests the anthropometry of the human body. The surface texture of the canvas also creates the impression that his mother's face was marked by a life of hard work and exposure to the harsh climate of southeastern Morocco. His mother's difficult life is a metaphor for the situation of the Amazigh people, who are struggling to preserve their heritage and identity. He visually creates a correlation between women's bodies and the Amazigh culture, reinforcing the idea that women shape Amazigh identity.

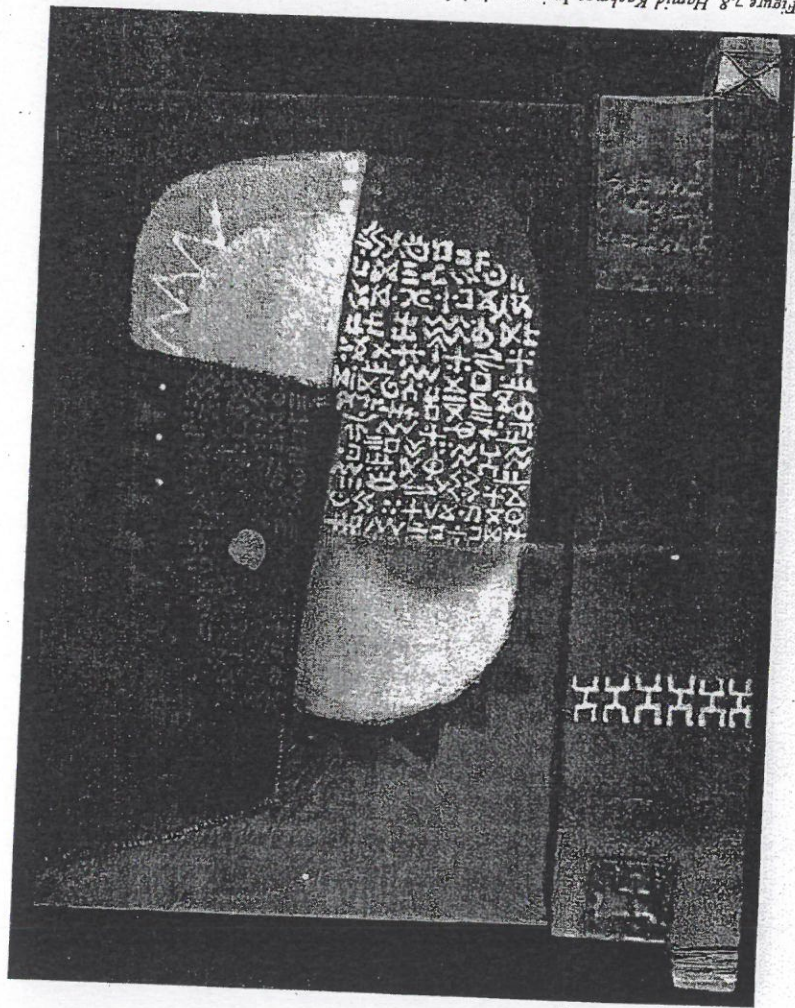


Figure 7.8. Hamid Kachmar, *Imi n war imi* (2005), mixed media on canvas, 58 cm x 45 cm.

According to Kachmar, the image of the door itself has multiple meanings. The door can represent a literal passage or opening and suggests the important role that mothers play in guiding their children into the future. A door is often referred to metaphorically as the opening or "mouth" of a house. The image of a door, the mouthless face of the female figure, and the title, *Mouth of the Amazigh people*,²⁰ Kachmar feels that the Amazigh people have been rendered voiceless by political and social discrimination but are on the threshold of a cultural renaissance. Kachmar and the other artists discussed here honor the creative power of women and their role in shaping Amazigh identity, but they also reflect the paradoxical situation of Amazigh arts in Morocco today. Amazigh women's arts are rapidly changing, due to economic, social, and political factors. This often results in their transformation and disappearance, even as an active political movement in Morocco calls for the recognition of the Amazigh language and heritage and the official acknowledgment of the Amazigh women's visual vocabulary, both Arab and Amazigh artists give material form to their own conceptions of Morocco's distinct multicultural and pluralistic heritage. Contemporary painters recognize the crucial contribution of the artistic legacy of Amazigh women to Morocco's history and contemporary identity.

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**T**Despite this sonorous and rather solemn air, it was very lively affair and a very exciting and useful experience for many of us. But there was something which we tried to do and failed—that was

it embrace the whole continent of South or the East of Africa? And then the question of language. Should it be in indigenous African languages or should it include Arabic, English, French, Portuguese,

on my own investigation. Perhaps we should not have given  
seems to me from some of the things I have since heard and read that we  
may have given the impression of not knowing what we were doing, or

A Nigerian critic, Obi Wali, writing in *the New Nigerian*, is that African literature as now defined and understood leads nowhere.

while Graham Greene's *Heart of the Matter* takes com-



indisputably desirable end, namely, to introduce African students to literature set in their environment. But I could not help being amused by the curious circumstance in which Conrad, a Pole, writing in English could produce African literature while Peter Abrahams would be ineligible should he write a novel based on his experiences in the West Indies.

What all this suggests to me is that you cannot cram African literature into a small, neat definition. I do not see African literature as one unit but as a group of associated units—in fact the sum total of all the *national* and *ethnic* literatures of Africa.

A national literature is one that takes the whole nation for its province and has a realised or potential audience throughout its territory. In other words a literature that is written in the *national* language. An ethnic literature is one which is available only to one ethnic group within the nation. If you take Nigeria as an example, the national literature, as I see it, is the literature written in English; and the ethnic literatures are in Hausa, Ibo, Yoruba, Efik, Edo, Ijaw, etc., etc.

Any attempt to define African literature in terms which overlook the complexities of the African scene at the material time is doomed to failure. After the elimination of white rule shall have been completed the single most important fact in Africa in the second half of the twentieth century will appear to be the rise of individual nation states. I believe that African literature will follow the same pattern.

What we tend to do today is to think of African literature as a new-born infant. But in fact what we have is a whole generation of new-born infants. Of course if you only look cursorily one infant is pretty much like another; but in reality each is already set on its own separate journey. Of course, you may group them together on the basis of anything you choose—the colour of their hair, for instance. Or you may group them together on the basis of the language they will speak or the religion of their fathers. Those would all be valid distinctions; but they could not begin to account fully for each individual person carrying, as it were, his own little, unique lodestar of genes.

Those who in talking about African literature want to exclude North Africa because it belongs to a different tradition surely do not suggest that Black Africa is anything like homogenous. What does Shabaan Robert have in common with Christopher Okigbo or Awooner-Williams? Or Mongo Beti of Cameroun and Paris with Nzekwu of Nigeria? What does the champagne-drinking upper-class Creole society described by Easmon of Sierra Leone have in common with the rural folk and fishermen of J. P. Clark's plays? Of course, some of these differences could be ac-

counted for on individual rather than national grounds but a good deal of it is also environmental.

I have indicated somewhat off-handedly that the national literature of Nigeria and of many other countries of Africa is, or will be, written in English. This may sound like a controversial statement, but it isn't. All I have done has been to look at the reality of present-day Africa. This 'reality' may change as a result of deliberate, e.g. political, action. If it does an entirely new situation will arise, and there will be plenty of time to examine it. At present it may be more profitable to look at the scene as it is.

What are the factors which have conspired to place English in the position of national language in many parts of Africa? Quite simply the reason is that these nations were created in the first place by the intervention of the British which, I hasten to add, is not saying that the peoples comprising these nations were invented by the British.

The country which we know as Nigeria today began not so very long ago as the arbitrary creation of the British. It is true, as William Fagg says in his excellent new book *Nigerian Images*, that this arbitrary action has proved as lucky in terms of African art history as any enterprise of the fortunate Princes of Serendip. And I believe that in political and economic terms too this arbitrary creation called Nigeria holds out great prospects. Yet the fact remains that Nigeria was created by the British—for their own ends. Let us give the devil his due: colonialism in Africa disrupted many things, but it did create big political units where there were small, scattered ones before. Nigeria had hundreds of autonomous communities ranging in size from the vast Fulani Empire founded by Usman dan Fodio in the North to tiny village entities in the East. Today it is one country.

Of course there are areas of Africa where colonialism divided up a single ethnic group among two or even three powers. But on the whole it did bring together many peoples that had hitherto gone their several ways. And it gave them a language with which to talk to one another. If it failed to give them a song, it at least gave them a tongue, for sighing. There are not many countries in Africa today where you could abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility for mutual communication. Therefore those African writers who have chosen to write in English or French are not unpatriotic smart alecs with an eye on the main chance—outside their own countries. They are by-products of the same process that made the new nation states of Africa.

You can take this argument a stage further to include other countries of Africa. The only reason why we can even talk about African unity is



Of Brazilian authors I have only read, in translation, one novel by Jorge Amado who is not only Brazil's leading novelist but one of the most important writers in the world. From that one novel *Gabriella* I was able to glimpse something of the exciting Afro-Latin culture which is the pride of Brazil and is quite unlike any other culture. Jorge Amado is only one of the many writers Brazil has produced. At their national writers' festival there were literally hundreds of them. But the work of the vast majority will be closed to the rest of the world for ever, including no doubt the work of some excellent writers. There is certainly a great advantage to writing in a world language.

I think I have said enough to give an indication of my thinking on the importance of the world language which history has forced down our throat. Now let us look at some of the most serious handicaps. And let me say straight away that one of the most serious handicaps is *not* the one people talk about most often, namely, that it is impossible for anyone ever to use a second language as effectively as his first. This assertion is compounded of half-truth and half-bogus mystique. Of course, it is true that the vast majority of people are happier with their first language than with any other. But then the majority of people are not writers. We do have enough examples of writers who have performed the feat of writing effectively in a second language. And I am not thinking of the obvious names like Conrad. It would be more germane to our subject to choose African examples.

The first name that comes to my mind is Oluadah Equiano, better known as Gustavus Vassa, the African. Equiano was an Ibo, I believe from the village of Isike in the Orlu division of Eastern Nigeria. He was sold as a slave at a very early age and transported to America. Later he bought his freedom and lived in England. In 1789 he published his life story, a beautifully written document which, among other things, set down for the Europe of his time something of the life and habit of his people in Africa in an attempt to counteract the lies and slander invented by some Euro-peans to justify the slave trade.

Coming nearer to our times we may recall the attempts in the first quarter of this century by West African nationalists to come together and press for a greater say in the management of their own affairs. One of the most eloquent of that band was the Hon. Casely Hayford of the Gold Coast. His Presidential Address to the National Congress of British West Africa in 1925 was memorable not only for its sound common sense but as a fine example of elegant prose. The governor of Nigeria at the time was compelled to take notice and he did so in characteristic style: he called Hayford's Congress 'a self-selected and self-appointed congregation

that when we get together we can have a manageable number of languages to talk in—English, French, Arabic.

The other day I had a visit from Joseph Kariuki of Kenya. Although I had read some of his poems and he had read my novels we had not met before. But it didn't seem to matter. In fact I had met him through his poems, especially through his love poem, 'Come Away My Love' in which he captures in so few words the trials and tensions of an African in love with a white girl in Britain.

Come away my love, from streets  
Where unkind eyes divide  
And shop windows reflect our difference.

By contrast, when in 1960 I was travelling in East Africa and went to the home of the late Shabaan Robert, the Swahili poet of Tanganyika, things had been different. We spent some time talking about writing, but there was no real contact. I knew from all accounts that I was talking to an important writer, but of the nature of his work I had no idea. He gave me two books of his poems which I treasure but cannot read—until I have learnt Swahili.

And there are scores of languages I would want to learn if it were possible. Where am I to find the time to learn the half-a-dozen or so Nigerian languages each of which can sustain a literature? I am afraid it cannot be done. These languages will just have to develop as tributaries to feed the one central language enjoying nation-wide currency. Today, for good or ill, that language is English. Tomorrow it may be something else, although I very much doubt it.

Those of us who have inherited the English language may not be in a position to appreciate the value of the inheritance. Or we may go on re-sending it because it came as part of a package deal which included many other items of doubtful value and the positive atrocity of racial arrogance and prejudice which may yet set the world on fire. But let us not in rejecting the evil throw out the good with it.

Some time last year I was travelling in Brazil meeting Brazilian writers and artists. A number of the writers I spoke to were concerned about the restrictions imposed on them by their use of the Portuguese language. I remember a woman poet saying she had given serious thought to writing in French! And yet their problem is not half as difficult as ours. Portuguese may not have the universal currency of English or French but at least it is the national language of Brazil with her eighty million or so people, to say nothing of the people of Portugal, Angola, Mozambique, etc.





of educated African gentlemen'. We may derive some amusement from the fact that British colonial administrators learnt very little in the following quarter of a century. But at least they *did* learn in the end—which is more than one can say for some others.

It is when we come to what is commonly called creative literature that most doubt seems to arise. Obi Wali whose article 'Dead End of African Literature' I referred to, has this to say:

... until these writers and their Western midwives accept the fact that any true African literature must be written in African languages, they would be merely pursuing a dead end, which can only lead to sterility, uncreativity and frustration.

But far from leading to sterility the work of many new African writers is full of the most exciting possibilities.

Take this from Christopher Okigbo's 'Limits':

Suddenly becoming talkative  
like weaverbird  
Summoned at offside of  
dream remembered  
Between sleep and waking.  
I hand up my egg-shells  
To you of palm grove,  
Upon whose bamboo towers hang  
Dripping with yesterupwine  
A tiger mask and nude spear. . . .  
Queen of the damp half light,  
I have had my cleansing.  
Emigrant with air-borne nose,  
The he-goat-on-heat.

Or take the poem 'Night Rain' in which J. P. Clark captures so well the fear and wonder felt by a child as rain clamours on the thatch-roof at night and his mother walking about in the dark, moves her simple belongings

Out of the run of water  
That like ants filing out of the wood  
Will scatter and gain possession  
Of the floor . . .

I think that the picture of water spreading on the floor 'like ants filing out of the wood' is beautiful. Of course if you have never made fire with faggots you may miss it. But Clark's inspiration derives from the same

source which gave birth to the saying that a man who brings home ant-ridden faggots must be ready for the visit of lizards.

I do not see any signs of sterility anywhere here. What I do see is a new voice coming out of Africa, speaking of African experience in a world-wide language. So my answer to the question: *Can an African ever learn English well enough to be able to use it effectively in creative writing?* is certainly yes. If on the other hand you ask: *Can he ever learn to use it like a native speaker?* I should say, I hope not. It is neither necessary nor desirable for him to be able to do so. The price a world language must be prepared to pay is submission to many different kinds of use. The African writer should aim to use English in a way that brings out his message best without altering the language to the extent that its value as a medium of international exchange will be lost. He should aim at fashioning out an English which is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience. I have in mind here the writer who has something new, something different to say. The nondescript writer has little to tell us, anyway, so he might as well tell it in conventional language and get it over with. If I may use an extravagant simile, he is like a man offering a small, nondescript routine sacrifice for which a chick or less will do. A serious writer must look for an animal whose blood can match the power of his offering.

In this respect Amos Tutuola is a natural. A good instinct has turned his apparent limitation in language into a weapon of great strength—a half-strange dialect that serves him perfectly in the evocation of his bizarre world. His last book, and to my mind, his finest, is proof enough that one can make even an imperfectly learnt second language do amazing things. In this book *The Feather Woman of The Jungle* Tutuola's superb story-telling is at last cast in the episodic form which he handles best instead of being painfully stretched on the rack of the novel.

From a natural to a conscious artist: myself, in fact. Allow me to quote a small example, from *Arrow of God* which may give some idea of how I approach the use of English. The Chief Priest in the story is telling one of his sons why it is necessary to send him to church:

I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place. My spirit tells me that those who do not befriend the white man today will be saying *had we known* tomorrow.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chinua Achebe, *Arrow of God*, William Heinemann, London, 1964, p. 55.



Now supposing I had put it another way. Like this for instance:

I am sending you as my representative among these people—just to be on the safe side in case the new religion develops. One has to move with the times or else one is left behind. I have a hunch that those who fail to come to terms with the white man may well regret their lack of foresight.

The material is the same. But the form of the one is in *character* and the other is not. It is largely a matter of instinct, but judgment comes into it too.

You read quite often nowadays of the problems of the African writer having first to think in his mother tongue and then to translate what he has thought into English. If it were such a simple, mechanical process I would agree that it was pointless—the kind of eccentric pursuit you might expect to see in a modern Academy of Lagado; and such a process could not possibly produce some of the exciting poetry and prose which is already appearing.

One final point remains for me to make. The real question is not whether Africans *could* write in English but whether they *ought* to. Is it right that a man should abandon his mother-tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling.

But for me there is no other choice. I have been given this language and I intend to use it. I hope, though, that there always will be men, like the late Chief Fagunwa, who will choose to write in their native tongue and ensure that our ethnic literature will flourish side-by-side with the national ones. For those of us who opt for English there is much work ahead and much excitement.

Writing in the *London Observer* recently, James Baldwin said:

My quarrel with English language has been that the language reflected none of my experience. But now I began to see the matter another way . . . Perhaps the language was not my own because I had never attempted to use it, had only learned to imitate it. If this were so, then it might be made to bear the burden of my experience if I could find the stamina to challenge it, and me, to such a test.

I recognise, of course, that Baldwin's problem is not exactly mine, but I feel that the English language will be able to carry the weight of my African experience. But it will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but altered to suit its new African surroundings.

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*Civil religion in America*

Robert Bellah

that we shall ask of you. With a good conscience our only sure reward, with history the final judge of our deeds, let us go forth to lead the land we love, asking His blessing and His help, but knowing that here on earth God's work must truly be our own.

*Civil religion in America*

These are the three places in this brief address in which Kennedy mentioned the name of God. If we could understand why he mentioned God, the way in which he did it, and what he meant to say in those three references, we would understand much about American civil religion.

Considering the separation of church and state, how is a president justified in using the word "God" at all? The answer is that the separation of church and state has not denied the political realm a religious dimension. Although matters of personal religious belief, worship, and association are considered to be strictly private affairs, there are, at the same time, certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of American institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. This public religious dimension is expressed in a set of beliefs, symbols, and rituals that I am calling the American civic religion. The inauguration of a president is an important ceremonial event in this religion. It reaffirms, among other things, the religious legitimation of the highest political authority.

Let us look more closely at what Kennedy actually said. First he said, "I have sworn before you and almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago." The oath is the oath of office, including the acceptance of the obligation to uphold the Constitution. He swears it before the people (you) and God. Beyond the Constitution, then, the president's obligation extends not only to the people but to God. In American political theory, sovereignty rests, of course, with the people, but implicitly, and often explicitly, the ultimate sovereignty has been attributed to God. This is the meaning of the motto "In God we trust," as well as the inclusion of the phrase "under God" in the pledge to the flag. What difference does it make that sovereignty belongs to God? Though the will of the people as expressed in majority vote is carefully institutionalized as the operative source of political authority, it is deprived of an ultimate significance. The will of the people is not itself the criterion of right and wrong. There is a higher criterion in terms of which this will can be judged; it is possible that the people may be wrong. The president's obligation extends to the higher criterion. When Kennedy says that "the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God," he is stressing this point again. It does not matter whether the state is the expression of the will of an

While some have argued that Christianity is the national faith, and others that church and synagogue celebrate only the generalized religion of "the American Way of Life," few have realized that there actually exists alongside of and rather clearly differentiated from the churches an elaborate and well-institutionalized civil religion in America. This [chapter] argues not only that there is such a thing, but also that this religion — or perhaps better, this religious dimension — has its own seriousness and integrity and requires the same care in understanding that any other religion does.

*The Kennedy inaugural*

John F. Kennedy's inaugural address of January 20, 1961, serves as an example and a clue with which to introduce this complex subject. That address began:

We observe today not a victory of party but a celebration of freedom — symbolizing an end as well as beginning — signifying renewal as well as change. For I have sworn before you and Almighty God the same solemn oath our forebears prescribed nearly a century and three quarters ago.

The world is very different now. For man holds in his mortal hands the power to abolish all forms of human poverty and to abolish all forms of human life. And yet the same revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought are still at issue around the globe — the belief that the rights of man come not from the generosity of the state but from the hand of God.

And it concluded:

Finally, whether you are citizens of America or of the world, ask of us the same high standards of strength and sacrifice

From Bellah, *Beyond Belief*. New York: Seabury Press. Reprinted with permission



autocratic monarch or of the "people"; the rights of man are more basic than any political structure and provide a point of revolutionary leverage from which any state structure may be radically altered. That is the basis for his reassertion of the revolutionary significance of America.

But the religious dimension in political life as recognized by Kennedy not only provides a grounding for the rights of man that makes any form of political absolutism illegitimate, it also provides a transcendent goal for the political process. This is implied in his final words that "here on earth God's work must truly be our own." What he means here is, I think, more clearly spelled out in a previous paragraph, the wording of which, incidentally, has a distinctly biblical ring:

Now the trumpet summons us again – not as a call to bear arms, though arms we need – not as a call to battle, though embattled we are – but a call to bear the burden of a long twilight struggle, year in and year out, "rejoicing in hope, patient in tribulation" – a struggle against the common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease and war itself.

The whole address can be understood as only the most recent statement of a theme that lies very deep in the American tradition, namely the obligation, both collective and individual, to carry out God's will on earth. This was the motivating spirit of those who founded America, and it has been present in every generation since. Just below the surface throughout Kennedy's inaugural address, it becomes explicit in the closing statement that God's work must be our own. That this very activist and noncontemplative conception of the fundamental religious obligation, which has been historically associated with the Protestant position, should be enunciated so clearly in the first major statement of the first Catholic president seems to underline how deeply established it is in the American outlook. Let us now consider the form and history of the civil religious tradition in which Kennedy was speaking.

### The idea of a civil religion

The phrase "civil religion" is, of course, Rousseau's. In chapter 8, book 4 of *The Social Contract*, he outlines the simple dogmas of the civil religion: the existence of God, the life to come, the reward of virtue and the punishment of vice, and the exclusion of religious intolerance. All other religious opinions are outside the cognizance of the state and may be freely held by citizens. While the phrase "civil religion" was not used, to the best of my knowledge, by the founding fathers, and I am certainly not arguing for the particular influence of Rousseau, it is clear that . . . reli-

gion, particularly the idea of God, played a constitutive role in the thought of the early American statesmen.

Kennedy's inauguration pointed to the religious aspect of the Declaration of Independence, and it might be well to look at that document a bit more closely. There are four references to God. The first speaks of the "Laws of Nature and of Nature's God" that entitle any people to be independent. The second is the famous statement that all men "are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights." Here Jefferson is locating the fundamental legitimacy of the new nation in a conception of "higher law" that is itself based on both classical natural law and biblical religion. The third is an appeal to "the Supreme Judge of the world for the rectitude of our intentions," and the last indicates "a firm reliance on the protection of divine Providence." In these last two references, a biblical God of history who stands in judgment over the world is indicated.

The intimate relation of these religious notions with the self-conception of the new republic is indicated by the frequency of their appearance in early official documents. For example, we find in Washington's first inaugural address of April 30, 1789:

It would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official act my fervent supplications that the Almighty Being who rules over the universe, who presides in the councils of nations, and whose providential aids can supply every defect, that His benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the people of the United States a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes. . . .

No people can be bound to acknowledge and adore the invisible Hand which conducts the affairs of man more than those of the United States. Every step by which we have advanced to the character of an independent nation seems to have been distinguished by some token of providential agency. . . .

Nor did these religious sentiments remain merely the personal expression of the president. At the request of both Houses of Congress, Washington proclaimed on October 3 of that same first year as president that November 26 should be "a day of public thanksgiving and prayer," the first Thanksgiving Day under the Constitution.

The words and acts of the founding fathers, especially the first few presidents, shaped the form and tone of the civil religion as it has been maintained ever since. Though much is selectively derived from Christianity, this religion is clearly not itself Christianity. For one thing, neither Washington nor Adams nor Jefferson mentions Christ in his inaugural address; nor do any of the subsequent presidents, although not one of

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them fails to mention God.<sup>1</sup> The God of the civil religion is not only rather "unitarian," he is also on the austere side, much more related to order, law, and right than to salvation and love. Even though he is somewhat deist in cast, he is by no means simply a watchmaker God. He is actively interested and involved in history, with a special concern for America. Here the analogy has much less to do with natural law than with ancient Israel; the equation of America with Israel in the idea of the "American Israel" is not infrequent. What was implicit in the words of Washington already quoted becomes explicit in Jefferson's second inaugural when he said: "I shall need, too, the favor of that Being in whose hands we are, who led our fathers, as Israel of old, from their native land and planted them in a country flowing with all the necessities and comforts of life." Europe is Egypt; America, the promised land. God has led his people to establish a new sort of social order that shall be a light unto all the nations.

This theme, too, has been a continuous one in the civil religion. We have already alluded to it in the case of the Kennedy inaugural. We find it again in President Johnson's inaugural address:

They came here — the exile and the stranger, brave but frightened — to find a place where a man could be his own man. They made a covenant with this land. Conceived in justice, written in liberty, bound in union, it was meant one day to inspire the hopes of all mankind; and it binds us still. If we keep its terms, we shall flourish.

What we have, then, from the earliest years of the republic is a collection of beliefs, symbols, and rituals with respect to sacred things and institutionalized in a collectivity. This religion — there seems no other

1. God is mentioned or referred to in all inaugural addresses but Washington's second, which is a very brief (two paragraphs) and perfunctory acknowledgment. It is not without interest that the actual word "God" does not appear until Monroe's second inaugural, March 5, 1821. In his first inaugural, Washington refers to God as "that Almighty Being who rules the universe," "Great Author of every public and private good," "Invisible Hand," and "benign Parent of the Human Race." John Adams refers to God as "Providence," "Being who is supreme over all," "Patron of Order," "Fountain of Justice," and "Protector in all ages of the world of virtuous liberty." Jefferson speaks of "that infinite Power which rules the destinies of the universe" and "that Being in whose hands we are." Madison speaks of "that Almighty Being whose power regulates the destiny of nations" and "Heaven." Monroe uses "Providence" and "the Almighty" in his first inaugural and finally "Almighty God" in his second. See *Inaugural Addresses of the Presidents of the United States from George Washington 1789 to Harry S. Truman 1949*, 82d Congress, 2d Session, House Document No. 540, 1952.

word for it — while not antithetical to and indeed sharing much in common with Christianity, was neither sectarian nor in any specific sense Christian. At a time when the society was overwhelmingly Christian, it seems unlikely that this lack of Christian reference was meant to spare the feelings of the tiny non-Christian minority. Rather, the civil religion expressed what those who set the precedents felt was appropriate under the circumstances. It reflected their private as well as public views. Nor was the civil religion simply "religion in general." While generality was undoubted, seen as a virtue by some . . . the civil religion was specific enough when it came to the topic of America. Precisely because of this specificity, the civil religion was saved from empty formalism and served as a genuine vehicle of national religious self-understanding.

But the civil religion was not, in the minds of Franklin, Washington, Jefferson, or other leaders, with the exception of a few radicals like Tom Paine, ever felt to be a substitute for Christianity. There was an implicit but quite clear division of function between the civil religion and Christianity. Under the doctrine of religious liberty, an exceptionally wide sphere of personal piety and voluntary social action was left to the churches. But the churches were neither to control the state nor to be controlled by it. The national magistrate, whatever his private religious views, operates under the rubrics of the civil religion as long as he is in his official capacity, as we have already seen in the case of Kennedy. This accommodation was undoubtedly the product of a particular historical moment and of a cultural background dominated by Protestantism of several varieties and by the Enlightenment, but it has survived despite subsequent changes in the cultural and religious climate[s].

### Civil War and civil religion

Until the Civil War, the American civil religion focused above all on the event of the Revolution, which was seen as the final act of the Exodus from the old lands across the waters. The Declaration of Independence and the Constitution were the sacred scriptures and Washington the divinely appointed Moses who led his people out of the hands of tyranny. The Civil War, which Sidney Mead calls "the center of American history," was the second great event that involved the national self-understanding so deeply as to require expression in the civil religion. In 1835, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote that the American republic had never really been tried and that victory in the Revolutionary War was more the result of British preoccupation elsewhere and the presence of a powerful ally than of any great military success of the Americans. But in 1861 the time of testing had indeed come. Not only did the Civil War have the



tragic intensity of fratricidal strife, but it was one of the bloodiest wars of the nineteenth century; the loss of life was far greater than any previously suffered by Americans.

The Civil War raised the deepest questions of national meaning. The man who not only formulated but in his own person embodied its meaning for Americans was Abraham Lincoln. For him the issue was not in the first instance slavery but "whether that nation, or any nation so conceived, and so dedicated, can long endure." He had said in Independence Hall in Philadelphia on February 22, 1861:

All the political sentiments I entertain have been drawn, so far as I have been able to draw them, from the sentiments which originated in and were given to the world from this Hall. I have never had a feeling, politically, that did not spring from the sentiments embodied in the Declaration of Independence.

The phrases of Jefferson constantly echo in Lincoln's speeches. His task was, first of all, to save the Union – not for America alone but for the meaning of America to the whole world so unforgettably etched in the last phrase of the Gettysburg Address.

But inevitably the issue of slavery as the deeper cause of the conflict had to be faced. In his second inaugural, Lincoln related slavery and the war in an ultimate perspective:

If we shall suppose that American slavery is one of those offenses which, in the providence of God, must needs come, but which, having continued through His appointed time, He now wills to remove, and that He gives to both North and South this terrible war as the woe due to those by whom the offense came, shall we discern therein any departure from those divine attributes which the believers in a living God always ascribe to Him? Fondly do we hope, fervently do we pray, that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away. Yet, if God wills that it continue until all the wealth piled by the bondsmen's two hundred and fifty years of unrequited toil shall be sunk, and until every drop of blood drawn with the lash shall be paid by another drawn with the sword, as was said three thousand years ago, so still it must be said "the judgments of the Lord are true and righteous altogether."

But he closes on a note if not of redemption then of reconciliation – "With malice toward none, with charity toward all."

With the Civil War, a new theme of death, sacrifice, and rebirth enters the civil religion. It is symbolized in the life and death of Lincoln. Nowhere is it stated more vividly than in the Gettysburg Address, itself part

of the Lincolnian "New Testament" among the civil scriptures. Robert Lowell has recently pointed out the "insistent use of birth images" in this speech explicitly devoted to "these honored dead": "brought forth," "conceived," "created," "a new birth of freedom". . . . The earlier symbolism of the civil religion had been Hebraic without in any specific sense being Jewish. The Gettysburg symbolism ("... those who here gave their lives, that the nation might live") is Christian without having anything to do with the Christian church.

The new symbolism soon found both physical and ritualistic expression. The great number of the war dead required the establishment of a number of national cemeteries. Of these, the Gettysburg National Cemetery, which Lincoln's famous address served to dedicate, has been overshadowed only by the Arlington National Cemetery. Begun somewhat vindictively on the Lee estate across the river from Washington, partly with the end that the Lee family could never reclaim it, it has subsequently become the most hallowed monument of the civil religion. Not only was a section set aside for the Confederate dead, but it has received the dead of each succeeding American war. It is the site of the one important new symbol to come out of World War I, the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier; more recently it has become the site of the tomb of another martyred president and its symbolic eternal flame.

Memorial Day, which grew out of the Civil War, gave ritual expression to the themes we have been expressing. As Lloyd Warner has so brilliantly analyzed it, the Memorial Day observance, especially in the towns and smaller cities of America, is a major event for the whole community involving a rededication to the martyred dead, to the spirit of sacrifice, and to the American vision. Just as Thanksgiving Day, which incidentally was securely institutionalized as an annual national holiday only under the presidency of Lincoln, serves to integrate the family into the civil religion, so Memorial Day has acted to integrate the local community into the national cult. Together with the less overtly religious Fourth of July and the more minor celebrations of Veterans Day and the birthdays of Washington and Lincoln, these two holidays provide an annual ritual calendar for the civil religion. The public school system serves as a particularly important context for the cultic celebration of the civil rituals.

### The civil religion today

... The civil religion at its best is a genuine apprehension of universal and transcendent religious reality as seen in or, one could almost say, as revealed through the experience of the American people. Like all religions, it has suffered various deformations and demonic distortions. At



Rarely are we met with the challenge, not to our growth or abundance, or our welfare or our security — but rather to the values and the purposes and the meaning of our beloved nation. The issue of equal rights for American Negroes is such an issue. And should we defeat every enemy, and should we double our wealth and conquer the stars and still be unequal to this issue, then we will have failed as a people and as a nation. For with a country as with a person, "What is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" And in conclusion he said:

Above the pyramid on the great seal of the United States it says in Latin, "God has favored our undertaking." God will not favor everything that we do. It is rather our duty to divine his will. I cannot help but believe that He truly understands and that He really favors the undertaking that we begin here tonight.

The civil religion has not always been invoked in favor of worthy causes. On the domestic scene, and American-Legion type of ideology that fuses God, country, and flag has been used to attack nonconformist and liberal ideas and groups of all kinds. Still, it has been difficult to use the words of Jefferson and Lincoln to support special interests and undermine personal freedom. The defenders of slavery before the Civil War came to reject the thinking of the Declaration of Independence. Some of the most consistent of them turned against not only Jeffersonian democracy but Reformation religion; they dreamed of a South dominated by medieval chivalry and divine-right monarchy. For all the overt religiosity of the radical right today, their relation to the civil religious consensus is tenuous, as when the John Birch Society attacks the central American symbol of Democracy itself.

With respect to America's role in the world, the dangers of distortion are greater and the built-in safeguards of the tradition weaker. The theme of the American Israel was used, almost from the beginning, as a justification for the shameful treatment of the Indians so characteristic of our history. It can be overtly or implicitly linked to the idea of manifest destiny that has been used to legitimate several adventures in imperialism since the early nineteenth century. Never has the danger been greater than today. The issue is not so much one of imperial expansion, of which we are accused, as of the tendency to assimilate all governments or parties in the world that support our immediate policies or call upon our help by invoking the notion of free institutions and democratic values. Those

its best, it has neither been so general that it has lacked incisive relevance to the American scene nor so particular that it has placed American society above universal human values. . . . It is certainly true that the relation between religion and politics in America has been singularly smooth. This is in large part due to the dominant tradition. As de Tocqueville wrote:

The greatest part of British America was peopled by men who, after having shaken off the authority of the Pope, acknowledged no other religious supremacy: they brought with them into the New World a form of Christianity which I cannot better describe than by styling it a democratic and republican religion.<sup>2</sup>

The churches opposed neither the Revolution nor the establishment of democratic institutions. Even when some of them opposed the full institutionalization of religious liberty, they accepted the final outcome with good grace and without nostalgia for an *ancien regime*. The American civil religion was never anticlerical or militantly secular. On the contrary, it borrowed selectively from the religious tradition in such a way that the average American saw no conflict between the two. In this way, the civil religion was able to build up without any bitter struggle with the church powerful symbols of national solidarity and to mobilize deep levels of personal motivation for the attainment of national goals.

Such an achievement is by no means to be taken for granted. It would seem that the problem of a civil religion is quite general in modern societies and that the way it is solved or not solved will have repercussions in many spheres. One need only think of France to see how differently things can go. The French Revolution was anticlerical to the core and attempted to set up an anti-Christian civil religion. Throughout modern French history, the chasm between traditional Catholic symbols and the symbolism of 1789 has been immense.

American civil religion is still very much alive. Just three years ago we participated in a vivid reenactment of the sacrifice theme in connection with the funeral of our assassinated president. The American Israel theme is clearly behind both Kennedy's New Frontier and Johnson's Great Society. Let me give just one recent illustration of how the civil religion serves to mobilize support for the attainment of national goals. On March 15, 1965, President Johnson went before Congress to ask for a strong voting rights bill. Early in the speech he said:

2. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America* Vol. I (New York: Doubleday, 1954), p. 311.



nations that are for the moment "on our side" become "the free world." A repressive and unstable military dictatorship in South Vietnam becomes "the free people of South Vietnam and their government." It is then part of the role of America as the New Jerusalem and "the last best hope of earth" to defend such governments with treasure and eventually with blood. When our soldiers are actually dying, it becomes possible to consecrate the struggle further by invoking the great theme of sacrifice. For the majority of the American people who are unable to judge whether the people in South Vietnam (or wherever) are "free like us," such arguments are convincing. Fortunately President Johnson has been less ready to assert that "God has favored our undertaking" in the case of Vietnam than with respect to civil rights. But others are not so hesitant. The civil religion has exercised long-term pressure for the humane solution of our greatest domestic problem, the treatment of the Negro American. It remains to be seen how relevant it can become for our role in the world at large, and whether we can effectively stand for "the revolutionary beliefs for which our forebears fought," in John F. Kennedy's words.

The civil religion is obviously involved in the most pressing moral and political issues of the day. But it is also caught in another kind of crisis, theoretical and theological, of which it is at the moment largely unaware. "God" has clearly been a central symbol in the civil religion from the beginning and remains so today. This symbol is just as central to the civil religion as it is to Judaism or Christianity. In the late eighteenth century this posed no problem; even Tom Paine, contrary to his detractors, was not an atheist. From left to right and regardless of church or sect, all could accept the idea of God. But today, as even *Time* has recognized, the meaning of "God" is by no means so clear or so obvious. There is no formal creed in the civil religion. We have had a Catholic president; it is conceivable that we could have a Jewish one. But could we have an agnostic president? Could a man with conscientious scruples about using the word "God" the way Kennedy and Johnson have used it be elected chief magistrate of our country? If the whole God symbolism requires reformulation, there will be obvious consequences for the civil religion, consequences perhaps of liberal alienation and of fundamentalist ossification that have not so far been prominent in this realm. The civil religion has been a point of articulation between the profoundest commitments of the Western religious and philosophical traditions and the common beliefs of ordinary Americans. It is not too soon to consider how the deepening theological crisis may affect the future of this articulation.

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