



**SPECIAL FOCUS ON AMAZIGH LITERATURE: CRITICAL AND CLOSE  
READING APPROACHES**

## **Lyrical Opponency in Amazigh Music: The Racial and Gender Question in *Tanddamt***

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### **Abstract**

A very significant sub-version that derives from Tirruyssa (ⵜⵉⵔⵓⵢⵙⵙⴰ) is called *Tanddamt* (ⵜⴰⵏⴰⵎⴰⵎⵜ), which refers to musical jousting between two seemingly opponent Rways and/or Raysat. Each singer attempts to address convincing and satirical chants to the opponent singer. *Tanddamt* is rich of social topoi such as race and gender. This chapter aims to deconstruct the discursive contexts that gave rise to the derivative form of *tanddamt*, and provide an in-depth analysis of the assorted images of eloquence and satire in the discourse of this melodious genre of contest. A close reading of the conversational poetics of *tanddamt* shall provide us with profound insight into individual as well as social worries and memories as expressed in the art of Tirruyssa. While the black-versus-white *tanddamt* triggers an historical debate of racial discourse, blackness, negritude, and slavery, the male-versus-female *tanddamt* revisits an everlasting discourse of gender discontentment. These binaries are an inherent subject in Amazigh music and constitute a source of acoustic pleasure for the audience. I argue that *Tanddamt*, as a refined art of lyrical opponency provides a considerable space for ‘subaltern’ expression in the public sphere, which sets it as a propitious canonical genre, amply instrumental in the enrichment of world literature.

**Keywords:** Tirruyssa; Tanddamt; race; gender; Amazigh jousting

Striving to locate the origins of a literature that had been clothed in orality for so long is like a wild-goose chase. The origins of *tanddamt*, a musical performance in which two artisans face off in a competitive performance akin to a “rap battle” in American music, cannot be traced without reference to various earlier arts such as *ahwach*, *ahidous*, and *tirruyssa*, which imbibed from oral thought and tradition as its principal source. *Tanddamt* is a dialogic form of

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versification and a substantial element of the larger performing band whether in *ahwach*, *ahidous*, or *tirruyssa*. It has been described as a “poetry of contradictions resembling something that appeared during the pre-Islamic era and flourished during the ‘Umayyad era especially through three prominent Arab poets: *Al Firazdaq*, *Jarir*, and *Al-Akhtal*.”<sup>1</sup> This genre draws on the early tradition of poetic encounters expressed during *ahwach* performances. Phillip Tagg devises an “axiomatic triangle” wherein he indicates several characteristics categorizing three genres of music: folk, art, and popular. According to features of production and transmission, orality as a main mode of storage and distribution, composer-author anonymity, and theory and aesthetics,<sup>2</sup> *tanddamt* falls within the category of folk music. In Amazigh music, *tanddamt* has produced speakers of unsurpassed grace and felicity, with an adeptness at conversing in eloquence and poetic poise around a wide range of themes. “Poetry is the channel through which you can pass any message. It’s even greater than speech itself.”<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, *tanddamt* is a form of literary extemporization, a proficiency of which Amazigh poets are proud. The two seemingly opponent chanters exchange a number of meaningful poetic verses expressive of societal problems and cultural phenomena pertaining to Amazigh legend and mythology.

Focusing on the questions of race and gender, I argue that *tanddamt*, as a refined art of lyrical opponency, provides considerable space for “subaltern” expression in the public sphere, and is also deemed, from an Amazigh perspective, a canonical genre that is instrumental in the enrichment of world literature. There is a rich and inspiring corpus of *tanddamt* related to the concepts of gender and race: black vs. white (Mohamed Demsiri vs. Mehdi Ben Mbarek; Mohamed Boulayad vs. Brahim Afroug); and Male versus Female (Demsiri vs. Tihihit Mqqorn; Demsiri vs. Saadia Tatiguit; Mhand Ajojguel vs. Mina Talloubant; Mbarek Ayssar vs. Ijja Tihihit; Lahcen Akhattab vs. Saadia Tatiguit; Lahcen Akhattab vs. Mina Demsirya; Lahcen Akhattab vs. Naima Demsirya). For their poetic symbolism, aesthetic rhythm, and lyrical content, my target corpus of analysis is a gender-performing dialogue: Ajojguel vs. Talloubante, and a race-performing conversation: Afroug and Boulayad, both of which run on three to four rounds of exchange.

### The Racial Question in *Tanddamt*

I propose to examine a race-performing song on which the dynamics of power are foregrounded. I look into sites where the white-dominant discourse of

<sup>1</sup> Abdellah El Asri, *Fann Tanddamt Aw Ann'qa'id fi As-shi'ri Al-Maghribi Al-Amazighi As-Soussi* [The Art of Tanddamt, Or Opposites in Moroccan Amazigh Sousi Poetry], (February 2016), accessed at <https://tinyurl.com/y2c7muub>.

<sup>2</sup> Phillip Tagg, “Analysing Popular Music: Theory, Method and Practice,” *Popular Music* 2 (1982): 37-65.

<sup>3</sup> Tara F. Deubel, “Poetics of Diaspora: Sahrawi Poets and Postcolonial Transformations of a Trans-Saharan Genre in Northwest Africa,” *The Journal of North African Studies* (2011): 1-20. DOI:10.1080/13629387.2011.610591.

power occurs, along with the invocation of long-standing legacies of racism and slavery. While the white *rrays*' ("the main singer and musician who plays *ribab*") sends out a speech premised on the discourse of power, domination, and humiliation, the black singer's lyrics adopt a resistive position. The art of *tanddamt* has not extensively tackled the racial question; only two *tindammin* (pl. of *tanddamt*) are mentioned to have occurred in history: Lhaj Belaid vs. Lhaj Boudraa and Demsiri vs. Benbark.<sup>4</sup> The first exchange by the white-skinned *rrays* Brahim Afroug is loaded with insinuations to historical memories of slavery and bondage:

*Nousid rsoum lid izwern s oufous nghi* / (We refer back to the pamphlets at  
our hands)  
*Atn saqragh ismg ad rat nsak afoussi* / (to read them! this slave shall go  
through (our) hardship)  
*Inna bismillah adagh sawlgh igh oufighi* / (In the name of Allah will I begin  
to speak)  
*Ad nrar yan ouzemz ortan akk imatili* / (we'll talk of an epoch not far from  
today!!)  
*Adagh nssagh ismgan ghikli nmyari* / (to purchase (again) slaves as we  
usually did!)

Since the abolishment of slavery in the nineteenth century, offensive discourse about blacks and blackness has been placed beyond the pale. Later, with social progress, racial slurs against black-skinned people became considered pejoratives and intolerable to any courteous person. Slavery was deeply rooted in Moroccan society and it was even thought to be part of the Islamic Law. El Hamel claims that the then-Sultan of Morocco Mawlay 'Aabd Ar-Rahman was not annoyed by the British Consul's inquiries on the status of slaves in Morocco.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of how the British diplomatic authorities campaigned for the abolishment of slavery in Morocco, this latter's slave market flourished, generating significant octroi for the *makhzen* ("the elite"). Daniel Schroeter compiled detailed statistics on slaves in Morocco during the nineteenth century,<sup>6</sup> describing trading hotspots, prices, taxation, domestic chores, and the number of slaves coming in at different periods. This history is echoed in Afroug's lyrics when he reminds his black opponent of the price paid to own a slave. He states in the second exchange:

*Ikkatin yan ouzemz nktit ntan ittouti* / (There was an era I recall, and he forgot)  
*5 francs ayismeg aygan taman nki* / (O Slave, only '5 cents' was your price)

<sup>4</sup> The entertainer of the music spectacle under analysis in this study mentions that two *oumlil-vs-isemg* ("white-vs.-slave") songs took place in the history of *tanddamt*. While Demsiri vs. Benbark is available on YouTube, no version of Belaid vs. Boudraa's performance could be found online.

<sup>5</sup> Chaouki El Hamel, *Black Morocco: A History of Slavery, Race, and Islam* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 243-44.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel J. Schroeter, "Slave Markets and Slavery in Moroccan Urban Society," *Slavery & Abolition* 13.1 (1992): 185-213, doi:10.1080/01440399208575058.



Open Source: [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X\\_p7bCt2vls&t=747s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X_p7bCt2vls&t=747s), Wārda Production.

**Figure 1.** Ahmed Boulayad and Rays Brahim Afroug.

Schroeter reported that slave prices varied depending on the criteria of the market and age, gender, and skill of the person being sold. He reported, for instance, that “[i]n 1831, a pretty slave girl of about 14 was sold for around £8 sterling in Tangier.”<sup>7</sup> Afroug’s use of the expression “5 cents” is extremely ironical because it reflects a comic twist in daily Moroccan conversations. ‘Five cents’ connotes the cheap value of a person or thing. The whole song is framed within a work of memory as the singer indulges into a process of historical awakening. It seems that Afroug’s exchange in this *tandamt* poem celebrates the past system of slavery. The singer gives vent to his tone by expressing not only his excitement to consciously recall into memory the subjugating relationship that once bound the whites and the blacks, but also his incitements to inflame both the opponent singer and the (black) audience. The white *rays* uses the word *rsoum* (“legal purchase license”) as an object of testimony and memory on which a master–slave linkage was scripted to affirm an everlasting social and cultural phenomenon of subjugation and superiority (“we refer back to the *Rsoum* at our hands”). He is reminding the audience that his musical opponent, a black slave in origin, is expected to go through hardship again by listening to what the slave letter reads: “To read them [pamphlets]! this slave shall go through [our] hardship).” In Morocco, oral history records that slavery took place even after independence, and various stories are narrated of use in the very recent past of slaves in Moroccan homes. The poem describes the kind of household tasks slaves performed:

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 194.

*Ar itbndaq ismg ngh icha akorayi / (The slave shall succumb or be flogged)*  
*Tawaya ar tssirid I lallass I hoyaki / (The slave girl washes her Lady's clothes)*  
*A tawyasnt s lbit tiram rghanini / (And she serves her food in her room)*

Cooking, serving, fetching water, and doing laundry are common menial chores and orders in the Moroccan households to which slaves must stay always attuned. The white *r-rays* recounts these domiciliary commitments with relish. The song is accompanied with gestures and body movements that look simultaneously facetious and provocative. *R-rays* Afroug's performance is replete with satire and mockery. He is fully engaged in elucidating his verses with corresponding bodily gestures not only to impart a comprehensive image to the audience, but also to spur his opponent in a heated debate on the nature and culture of white-black relationship during the history of Moroccan slaveholders. The white *r-rays* adds:

*Adukan ghergh wa Berka nanagh na'ami / (Once 'Berka' is called, they come running)*

This is an especially significant verse that informs us about the frequent common names for the slaves. The white *r-rays* confidently reports on how the slaves would respond very promptly once they hear their names. *Berka* is a synonym for black skin. In this song *berka* and *isemg* ("slave") are often interchanged. While obviously derogatory, these words pose less offensiveness than other racial slurs like *azzie*, *kahlouche*, or *al-hartani* do in the larger social context. These words, Stephen King notes, are used by Moroccans at "the most basic level of daily life," especially against today's sub-Saharan immigrants. The racist paradigm they imply, however, is intensified to the extent of animalization via the use of other words such as *qird* ("monkey") and *hayawan* ("animal"), for instance. "Slave" or "black," while extremely offensive themselves in the context of this tanddamt, do not outweigh the abuse and more incendiary offensiveness of such words as *azzie* (negro) or *qird* (monkey).

Nonetheless, a variety of racist images are still employed by the white *r-rays* to ridicule the black opponent. In the fourth exchange, reference to "blackness" is explicitly insulting. Pointing to his opponent Boulayad as *santaffa*,<sup>8</sup> he describes his face as a "tire" that has been burned to ashes, an image to which the black man responds wisely:

*Tnnit udm inu zud lḥnu ichhat nnari?! / (You said my face is like a burnt tire!!)*

*Mach agma lqelb issfa saḡsa ḡlasi / (but the heart is white, check!!)*  
*hadak udm nk igadda sḡan wul nek illassi / (let's say your face is white; your heart is dark!!)*

*madagh imlan lḡrboun ḡhaylli ttiniti / (and the proof is what you're saying!)*

<sup>8</sup> The word *Santaffa* is frequently used in Moroccan Amazigh culture to refer to a black-skinned arrogant person. I have attempted deconstruct the word in possible derivatives to detect its etymology, but to no avail.

This portion of the exchange is replete with derogatory metaphors. Reciprocal accusations of “darkness” occur between the two *inddamen* (“jousters”). Boulayad deftly flips the glib racism of his opponent by applying the metaphorical meaning of “white heart” and “darkness” to expose his opponent’s moral inferiority. For Boulayad, it would be senseless to boast about virtue if it does not translate into words and actions.

The white *r-rays* continues to denigrate his black opponent associating his daily life chores with donkeys, flies, *amazzir* (“Donkey’s poo”), etc. The entire derogatory performance demonstrates how even if slavery has been officially ended at the institutional level, it does not mean the ugly cultural attitudes and moral beliefs underlying that system have been erased. Significantly, the opening and the closing verses of the first exchange raise the theme of violence. The white *r-rays* explicitly threatens violence against the black singer:

*Raryi slam inou frabbi nighd ousigh akorayi* / (Respond to my greetings or I shall use my Stick)

The black *r-rays* retorts: *Nighd Ousigh Akourayi* / (“Or I shall use my stick!!”) The stick is a symbol of the violence that was central to the slave trade’s existence.

### Boulayad: Debunking Documented Slavery

Using lyrics laden with self-confidence, resistance, and wisdom, the black-skinned *r-rays* Boulayad toys with his opponent. Boulayad’s response is an ironical and contemptuous rebuke to the white *r-rays* for his abusive address. He reminds his white opponent that the *rsoum* (slavery purchase certificate) of the past are of questionable reliability. The *rsoum* attest to an era of debasement and dehumanization. Boulayad notes:

*atghert rsoum an n zour maykten yourani* / (Those perjurious certificates, who’s written them?  
*mlatagh man lqadi ihllan lharami?* / (How come the judges ‘halalize’ that which is haram?)  
*azmzan li trjout right nkin niti* / (The epoch you wish for, I myself long for it!)  
*tawala noun ayad ilkmen a trfoufimi* / (It is your turn to struggle now!)

Boulayad contends that the slave ownership certification reflected the depravity of any judiciary system that took human beings for properties. He points out that slavery is haram. This echoes a larger debate around slavery in Islam, whereby the treatment of slaves is conditioned by a number of regulations. Schroeter points out to the confusion foreign authors make in comparing between slaves in Muslim societies and the exploitation of black laborers in American plantations.<sup>9</sup> In Islam, slaves had rights and obligations. Slaves could buy their own freedom, file a lawsuit against a tyrannical master,

<sup>9</sup> Schroeter, “Slave,” 201.

and request resale.<sup>10</sup> It is in this logic that the black singer attempts to locate his relationship with his white opponent.

Boulayard's line "The (former) era you wish for, I myself long for it" is an exceptionally striking verse because it alludes to the concept of "return." The black jouster is eager for returning to the epoch of slavery on the condition that the whites should be the ones to struggle this time. *Tawala noun ayad ilkmen a trfoufnmi* / ("It is your turn to struggle now!") By reversing the roles, the whites should be subjected to the ravages of slavery now. Boulayard's reactive verse is prefaced with a more noble intention:

*Ahan urd is nksud ghir nnigh ukani* / (We are not afraid; We just thought)  
*Adur nbdu sl3ib achku ikhchen flaghi* / (We should not start offense for it is  
 heinous)

The black singer utilizes the plural "we" to refer to a collectivized experience as a common saga that binds all the blacks of the world. As a universal issue, they share similar worries and miseries due to racism. However, the black *rays* continues teaching moral lessons to his opponent and feels relieved, especially when he resorts to his belief in the supreme power of God, as the source of all mercy. Boulayard calls *tiwiwin* ("female slaves"; sing. *tawaya*) to join his alleviation from the burden of white wrath. Along with God's grace, Boulayard also reminds his opponent that the blacks have become independent, which would allow them to fend for themselves.

*afrahat aysmgan wala tiwiwini (female slave)* / (O' male and female slaves! Be  
 happy)  
*rhemt ilahi (of God) togr kra sakina yani* / (Allah's mercy is better than  
 whatsoever)  
*amach i3fayagh rbbi nlla slmal naghi* / (Thanks to Allah, we're now  
 relieved, we've got our own money)

Boulayard uses *tanddamt* as a powerful space for contestation. *Tanddamt*, hence, constitutes an enabling arena for resistance against stereotypical and harmful clichés. Boulayard contends that there is an obvious shift in the lives of the blacks, from access to nourishment, to freedom of travel, to career opportunities, to Frederick Douglas's famous quote that "knowledge unfits a child to be a slave."<sup>11</sup>

*Rwah atzert ismgan ghilli ghatilini* / (You should see where slaves live now!)  
*Affla rkham, izrbay ghammas nwakali* / (On marble, and crimson carpets on  
 the floor!)

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Frederick Douglass, "My Bondage and My Freedom," In *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies: Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave / My Bondage and My Freedom / Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (Library of America, 1882), 150.



*Telifisioun zghlbit wala telephouni / (The rooms equipped with TV set and Phone!)*

Probably, Boulayad refers to the success stories penned by the black diaspora as an experience that is transposable on the marginalized slaves everywhere. In the last exchange, he develops a counter-discourse, or in Aimé Césaire's words, a "reverse shock,"<sup>12</sup> whereby the whites become the current receptacle of their own moral germ, racism: *Attan an yad liquingh iwri sitouni / "this germ/pain we have has turned against you!"* The germ of racism has turned against the whites, redolent of the history of the colonial germ and its reverse effect on the colonizer. The term *Attan* (germ/pain) is of multifarious significance in this context of racial discourse as it alludes to physical, psychological, and moral pain. This verse backs up Boulayad's diverting assertion that this disease is definitely infiltrating back into the psyche of the former enslavers. Addressing this message to his white opponent, the black *Anddam* warns white enslavers of the risk of infection in the sense that damage inflictors must be subject to an everlasting trauma. While *tanddamt* offers the blacks a considerable space to develop a counter-discourse, it also provides grounds for women to develop images of equity, justice, and even gender emulation.

### The Gender Question in *Tanddamt*

Unlike race-performing *tanddamt*, the presence of gender in this artistic genre has been frequent and abundant. Ample songs have been recorded in which lyrical opponency takes place between male and female singers. Similarly, many studies have been conducted with the question of gender in music as a central argument.<sup>13</sup> Female singers have resorted to music as a defense mechanism to subvert both patriarchal and masculinist ideologies. While music was an accessible field of artistic expression to both males and females whether in solo or group, the emergence of *tanddamt* where female Amazigh women took part was especially significant by virtue of the preeminence they enjoyed in the conversation. Moïsa provides an analytical concept she calls "Musical Gender," in the sense that music is "a specific site for gender performance and analysis."<sup>14</sup> Through this framework we may deconstruct gender dichotomies with the aim of appreciating differences and variations of gender.

<sup>12</sup> Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, trans. by Joan Pinkham (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 36.

<sup>13</sup> T.B. Joseph, "Poetry as a Strategy of Power: The Case of Rifian Berber Women," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 5.3 (1980); Beverly Skeggs, "Two Minute Brother: Contestation through Gender, 'Race' and Sexuality, Innovation," *The European Journal of Social Science Research* 6.3 (1993), doi:10.1080/13511610.1993.9968358; Charles A. Elliott, "Race and Gender as Factors in Judgments of Musical Performance," *Bulletin of the Council for Research in Music Education* 127 (1995): 50-56; Linda Cimardi, "Gender Studies and Music," in *The Sage International Encyclopedia of Music and Culture*, ed. Janet Sturman (Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publications, 2019), 981-84, doi:10.4135/9781483317731.n308; Tassadit Yacine, "Women, Their Space and Creativity in Berber Society," *Amazigh Voices: The Berber Question* 8.3 (2001): 102-13.

<sup>14</sup> Pirroko Moïsa, "Musical Gender in Performance," *Women & Music* (1999): 1.





Open Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZ4NiiUbtEM&t=408s>, Warda Production.

**Figure 2.** *Tandamt* between *Rrays* Mhand Ajoujuel and *Rraysa* Mina Talloubant.

In *tandamt*, Amazigh female singers seek to churn up the intricate composite of authority and power in a gendered society whereby social and cultural perceptions and practices devalue women and their achievements. This genre contains different performance levels. In the background, instrumentalists are all men; women perform dancing and constitute the object of multiple gazes. At the forefront, as is the case of *tirruyssa* in general, the scene is dominated by a male singer, the maestro, who is also usually the main composer of the song. With the appearance of male-female *tandamt*, the two singers share the same space whereby scoring points over the adversary becomes the primary mission. By adopting the role of a prima donna at the stage, the Amazigh *tarrayst* contributes to the gains of Moroccan women in different socio-economic spheres in a society where male authority is, to borrow Fatima Sadiqi's words, "the instrument par excellence of [its] patriarchy."<sup>15</sup> In what follows, I propose to delve into the fabric of a musical piece sung by *r-rays* Mhand Ajoujuel and *r-raysa* Mina Talloubante.

Ajoujuel begins this exchange with his need to overcome and appease his psychic burden by soliciting "Jacob's" help. Whether he means a prophet or saint, the poet engages in a spiritual and romantic imploration seeking alleviation, which hints to an alignment of "poetry and prophecy."<sup>16</sup> Ajoujuel, in

<sup>15</sup> Fatima Sadiqi, "The Feminization of Authority in Morocco," in *Gender and Power*, eds. M. Vianello and M. Hawkesworth (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 275, doi:10.1057/9781137514165\_17.

<sup>16</sup> A considerable number of Amazigh songs discuss religious themes of faith, pilgrimage, pillars of Islam, etc. Other formulae include accounts on prophets, followers, and saints. Such songs





households, along with Joseph's reasons of "decorum" and "modesty," a woman might be deprived of free expression when it comes to argument or communication with the spouse due to fear of the male's authority in the private space of home; access to riposte is offered more in the public space during festivities, where women poetically and lyrically unleash their genius. In similar vein, I borrow Beverley Skeggs's assertion of how female rappers "defiantly speak"<sup>24</sup> to the system of institutionalized and hegemonic masculinity that places all women as objects through the representational processing of masculine fear and fantasy.<sup>25</sup> The Amazigh poetess in *tanddamt* also enjoys the power privilege offered through the physical and symbolic space of the song. Her voice projection, posture, movements, satirical grimaces, are all the more obvious to the audience in a way that overturns or, if nothing else, diminishes, the phallic, masculinist, and patriarchal dominance. Mina adequately manifests Moïsalâ's claim that "staged performance allows the performer to move in and out of conventional gender roles."<sup>26</sup> While gender riposte and resistance through music is a universalized experience, it is worth noting that the history of *tanddamt* is devoid of performance between a black female and a white person, whether male or female. In the United States, for instance, black rappers developed a version of rap music to resist the stereotypical perception of black women as possessions and sex objects; black females in Morocco have not figured on the list of *tirruyssa*, which is an obvious gap in gender dialogue.

Nowhere is this riposte clearer than in Mina's messages to Ajoujguel, who becomes an object of her blazing fire for his solicitations. The whole exchange is a round of praise and satire. Whereas Ajoujguel sings the praises of her company, Mina simply mocks and ridicules him for his older age and lower social class. The patriarchal logic of subjugation is poetically redefined through lyrical jousting:

*Ightofit a rrays adagh tanft ijrti / (rrays, would you please exempt me from  
this burden?)*

*Nzzin wala tayri rak hlli siidnti (tamadont)/ (Beauty and love will only ache  
you!)*

*Ur daroun illy yat orguiwn lmziti / (You own nothing, you're worthless!)*

*Yan dar orilla lmal ihkem ghlgherd nsi / (Penniless people have to hold down  
their instincts!)*

While the youthful Mina speaks from a vantage point incompatible with her antagonist's age, and while she questions the logic of a patriarchal society in which older men have free access to marrying and remarrying younger women, she falls into a sidetracking blunder when she associates love with social class. Whereas her argument on age sounds solid (questioning early marriage), her stance weakens by virtue of her discriminatory views against poor

<sup>24</sup> The concept belongs to bell hooks, *talking back thinking feminist, thinking black* (London: Routledge, 1989).

<sup>25</sup> Beverley Skeggs, "Two Minute Brother."

<sup>26</sup> Moïsalâ, "Musical Gender," 2.

lovers. She literally endorses the fact that access to a female's emotions is contingent on financial power. The best expression of this view is reiterated in the following verses:

*zound kiyin arrays ighikhwan ljibb nki / (as you, rrays, have empty pockets)*  
*wadrat ukan ichahawat lgherd nki / (would you) subdue your instincts!*  
*Ighdark derhem tawidt sers ibawni<sup>27</sup> / (Go get soybeans with your dirham*  
*(penny))*  
*ima tallouzzin wala slanen qndasni / (Almonds you'll never reach!)*

Music is oftentimes carried through the use of figurative language. In *tandamt*, where gender and race issues are performed, we spot a recurrent reference to fruits/vegetables and their monetary and symbolic value. Mina uses almonds as a fruit that only rich people could purchase, in contrast with soybeans as a symbol of a vegetable that is easily accessible to the average citizen. Mina is hence metaphorically pictured in these verses as an almond fruit that is too expensive and too beautiful to be reached by the old poor *rrays*. Similar images are used in the race-performing *tandamt* between Afroug and Boulayad in their verses with food-related imagery. Notably, the *isemg* is pictured as somebody whose survival in their master's households is secured on the guts of livestock. While the masters enjoy beef or lamb steak and liver, the *isemgan* live on the leftover guts. Such metaphors enrich the aesthetic poetics of *tandamt* as they mirror the living traditions of the Amazigh in villages. Most *rrayses* hail from a simple rural lifestyle. These agrarian circumstances are decisive in formulating the stylistics of *tirruyssa* poems and transmit much of the emotional as well as the psychological state of Amazigh poets.<sup>28</sup>

After *rraysa* Mina's harsh response, the male *rrays*, Ajoujguel, modifies his initial discourse based on flirtation and praise by adopting a scolding tone in the second exchange. The female's subverting arguments only intensified his inner unease and triggered a masculinist, even misogynist, mindset. "*Shahdat ukan ay moslmen ftalloubanti / O Muslims!! Bear witness to Talloubante.*" In his eyes, Mina Talloubante should have approved of his requests of love and possession. It sounds quite odd how, given the patriarchal logic, a eulogized female does not reciprocate the courter's compliments. The *rrays* then intensifies his negative judgments of women, asserting that they are useless, a source of neither panacea nor agony ("*orguiwnt aasafar ola tamadonti*"). This machismo surfaces when he describes Mina as *gar amud* (rough trans.: a crop culled from a defected seed): *atquit agar amud orguiwn lmzziti*. She is lost, with both mind and

<sup>27</sup> *Ibawn* (sing. *abaw*) refers to some sort of edamame or soybean. They look like fat green beans used in Moroccan cuisine, especially in the traditional Couscous recipe.

<sup>28</sup> *Rrays* constitute the voice of Amazighity for recognition and dignity; they have been an informal channel through which Amazigh culture has been sustained against foreign influences. For more insight on the topic see my article: Hassane Oudadene, "Rwāys and Tirruyssa: A Symbolic Site of Amazigh Identity and Memory," (November, 2021), <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/43446>.

feet adrift: *ijlayam rbbi l3aql jlunam iddarni*. The male poet feels he should interfere, and he responds (with shocking ignominy to an outside audience): *radam neg ahllass nkrfam idarni* / “we’ll saddle you up and truss your feet.” The poet crudely brags of his power to subjugate her: *ikfayagh rbbi sber ikfawnt lhifi* / “we’re endowed with poise while you’re cursed with indecency.” This image is reminiscent of Moroccan wedding tradition to celebrate the sanctity of the bride and show her preciousness to the groom. Deborah Kapchan notes:

On the day of the wedding celebration someone or some people from the bride’s family try to steal her. They take her somewhere and hide her. The groom’s family must find her. This makes the bride into something very desired. When she is finally found and brought to her husband’s house, she must be carried. Her feet must not touch the ground. This makes the bride “proud”; she is unspoiled. The groom’s brother or cousin carries her. She is covered completely with veils and cloth.<sup>29</sup>

The exchange ventures into a round self-eulogizing and other denigrating lyrics that jeopardize the potential of gender complementation and negotiation. Jousting is based on argument, but not to the extent of a gender chasm that becomes scooped out more by the competitive logic of exclusion.

This last verse inflames the woman, it unleashes the inner forces of a *femme fatale* through (counter)seduction wiles. Mina’s response in the second exchange is lyrically ambivalent. She becomes well aware that the old man speaks out of envy of her beauty and young age. Meanwhile, she seizes the chance to posit a different logic that she considers more plausible in love affairs. For her, the flaw of old men is that they are seeking to exploit younger girls to deflower their beauty. She advises him that she is definitely beyond his reach, and that it would be better for him to fetch an older woman, instead:

*ighd asmoun atrit orguigh mind nki* / (If you’re looking for a partner, I am  
not your match)  
*yufak ukan atsigguilt kra n tchibanti* / (You’d better fetch an older (hair-  
grayed) woman)

I use the concept of *femme fatale* for there is a remarkable use of images that reveal how detrimental the seductiveness of the woman is. The poet accuses his opponent, and by extension, all women, of a lethal infliction: *mchka nyan atnghanm mchka ityagasni* / “how many men you’ve killed, many you’ve wounded.” Since the rare and precious Mina is beyond the poet’s reach, he lambasts her with accusatory lyrics associating females with violence. Elsewhere in the song, he states: *mchka ikhlan ikkiss ak aqchab nsi* / “how many men got maddened and took off their clothes.” Death, injury, and madness are the eventual consequences of love/women. Mina the precious pearl, turns into a ball of destruction, a vamp that flips the gender logic of authority and power.

<sup>29</sup> Deborah Kapchan, *Gender on the Market: Moroccan Women and the Revoicing of Tradition* (Pennsylvania: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), 154.



In fact, the song covers a controversial conversation of different logics depending on gendered perspectives. The last two exchanges open up on a set of eternal questions: who's to blame? The male's instincts or the female's seductive beauty? The verses reflect this debate of power dynamics. In the third exchange, there is a conspicuous imagery of the dissolution of power, which the male poet raises through the use of animal metaphors – lion, eagle, cat, porcupine – all of which to refer to the crumbling of man's authority. The singer sees this power dissolution as a result of anarchy and chaos.

*addounit ad la3jab aguiwn dofghi* / (Wonders can I see in this world)  
*lbrrem koulou lfelk ijla idbabnsi* / (The Cosmos has been flipped, everyone  
 lost)  
*Lbab rzan itgmmi rweln imougayni* / (The House door is broken, Oxen ran  
 away!)  
*Foughned wlli foughnd ifoullousn joulni* / (Cattle fled; chickens fled!)  
*Lbaz ichib ouchen yilla gh tamadonti* / (The eagle is aged; The wolf is in  
 agony!)  
*Tarouch tmmagh d ifiss wala agrzamni* / (Porcupine defeats lions)  
*ifough oumouch irwel ttaynt ighrdayni* / (The cat fled, chased by mice)

Everything has become out of control. Gates open, domestic animals have all fled in defiance of their keepers; the lion and eagle, the great symbols of power and prestige, are challenged in the jungle by the powerless animals; the cat is chased by mice; all of these tropes reveal a different status quo of a world in turmoil. The conventional order of things is reversed. Man's power has turned to weakness and fragility.

Nevertheless, the song ends in a compromise. Rays Ajoujuel reduces the whole conflict to *man* himself, and his instincts. He wisely argues that awareness and respect of boundaries, physical, social, or cultural, is likely to avoid such conflictual conditions. Explicit in the last exchange is a self-blame recovery by which the poet resists his own detrimental ego asserting that beauty cannot be held responsible for man's caprices.

*Ur guigh l3ib izzin wala ratn jremghi* / (beauty shouldn't be demonized nor  
 incriminated)  
*Achkou nzrat arittamz lhudud nsi* / (we see it respecting its boundaries)  
*urra akiddlem wala rasrun sigguilni* / (it wouldn't start evil nor fetch you)  
*nkni irgazzn agh trgha takat iggoutni* / (we, men, are the evil inflamers)

Allusion to the physical boundaries is metaphorically fulfilled through imageries of animals and their spatial configuration. *Majju innan ichat iifis ghlminti* / "who's ever complained of being attacked by lion in the city??" This rhetorical question explains the concept of area demarcation and reservation in the sense that if one is the victim of a lion attack, it is because they have trespassed his own territory. This metaphor is borrowed to elaborate on men's transgression of their own scope of rights and needs by virtue of their instincts, *kullou madak innan zzin adagh idlmi* / "Anyone accusing beauty of



starting evil”; *inatassn chahawa nek ak irrublani* / “tell them it is your own instincts that have troubled you!” This last exchange whereby the male poet admits his own destructiveness ends the opponency of the song.

## Conclusion

In this article I have attempted to analyze two types of *tanddamt*: a gender-performing *tanddamt* and a race-performing one. In both types, I have tried to demonstrate how the dynamics of power and authority are interplayed at the scales of gender, race, and social class. The conversation between Afroug and Boulayad reveals different memories on the legacy of slavery and servitude and how this affects today’s practices in a Moroccan society still structured on racial lines. The dialogue between Ajoujguel and Talloubante, on the other hand, depicts the complex and intricate nature of Morocco’s gender dynamics. The male-vs.-female lyrical opponency has reflected the ambivalent negotiation of the male’s ego and the female’s beauty in exchange of allegations and blame. I have tried to demonstrate how the Amazigh musical version of *tanddamt* is a vehicle to redefining and revisiting the social and cultural construction of gender boundaries. The two *tinddamin* proved to offer prospects for resistance and riposte for the racialized as well as the gendered “Other.” Both Boulayad and Talloubante managed to break down the edifice of white supremacist and masculinist ideologies. While Boulayad functions as an abolitionist agent, Talloubante uses her poetic prowess to question the machismo disdain of her opponent.

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