



The Role of Maghrebi Women in Preserving Cultural Heritage and Promoting Social Bond: A Case Study in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia

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Abstract

Cultural heritage represents a lasting source of identity and a strategic driver of development for any nation, as it constitutes the symbolic and intellectual reservoir from which contemporary social structures emerge. No society can achieve genuine development unless it is deeply rooted in its cultural legacy. In this sense, the transmission of heritage is not viewed as a static act but as a dynamic process that enables the preservation of social cohesion and the reshaping of identities in light of current transformations.

Within this framework, this study examines the impact of cultural heritage on Maghrebi women in strengthening the social bond among the countries of the Maghreb. It adopts the case study method through an analysis of real-life examples of women in Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia who play active roles in safeguarding both tangible and intangible heritage.

The findings reveal that Maghrebi women are central actors in transmitting cultural values, traditions, and knowledge, thereby reinforcing symbolic and emotional ties that transcend national borders. Moreover, the study demonstrates that women's involvement in heritage preservation projects contributes to strengthening both national and Maghrebi identities, transforming cultural heritage into an effective tool for fostering social unity and regional integration among Maghreb countries.

Keywords: *role, cultural heritage, Maghrebi women, social bond.*

Le rôle des femmes maghrébines dans la préservation du patrimoine culturel et la promotion des liens sociaux : une étude de cas en Algérie, au Maroc et en Tunisie

Résumé

Le patrimoine culturel représente une source durable d'identité et un moteur stratégique de développement pour toute nation, car il constitue le réservoir symbolique et intellectuel à partir duquel émergent les structures sociales contemporaines. Aucune société ne peut parvenir à un véritable développement si elle n'est pas profondément enracinée dans son héritage culturel. En ce sens, la transmission du patrimoine n'est pas considérée comme un acte statique, mais comme un processus dynamique qui permet de préserver la cohésion sociale et de remodeler les identités à la lumière des transformations actuelles.

Dans ce cadre, cette étude examine l'impact du patrimoine culturel sur les femmes maghrébines dans le renforcement du lien social entre les pays du Maghreb. Elle adopte la méthode de l'étude de cas à travers l'analyse d'exemples concrets de femmes en Algérie, au Maroc et en Tunisie qui jouent un rôle actif dans la sauvegarde du patrimoine matériel et immatériel.

Les résultats révèlent que les femmes maghrébines jouent un rôle central dans la transmission des valeurs culturelles, des traditions et des connaissances, renforçant ainsi les liens symboliques et émotionnels qui transcendent les frontières nationales. De plus, l'étude démontre que la participation des femmes aux projets de préservation du patrimoine contribue à renforcer les identités nationales et maghrébines, transformant le patrimoine culturel en un outil efficace pour favoriser l'unité sociale et l'intégration régionale entre les pays du Maghreb.

Mots clés : *rôle, patrimoine culturel, femmes maghrébines, lien social.*



Introduction

Cultural heritage plays a vital role in highlighting the history and civilization of nations, especially those possessing limited and fragmented historical evidence. It serves as a fundamental means of preserving and strengthening national identity. Heritage reveals the features of the past, enriches collective memory with values, and contributes to shaping social and cultural awareness. In this context, Maghrebi women play a central role in safeguarding and transmitting this heritage to future generations, recognizing that this responsibility rests upon everyone without exception.

Heritage influences the behavior of individuals and communities, as the continuity of fundamental social values and behaviors is closely tied to civilizational principles. One of the most significant advantages of cultural heritage lies in its ability to strengthen social cohesion both among individuals and between societies, particularly neighboring nations. These bonds are preserved through inherited practices and values passed down across generations. Maghrebi women, in particular, have played a pivotal role in preserving and promoting this cultural heritage, a role that will be clarified in this study.

Research Problem

The development of nations is not measured solely by their material or civilizational achievements but also by their ability to preserve and valorize their cultural heritage. Cultural spaces and traditions represent powerful resources

in the path of development, as they stimulate interactions among individuals and reinforce the social bonds that enrich the collective civilization to which they belong. The preservation and revival of heritage not only support these interactions but also generate shared meanings and values that strengthen connections between nations.

In the Maghreb region, areas rich in cultural manifestations offer opportunities to reinforce relations between countries through shared traditions. Women have played a fundamental role in representing this common cultural identity, both within the Maghrebi context and on a broader global scale.

This paper aims to explore the role of Maghrebi women in preserving cultural heritage through the construction of effective social ties and to analyze how this role contributes to strengthening relations among the countries of the Maghreb.

The central research question is as follows: Does the Maghrebi woman play a role in preserving cultural heritage and enhancing the social bond in fostering social relations among the countries of the Maghreb?

The study focuses on case analyses of women from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco, based on the following hypothesis:

Maghrebi women play a role in preserving cultural heritage and strengthening the social bond by fostering social relations among the Maghreb countries.

Significance of the Study

- To clarify the value of tangible and intangible cultural heritage in strengthening social ties among Maghreb countries.



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- To study how shared cultural heritage contributes to reinforcing mutual belonging and relationships among Maghrebi peoples.
- To highlight the role of Algerian women in promoting social cohesion through the preservation and transmission of cultural heritage.

Objectives of the Study

- To emphasize the importance of cultural heritage and promote it at the regional level.
- To explain the role of social bonds in strengthening identity and fostering friendly relations among Maghreb countries.
- To demonstrate how building social ties based on shared heritage enhances the status of Maghrebi women and protects their individual and collective relationships.

2. Conceptual and theoretical framework

2.1. Definition of Concepts

2.1.1. *The Concept of Cultural Heritage*

The word “heritage” (in Arabic turāth) is derived from “inheritance” (mīrāth), which originally refers to “what a son inherits from his father in terms of property only.” It can be defined as “all sites of scientific or historical importance, national landmarks, wildlife, monuments, buildings and structures, artifacts, oral and written heritage, hidden collections, and the documentation of all these elements, forming the basis of cultural creativity and collective expression” (Al-Hamil, 2015, p. 304).

The term heritage refers to both tangible and intangible legacies transmitted across generations. Although some researchers use the term cultural inheritance, the

academically more accurate and widely accepted term is cultural heritage, as it highlights the intergenerational continuity and the dynamic, ever-evolving nature of cultural expressions.

According to the 1972 UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage, cultural heritage is defined as: “monuments, architectural works, artworks, inscriptions, cave dwellings, and architectural ensembles” possessing outstanding universal value from the point of view of history, art, or science (UNESCO, 1972).

In contemporary academic studies, cultural heritage is no longer viewed as a fixed collection of elements but rather as a living, continuously evolving process. Laurajane Smith emphasizes that heritage is reconstructed and reactivated within local communities and serves as a tool for shaping identity, reinforcing collective memory, and fostering social cohesion (Smith, L., 2006, p. 5).

Rodney Harrison adds that heritage is not limited to material elements (such as buildings and artifacts) but also includes intangible aspects such as oral narratives, rituals, languages, and traditional knowledge elements that ensure cultural continuity and nurture creativity and collective belonging (Harrison, R., 2013, pp. 14-19).

Thus, cultural heritage encompasses all tangible and intangible legacies that reflect a society’s way of life during a given historical period. Over time, these practices undergo transformation and accumulation, giving rise to modern forms of heritage. Many of these practices remain present in society and continue to be transmitted across generations, making heritage a transgenerational phenomenon that



embodies civilizational continuity and reflects the intellectual contributions of successive generations.

2.1.2. The Concept of the Social Bond

The concept of the social bond is one of the fundamental notions that has attracted wide attention in sociology, philosophy, and anthropology. It refers to the network of relationships connecting individuals through shared values, norms, and mutual commitments, granting them a sense of belonging and solidarity. Numerous scholars from various disciplines have examined this concept, confirming its central importance in the social and human sciences.

Most researchers define the social bond as a set of concrete relationships among individuals based on shared values and norms that generate a sense of collective belonging.

Émile Durkheim classified social bonds into two main types:

- **Mechanical solidarity**, based on shared beliefs and values.
- **Organic solidarity**, based on specialization and complementarity of roles.

He considered both types essential for social cohesion (Durkheim, É., 1997, p. 38).

Pierre Bourdieu linked the concept of the social bond to symbolic capital, arguing that cultural and social practices reinforce domination and legitimize relationships within social groups (Bourdieu, P., 1986, p. 250).

Gerard Delanty reexamined the concept within the framework of reflexive modernity, noting that belonging in pluralistic modern societies is shaped through dialogue and

interaction rather than through rigid traditional structures (Delanty, G., 2009, p. 39).

Sociologist Pierre Bouvier defined the social bond as “a set of relationships characterized by the absence of opposition, where satisfaction, agreement, and mutually accepted happiness prevail.” It represents all relationships that link individuals belonging to the same social group or that arise between different individuals or groups and work to strengthen these ties. When used in the plural form (social bonds), the term refers to actual social relationships (Bouvier, P., 2005, p. 64).

Pierre-Yves Cusset also pointed out that the term is multidimensional, its simplest meaning being “the set of relationships that connect us to family, friends, and neighbors, extending to mechanisms of collective solidarity through the rules, norms, and values that provide the minimum level of shared meaning.” (Khawaja, A., 2018, p. 12).

In this sense, the social bond is not merely an organizational structure but also carries symbolic, ideological, and performative dimensions that evolve with changing contexts and lived experiences.

2.2. Types of Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage is one of the most important elements that express the identity of nations and the continuity of their history. It encompasses everything passed down from previous generations whether practices, beliefs, sites, or tangible and intangible manifestations. Generally, cultural heritage is classified into two main forms: tangible, such as buildings and artifacts, and intangible, such as customs, traditions, and oral knowledge. Both types play a



fundamental role in preserving cultural identity and strengthening the sense of belonging within societies.

2.2.1. Tangible (Material) Cultural Heritage

Tangible cultural heritage refers to everything created by humans in their daily lives all material objects produced through human effort. These inheritances are traditional by nature; although many have been replaced by modern alternatives, they still hold great value within their communities.

Tangible cultural heritage thus includes the skills, techniques, and knowledge passed down through generations, such as house construction, clothing design, food preparation, agriculture, and fishing. It also encompasses buildings, historical sites, monuments, and artifacts that deserve preservation for future generations due to their architectural, scientific, or technological value (Cleere, H., 1989, pp. 12-14).

Natural heritage is also considered an important part of this category, as it represents essential components of the natural environment. Tangible heritage is usually divided into two main types:

- **Immovable Tangible Cultural Heritage:**

This includes fixed sites and landmarks such as inscriptions, rock carvings, and buildings of religious, military, or civil nature temples, fortresses, bridges, and various properties.

- **Movable Tangible Cultural Heritage:**

This includes portable objects such as archaeological artifacts, scientific and artistic manuscripts, statues,

photographs, and other items of historical or cultural value.

2.2.2. Intangible (Non-Material) Cultural Heritage

Intangible cultural heritage refers to all that humans produce and use to interpret their behavior and guide their actions, as long as it remains within the realm of thought and abstraction. This type of heritage encompasses all non-material aspects of culture, such as artistic skills, values, beliefs, attitudes, and language elements transmitted from generation to generation (Harrison, R., 2010, pp. 27–33).

According to UNESCO, intangible cultural heritage refers to traditions transmitted orally or through bodily expression from one generation to another (Kurin, R., 2004, pp. 3–4). It includes oral traditions and expressions (including language as a vehicle for cultural knowledge), performing arts (such as music, dance, and traditional theater), social practices, rituals, festive events, and knowledge related to nature and the universe.

This type of heritage also comprises elements such as beliefs, customs, values, laws, social systems, symbols, myths, folktales, and proverbs that express the intellectual and ideological dimensions of human cultural expression (Smith, L., 2006, p. 109).

Intangible heritage includes unseen and non-material elements that play a major role in shaping daily behavior and social norms—such as customs, traditions, values, and rituals. The main domains of intangible cultural heritage include:

- **Oral traditions and expressions**, including language as a vehicle for transmitting cultural knowledge.
- **Traditional and performing arts.**



- **Social practices, rituals, festive events, and knowledge related to nature and the universe.**
- **Skills related to traditional craftsmanship.**

2.3. Characteristics of Cultural Heritage

2.3.1. Importance

Assessing the importance of heritage is often a relative process influenced by several factors such as perception, awareness, and management. The preservation of cultural heritage especially in the field of architecture is not an independent concept but rather a set of processes that must be implemented. The term “preservation” is no longer used in isolation from its contexts.

For this reason, specialists consider preservation a general term that can only be understood by specifying the particular process it involves. Each process has a specific designation that determines its scope and level. The most prominent of these processes include:

- **Preservation:**

It encompasses all aspects related to protecting a site or a historical monument in a way that ensures the maintenance of its cultural value. Preservation involves maintenance operations and may also include prevention, restoration, reconstruction, adaptation to modern uses, or a combination of these actions.

- **Maintenance:**

It refers to conserving a site without making alterations to it and delaying its gradual deterioration. Maintenance focuses on protection, support, and possibly stabilization

of the existing structure as long as it reflects the desired cultural values of preservation.

- **Restoration:**

This means returning an existing structure to its previous condition when sufficient evidence of that condition is available by removing additions or reassembling original elements without introducing new materials, in order to reveal the cultural value of the site.

- **Rehabilitation (Adaptation):**

It involves adapting a structure to its original use or to new functions, provided that such adaptation does not detract from its cultural value and is necessary to ensure its economic sustainability (Youssef, 2009, pp. 12–13).

2.3.2. Documentation and Designation of Heritage Sites and Monuments

The documentation and naming of monuments and sites are fundamental procedures in implementing heritage protection laws. It is difficult to trace artifacts, combat theft and smuggling, or identify lost sites without clear names or identities. Registering heritage in national records is one of the key proofs of public ownership. Just as history cannot be narrated without documents, heritage cannot be discussed without proper documentation in the archives of relevant authorities (Youssef, 2009, pp. 13–15).

The heritage that has reached us through material or oral evidence requires an official record to affirm its identity; otherwise, its loss would be inevitable. Typically, a heritage register consists of a documentation system that includes programs for monitoring, analysis, and follow-up. Criteria



such as cultural authenticity and religious value are among the most important factors considered when preparing this register.

It is crucial that the work on this record does not stop upon its issuance, for it is not merely a documentation tool but a continuous means of protection. Preservation, therefore, does not simply mean archiving the past it requires its active use and integration into the present.

2.4. The Role of Protecting and Reviving Cultural Heritage

Cultural heritage represents the living remnants, symbols, and expressions of human civilization that have endured throughout history. It may appear in the form of archaeological sites, historical records, behavioral patterns, oral narratives, or active cultural practices. However, what we possess today constitutes only a small fraction of the vast cultural production of past civilizations.

As David Lowenthal (1985) and Laurajane Smith (2006) emphasize, much of this heritage has been lost due to neglect, natural deterioration, conflict, and modernization (Lowenthal, D., 1985, p. 121). The further we go back in time, the fewer the surviving material and intellectual traces become – and what remains is often incomplete or damaged (Smith, L., 2006, p. 49).

In many cases, we now celebrate heritage that is threatened with extinction heritage that may survive only in oral memory or documentation, without any physical presence. As Lowenthal stated, “The past is a foreign country; they do things differently there,” and the fragility of memory and material culture renders the past something that easily fades away (Lowenthal, D., 1985, p. 130).

Youssef (2009) argues that the real challenge today lies not in selecting what should be preserved but in saving what can still be saved (Youssef, 2009, p. 16). Therefore, preservation goes beyond merely protecting remains; it requires a comprehensive approach encompassing documentation, maintenance, restoration, and most importantly revitalization.

According to UNESCO (2003), effective cultural protection involves the transmission of knowledge, values, and practices through education and community participation (UNESCO, 2003, p. 14).

Revitalization efforts include organizing local festivals, documenting oral traditions, digitizing cultural practices, and encouraging older generations to teach younger ones traditional skills. The goal is not to archive the past but to activate it as a living force in the present.

Accordingly, the preservation of heritage requires:

- Identifying cultural expressions that are endangered.
- Recording and documenting heritage elements.
- Applying scientific methods of conservation and maintenance.
- Integrating heritage into educational curricula, development plans, and collective memory.

Heritage must also be linked to contemporary identity, the local economy (such as sustainable tourism), and cultural diplomacy. As Rodney Harrison (2013) affirms, heritage is not merely what we inherit but what is continuously reconstructed, challenged, and embodied (Harrison, R., 2010, p. 95).

Thus, the protection of heritage is not simply nostalgia for the past it is a strategic investment in the continuity of civilization. By perceiving our lives as a logical extension of



the past, we understand that safeguarding heritage concerns not only the past but also the future.

3. analytical framework and case study

3.1. The Status of Women in the Promotion of Cultural Heritage

3.1.1. *The Social Status of Women*

Women continue to play a pivotal role in the advancement of both ancient and modern societies, having proven their ability to drive change in various aspects of life. The need for women to stand alongside men and support them serves as evidence that they are essential agents of transformation within society. This role requires self-confidence, ambition, intelligence, initiative, and a strong desire for work, achievement, and creativity (Al-Bashir, 2012, p. 73).

Women raise the sons and daughters of society according to standards derived from traditions, religion, and cultural norms. They are the most influential in shaping their upbringing due to their positive impact on their children's success and excellence—making them respected and appreciated by all. Therefore, the woman's role is among the most influential human roles in any community.

Today, women have demonstrated their capacity to adapt to the rapid social, economic, and political transformations surrounding them, achieving remarkable progress in fields that demand knowledge, discussion, and effective participation (Jandal, 2011, p. 12).

Moreover, women contribute to the growth and development of society through their leadership roles. This is attributed to their ability to adapt to changing

circumstances and their strong connection to the family as the nucleus of society. A woman applies the sound strategies she follows as a mother and wife in her professional and leadership roles. She pays close attention to the people she leads and carefully considers their needs, making her capable of serving them and helping them achieve the sustainable development their communities require.

3.1.2. The Role of Women in Preserving and Promoting Cultural Heritage

Women constitute a fundamental unit within the structure of society and play a vital role in maintaining stability and preserving their position within the cultural and social fabric. This has granted them an elevated status and the rank accorded to them in Islam, making them one of the pillars of society when they thrive, the entire social structure thrives.

Women are part of the social organization and perform an essential role as social transmitters of cultural systems and guardians of both tangible and intangible heritage (Debouz, 2007, pp. 227–228). Individuals acquire much of this heritage from their mothers, who serve as keepers of folk traditions as well as educators, writers, and poets striving to preserve their cultural legacy.

During religious and cultural occasions, women especially the elderly take the initiative to revive these events through singing, dancing, chants, storytelling, sermons, and poetry that express the customs of specific regions or nations, in fear of their disappearance and the loss of their meanings.

Women, therefore, serve as the reservoir of society's cultural memory, showing the greatest dedication to



preserving heritage in all its cultural components across generations. This stems from the fact that every member of the community has their place, role, and mutual relationships with others, along with a shared sense of belonging and participation. Collectively, they strive to achieve common goals that reflect their collective identity – an identity shaped through this shared interaction and social bonding, which ultimately fosters mutual acceptance among individuals (Dan Wilson, 2016, p. 07).

3.2. Examples of Maghrebi Cultural Heritage (Algeria, Tunisia, Morocco)

3.2.1. *Tangible Heritage*

Women have participated alongside men in building and shaping civilizations. Man alone could not have achieved such development or claimed to have constructed civilization independently. From the very beginning, women have been active in all domains of life, responsible for raising children in their early years and, at times, for caring for their parents as well.

- **Weaving and Spinning**

It is not easy to enumerate all the crafts and trades practiced by women throughout ancient history, particularly since historical sources mention them only incidentally, as women were primarily perceived as homemakers and caregivers. Nevertheless, evidence confirms that women actively participated in most forms of work alongside men. In addition to domestic tasks, they engaged in agriculture, herding, fetching water,

collecting firewood, and practicing several crafts, including:

- **Wool Weaving**

This craft was practiced by women from all social classes, both rich and poor. Its products were used within the household or for commercial purposes. Each family possessed its own spinning tools, often purchased from Jewish merchants who supplied raw wool, needles, and threads (Al-Bakri, 1992, p. 855).

Among the coastal peoples of North Africa, wool work has traditionally been considered a female domain, while men were limited to sheep herding. All stages of spinning, dyeing, and weaving were women's responsibility (Basset, 1922, p. 139).

- **Carpet Weaving**

Wool, along with other fibers such as doum (palm fiber), is used in carpet making. Women developed this craft by introducing new techniques and creative designs within an extended family environment, demonstrating skill, precision, and aesthetic harmony in color and patterns (Amahan, 2012, p. 186).

Through carpet weaving, women establish a symbolic link between their community's past and future, as well as between themselves and the external world (Becker, 2006, pp. 38–46). Amazigh carpets in the Atlas regions, especially in Azilal and Khenifra, represent collective artistic expressions and the embodiment of feminine memory.

Each carpet is handmade using local wool and decorated with culturally charged symbols such as the eye



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(protection) and geometric motifs representing fertility and balance. Women master these symbols through inherited knowledge, transmitted not in formal schools but through observation and hands-on participation from childhood.

Weaving sessions also serve as social spaces for learning, storytelling, and solidarity among women, where proverbs are shared, kinship bonds are strengthened, and cooperation networks are formed. Carpets are used in weddings, childbirth ceremonies, and as both decorative and spiritual home elements, turning them into cultural documents that position women as creators, transmitters, and historians within their communities.

• Pottery

Pottery preserves the memory and history of the societies that produced it. It reflects their cultural values, social behaviors, and collective creativity, serving as a record of their nature, customs, and beliefs thus acting as a witness to their economic and social history (Touchekhrit, 2008, p. 406).

Despite modern developments, traditional pottery has retained much of its artistic quality. Pottery-making flourished around the Mediterranean Basin, especially in the Maghreb and Algerian cities, evolving from Neolithic traditions while preserving many ancient stylistic elements (Barada, 2001, pp. 25–26).

In the Beni M'zab region, pottery production has survived largely thanks to women artisans, who transformed it into a purely rural family activity. Women were particularly

keen on producing pottery that met household functional needs.

Studies on Algerian pottery have shown that the M'zab Valley is distinguished by its authentic ceramic products with diverse forms and decorations, maintained as part of a long-standing local tradition. Pottery remains primarily a women's craft in most M'zab areas.

In addition to their daily household responsibilities, women also work with clay building traditional ovens for baking bread, repairing rooftops before the rainy season with low-permeability clay, and plastering floors and walls with white earth.

3.2.2. *The Moroccan Caftan*

The Moroccan caftan is one of the most prominent cultural symbols associated with women. It is more than a traditional garment worn on special occasions; it is a vessel carrying aesthetic, social, and religious meanings. The caftan originated in Morocco's historic cities such as Fez and Rabat and was historically linked to the upper social classes before gradually spreading to reflect women's position within the social hierarchy. Its luxurious fabrics and intricate embroidery embody Moroccan identity and the intergenerational transmission of tradition (Benkirane, 1996, p. 112).

In traditional societies, the caftan represented lineage, social class, and prestige, later expanding to all social groups with variations in design and fabric quality. Women master the craft of caftan-making through Fez-style embroidery, fine hand-stitching, and the selection of luxurious textiles such as silk and velvet. Mothers also pass on the traditions



Soumission : 01/02/2025 Acceptation : 10/08/2025 Publication : 10/10/2025

of wearing and using the caftan to their daughters, making it a tool of feminine cultural education.

Thus, the caftan transcends its function as clothing to become a symbol of feminine presence in both public and private spaces. It expresses the harmony between religious identity and local culture, while also functioning as an economic asset through women's cooperatives engaged in its production and export.

3.2.3. *The Sefsari*

The Sefsari is one of the most distinctive traditional garments of Tunisian women. It is a white silk or cotton wrap covering the entire body except for one eye. The Sefsari carries strong social and religious connotations, symbolizing modesty and urban identity, particularly in old cities such as Tunis and Sfax. It played a significant role in social events and remains a part of the collective memory of Tunisian women (Ben Chaaban, 2010, p. 132).

The Sefsari symbolizes modesty and femininity and was traditionally used to conceal a woman's identity in public, reflecting the boundaries between the private and public spheres in traditional Tunisian culture. Although its use declined after independence and the rise of modern values, it continues to appear in formal events such as weddings and shrine visits.

Furthermore, the Sefsari also indicates social status—the fabric and ornamentation often reflected class distinctions. Today, it is viewed as a heritage symbol revived in folkloric displays and cultural events, representing an effort to restore and celebrate local identity.

3.2.4. *Jewelry of the Chaouia and the South*

Chaouia women of the Aurès region and women from southern Tunisia (Gafsa, Tataouine, and Kebili) are renowned for wearing and crafting silver jewelry adorned with Amazigh engravings and geometric symbols. These ornaments, typically worn at weddings and social celebrations, symbolize protection and fertility and serve as markers of familial and cultural belonging.

Women play a central role in preserving this artisanal heritage, as the techniques of silver crafting and decoration are passed from mother to daughter making jewelry a living domain of cultural knowledge transmission (Camps-Fabrer, 1990, p. 87).

These pieces often carry religious and social symbolism, such as protection and fertility motifs, and are exchanged as wedding gifts to affirm family ties. Thus, women act not only as consumers but also as artisans and promoters, participating in traditional markets and women's cooperatives.

Through this intergenerational transmission, jewelry-making becomes both a technical and cultural legacy an artistic expression of continuity and identity that strengthens the social fabric of Maghrebi communities.

1. Intangible Heritage

Intangible heritage encompasses a diverse range of cultural elements recognized by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). These elements embody the richness of local traditions, expressions, and artisanal skills that have been transmitted across generations, reflecting the complex identity of Maghrebi societies and their place within the broader cultural space of the region (UNESCO, 2023).



3.3. The Traditional Ahallil of Gourara

The Ahallil of Gourara is a prominent example of traditional musical and poetic heritage originating from the Gourara region in southwestern Algeria, particularly in Timimoun, Adrar Province. It is a form of collective chanting that combines spiritual poetry, rhythmic clapping, and harmonious movements.

Formerly known as Aznun, it later became known as Ahallil. Some trace the name to Ahl al-Layl (“people of the night”) because it is performed at night, while others link it to al-Hilal (the crescent moon) or to tahlil (“La ilaha illa Allah”) (UNESCO, 2008).

Ahallil is considered a form of Sufi singing inspired by the lives of the Prophet’s companions and righteous saints, influenced by Sufi orders such as the Tijaniyya and Qadiriyya. It embodies a collective expression of faith, memory, and belonging (Abu-Lughod, 1998, pp. 107–108).

3.4. Tuareg Imzad Music

Imzad music is an essential element of the Tuareg musical heritage. The Imzad is a single-stringed bowed instrument reserved exclusively for Tuareg women. It resembles the rebab or violin and consists of a wooden bowl-shaped body covered with goatskin or sheepskin, with horsehair used for both the string and the bow.

The performance of Imzad is not merely musical it represents a profound spiritual and cultural experience that preserves collective identity (Hamida, 2019, pp. 104–108).

It is inseparable from Tuareg cultural and historical identity. Despite modernization, the Imzad remains a

symbol of continuity, feminine creativity, and resistance to cultural erosion (Claudot-Hawad, 2000, pp. 89–91).

3.5. Aita and Women’s Popular Singing in Morocco

Aita is not merely a popular musical genre but a cultural discourse that redefines women’s social roles in Moroccan rural and semi-urban contexts. It is performed by women known as cheikhates, who act as guardians of collective stories expressed through vocal and gestural performance before mixed audiences.

Aita addresses themes of love, betrayal, poverty, revolt, and honor. Through these topics, the cheikha emerges not just as a performer but as a transmitter of collective memory and sometimes as a political and cultural actor in the absence of official platforms (Ciucci, 2012, p. 44).

It also constitutes an alternative vocal space that allows women to express the silenced and to negotiate with patriarchal authority and conservative society. The call-and-response style (from “‘ayt” = “to call”) transforms the performance into a collective act representing pain, protest, and reconciliation.

Despite societal marginalization of cheikhates, Aita has recently gained official recognition through national festivals and inclusion in intangible heritage preservation programs.

3.5. Women’s Rituals in the Hammam

The traditional hammam (public bath) is not merely a place for bathing but a central social and symbolic space in women’s lives, fulfilling ritualistic, psychological, and relational functions. It represents a semi-sacred space where



women perform collective rituals that foster relationships, knowledge exchange, and solidarity.

According to Fatima Mernissi, the hammam can be seen as an “informal female assembly” where women exercise symbolic authority as compensation for their exclusion from the male-dominated public sphere. It is an internal communicative space that strengthens women’s unity and their symbolic resistance to social marginalization (Mernissi, 1991, pp. 137-140).

3.6. Wedding Songs and Ululations

Women’s songs play an essential role in social rituals, particularly during weddings, where women perform chants known as *hdaya* or *zaghārid*. These songs express joy and blessings and carry symbols of fertility, honor, and transitions between life stages (such as marriage or motherhood).

This oral form of expression serves as a channel for transmitting social values and norms, as the lyrics often contain implicit messages about morality, honor, and lineage (Makhloufi, 2017, pp. 89-92).

Their significance lies in their unwritten nature preserved in women’s memory and transmitted orally within female gatherings making them a form of oral heritage now endangered by the decline of traditional rituals in urban areas.

3.7. Women’s Storytelling in Night Gatherings (*Al-Haddouta*)

Elderly women, especially grandmothers, have played a central role in popular storytelling, transmitting folktales

and legends known as Al-Haddouta during evening family gatherings. Stories such as Aisha al-Tayyara or al-Ghoula (the ogress) are not mere entertainment but educational tools conveying moral lessons such as obedience, patience, and caution toward strangers.

These tales reinforce collective identity and affirm the woman's role as a source of traditional knowledge, making her the keeper of communal memory in times preceding modern media (Ben Messaoud, 2016, pp. 115–118). Storytelling often adopts symbolic and mythical styles, allowing women to express social tensions and fears indirectly.

By tracing the various tangible and intangible heritage models across Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia, it becomes evident that women are not mere custodians of tradition but active participants in producing, reshaping, and transmitting it across generations. The roles women play in carpet weaving, pottery-making, and child-rearing are not confined to economic or domestic functions; rather, they form part of a collective identity that reconnects society with its history and values (UNESCO, 2012, pp. 60–65).

Traditional crafts practiced by women rich with symbols and meanings consolidate in collective memory cultural practices that provide a solid foundation for both local and Maghrebi belonging. A woman who weaves or decorates pottery does not merely transmit a skill but conveys a system of meanings rooted in rituals, celebrations, and oral traditions.

These practices form a vital link between past and present, ensuring the continuous renewal of identity. Furthermore, the shared forms of heritage among Maghrebi women – whether in weaving, traditional dress, or religious



Soumission : 01/02/2025 Acceptation : 10/08/2025 Publication : 10/10/2025

rituals—create a symbolic common ground that fosters cross-border cultural integration.

These informal feminine roles represent a symbolic infrastructure for building the Maghrebi social bond and strengthening the prospects for a sustainable, unified cultural project. Through her traditional yet strategically significant roles, the Maghrebi woman reproduces heritage as a living practice, revitalizing the symbolic language of the community and orienting it toward the future.

Thus, heritage becomes not merely memory but a dynamic instrument in shaping culturally cohesive Maghrebi societies that recognize women as a structural cornerstone of their unity.

Haut du formulaire

4. Case Studies: Maghrebi Women Pioneers in the Preservation of Cultural Heritage

Women in Maghrebi societies play a central role in safeguarding cultural heritage both tangible and intangible transforming their activities into a means of reproducing collective identity and strengthening social bonds between generations.

4.1. Algeria - Tindi (Imzad) among Tuareg Women

The Imzad represents one of the most prominent forms of intangible heritage in southern Algeria. It has been exclusively associated with Tuareg women for centuries. Only women play this music using a traditional string instrument handcrafted from wood and leather. The value of the Imzad lies not only in its musical aesthetics but also in its

social function, as it is linked to epic tales of love, chivalry, and collective wisdom.

The women who preserve this art perform a dual role: on the one hand, they ensure its continuity through oral transmission to younger generations; on the other, they contribute to affirming Tuareg identity within the Algerian national framework, especially after its inscription by UNESCO on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity.

However, the greatest challenge lies in the declining interest of younger generations due to the influence of globalization and modern musical trends—placing additional responsibility on women to protect this art from extinction. Here, the Tuareg woman transforms from a mere artist into a guardian of memory and a custodian of identity (Benkheira, 2010, p. 122).

4.2. Algeria - Traditional Jewelry in the Aurès

Silver jewelry in the Aurès region is not merely ornamental but a symbolic language expressing belonging and identity. Women not only wear these pieces but actively participate in their creation and preservation. Each item bears Amazigh engravings whose meanings range from protection to fertility and blessing.

Through these symbols, jewelry becomes a nonverbal means of social communication. The transmission of silversmithing techniques from mother to daughter reveals that jewelry is not simply a commodity but a tool for transmitting collective knowledge and practicing identity.

Women's presence in traditional markets and artisan cooperatives has also turned craftsmanship into a field of economic empowerment. Nevertheless, this traditional craft



faces major challenges, such as competition from imported jewelry and weak institutional support. Thus, the Auresian woman remains a key actor in protecting this material heritage from disappearance and reinterpreting it in ways that align with modern life (Cherif, 2015, p. 88).

4.3. Algeria – Ahallil of Gourara

The Ahallil art of the Gourara region is one of the most distinguished forms of intangible heritage in which women play an active role. It is based on collective chanting that merges spiritual and secular dimensions and is performed during religious and social ceremonies.

Women's participation is not merely decorative but essential to maintaining the vocal and aesthetic balance of this art. The symbolic dimension of Ahallil lies in its role as a space for renewing social ties and strengthening community solidarity. Through their participation, women contribute not only to sustaining the art but also to reproducing local collective identity.

The challenge, however, arises when this art moves from its traditional context to touristic or folkloric performances, potentially stripping it of its original meaning. In this sense, women bear a dual responsibility: protecting the authenticity of the art from distortion and ensuring its transmission in its spiritual and symbolic essence to future generations (Hammami, 2007, p. 64).

4.4. Storyteller Khadija Ben Chaaban – Tales of Southern Tunisia

Khadija Ben Chaaban, from the governorate of Tataouine, is considered one of the last traditional storytellers preserving

the memory of Tunisian folk tales. She is often invited to family gatherings to narrate stories (al-haddouta) before children and women, embodying what anthropologists refer to as embodied memory.

Her narratives intertwine with the community's history and exert an educational influence through cultural symbolism. Her stories are not mere entertainment but tools for teaching values and reinforcing local identity (Ben Messaoud, 2016, pp. 112-114).

4.5. Zahra Ammar - Silver Jewelry Artisan in Gafsa

Zahra Ammar, a traditional artisan from the city of Gafsa, has been working for more than thirty years crafting Amazigh silver jewelry and runs a small workshop to train young women in this craft. She represents a model of a woman who combines cultural preservation with economic empowerment.

Through her workshop, Zahra reproduces a series of cultural symbols linked to Amazigh identity while embodying resistance to marginalization through local productive action. She thus plays a dual role as both a preserver and innovator of heritage (UNESCO, 2012, pp. 55-57; Jomaa, 2019, p. 83).

4.6. Tunisia - Traditional Weaving in the Island of Djerba

Traditional weaving in Djerba is one of the most prominent forms of tangible heritage preserved by women over centuries. The weaving process carried out at home or in small workshops holds both social and economic dimensions.

Women do more than produce covers and carpets; through weaving, they create spaces for interaction,



knowledge exchange, and mutual learning. Symbolically, weaving is not merely a material product but a visual text carrying signs and motifs of regional identity. The patterns and designs often draw inspiration from religious, agricultural, or mythological traditions.

Moreover, this activity has provided women with economic independence through cooperatives and local markets. Yet, the threats posed by global markets and cheap industrial products endanger this heritage, reinforcing women's vital role as agents of innovation who adapt traditional weaving to modern demands without losing its authenticity (Belhadj, 2012, p. 97).

4.7. Morocco - The Moroccan Caftan

The Moroccan caftan is among the most iconic symbols of material heritage associated with Moroccan women, transcending its function as clothing to become a carrier of social and aesthetic memory. It developed in major cities such as Fez and Rabat, becoming a symbol of prestige and social status.

Through wearing and producing it, women have transformed the caftan into a cultural discourse that embodies both authenticity and openness. The caftan reflects not only Moroccan national identity but also the historical interaction between Morocco and Andalusian and Ottoman influences.

Today, as it features prominently in international fashion shows, it raises questions about balancing authenticity with modern adaptation. Women whether as designers, artisans, or consumers play a vital role in maintaining this balance,

reshaping heritage to fit the present while preserving its historical roots (Abhzan, 2014, p. 47).

4.8. Morocco - The Art of Ahwash

The Ahwash art, widespread in the High and Anti-Atlas regions, represents a collective intangible heritage in which women play a major role. Their participation in singing and dancing reflects gender complementarity in the construction of Amazigh identity.

Ahwash is not merely a performance but a celebratory practice that renews social ties and reaffirms community unity. Women's participation extends beyond aesthetic contribution to a deeper social role, serving as a sign of cultural legitimacy and continuity of tradition.

However, Ahwash faces the risk of simplification and commodification when presented to tourists as a folkloric spectacle. This underscores the importance of women's role in safeguarding the authenticity of this art and defending its symbolic and identity dimensions (El Mansouri, 2011, p. 133).

Thus, each case represents a living model of the interconnection between tangible and intangible heritage, and between women's experience and the public sphere. Through these practices, women perform a social and cultural role that transcends the local level, creating shared spaces of Maghrebi identity.

Accordingly, the case studies confirm the research hypothesis that heritage plays a pivotal role in empowering Maghrebi women to create cross-border social bonds and to consolidate intertwined and sustainable national and regional identities.



General Findings

Through the theoretical and analytical approaches, as well as the case study analysis, this research has arrived at a set of key findings that highlight the deep relationship between women, heritage, and the Maghrebi social bond:

- **Heritage as a Source of Social Cohesion:**

The study shows that heritage, in all its tangible and intangible forms, contributes to reinforcing shared values and provides a symbolic foundation that unites Maghrebi societies—especially when cultural practices and symbols intersect in areas such as clothing, crafts, rituals, and language.

- **Women as Cultural Actors:**

Women's contributions are not limited to passive preservation of heritage; rather, they are active partners in its reproduction and revitalization through economic, artistic, and religious activities that strengthen both local and Maghrebi belonging.

- **Heritage as a Tool Against Oblivion:**

As illustrated by examples such as the "*Kheymetna*" (*Our Tent*) project in Tindouf, women use heritage as a means of resisting forgetfulness, expressing identity, and documenting collective memory, thereby restoring to heritage its militant and documentary function.

- **Cultural Similarity Strengthens Heritage:**

The comparative analysis of cases from Algeria, Morocco, and Tunisia reveals structural similarities in the roles of women, indicating the potential for building an integrated Maghrebi cultural project grounded in shared cultural foundations that reinforce Maghrebi identity.

- **Heritage for Sustainable Development:**

Women-led heritage practices, particularly in rural contexts, foster a solidarity-based economy that preserves traditional knowledge and promotes economic independence, demonstrating the organic link between heritage and development.

- **Heritage as Intergenerational Interaction:**

Women serve as temporal mediators between the past and the future they transmit memory and skills, transforming them into living knowledge that adapts to contemporary contexts, thereby ensuring the continuity of cultural identity.

Each case represents a living model of interaction between tangible and intangible heritage, between women's experiences and the public sphere. Through these practices, women perform a social and cultural role that transcends local boundaries, establishing spaces for a shared Maghrebi identity.

Thus, the case studies confirm the central hypothesis of this research: that Maghrebi women play a vital role in preserving cultural heritage and strengthening the social bond by fostering social relations among the Maghreb countries, as well as empowering women to create cross-border social connections and to consolidate intertwined and sustainable national and regional identities.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that cultural heritage both tangible and intangible plays a crucial and multidimensional role in strengthening social cohesion, with women serving as



a central element in this process. Through a comparative and interdisciplinary perspective, we explored how women in the Maghreb region act as cultural mediators who preserve collective memory, transmit values, and reinforce continuity between generations.

It has been shown that heritage is not a static collection of objects or rituals, but rather a dynamic social process that evolves through reinterpretation, participation, and lived experience. The practices and symbols preserved and reproduced by women such as oral storytelling, handicrafts, traditional dress, musical expressions, and culinary knowledge are not merely markers of identity but also instruments of connection that bind individuals and communities across borders.

Cultural heritage serves as a powerful mechanism for reviving a shared Maghrebi identity. Despite political divisions, the study demonstrated that women's engagement in heritage represents an alternative form of diplomacy and a transnational unity built upon symbols, values, and everyday practices.

Moreover, the process of cultural transmission often neglected in official policies emerges as a vital tool for building the "social link." It encompasses not only the family but also collective rituals, informal education, and community interaction.

Hence, cultural heritage is not simply a remnant of the past but a living force that shapes identities, strengthens belonging, and reinforces regional cohesion. Through the lived experiences and cultural work of Maghrebi women, this heritage becomes a bridge between generations and between nations.

Based on these findings, this study reaffirms that the role of women in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage is fundamental to the formation of social bonds, particularly within the Maghrebi context. Therefore, heritage should not be viewed merely as a tool for cultural preservation but as a strategic resource for regional integration, social development, and intercultural understanding.

Accordingly, this study proposes the following recommendations:

- 1) The necessity of adopting cultural policies that encourage women to actively engage in preserving and transmitting heritage across generations.
- 2) Integrating heritage into educational curricula to raise collective awareness of women's historical roles in shaping national identity.
- 3) Promoting women-led heritage cooperatives in fields such as weaving, crafts, and folk singing, which serve as foundations for local economic and cultural development.
- 4) Documenting women's oral heritage such as stories, songs, and celebratory ululations performed by women.
- 5) Strengthening scientific research on women and heritage and expanding sociological and anthropological studies that explore the relationship between women and cultural heritage in the Maghreb region.
- 6) Establishing national and local awards to honor women working in the preservation of heritage, granting them social and symbolic recognition.
- 7) Organizing periodic festivals, exhibitions, and cultural events aimed at showcasing women's



Soumission : 01/02/2025 Acceptation : 10/08/2025 Publication : 10/10/2025

contributions to heritage preservation, thereby enhancing their presence in the public sphere and reinforcing Maghrebi social cohesion.

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Soumission : 01/02/2025 Acceptation : 10/08/2025 Publication : 10/10/2025

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