

## THE *PIROPO* AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN CULTURES IN TETUAN (NORTHERN MOROCCO)

Nina Pinto-Abecasis

The Spanish *piropo* is a short linguistic expression consisting of an image, metaphor or witty play on words that refers mainly to physical aspects of a woman passing by in the street. The *piropo* was also accepted as a popular practice for paying a woman compliments during courtship throughout Spain and Spanish-speaking countries. The Spanish Christians who arrived in Tetuan, the capital of Spanish Morocco during the Protectorate (1912-1956), maintained the habit of using *piropos* in their new location. The *piropos* had sexual overtones, indicating close observation of parts of the female body, and to some extent violated the norms of respect and honor that were the customary attitudes toward Jewish women. From their subjects' point of view, these linguistic expressions made the streets of Tetuan an arena of colorful, poetic courtship, full of humor and lightness, creating contact between cultures which was otherwise taboo for Jewish women. They were manifestations of color, imagination and openness in a conservative and closed society. For instance, one *piropo* connects the eyes of a woman – the higher and purer part – with the lower, rough, and dirty parts of the human body, a soldier's crotch: *Tienes los ojos más negros que los calzoncillos de un soldado* (Your eyes are blacker than a soldier's underwear.)

In this article I examine the genre of *piropos* that was prevalent in Tetuan, analyzing their poetic aspects and humorous effect. The article examines the basis of genderism and sexism in the *piropos* that were humorously directed at women and, in addition, examines the types of humorous perspective that changed over the generations, with the passage of time, in the case under review: between the informants and the researcher.

The Tetuan streets where the *piropos* were heard are presented as a hybrid 'linguistic marketplace', created also through the parody of *piropos* by Muslims, who were trying to imitate the Spanish Christians, and by women, trying to imitate the voice of Spanish-Christians. In this layered space, the *piropos* mark a site of contact between cultures that was made possible, temporarily, through the use of these linguistic expressions.