



## *Androman*

**Director:** Az Larabe Alaoui

**Type:** Feature drama

**Origin:** Morocco

**Year:** 2012

**Screening time:** 97 mns

### Synopsis

In a remote village where only boys inherit property, a poor charcoal trader and widower whose only offspring are two girls desperately seeks to secure his land by having his older daughter pretend she is a boy. Named Androman, the girl obeys but inevitably matures. What will happen when she befriends a brave shepherd? Roughly based on *The Sand Child*, a well-known novel by the French Moroccan writer Tahar Ben Jelloun.

### Background

“Amazigh” is the singular of “Imazighen” which means “free human.” Formerly known by the pejorative term “Berbers,” these ethnically diverse people are the native or indigenous inhabitants of Northern and Sub-Saharan Africa. They now extend to Europe and North America as one of the first African immigrant Diasporas in the 20th century. Grouped into numerous communities, including the Kabyle, Tuareg, Chleuhs, and Siwis, they developed and have maintained diverse cultural practice for centuries. Successively colonized by waves of invaders and influenced by global exchange, the Amazigh people hold Muslim, Jewish, and Christian faiths and many of them are simply irreligious. Amazigh people share unique powers of resistance and a relationship with land with all indigenous peoples. They have preserved their language, Tamazight, which is written

with the Tifinagh alphabet, and their rich cultural expression. Today the Amazigh are known for their contributions to world music, artisan crafts, and transnational film.

For more information on the Amazigh people, watch an overview of Amazigh history/identity/politics from Turkish Television:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Swh8898LBps&feature=youtu.be> and read: Rachik, Hassan. "Berbers." *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, edited by Richard C. Martin, 2nd ed., vol. 1, Gale, 2016, pp. 165-167. Gale eBooks.

### **Key insights of Amazigh Cinema**

- Since the mid-1990s, videos, shorts, documentaries, and fictional films have emerged to represent the challenges and resiliency of Amazigh identities in changing times and in relation to Arab and European cultures. The stories they tell bridge locations and mentalities – village and city, nation and diaspora - and use multiple languages including their native Tamazight.
- No one film captures Amazigh identity or life – only a wide variety of films and videos can offer viewers a grounded sense of contemporary issues and values impacting these diverse communities.
- Film is one way to understand and to preserve an ancient culture in active transformation.

### **The Film Context**

#### **1. Sulaliyate: Land Ownership and Women's Rights**

The dispossession of indigenous land dates back to the 7<sup>th</sup> century Arab-Islamic colonization of Morocco, then the French colonial period in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The process of removing indigenous Imazighen of their ancestral lands persisted in the post-independence period. Governmental policies of land privatization and commodification became the main forces behind depriving remote tribes, villages and ethnic groups from their collective lands. Both, under the collective and private systems of land ownership, Amazigh rural women have always been the most disadvantaged groups being deprived of their share in land inheritance. One of the reasons behind the tradition of depriving women of their land share is the Amazigh tribe's aim to preserve the collective ownership within the same tribe as women might get married outside the tribe. In early 2000s, grassroots demonstrations spread nationwide in Morocco. They were organized by what has become known as "*Soulaliyate women*" in reference to the tribal women who lived on collective land and decided to start a movement demanding equal access to land property. For more information on *Soulaliyate* movement in Morocco read [here](#).

#### **2. Labor and inequality in an Amazigh village**

According to anthropologist David Crawford (2008) Amazigh people are famously egalitarian, and villagers do not typically display their economic status in the same way that urbanites might. Nonetheless, economic inequality among Amazigh villages is strongly held by the villagers themselves, especially across households. This frame of inequality conditions the capacity for

households to produce children to labor, and this in turn influences the kind of lives lived within particular households, the amount of leisure, the quality of food, the availability of medicine, the political potential of the patriarch. Inequalities between households influence and are influenced by inequalities within particular households, and they influence and are influenced by inequalities at the broader lineage and village levels, too. [...] lineage associations have been claimed to have formed the political glue that allowed tribes to govern themselves without any permanent authority or the intervention of the state (Gellner 1969). For more information on this theme read [here](#)

### **3. Femininity and women's oppression under a patriarchal system**

Simone de Beauvoir famously asserted that “one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman,” which suggests that womanhood is not fixed feature, but a social construct. The same is true for manhood since violating certain masculinity traits, pushes men out of manhood. Nonetheless, being a woman in patriarchal cultures, as the Amazigh culture(s), is not only a social construct, but an ongoing endurance of multilayered oppressions upheld by powerful cultural norms and supported by tradition and religion, with the complicity of law and state. FGM, child marriage, honor killing, forced hijab are few examples of the continuous violence inflicted on women because of their gender in those cultures. The lack of liberal context and/or democratic culture in patriarchal cultures as such exacerbates the experience of being a woman, girl, and child. Patriarchy in those contexts is not only a means of hating or controlling women, but of dehumanizing and denying them the right to life, too. No wonder a Woman, Life, Freedom, Revolution emerges from an illiberal context.

#### **Film Assignment**

##### **Prior reflections:**

- What are some examples of the gender gap in economic participation and opportunity?
- Cross-dressing has occurred for various reasons across centuries. Could you think of a few reasons why female-to-male cross-dressing occurs? What are its effects on women? What is its effect on men?
- Could you share insights about the impact of patriarchy on women's work-life balance and economic participation in your community, society, or country?

##### **Making observations:**

1. Stunning natural landscapes have appeared in most of the scenes since the beginning of the film. What can we learn about the Amazigh people's life from the landscapes? Could you draw any paradox between the landscapes and the Amazigh village's quality of life?
2. Why did the fqih (the religious leader) meet with the tribesmen? What was the main topic of their discussion? What did the tribesmen suggest to solve the issue at hand? What was the fqih's position?

3. Could you describe the toy that the shepherd (Mhand) gave to the little sister in the front yard? What symbolic dualisms (contrastive ideas) does it evoke and how are they revealed and played throughout the rest of the film?
4. Why is Androman's father (Oushen) always emotionally distressed, frustrated, and loud? How do you find his action of stealing charcoal from the government's store?
5. Androman, was silent during the entire time of the film. What is the reasoning behind silencing the main protagonist?
6. How does Androman pursue her preferred gender identity throughout the film? Describe those moments of conflicts between internal identity and external image.
7. What does the little sister, Rqia, symbolize in the film? What are the similarities and differences between her and Androman?
8. How did the village men react in front of the photo camera to make their ID cards? Could you elaborate your answer by referring to what you know about the dualism of indigeneity and modernity (how indigenous people engage with modernity)?

### **Analysis**

1. Androman is the Amazigh name of a tree that grows in Morocco's Atlas forests. It is also the name of the main female character who had to disguise as a young man in the film. Is there a symbolic significance in the association of both meanings?
2. The village women refused to buy anything from the peddler following a discussion with him. Why was that? Could we link the discussion topic in that scene to the role of patriarchy in creating a divide within women through means of envy of looks and jealousy? How women's bodies are judged and scrutinized under the patriarchal system based on that discussion? Is there a moment of liberation for women in that same scene? How is it expressed?
3. The preference for a male child over a female child is deeply enshrined in the Amazigh village in question and articulated clearly in the film's imaging and script. What are the deep-rooted reasons for son preference? Do you see a link between the dynamics of women's inheritance and the village's socioeconomic status?
4. When Androman was tattooing her chin, a young girl from the women's gathering approached with the question "I don't know why you want to become a girl?". Why did the young girl ask that question? What did she imply? Could you relate your response to the current public-discourse debate around the question of "what is a woman?".
5. The filmmaker seems to draw upon the mythological superhero or savior through the character of Mhand, the shepherd. Do you agree with this interpretation? Could you analyze the similarities and differences between both?

6. In your opinion, what's the filmmaker's message in making Androman win the race? Will that change the perception of women and economic in a similar village?

7. Could you provide an intersectional analysis of indigeneity, women, sexuality, class, and access to property ownership through the film?

### **Connections**

- Have you ever read anything or watched a movie that speaks to the same themes of Androman? What was it? What does that tell you about the patriarchal system?
- The theme of the 8th edition of NYFAF is **Facing the Unexpected**. In *Androman* this is depicted through Mhand's reaction when he found out about Androman's actual gender identity. Have you ever been through an unexpected situation? How did you face it?

### **Things you can do to promote gender equality**

**Think** about what institutional, legal, and social initiatives have been taken in your society to combat patriarchal norms and promote gender equality.

**Reflect** on the way you perceive the shifting landscape of gender around the world.

**Question** how your cultural upbringing influences your understanding of gender roles and economic growth.