Sabbah's Legacy: The Evolution of the Image of Woman in the Muslim Unconscious

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SABBAH'S LEGACY: THE EVOLUTION OF THE IMAGE OF WOMAN IN THE

MUSLIM UNCONSCIOUS

by

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Abstract

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Taking Fatna Ait Sabbah's two editions of *La Femme dans l'inconscient musulman* (1982 & 2010) as my point of departure, I analyze the image of the woman in several contemporary French and Arabic texts. Sabbah argues that buried in early Muslim pornographic texts lies an image of woman that reflects the unconscious view of her in the masculine imagination. In this image woman is positioned in opposition to the Muslim ethical system largely due to her subversive sexual desire. Sabbah's texts raise key questions: Where a transformation of the feminine condition takes place, is it accompanied by a corresponding change in the image of the woman in the Muslim unconscious? How does the collective unconscious change? Is the unconscious always a reactionary force? Does contemporary literature reinforce Sabbah's conception or depart from it?

The novelists I have selected combine two pertinent attributes: they critique their own society and they examine female subjectivity, or in other words how a woman perceives her role, her identity and her consciousness. Through an analysis of heterodox texts, I focus particularly on how the Arab world sees itself.

My first chapter compares Sabbah's two editions, including her shift in tone and agenda, and the lacunae in her texts. In my second chapter I study Moroccan novelist

Rajae Benchemsi's *Marrakech, lumière d'exil* (2002) and Nawal el Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* (1975) in terms of how the erotic and space function in both texts. I explore the women characters' compliance with or resistance to Maghrebian notions of feminine and masculine space. I argue that the individual choices regarding space help define the characters' identity.

In my third chapter I examine the Sufi view of woman as included in Rajae Benchemsi's *La Controverse des temps* (2006) and Ahmed Toufiq's *Abu Musa's Women Neighbors* (2006). I point out that the Sufi view presents a counter-discourse to Sabbah's description of the image of the woman in the Muslim unconscious. If Fatna Sabbah sees woman in early erotic and orthodox texts as reduced to an exclusively sexual essence, these texts present a spiritual dimension to woman's identity, a dimension which in the context of Sabbah's work, I argue, has a transgressive aspect.

In my fourth chapter I analyze the mother figure in two novels by the Algerian writer, Boualem Sansal: *Harraga* (2005) and *Rue Darwin* (2011). I describe the distance between the representation of the mother in Sansal's work and the image of the woman in the Muslim unconscious as described by Sabbah.

I conclude that while the image of the woman as described by Sabbah continues to be present in contemporary texts, other images, remarkable for their diversity, have emerged.

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Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my grandmother Frances Zonis, who was the embodiment of love.

Acknowledgments

First and foremost I wish to thank the director of my dissertation, Professor Régine Jean-Charles, for her careful review of chapter drafts, and her clear and insightful feedback. Her dynamic vitality and passion for the study of Francophone literature are inspiring. I would also like to thank my other committee members, Professor Franck Salameh and Professor Kevin Newmark. I am grateful to Professor Salameh for encouraging me to study the work of the Algerian writer Boualem Sansal and for his elucidation of key points in Arabic history and language. Professor Newmark helped lay the foundation for my study through the courses that I took with him which emphasized literary theory. His readings of my papers over the years helped sharpen my writing skills and develop my scholarship. I would also like to thank Laurence Busenbark for his amazing research skills and immediate responses to my sometimes rather obscure questions. I would like to thank my mother, Judith Listernick, for her patience, kindness and love during this long process. I would also like to thank my aunt and uncle, Elissa and Mel Zonis, for encouraging me to pursue my dream of a doctorate in French literature.

Son désir [le désir féminin] est une force si irrésistible, si biologique, si animale qu'elle est fatalement portée à s'insurger contre les contraintes, les barrières dans le temps et l'espace qui tenteraient de porter atteinte à ses capacités de jouir. Elle est par définition rebelle à tout souci de hiérarchisation, de classification qui fondent l'univers spirituel de l'islam, fondé sur la gestion contrôlée du biologique et sa soumission à un ordre dessiné par et pour l'homme et sa glorification (Sabbah, 1982 58).

Introduction: Relativism and Ethnocentrism

The epigraph for this dissertation is drawn from *La Femme dans l'inconscient musulman* by Fatna Ait Sabbah[1] published in 1982, and released in a revised edition in 2010. Both editions contain this excerpt. It was this particular passage that first attracted my attention, motivating me to pursue a further study of Sabbah's work and its implications for literary analysis of contemporary texts which treat the image of the Muslim woman. I was particularly curious as to whether the image that Sabbah describes here has remained consistent in contemporary texts, or whether over time it has been modified, a question that had not yet been explored. Before turning to the literary questions that I will examine, I wish to look at how the issue of cultural relativism, an anthropological construct, is inextricably entangled with my subject: the transformation of the image of the Muslim woman in Francophone literature. The question of cultural relativism affects the legitimacy of my writing as an outsider on this subject. Will I try to be morally neutral? How will I make judgments? What kinds of judgments can I legitimately make? These questions lie behind the questions that I will ask in the dissertation itself and so need to be addressed first.

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[1] A pseudonym for an unknown author believed to be a Maghrebian woman. One internet source ("Aït Sabbah Fatna") identifies her as Fatima Mernissi. The anonymity of the author, which has been successfully preserved for over 30 years, is indicative of the degree to which she viewed her book as potentially explosive as radical interests have attempted to repress a critique of the position of the woman in Muslim society. "Fatna" is not a common female's name in Arabic, for obvious reasons, it means "seduction." "Ait" is common in North African place names, and it may possibly be a vestige of Punic-Phoenician. In its modern Syrian form it means "congregation" or "flock." "Sabbah" is "morning," or "morning-bringer" and is the tribal name of Kuwait's ruling family.

It is interesting to note that Gallimard proposed the taking of a pseudonym to Boualem Sansal. But he refused, saying "Il faut assumer" (Redouane 79).

Cultural relativism, a term drawn from the anthropological work of Franz Boas and Alain Locke (1924), implies that there is no absolute truth (Jarvie 53)[2]. I.C. Jarvie explains this further:

> This means either that there is no truth known to us, and hence all attempts to capture it are equal […]; or it means that truth is whatever is declared true *by a system*, that systems of culture, ethics or knowledge have their own differing means of appraisal, but there is no super-systemic means of appraising these means of appraisal (Jarvie 53).

Although the term cultural relativism was not coined until the early 20th century, the concept goes back to Montaigne who wrote,

> Or, je trouve, pour revenir à mon propos, qu'il n'y a rien de barbare et de sauvage en cette nation, à ce qu'on m'en a rapporté, sinon que chacun appelle barbarie ce qui n'est pas de son usage; comme de vray il semble que nous n'avons autre mire de la verité et de la raison que l'exemple et idée des opinions et usances du pais où nous sommes (Montaigne, *Essais* 205).

Montaigne here discusses how we relate to otherness. It is always in relation to ourselves that we see the difference in the "other." According to Montaigne, when we observe others, we take our own culture as the specific standard against which we measure what it means to be civilized. Relativism is a reaction against the ethnocentrism of which Orientalism is one example. The following comments will compare relativism and Orientalism as it is understood by Edward Said. Relativism is an anthropological approach, while Orientalism is an attitude which can be taken in fields as divergent as

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[2] Jarvie, I.C. "Rationalism and relativism." *The British Journal of Sociology* 34.1. (1983): 44-60. Print.

anthropology, sociology, history, or philology--that is, by any discipline that studies the Orient. Relativism has been critiqued both as an erosion of values and as an over-accepting view of the "other" which engenders a response of passivity. Relativism seems to create a dynamic where the "other" is accepted as is. But this acceptance hinges on the characterization of the "other" as inhabiting a realm of values irremediably separate from the viewer's, rendering invalid any notion of absolute truth.

The Orientalist eye, for its part, looks at the Orient not as it was, but rather as it has been represented in the colonial tradition, mediated through a gaze of fascination and justifying a view of superiority by the West. This gaze deforms reality to view the people of the Orient as irrational, fallen and different. Orientalism has been seen by Said as a form of paranoia, a dehumanizing ideology, which has justified Western aggression and colonial rule.[3]

Thus, I would suggest that both relativism and Orientalism offer an immediate but false reassurance through their confirmation and justification of the status quo. But this reassurance is short-lived as both have produced reactions against themselves, reactions which unsettle our notion of ourselves, and our view of the "other." Said's critique of Orientalism makes us question Western hegemony, a subject that has been treated by

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[3]   Philopsophically, then, the kind of language, thought, and vision that I have been calling Orientalism very generally is a form of radical realism; anyone employing Orientalism which is the habit for dealing with questions, objects, qualities, and regions deemed Oriental, will designate, name, point to, fix what he is talking or thinking about with a word or phrase, which then is considered either to have acquired, or more simply to be, reality. Rhetorically speaking, Orientalism is absolutely anatomical and enumerative: to use its vocabulary is to engage in the particularly and dividing of things Oriental into manageable parts. Psychologically, Orientalism is a form of paranoia, knowledge of another kind, say, from ordinary historical knowledge (Said, *Orientalism* 72).

Samuel Huntington in *The Clash of Civilizations* (1993). Samuel Huntington claims that the West and other cultures, in particular Islam, have been engaged in an enduring conflict, a thesis that has been criticized by Edward Said.

Huntington attributes the tensions and clashes between civilizations to differences in culture. He might have been more exact to blame ethnocentrism. As Said so aptly points out in his critique of Huntington, Huntington seems to come from a somewhat ethnocentric position himself, apparently having as his primary agenda the will to have the West remain "Western" in identity and not become multi-cultural, as he sees this as the only way to avoid decay. This, rather than the desire to understand or to seek reconciliation as part of the process of globalization or the building of international community, is Huntington's goal, as Said explains it.

Further, Said, in his critique of Huntington points out that cultures are not homogenous or monolithic and that within every culture there are dissenting or heterodox strands. He comments that to assume the homogeneity between the two views is to miss what is fertile. My study gives particular attention to these latter strands, focusing on the analysis of texts of internal critique.

The anti-relativist critique, the view that there are some values that traverse cultures at least to some degree, leaves us uncertain as to the boundaries of our own values, when they can be considered universal and when they should be rightly viewed as culturally specific.

I note that there are also problems with the anti-relativist argument. Some anti-relativists claim that human nature is deeper than culture, and so there are universal absolute values such as human rights in a Western form, and democracy as we

understand it, values which should be used to "enlighten" those who do not yet hold them. This particular form or caricature of anti-relativism is a call back to the colonialist "mission civilisatrice," and deforms the idea of a call for tolerance.

In my approach of texts about North African women, on the one hand, one might say that the cultural distance between myself as a Western writer and the text would render analysis impossible. This criticism assumes a form of cultural relativism which can only be considered caricatural because it denies any possibility of understanding another culture.

These two opposite attitudes, extreme relativism and anti-relativism, are both more than problematic; they are erroneous views, but ones that nevertheless need to be raised to highlight the need for discussions of the following questions: Is it possible to judge or to critique the condition of the woman in North African society? Who can analyze and on behalf of what? What are the criteria that will be used? These are the questions that an examination of cultural relativism and of anti-relativism pose.

Two authors, Djemela Benhabib and Lila Abu-Lughod, address these issues. Benhabib, the Algerian born author of *Ma vie à contre-Coran: Une femme témoigne sur les islamistes* (2010), comes down hard on those who take the first approach: silence in the name of cultural relativism, silence in the face of some practices which she deems to be objectively and universally detrimental to women.

For her part, Leila Abu-Lughod, author of the 2013 book *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* criticizes the imposition of the Western template as a model to look at the condition of the Muslim woman. She sees the use of this template as a tool of propaganda to justify intervention in Muslim countries, intervention which has included the Franco-

Algerian war and more recently the Afghanistan war. Abu-Lughod criticizes self-righteous Western dominant attitudes that make of humanitarianism the new colonialism.

Abu-Lughod critiques the whole notion of the existence of the "Muslim woman." She argues that no one would ever make generalities about "the Christian woman" or about "the Jewish woman" because it is clear that it is necessary also to define her historical, economic, and social position before making any statement applying to her situation. Furthermore, the concept of the "Muslim woman" mistakenly ignores diversities of the Muslim identity across varying communities.

Abu-Lughod agrees with Benhabib that cultural relativism fosters acceptance of the status quo, and she further challenges cultural relativism as precluding the question of how the West might examine its own responsibilities for the situations of others in distant places. Abu-Lughod characterizes her own work as "writing against culture" (6). She problematizes the concept of culture, by making the radical argument that generalizing about cultures interferes with understanding individual human experience in a historical and political framework. While Abu-Lughod praises respect for difference, she critiques cultural relativism as a moral judgment that is ahistorical. She cites Leti Volpp (127) whose article, "Blaming Culture for Bad Behavior" (2012) demonstrates that violent or abusive behavior gets attributed to culture only when it occurs in minority, or alien cultural, racial, or national groups.

Benhabib and Abu-Lughod's work are especially relevant to my study in so far as they confront the difficulty of writing about Muslim society as a Westerner. From Benhabib I take the notion that it is possible for an outsider to consider, study, and write about these issues, despite the barriers that "cultural relativism" might pose in creating an

opacity, and despite the necessary work to see past "Orientalism." From Abu-Lughod, I would like to take an appreciation for analyzing texts in their specificity, looking past the essentializing stereotypes, to remark on the individual texts in their historical contexts.

I rely on both authors when examining the questions, "Does a critique become legitimate/authentic only when made from within a society?" and "How does the critique originating from within a society differ from one originating externally?" I argue that despite the legitimacy of both sources of critique, there is a difference, as Nawal El-Saadawi highlights in a 1998 interview published in *Emerging Perspectives* (Emenyonu 264). Saadawi discusses the difference between intercultural and intracultural critique concerning female genital mutilation. She compares her own view of this practice, which she personally experienced, with the description of it in Evelyne Accad's *L'excisée* (1989) and Alice Walker's *Possessing the Secret of Joy* (1992).

Saadawi explains,

> So in a way, I would like to say that's the difference between people who lived the agony and the pain and paid the price for it [and those that did not]. In Arabic we say when your hand is in the fire, it is not like when your hand is in the water. So these writers, I say, their hand is in the water, but my hand is in the fire.

While not denying that both intracultural and intercultural scholars are immersed in their study, Saadawi in this metaphor, emphasizes the difference in the quality of their experience. She sees the engagement with the subject as more than intellectual; the scholar's body has a physical contact with its object: in the one case soothing, or comfortable and in the other unbearably painful, often even life-threatening.

Among the multiple critiques[4] that dispute and analyze Said's most famous work *Orientalism* is Daniel Varisco's *Reading Orientalism: Said and the Unsaid* (2007). Varisco looks at the lack of impact and lack of dialogue in the Arab world with Said's *Orientalism.* Varisco attributes this to Said's "failure to engage with anything actually written in Arabic" (17). This, of course, is accurate. But, the lapse is even larger. Said focuses exclusively on distortions in the Western gaze on the Orient, never, as Varisco points out in his conclusion, setting forth his own view of "what the real Orient was" (291) or how it could be more accurately represented (294). In other words, Said does not examine Arab thought, philosophy or view of itself.

If, according to Varisco, what is missing in Said is a description of the true Orient, I do not intend to fill this gap but to critique the possible existence of one true Orient by emphasizing the lack of homogeneity in the Middle East. While I begin with references to some major Western scholars on the Orient (Said, Varisco and Huntington), I am far more interested in how the Orient sees itself. My goal is to attract both Western and Arab readers to my analysis, so that a dialogue can be opened regarding the texts that I study.

Varisco confronts the thorny question of how a scholar from outside a culture can analyze texts from that culture. He develops the theory that such work can be done through "nodalities." By nodalities, Varisco refers to "intersections through which ideas flow" (299). If rendering my own gaze transparent is an ideal, but perhaps unrealistic model that of studying nodalities introduces the concept that at certain points contact between cultures is possible. Varisco asserts that analyzing the language of specific text

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[4] Including Robert Irwin's *Dangerous Knowledge* (2006) and Ibn Warraq's *Defending the West* (2007).

(or, in other words, close readings) are one such point. According to him, it is through language that we meet.

Although it is important to put the question of cultural relativism in a broad context, I also realize that when writing in a department of languages and literatures, I must ask, how these lines of anthropological questioning differ from the literary questioning that I will use? Does the question of cultural relativism have a role in literary analysis? What is that role? Does cultural relativism imply a moral judgment dissociable from a literary analysis? Can my central questions: "How do the texts studied describe the image of the woman?" "What are the literary devices used to establish archetypal figures?" and my fundamental question, "How do these archetypes relate to the unconscious?" be distinguished from the problematic of cultural relativism? It is possible that these questions can bypass the very difficult hurdle of cultural relativism to shed light on an ongoing transformation without assigning value/or devaluation to this shifting image from a Western perspective. I argue, however, that literary analysis as a genre is not neutral. While it need not imply a moral judgment, it does frame our gaze on other societies.

While an anthropological approach focuses on society and culture, the object of a literary approach is texts; thus the representation of people is not transparent, but is mediated by language. Unlike anthropology, which focuses on the behavior of society and of individuals, literary analysis of archetypes investigates how authors construct representations, and behind that the question of how these authors think about or view the existing archetypes. As literary scholars, it is the reflection of reality, not the reality itself that interests us.

While the representations that I am studying are not, and can never be neutral, my purpose is not to make judgments about them on a moral level. The choice between cultural relativism and anti-relativism stands between the reader and the text. It is insidious and inescapable. It forms a cross-axis to that of intercultural and intracultural critique, both of which can take either position.

All critique takes a distance from its object. It is the qualitative nature of this distance that forms the essential dichotomy between intercultural and intracultural criticism. All readers choose between relativism and anti-relativism. It is making this choice that forms one aspect of our distance from the text. The feeling of intimacy with the text, especially when the reader and the text belong to the same culture, should not blind us to the distance. But a text from another culture brings in a wider aspect to this distance, an aspect that cannot be ignored. The most useful point for a literary scholar to take from Abu-Lughod is that it is with the text in its individuality which we must deal. Writing against culture highlights this individuality against the homogenizing aspect of culture.

The distance between Fatna Sabbah and Leila Abu-Lughod is wide. While Sabbah finds culture so determinative that it fractures "a universal" unconscious, Abu-Lughod wants the term to disappear or melt away in the messiness of individual experience. Is it possible that they are both correct—because Sabbah deals with archetypes, while Abu-Lughod analyzes reality?

Is there thus even such a thing as the Muslim unconscious, if as Abu-Lughod argues, there is no such thing as a Muslim woman? It is with this question and an analysis of Sabbah's text that my dissertation will begin.

* * *

Following Françoise Lionnet, I do not mean to examine literature purely as a cultural phenomenon to be decoded (*Écritures féminines et dialogues critiques* 35). To analyze Francophone literature without focusing on its literary merit would be to devalue it.

Lionnet, in the same work, describes many famous authors depicting women "devoid of subjectivity, singularity, agency, independence, and will" (op cit. 30). So much space has been given to analyzing texts critiqued as objectifying women. I will explore instead texts that evoke female subjectivity,[5] that write against myths, that subvert, even as they demystify. Some examples of the types of questions that interest me follow. How is female subjectivity shown in the North African novel? What happens when the story is seen through the eyes of a female narrator? If women have been described traditionally as objects to be looked at by men, what happens when the female gaze turns on itself?

The novelists I have selected combine two pertinent attributes: they critique their own society and they examine female subjectivity. Referring back to Said's critique of Huntington, I am interested in writers who represent heteredox forms of thinking in the

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[5] By female subjectivity I refer to how a woman looks at herself, her role, her identity and how she defines her own consciousness, or in other words how a woman perceives the personal, social and political meanings of herself. This definition suggests a potential distance between how women are represented as "other" in images, symbolic systems and language and how women see themselves. Analyzing this distance is central to my dissertation. Accessing female subjectivity thus poses a logistical problem; for we can only analyze how women see themselves through the study of their use of language, be it the use of words, body-language or even the language of music. Our understanding of female subjectivity can never be direct, but is always mediated by a symbolic system. The difficulty arises, of course, when the symbolic system through which female subjectivity is expressed already contains within it a structuring of society seen as disembodied or patriarchal.

Muslim world. For these reasons, I look at the work of the French writers Boualem

Sansal and Rajae Benchemsi. Sansal has been awarded the prestigious Arabic Novel

prize of 2012 for his novel *Rue Darwin* (2011)[6] and he has been nominated for the Nobel

prize. Though she has been less recognized than Sansal, Benchemsi's work is compelling

because of her dual position as "insider" and "outsider." As she grew up in Morocco, its

culture has become part of her. Having then spent many years in France before returning,

her view is characterized by compassion, fresh eyes, and a nostalgia which only distance

can evoke.

The two other authors whose work I focus on are Nawal al Saadawi and Ahmed

Toufiq. Saadawi is perhaps the most famous of the authors whom I examine, having

written forty-one books, most of which center on the condition of the Arab woman. What

is different about my analysis of her work *Woman at Point Zero* (1983) is how reading

her alongside Rajae Benchemsi brings certain of both authors' themes into focus.

Comparing *Woman at Point Zero* (1983) with Benchemsi's *Marrakech lumière d'exil*

(2002) deepens our understanding of both texts, in particular by exploring how sexuality

can be uncoupled from the erotic and how both authors explore the importance of space

as a component of the novel.

Including Ahmed Toufiq's work was a happy solution to my desire to develop a

chapter around the Sufi view of woman. His work *Abu Musa's Women Neighbors* (2006)

to this point has been rarely analyzed. Reading him side-by-side with Rajae Benchemsi's

La Controverse des temps (2006) reveals how the Sufi view of woman and of love is

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[6] See chapter four for a discussion of the controversy surrounding this award.

constructed in two contemporary Moroccan texts. This analysis introduces another heterodox strand within Islam.

In my first chapter I will study a work I consider seminal: the two editions of Fatna Sabbah's work entitled *La Femme dans l'inconscient musulman* (1982). Sabbah's work in many ways constitutes the source of inspiration and the theoretical basis of this thesis. The issues that she explores are fundamental ones: how widely read texts reveal a certain image of the Muslim woman which Sabbah sees as situated in the unconscious of her society; the distance between this image and the reality of woman's lives, hopes, and struggles; and the implicit suggestion that a circle has developed where the legal system has responded to this image, re-enforcing it by embedding it in society's codes. Although Sabbah's work (1982) is cited frequently, no in depth analysis of it exists and her 2010 revision has not to date been studied.

In my second chapter I look at the questions of eroticism and the spatial dynamics of gender in two texts never before compared, one by Nawal al Saadawi and the other by Rajae Benchemsi. In both books the woman narrator offers a unique perspective on these issues. I argue that both texts explore the woman characters' compliance or resistance toward societal expectations about their interaction with space. These individual choices regarding space serve to in part define the characters' identity. Thus space and psychology can be seen as intimately linked.

In my third chapter I take as my point of departure Sabbah's (1982) silence on the subject of the Sufi view of woman. In order to explore the Sufi view I look at two texts which treat a woman who loves a Sufi master. I point out that the Sufi view presents a counter-discourse to Sabbah's description of the image of the woman in the Muslim

unconscious. In these two texts Sufism is seen as having a redemptive message for society as a whole and for women in particular. The question that these texts suggest is how far a woman in Moroccan society can go toward becoming a bearer of the sacred. If Fatna Sabbah sees woman in orthodox Muslim literature as reduced to her sexual essence, these texts present a spiritual dimension to woman's identity, a dimension which in the context of Sabbah's work, I argue has a transgressive aspect.

In my fourth chapter I analyze the mother figures in two of Boualem Sansal's books, *Harraga* (2005) and *Rue Darwin* (2011). I describe the distance between the representation of the mother in Sansal's work and the image of the woman in the Muslim unconscious as described by Sabbah. Through a detailed study of Sansal's use of the Bluebeard figure in *Harraga* I argue that by evoking this fairy tale, Sansal sends multiple messages to the reader. On a first plane he raises the question of the reliability of the narrator in the difficulty she faces in discerning the difference between fantasy and reality. But on an even deeper level, he may be using Bluebeard to point to the problem of Islamophobia in Western society, where the gaze on the "other" becomes characterized by a refusal of true contact. In *Rue Darwin* (2012) I look at the narrator's search for the mother through the lens of Jung's analysis of the mother archetype. In this context, I analyze the narrator's relationship with each of his three mothers and the significance of the motif of the triple death of the mother.

Throughout this dissertation I focus on fluctuations, ripples, and heterogeneity in the woman's image in various texts. The novelists I study are writers as well as scholars, familiar with traditional views, but ready to break with them. To try to assess how far

these authors dare to go, I start with an exploration of the traditional concept of the woman in Islamic culture.

Chapter One: In the Swamplands of Memory

I return to the epigraph of this dissertation which cannot fail to surprise the reader. Woman as described here, is invested with an uncontrollable desire which stands in radical opposition to the Muslim ethical code. An example of this conflict concerns one aspect of this code, the preservation of social homogeneity, or *kafaa. Kafaa* is the goal of the *wali*, the women's legal representative who enters into the marriage contract on her behalf (Sabbah, 1982 2-3). In traditional Muslim jurisprudence the woman's marriage contract is thus between the *wali* and the husband, not between the woman and her husband. Whether the woman's consent is necessary is disputed by the jurists, although all agree that it is commendable to seek it[7] (Abd Al Ati 72-82).

The official reason given for the institution of the *wali* and the woman's inability to legally sign her own marriage contract is to protect her from a poor selection of mate because of her own inexperience (Ibid. 71). But Sabbah's insight offers a completely different explanation; according to her, the necessity of the *wali* is to protect society from a leveling of social hierarchies because of a woman's selection based on her natural inclination to choose a man, regardless of his status, whom she feels would best be able to satisfy her sexual desire: "Le féminin selon le discours érotique est érosion, nivellement des hiérarchies sociales" (Sabbah, 1982 63).

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[7] "This is what the Prophet said and did with his own daughters. It was his practice to tell the girl in question from behind a curtain that so and so had proposed. If the girl kept silent, that was indicative of her approval of the marriage. But if she shook the curtain, it meant objection on her part, and the Prophet would disregard the proposal" (Ibid. 82).

The extreme sense in which the woman in the erotic literature ignores *kafaa* in choosing sexual partners is shown by Sabbah through her citation of numerous examples of highborn women who have intercourse with slaves.

In a larger sense, the characteristics of the "omnisexual woman" as Sabbah describes woman in this literature, "une femme corps, exclusivement physique" (Sabbah, 1982 47) oppose and conflict with the Muslim woman's role as wife and mother. As a wife, her constant desire gets in the way of fidelity. Further this "egotistical desire" (Ibid. 62) deprives her of a maternal dimension.

Sabbah based her book on several categories of texts--legal, erotic and chivalrous[8]--among which several are regarded as classic, while others belong to the popular genre. All these texts can be classified as either descriptive (based on the erotic or the site of pleasure) or normative (based on a legal analysis or in other words one which organizes and defines reality).

Sabbah argues that buried in the erotic texts lies an image of woman that reflects the unconscious view of her in the masculine imagination. The orthodox discourse then serves as a response to and a repression of this image. Sabbah, however, does not justify theoretically her use of the collective unconscious as defining pornographic literature.

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[8] She defends her choice of texts analyzed only in the 1982 edition. Among the legal texts that she chooses are the *Qur'an*; Malik's Al-Muwatta (1979); Al-Bukhari's As-Sahih; Muslim's As-Sahih. Among the erotic works are *la Prairie parfumée où s'ébatlent les plaisirs* by Cheikh Nefzaoui (of the 15th or 16th century) and *Comment le vieillard retrouvera sa jeunesse par la puissance sexuelle* by Ibn Kamal Pacha (d. 1573). Among the chivalrous texts are *le Collier du pigeon* by Ibn Hazm; *les Périls des amoureux* by As-Cheikh As-sarraj, *le Dénigrement de l'amour* by Al Iman Abd Er Rahman Ibn Al Jawzi; *le Jardin des amoureux* by Ibn Quayyim Al Jawzia; *l'Agrément des souks à travers les nouvelles des amours* by Daoud Al Antaqui, *Anthologie de l'amour* by Ibn Hajla; *Le plus apprécié parmi les nouvelles des femmes esclaves* by Jalal Ad-Din As Suyuti; *Eloquences des femmes* by Ibn Tayfour and *Nouvelles de femmes* by Ibn Quayyim.

The goal of Sabbah's research is thus to bring to light what is authentically inscribed in the unconscious of this society (1982). "Authentically" here refers in part to a pre-colonial stage, relatively uncontaminated by foreign influence. I note, however, that even before colonialism, in the eighth and ninth century in particular, Greek philosophy including mainly Aristotelian works were translated into Arabic and came into contact with Muslim philosophy through, for example, the works of Averroes and Avicenna in the twelfth century. The question of "authenticity" touches on the geography of the unconscious, the degree to which its boundaries are porous, overlapping or well-defined. Sabbah, through her title itself, as well as in her work, fractures the collective unconscious[9] by implicitly critiquing the notion of its universality.

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[9] The origin of the idea of the collective unconscious is generally attributed to Carl G. Jung. And it is true that it was Jung who developed and promulgated the concept, while Freud conceptualized that of the individual unconscious. And so, in my research on the unconscious I look into Freud and Jung. But, some theorists point to the idea of the unconscious much earlier, and, interestingly, in Arab thought.

Stephen Tornay in his 1943 article "Averroes' Doctrine of the Mind" traces the idea of the collective unconscious through Eduard von Hartmann's "Philosophy of the Unconscious" and before through Malebranche's "raison universelle," back to Averroes. It is of note that Carl Jung wrote in his autobiography, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections* (1963) that he read von Hartmann "assiduously" (101). Von Hartmann wrote: "[…] why should not an unconscious world-soul be simultaneously present and purposely efficient in all organisms and atoms, since indeed the one and the other must be thought as unlocalized?" (Tornay 285 quotes von Hartmann 226 (1931)).

Also, in his work *Mysticism Sacred and Profane,* R.C. Zaehner explains Avicenna's beliefs about two parts of the human soul—the higher or rational soul— which seeks to live in accordance with the divine, and the lower soul or "nafs" which is made up of the imagination, anger and lust. Zaehner quotes Avicenna's *Hayy ibn Yaqzan* ("Alive, Son of Awake") which explains that if one attempts to suppress the lower soul completely, disaster would occur. Zaehner then concludes, "[t]hus, for Avicenna as for Jung, integration of the personality was man's first aim on earth, and his lower soul does not seem to differ greatly from Jung's collective unconscious" (Morewedge (1979) 208 cites Zaehner).

Nawal Al-Saadawi in her book *The Hidden Face of Eve* (2007) also attributes to Avicenna, rather than to Freud alone the conceptualization of the subconscious based on Avicenna's book *Al Kanoun Fil Tib* (*The Laws of Medicine)* (vol. 1 p. 71).

Though anchored in a certain historic reality, the works studied by Sabbah transcend it to reveal a cultural system. When they are dated, the texts were written between the 9th and the 16th centuries. Because of their popularity into the modern era, Sabbah argues that their content is still at work in the contemporary Muslim psyche.

Several remarks come to mind on reading this excerpt. The word "fatalement" suggests a conflict between woman's will and her fate, and the defeat of the former. It suggests further a static, repetitive and inescapable nature to this defeat, which takes the conflict out of the realm of the individual, and into the realm of the archetypal. Further, this excerpt suggests that the power of desire is confined to the feminine sex and is destructive.

A comparison with Freud's view of the sexes reveals certain differences between his conception and the one evoked by Sabbah.[10] If Sabbah's analysis is right, the Freudian distinction between the pleasure principle and the reality principle seems to be assigned, in Muslim culture (in particular in the legal and erotic codes as they are described by Sabbah), to each of the sexes: the woman is the seat of desire (described in all its negative aspects) and it is the man's role to control/repress her desire. Thus, as

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The tracing of the idea of the collective unconscious back to Arab thought may seem counter-intuitive as the Arabic word for the unconscious, "la-shu'ur," a term borrowed from the medieval Sufi philosopher Ibn Arabi (with the original meaning without sense or feeling) was introduced into the language of psychology by Yusuf Murad in the late 1940's (El Shakry 90). Prior to that, Salama Musa employed the term "al-aql al-batin" (inner mind) which in 1928 he had to explain at length (Ibid 93).

[10] In choosing Freud as a point of comparison, I do not mean to imply that his view of the unconscious is universally valid. Rather, by comparing his understanding of the unconscious with what we find to be true of the Muslim unconscious, my exploration reveals where Freud's interpretation is Eurocentric and the boundaries of its legitimacy in applying his understanding of the unconscious to Muslim societies in general and to the Maghreb in particular.

Sabbah explains, in Muslim culture, the woman is represented as a pure force of desire, devoid of superego: her libido knows no limit. The woman as described here has not integrated society's requirements into her psyche. In a sort of revisionism which results in justifying the male repression of the female, the man's perception of this void propels him to fulfill, from the outside, the role of the superego.

According to Freud, repression constitutes the source of neuroses: "Neurosis was regarded as the outcome of a struggle between the interest of self-preservation and the demands of the libido, a struggle in which the ego had been victorious but at the price of severe sufferings and renunciations" (112). In the conception described by Sabbah, repression is considered to be the necessary foundation for Muslim civilization (a little like the opinion of Trilling (24) according to whom repression is a positive force in the development of character). If Freud sees repression as internal to the individual and a necessity of civilization, the conception set forth by Sabbah liberates man from this "suffering" to place it between the sexes.

This conception of the woman reveals its simultaneous function of masking and unveiling. While sexual desire as a subversive force is unveiled, the force of male sexual desire is masked. Woman is presented as responsible for chaos (*fitna*), a shameful being who must be controlled, restrained (sequestered), and repressed in order to preserve the social order and the hierarchy of the sexes.

Based on historical texts, this conception is essentially static. Sabbah traces the origin of this traditional image as far back as the 9th century, and finds it to be consistent through the 16th century and at play even in the contemporary period. Sabbah's work (1982) refers to a fixed, aprioristic model concept, one that does not cover phenomena in

motion, but rather uses an unchangeable system of categories. At this point it would be helpful to refer to Erich Auerbach, a theoretician who studied the question of mimesis, or the interpretation of reality through literary representation, in specific texts drawn from the Western canon, ranging from Homer's *Odysseus* to Stendahl's *Le Rouge et le noir*. The fixed nature of the male/female dichotomy in Sabbah's work (1982) reminds one of the unchanging quality of character in antiquity (for example that of the Greek hero) as described by Auerbach in his seminal work, *Mimesis* (1953). Here, Auerbach makes the distinction between concepts such as aristocracy and democracy, which were described in antiquity according to unchanging aprioristic models, and modern conceptualizations such as industrial capitalism, which explain the world in a more synthetic and dynamic manner. According to him, modern models describe phenomena in motion. An important part of these modern concepts is that the idea of growth and transformation (evolution) is contained within them (Auerbach 38-9). Is Sabbah's static conception correct to the extent that it is based on the notion of a collective unconscious which by definition is ahistorical? Or, is it missing the historical dimension which, according to Auerbach, accounts more accurately for cultural phenomena?

The static conception of the way in which women fit into the social order stands in marked contrast to Gerda Lerner's view in *The Creation of Patriarchy* (1986). Lerner critiques modern feminist theory for being ahistorical. She cites, as an example, Simone de Beauvoir who writes: "they [women], have no past, no history, no religion of their own" (Lerner 221 cites de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* 1953). Lerner's thesis is that viewing patriarchy without the lens of history makes it seem natural. Instead, she argues

that "patriarchy is a historic creation formed by men and women in a process that took nearly 2,500 years to its completion" (212).

Two scholars, Fatema Mernissi and Amina Wadud, posit alternative views to Sabbah's theories. Mernissi, a Moroccan sociologist, presents a historic explanation for the relation between woman and *fitna*. She explains in *La peur modernité* that the goddesses Uzza, Manat and al-Lat during the period of *jahiliyaa* (the period before Islam) demanded human sacrifice of girls. Although clearly it was not the goddesses themselves who demanded human sacrifice, but their priestesses, their motivation is not evident from Mernissi's text. Nevertheless, the reign of the feminine became linked in the collective imagination with the blood of the victims (117-8). As the initial trauma was passed intergenerationally, its source was forgotten.

To Sabbah (1982), however, like for Auerbach's writers of antiquity, the role of historic forces has no interest. According to Sabbah, the relation between the male and the female is not one of an individual nature, not an inherently human relationship, but one between categories, without the specificity that human contact would imply.

Amina Wadud[11], a scholar-activist, directly criticizes Sabbah for not relying on the text of the *Qur'an*. Wadud argues that the dominant (traditional) notion of the Muslim woman is not based on the text of the *Qur'an* itself, but on its interpretation in exegetical texts. She notes that the absence of a feminine voice in these latter texts has been confused with its absence in the text of the *Qur'an* (2). She tries to demonstrate that the *Qur'an* is not incompatible with a liberation of the woman.

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[11] In *Qur'an and Woman: Rereading the Sacred Text from a Woman's Perspective*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999. Print.

In her article "Sex, Texts, and States: A Critique of North African Discourses on Islam" in *The Arab/African and Islamic World* (2000), Barlas analyzes the work of Sabbah and presents an argument similar to Wadud's, criticizing Sabbah for not basing her analysis on the *Qur'an* itself. Asma Barlas finds the significance of Sabbah in her examination of how the sexual is politicized or how her politics is sexualized. But she points out (and Barlas acknowledges that Sabbah herself remarks on this) that some of the misogynistic themes--such as women as destructive and insatiable--derived from Greek myths rather than from the *Qur'an*.

In my estimation, however, Sabbah never intends to focus on an analysis of the *Qur'an*, but rather on the image of women in various legal and erotic texts. Her work is not exegesis, but literary analysis in the realm of the unconscious. While Barlas correctly analyzes several misreadings, overall, she seems to misunderstand the nature of Sabbah's work.

Despite the accuracy of Wadud's (and Barlas's) critique of Sabbah, that the latter does not base her research on the *Qur'an* itself, I take Sabbah's work as my point of departure for several reasons. First, as the object of my analysis will be literary (rather than religious) texts, Sabbah's model fits my subject matter better. Second, in order to analyze the process of transformation, I will use the reconstruction of the image of the woman used by Sabbah as the paradigm which does (or does not) evolve. No such reconstruction occurs in Wadud's work. Third, this image, as described by Sabbah, has been considered culturally normative across centuries, even though it is not the only image which could have evolved from the *Qur'anic* text.

Sabbah's texts raise key questions which I will address further in this dissertation: What is the effect on Muslim society of having embedded in its core a stylized image of woman in opposition to society? How has this image evolved over time: does contemporary literature re-enforce Sabbah's conception or depart from it? My goal is to pursue Sabbah's line of reasoning in applying her theoretical framework toward contemporary literary texts.

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<u>Sabbah's Two Editions</u>

Almost thirty years separate the two editions of Sabbah's texts. Her 2010 edition is not simply updated, but thoroughly revised. Each text reflects where she is ahead of her time in the depth of her precise analysis and where she remains a product of her time. I look at both works as worthy of discussion in their own right, as the 1982 edition is not merely a precursor of her later work, but rather a text with a specific agenda: to look at the static image distilled from so many classic texts. Her 2010 edition is notable for its shift in tone, particularly in the new introduction and conclusion. In contrast to the polemic stance of the 1982 edition, in 2010 she appears more as an apologist, on the defensive against her critics, and trying to accommodate authoritative voices.

Sabbah's driving force in 1982 was the texts themselves. Her 2010 book is also a response to her critics. In this newer edition we read an apparent effort to appease both fundamentalists and feminists, while at the same time responding to nascent Western Islamophobia ("image déformée" (15)). This is a tall order, and perhaps an impossible

one, leading to some internal contradictions and at times distracting from Sabbah's groundbreaking 1982 arguments and discoveries.

Sabbah began in 1982 by explaining her intention to commit a subversive and blasphemous act (17). But in her newer edition she more than shies away from this attitude, instead presenting herself as a woman of faith, defending her religion to those who have forgotten its true principles. Sabbah in 2010 has enlarged her corpus to include Sufi texts such as Ibn Arabi's love poetry. Is it possible that these new readings have brought her also to recognize the loving aspect of Islam which she explores in her introduction? But her defensive tone is notable even in this context: "La face amoureuse de l'Islam, qu'on a tendance à oublier dans le vacarme des guerres et des luttes de pouvoir, illumine, depuis des siècles, tous ceux qui partent à sa recherche" (9). While in 1982 Sabbah did not write about love at all, here she defines Islam as a religion of love and makes this association her point of departure, rather than her original question as to what is the image of the woman in the Muslim unconscious. Thus, her text while perhaps taking in a larger view-point, becomes less stream-lined and focused on her original argument.

The pressure to defend herself against her critics seems to create some inconsistencies in her writing, of which I note three examples. The first occurs in the introduction to her 2010 edition: "Pour une religion qui insiste sur le rapport de chacun d'entre nous à Dieu, comme privilège indéniable et suprême, recourir à l'enfermement des femmes reste une contradiction flagrante et un mystère" (2010 11). This reference to the rules of spatial dynamics as a mystery seems out of synch with the results of her earlier research where she explains clearly that it is in response to the unconscious vision

of woman as sexually insatiable and in opposition to the Muslim ethical order that rules regarding control of her were seen as necessary. It seems as though in the above citation Sabbah has taken a distance from her own conclusions.

Another example of seeming internal contradiction concerns Sabbah's analysis of the difference between religions where there is a clergy who provides authoritative exegesis of texts and Islam's reliance on the text itself; Sabbah writes (in 2010):

> L'Islam a préféré, comme système social, miser sur le texte sacré, et non sur un clergé (c'est-à-dire des fonctionnaires d'une institution chargés de gérer le texte sacré), ceci explique sa souplesse et sa capacité à se rajeunir, à s'accommoder de toutes les conjonctures. Les hommes politiques peuvent se tromper, le texte sacré jamais (135).

It seems, in reality, that part of the suppleness of religion lies in the possibility of different and new interpretations.

A third area of inconsistency lies in her treatment of the question of the attitude of Islam toward sexuality and desire. In 1982 and in the end of her 2010 edition, Sabbah affirms that while sexuality within marriage is licit, desire is illicit lest it would reinforce an affective relationship between the partners which is discouraged. She writes that even during sex the believer is supposed to pray to God. But in her 2010 introduction she has revised her position on this: "L'Islam se singularise par une attitude apparemment positive envers la sexualité et le désir" (16). And further on, she states that the separation between the time for sexuality and that for prayer is permissible, if not desirable: "Un temps pour prier, et un temps pour jouir" (17).

Along with the change in tone, another major shift between the two editions is in Sabbah's fundamental purpose. In 1982 Sabbah reconstructs the image of woman from sacred and profane texts. Part of the brilliance and modernity of this edition lies in taking pornographic literature seriously and in bringing to light its significance.

Sabbah's purpose in 2010 is to show the diversity and richness in Muslim texts in how they approach the image of the woman, as well as to introduce a comparison with the roles and struggles of the "real" woman rooted in history. Interestingly, Sabbah chooses not to modify her original title. But is she still writing about the woman in the unconscious? What is the relation between the woman in history and the woman in the unconscious?

As Sabbah enlarges her corpus to include mystical, courtly and marvelous texts, she does not examine how these discourses relate to the fundamental interplay between the unconscious and its repression which she uncovered in 1982. Does this enlarged corpus validate her main point from her earlier edition or does it change it?

Let us take her discussion of the Sufi discourse as an example. How does her discussion of Sufism relate to the question of the woman in the Muslim unconscious? It appears that the image of the woman in Sufism does not reflect the orthodox view. It is other. According to Sabbah, woman in the Sufi discourse is a reflection of the divine: "La femme à la beauté resplendissante qui, chez beaucoup d'imams braqués sur la jurisprudence, incarne Satan, est, chez les Soufis, un reflet de Dieu" (19). Sabbah bases her analysis on a study of the texts of Ibn Arabi, explaining that, "[c]hez Ibn Arabi, le féminin peut incarner l'Harmonie, la sagesse et être une parcelle du divin" (20).

In my own research on the Sufi view of woman, presented in chapter three, I find that the Sufi approach represents one potential source of healing, a resolution of the difficult tension (dialectic) which Sabbah explores between the image of woman in the erotic and in the orthodox discourse. In both the erotic and the orthodox discourse the woman is defined through her sexuality: "La femme sera d'abord un objet sexuel. Sa sur-sexualisation va masquer sa dimension de croyante" (2010 142). But, in the Sufi discourse this dynamic is reversed, and sexuality itself becomes a means to a spiritual goal.

Sabbah describes marvelous literature, within which she includes *Arabian Nights,* as at the heart of collective memory. But in this literature, unlike in the more traditional view of beauty for the Muslim women, these women are neither silent, submissive, nor immobile:

> Le merveilleux, c'est le royaume de l'oralité délirante, où les femmes échappent aux rôles traditionnels et s'évadent dans un monde sans barrières ni frontières. Dans le merveilleux, les femmes possèdent le savoir qui n'est plus l'apanage des hommes. Un savoir qui métamorphose les hommes méchants en amoureux gentils (29).

What Sabbah does not explain is the relationship or distance between the collective unconscious and collective memory. While she perhaps corrects the error of reductiveness in her earlier edition, she produces in its place a vision of woman in Muslim thought that can perhaps be called crystalline, in that it has so many different prisms.

Lacunae in Sabbah's Two Editions

In 1982 Sabbah emphasizes the static, while only briefly touching on the possibility of an evolution.

She remarks:

> Je crois en l'être humain comme un être capable de faire et refaire son histoire, et je crois donc qu'il est possible aux hommes et aux femmes vivant dans les sociétés musulmanes de changer le cours de l'histoire, de vivre mieux, d'aimer mieux. Les femmes ne sont pas condamnées à vivre mutilées (Sabbah, 1982 15).

Thus, Sabbah sees the sources of change in Muslim society as primarily internal. And while she does not dispute the notion of woman's fate in itself, she proposes a new direction for that fate. The term "mutilation" presupposes an unnatural state,[12] one where violence has disfigured or injured. Sabbah writes: [this book] "tente de décoder les messages que l'ordre culturel musulman a tatoués sur le corps féminin [...]" (Ibid 12). Decoding tattoos does not erase them, but makes them more visible, focuses our intention on them in order to raise our level of consciousness as to their meanings and effects. Imagining (or imaging) the woman as "non-mutilated" goes further and suggests an act of erasure of these tattoos or even the cessation of tattooing. The gap between "decoding" and "erasure" is one little explored by Sabbah in 1982.

By asserting the possibility of human will and consciousness triumphing over a stagnant or repetitive past, Sabbah aligns herself with the modernist view of the

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[12] This reference to women as mutilated beings recalls Aristotle who wrote: "For the female is, as it were, a mutilated male, and the catamenia are semen, only not pure; for there is only one thing they have not in them, the principle of soul" (Lerner 207 cites Aristotle *De Generatione Animalium II,* 3 (737a, 26-31).

emancipation of humanity by progress, but does not provide a detailed theoretical framework as to how this change might occur. This may not be a true lacuna, but simply not her fundamental purpose. Nor does she confront the thorny issue of whether the unconscious itself is capable of change, and how it would change. Similarly, she never explains from whence she drew her notion of the collective unconscious, which is primarily a Jungian concept, rather than a Muslim one.

There exists another force, this one internal to Muslim society, which also has had and continues to have, a strong impact on North African women, a sort of native "feminism," which Sabbah must have been cognizant of, but apparently chose to omit at least in 1982. This critical lacuna is the Sufi view of woman. It is always difficult to interpret an absence of discussion. And even in her 2010 edition where she devotes a brief section to "Le discours soufi sur l'amour," she does not explain her previous silence. But I believe that the overwhelming efforts to suppress Sufi beliefs from without, and to maintain secrecy from within, show their success in keeping Sufism out of the mainstream education, and out of the attention of scholars such as Fatna Sabbah for many decades.

Sufism is not only a powerful and direct current in itself, but also in its ability to nourish and guide Islamic feminism. Sabbah herself must have recognized the shift in the status of Sufism, its growing popularity and widespread acceptance, as she gives voice to its presence in Islamic thought in 2010: "Le discours soufi comme le discours érotique religieux sont des interprétations qui ont leur légitimité" (16). The fact that Sabbah feels she must assert the legitimacy of the Sufi discourse, means that it has been called into question. Further, I note that in her short discussion of Sufism (2010), Sabbah seems to

present the view of gender in Sufism as monolithic, just as previously (1982), she had

presented the view of Islam as such: "Pour les soufis, les distinctions entre humain et

divin, ou masculin et féminin, ne constituent guère des barrières qui divisent, mais des

alternatives à explorer" (21). In chapter three I shall briefly examine various Sufi

interpretations of the role of gender: that of Ibn Arabi as interpreted by Shaikh, that of

Nasr and that of Murata. Both Sabbah's silence and her short discussion of the Sufi view

of woman call for a further exploration of this topic.

Can the Collective Unconscious Change?

     The collective unconscious presents the individual with two sources of danger.

The unconscious may enter into conflict with reality, as Sabbah demonstrates by

example. Second, the unconscious may suppress and impede personal differentiation, as

Carl Jung suggests (Jung, "The Structure of the Unconscious" 457). Jung writes: "A

collective attitude is always dangerous to the individual, even when it is the response to a

necessity. It is dangerous because it checks personal differentiation and very readily

suppresses it" (Ibid).

     Jung thus posits an antagonistic relationship between the power of the collective

unconscious and individual development. He discusses two ways to free the individual

from this conflict—the first, to repudiate the unconscious, by draining energy from her

(279) and the second to become absorbed in her by identifying oneself with her. The first,

according to Jung, is an impossibility:

          […] it is not possible to drain the energy from the unconscious: it

          continues to act, for it contains in itself the source of libido, whence all the

psychic elements flow into us […] It is not possible to exhaust the unconscious by analysis, or thus reduce it to inactivity. Nothing can deprive it of its power for however brief a space of time (280).

The second approach, to dissolve one's individuality, and merge with the collective unconscious, is also, according to Jung, problematic: "Anyone who identifies himself with the collective psyche, or in symbolic language, lets himself be devoured by the monster and becomes absorbed in her, also attains to the treasure defended by the dragon, but he does so in spite of himself and to his own great loss" (281).

Jung thus describes the problem which arises when the collective psyche and the individual psyche exclude each other. As a psychologist, rather than a sociologist, he focuses on the problematic of the individual and his pathology. Sabbah, on the other hand, as a sociologist, looks at the difficulties which arise in society such as the restrictions imposed on the woman as a result of the way she is conceived of in the collective unconscious. Both Jung and Sabbah seem to view the power of the unconscious as reactionary as they see it as fixed in nature.

For Sigmund Freud the pivotal and innovative role of psychotherapy is to bring the distortions of the personal unconscious to the surface where they can be analyzed and brought in accord with reality. Thus, fundamentally, he sees psychic change as a process of emptying and cyclically refilling the unconscious through further repression of conscious desires and fantasies.

From Carl Jung's presentation of the workings of the collective unconscious, that the archetypes are universally imprinted on humanity, it appears that he does not see any

possibility of change in the collective unconscious. Frantz Fanon in *Peau noire, masques blancs* certainly reads Jung in this way.

> La civilisation européenne se caractérise par la présence, au sein de ce que Jung appelle l'Inconscient collectif, d'un archétype : expression des mauvais instincts, de l'obscur inhérent à tout moi, du sauvage non civilisé, du nègre qui sommeille chez tout Blanc. Et Jung affirme avoir constaté chez les peuples non civilisés la même structure psychique que reproduit son diagramme. Personellement, je pense que Jung s'est abusé. D'ailleurs, tous les peuples qu'il a connus—Indiens Pueblos de l'Arizona où nègres du Kenya en A.O. britannique—ont eu des contacts plus ou moins traumatiques avec les Blancs […] Mais l'inconscient collectif, sans qu'il soit besoin de recourir aux gènes, est tout simplement l'ensemble de préjugés, de mythes, d'attitudes collectives d'un groupe déterminé. Il est entendu, par exemple, que les Juifs qui se sont installés en Israël donneront naissance en moins de cent ans à un inconscient collectif différent de celui qui était le leur en 1945 dans les pays d'où ils ont été expulsés […] [s]elon lui [Jung], en effet l'inconscient collectif est solidaire de la structure cérébrale, les mythes et archétypes sont des engrammes permanents de l'espèce. Nous espérons avoir montré, qu'il n'en est rien et qu'en fait cet inconscient collectif est culturel, c'est-à-dire acquis (Fanon, *Peau noire, masques blancs* 151-2).

Whether one defines the collective unconscious as does Jung or as does Fanon clearly impinges on the question of whether it can change. According to Jung, or at least

Fanon's reading of Jung, change is impossible. According to Fanon, one could surmise that just as culture is transmitted and can be transformed, so too, the collective unconscious, as a component and derivative of culture, could possibly and at times must change. Jung's example of the transformation of the Jewish collective unconscious among Israelis is speculative and a projection without evidence in his time.

With which definition does Sabbah side? As Jung defines the collective unconscious as universal, by specifically writing about the Muslim unconscious, it seems that Sabbah's notion is closer to Fanon's. It is noteworthy that in neither of Sabbah's editions does she directly mention Jung, nor, while she takes care to define what she means by Muslim (2010), does she ever define what she refers to by the unconscious. Instead, she does (2010) refer to a text concerning archetypes: Neumann's *The Great Mother; an Analysis of the Archetype* (1963). Erich Neumann, for his part, sees the central question as one of relationship, integration, and balance: "The health and creativity of every man depend largely on whether his consciousness can live at peace with this stratum [psychic depths] of the unconscious or consumes itself in strife with it" (44). Neumann thus offers a different perspective, where the question is not how to change the unconscious, but how to co-exist with it, as it is.

What about Sabbah? Does she posit an endless and insurmountable tension between a collective unconscious which exists outside of History with all its richness and reality distortions, and a social consciousness which deals with reality, but also distorts it? If it is the collective unconscious which resists social change, according to Sabbah, how can reform occur? While Freud sees a primary mechanism of individual change in psychoanalysis, Sabbah sees social change as occurring through careful reading, in

particular the reading and decoding of the messages that are tattooed on the woman's body. As tattoos are often put in places where the woman cannot see herself, who will read these messages, and how? Does the woman need a mirror to view the messages encrypted on her own flesh, or is she forced to rely on another in order to read these messages to her? To further extend the metaphor, visibility and legibility are entwined in a problematic of decipherment, where the woman becomes the scroll. This image evokes a text by Adonis, *Identité inachevée* (2004): "Un mystique a dit que pour arriver à l'invisible, à Dieu, il faut passer par le corps. Il a dit: le corps féminin. Le monde qui ne se féminise pas n'est rien" (13). This passage presents an apparent paradox by explaining that one can reach the transcendent through the most immanent, the incorporeal via the body, and the beyond-gender by the feminine.

Sabbah elevates literary criticism to the level of psychotherapy, in terms of its potential to support societal transformation. But this analogy, as powerful as it may be, is problematic in its own right. One can measure, to a certain extent, the effect of psychotherapy on the individual. Can one measure the effect of decoding the writing on the woman's body on the larger society? Is it the one who decodes who changes or society which changes upon reading the text of the decoder? How can we assess the correlation? Is there a correlation?

Sabbah seems to work from the same conception of the unconscious as Freud in the sense that the only way to change it, is to somehow empty its contents, personal or collective, into consciousness where transformation can occur. It is, both in Freud and in Sabbah, by assimilating the contents of the unconscious into consciousness that growth occurs. For both, the process involves hermeneutics.

History, Reform and Feminism

Part of the significance of Sabbah's analysis of the nature of the unconscious is in its implications for the struggle over reform. If the collective unconscious is seen as a force that opposes reform, how does this resistance materialize in language, ideology, and political force?

The tension between a reactionary force (the unconscious) and reform resonates with the question of where in time utopia is situated. In Islamic thought the *Qur'an* describes Medina in the early seventh century ("You are the best community produced [as an example] for mankind" (3:110)) as the utopia, thus suggesting that all reform would ideally be a movement of return (Reilly 172). This ideology is consistent with the work of Joseph Cambell and Mircea Eliade, as well as the myth of Eden where utopia is in the past, and any movement toward it is an act of re-creation rather than creation.

Another concept of utopia locates it in the future as an ideal to attain or create. In both cases, movement toward utopia begins with a critique of the present. Critique generally stems from an inability to reconcile two sets of beliefs, resulting in either synthesis or the suppression of one belief.

This was the general problem faced by Islamic society in the eleventh and twelfth centuries when Greek philosophy was introduced to the Arab world. Of particular interest during this period is the famous debate between Al-Ghazzali (1058-1111) and Averroes (1126-1198).[13] Al Ghazzali wrote *The Incoherence of the Philosophers* which rejected

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[13] Al Ghazzali is a complex thinker whose views according to Frank Griffel author of *Al-Ghazali's Philosophical Theology* (2009) have been largely misunderstood by Westerners. Al Ghazzali's opinion, developed in at least 70 books, has become normative across centuries.

the work of Aristotle and Plato as a contamination of Islam while Averroes' rebuttal

entitled *The Incoherence of The Incoherence* defended philosophy even within a religious

context.[14] While Al-Ghazzali sees religion in all instances as superior to faith, Averroes

sees both as revealing the same truths.[15]

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[14] A tale by Ibn Tufayl in twelfth century Spain supports Averroes' position that ultimately philosophy and religion reveal the same truths. Ibn Tufayl writes of a child who grows up on a desert island, who, by careful reflection develops a philosophical system consistent with the neo-platonists of the Muslim world. Through the spiritual techniques of fasting and concentration exercises, he has a vision of the universe consistent with philosophy. In contact with one other ascetic, he discovers that his inner truth is identical with that of all revealed religions (Baldick 70-71).

[15] There is a debate about how the outcome of the controversy between Al Ghazzali and Averroes affected (or stifled) the development of science and democracy in the Arab world. Robert Reilly's *The Closing of the Muslim Mind* (2010) argues that Al Ghazzali was an occasionalist who believed that everything that happens at any moment is based on God's will rather than on a natural law, and that this ideology undermined reason as a tool for independent study in the Arab world. Frank Griffel feels that Reilly misreads Al Ghazzali. While I couldn't begin to expand on this subject in any comprehensive way, I would like to comment on Reilly's theory as to why Al Ghazzali's views prevailed. Robert Reilly attributes the marginalization of philosophy in Arab thought to differences between Christianity and Islam. He argues that the former was a more hospitable ground for the growth of science. I would like to propose a different explanation.

     The translation of Greek texts into Arabic was organized and funded by the Abbasid caliphs beginning with Al-Mansur (754-775) and continuing with Al-Mahdi (775-786), Harun Al-Rashid (786-809), Al-Amin (809-813) and Al Mamun (813-833). Texts on agriculture, astronomy, grammar, music, philosophy and medicine were translated into Arabic. But the decision was made not to translate rhetoric, poetry, history or drama. In fact, the *Iliad* was not translated into Arabic until the 20th century (Snir 12).

     Several explanations have been put forth regarding this decision. Snir (2006) writes that it is because of the pagan elements that Greek literature was judged to be inappropriate or unworthy of the effort of translation. Robert Marzari (2006) in *Arabic in Chains* argues that these works were simply judged to be not useful and of no interest. In our modern society where science, technology and mathematics are often judged to be of more weight than humanities, the decision seems quite understandable. But, little speculation has surrounded the effects of this choice. Is it possible that the philosophical works taken out of their cultural context were harder to understand? Was it the devaluation of literary texts which ultimately led to the lack of integration of philosophical ideas into the culture of the time?

What is of interest in terms of my study is the early philosophical argument between Al Ghazzali and Averroes on the condition of the woman. Silent, immobile and obedient, Al Ghazzali's image of the virtuous woman is at the core of Sabbah's analysis. Why this image is equated with feminine desirability is, in fact, Sabbah's opening question (point of departure) in her original text. I look briefly at several citations from Al Ghazzali's *The Book on the Etiquette of Marriage* as translated by Madelain Farah to study the original context of this description.

As described by Al Ghazzali, the marital relationship evokes the Hegelian master-slave relationship (Vahdat 122). This, in the sense that there is reciprocity, or mutual interdependence, where the master defines himself in opposition to the slave. Al Ghazzali writes: "The authoritative statement in this context is that marriage constitutes a form of enslavement; thus she is his slave, and she should obey the husband absolutely in everything he demands of her […]"

The interdependency appears in the way Al Ghazzali describes the husband's obligations to his wife regarding the erotic aspect of their relationship: "Once the husband has attained his fulfillment, let him tarry until his wife also attains hers." He also recommends "tender words and caresses" following the advice of the Prophet.

Al Ghazzali further describes the proper etiquette for a woman as follows:

> She should remain in the inner sanctum of her house and tend to her
> spinning; she should not enter and exit excessively; she should speak
> infrequently with her neighbors and visit them only when the situation
> requires it; […] she should not leave his home without his permission: if
> she goes out with his permission, she should conceal herself in worn-out

clothes and choose the less-frequented places rather than the main avenues and market places, being careful that no stranger hear her voice or recognize her personally; […] she should always observe the rules of personal hygiene, and be ready at all times for him to enjoy her whenever he wishes.

As the woman is considered part of the man's property, the marital home is described exclusively as "his." Of particular interest is the recommendation that if the woman is to leave the house, she should wear old clothes. Why should the rules of spatial dynamics depend on how the woman is dressed? It seems as though the goal is her invisibility in public spaces.

One further text is directly relevant to my study. In *Counsels for Kings* (*Nasihat Al-Muluk*) (158-173) Al Ghazzali advises men against teaching women to write—"for teaching them to read and write will have an undesirable effect on their character"—thus rendering women's writing transgressive in any normative sense.

Averroes in his analysis of Plato's *Republic* takes a completely different position. He writes:

> […] since some women are formed with eminence and a praiseworthy disposition, it is not impossible that there be philosophers and rulers among them […] The competence of women is unknown, however in these cities since they are taken [in them] for procreation and hence are placed at the service of their husbands and confined to procreation, upbringing, and suckling. This nullifies their [other] activities since women in these cities are not prepared with respect to any of these human

virtues, they frequently resemble plants in these cities. Their being a burden upon the men [in these cities] is one of the cause of the poverty of these cities. This is because they are to be found there is double the number of men, while not understanding through [their] upbringing any of the necessary actions except for the few actions—like the act of spinning and weaving—that they undertake mostly at a time when they have need of them to make up for their lack of spending [power] […] they should be trained in the same way through music and gymnastic (58-59).

Averroes thus criticizes the society of his time for not affording women the same opportunities that are given to men to grow and develop. He believes the training for women should be similar if not the same as that given to men. His comparison of woman with vegetation evokes the nature of the plant, which rooted in one spot, is dependent on the climate and man's care to bloom. The plant, like the woman in this society, may be beautiful, but cannot move about and has few choices in its control; it is an image of passivity, of being alive while lacking components of what it means to be fully human. While one could argue that describing a woman as a plant is a way of objectifying her, a careful reading of Averroes' text reveals that it is not woman as a category that Averroes describes as a plant, but woman deprived by society of a proper education which would free her to be fully human. Averroes takes a feminist position (avant la lettre), in describing female potential as virtually unlimited, given proper education.

The association between woman and spinning is present in both Al Ghazzali's and Averroes' texts. While for Al Ghazzali staying confined and spinning constitutes the highest feminine virtue, for Averroes it symbolizes the life of the woman who conforms.

Spinning for him becomes associated with a lack of economic power. While for Al Ghazzali the virtuous woman enters the system of exchange by becoming a possession or slave, for Averroes, a society which does not allow a woman to enter the labor force transforms her into a burden, and harms itself.

Each of these texts presents a very different utopian vision. The debate about the two views of utopia has been answered de facto by the historical victory of Al Ghazzali. Averroes' work was little studied in the Muslim world after his exile from Spain to Morocco—until he was rediscovered many years later (Ofek 19). Nevertheless, a tension remains to this day in Muslim society between the two visions of utopia. As the homogeneity or uniformity of the Middle East is a myth, the dominance of one view over the other varies by country, region, and even time period.

Even before Al Ghazzali and Averroes, significant improvements to the status of women had been put into place by Islam itself. Reforms throughout the 19th and 20th century continued to work in this area. Of particular note are the Ottoman Tanzimat (reformers) who proposed that the emancipation of women was necessary for the modernization of Ottoman society. Among them is Namik Kemal who wrote an article called "Aile" in the journal *Ibret* in 1872 (no. 56) analyzing the Ottoman Turkish family, as well as two plays *Intibah* (The Awakening) and *Zavalli Çocuk* (Poor Child) which were critical of the woman's condition. Here I should also mention Sinasi's satirical play *Sar Evlennesi* (The Poet's Wedding) which criticized arranged marriages as early as 1859 (Lewis 266).

Kemal, for his part, argued that Islam's failures were due to the Muslim's treatment of women. Western societies are successful, he claimed, because they valorize

their women. The impact of Kemal's essay remained limited. Several possibilities come to mind for this. It may simply have been that society was not prepared for what he had to say. Another explanation is possible. Kemal argued that the role of women in Muslim society was limited by the vision of her as ignorant and inferior to men in intellectual and physical capacities. He also took Western society as a role model. Both of these ideas are problematic and inconsistent with more modern writing by Mernissi and Sabbah. Both of these writers explain that the Muslim system sees women as highly intelligent, but fears that they will use this intelligence against the system. In fact, there is even a word for this, *quaid.* Sabbah (2010) writes:

> L'islam classique n'a jamais considéré la femme comme intellectuellement inférieure. Son infériorité, comme on le verra dans l'analyse du discours orthodoxe, est une construction jurisprudentielle. Les arguments que les progressistes et les conservateurs échangeaient n'étaient guère du genre "la femme est incapable d'assimiler, elle n'est pas aussi intelligente", etc. Arguments qui furent avancés en Occident […] (38).

Kemal's further reliance on the West as a point of reference probably served to alienate his readers. For both of the above reasons, his analysis might not have resonated well with the society of his time. Nevertheless, the writings of Kemal and Sinasi are significant as they constitute some of the historical roots of reform.

It is not until much more recently that reforms have succeeded and the *mudawannas* (family codes) in North Africa have been revised, sometimes dispensing

with the *wali*.[16] Other areas for possible further reform of family law include changes in laws about polygamy, custody and guardianship, and inheritance, as well as ensuring that the new family laws are properly enforced and judges and courts are trained in them (Charrad 2012).

Transformation in contemporary society occurs because of many factors: the political situation, economic conditions, exchange between different parts of the world (cultural influences), the Internet, and social media. By 2010 Sabbah had added a chapter entitled "La place de la femme dans l'Islam contemporain" which begins to address some of these sources of change. In particular, she emphasizes the role of education as transformative to the lives of Muslim women, and its transgressive aspect: "L'accès des femmes à l'éducation viole la loi cardinale du système: la division sexuelle du travail et de l'espace" (Sabbah, 2010 36).

Sabbah explores the growing divide between the image that she had described in her 1982 edition, and the status of the "real" "modern" Muslim woman as it evolves:

> Elles [les femmes des *Milles et une nuits*] hantent l'imaginaire dans un
>
> monde musulman où le fantasme du voile entretient le désir de séquestrer
>
> les femmes réelles et de leur imposer le silence comme idéal. Réduire les

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[16] In Tunisia under article 3 of the 1956 Code du Statut Personnel the validity of the marriage does not require consent of the *wali*. In Morocco under article 25 of the 2004 Moudawanâ a woman of legal majority may conclude her marriage herself, or delegate this power to her father or one of her relatives. Thus, in Morocco and Tunisia, the law has made *wali* optional (Charrad 2012). The following countries have by law dispensed with the requirement of a *wali* for an adult Muslim woman getting married: Bangladesh, India, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Senegal, Turkey and Uzbekistan. However according to the Algerian Family Code amended in 2005 women cannot marry without the presence of their (male) guardians, but a woman cannot be forced to marry against her will. The latest reform authorizes the woman to choose her *wali* (*Spring Forward for Women: Algeria*).

    I mention the institution of the *wali* as an area of recent change and reform as it is one of the examples that Sabbah gives in both editions.

femmes aux discours que les hommes créent pour les apprivoiser est une

méthode millénaire et efficace. It faut pourtant, pour comprendre l'impact

et l'enjeu de telles représentations de la femme, connaître le statut et

l'évolution de la femme musulmane modern et "réelle" (Sabbah, 2010 32).

While Sabbah (2010) does address the changing symbolism of the woman in Muslim

society, she does not directly ask whether that image is changing also in the Muslim

unconscious, admittedly a very difficult question. One sentence, which she puts in

figurative language, suggests an answer: "Les imams ont essayé d'exorciser, à travers

cette femme omnisexuelle et surpuissante, leur peur du féminin, qui enveloppe et

engloutit. Ogresse qui dort profondément dans les marécages de la mémoire" (Sabbah,

2010 218). The "ogresse" refers to a classic image of woman[17] as sleeping in the swamps

of memory, or the collective unconscious. And so, the discussion that Sabbah opens in

1982 is expanded in 2010 to touch on various elements of transformation while still

hinting at the continued force of the unchanged unconscious.

The fact that Sabbah in 2010 still does not mention feminism, even Islamic

feminism in her text, as a potential force toward societal transformation becomes

understandable in terms of the reception of feminism in the Arab world. Maghrebian

society has often seen Western feminism as a Trojan horse (Dialmy 16, 135) in large part

because of feminism's perceived view of non-Occidental women as victims.[18] Zoulagh in

her 2014 doctoral dissertation, "Ni d'ici ni d'ailleurs: écrire l'entre-deux chez Rajae

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[17] Zola, *Nana* "mangeuse d'homme"

[18] The classic example of this critique is Chandra Mohanty's article "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses" published in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (1991).

Benchemsi et Touria Oulehri" (University of Oklahoma) describes the "Orientalist" slant

of Occidental feminism (244), which sees the "Oriental" woman as incapable of taking

charge of her life. As an example of this, Zoulagh cites Benchemsi (2003): "Pour ce qui

me concernait, elles étaient à l'origine de mon mépris si profond à l'égard du féminisme

tel que l'histoire du 20ème siècle en avait délimité les contours" (Zoulagh 244 cites

Benchemsi, *Marakech, lumière d'exil* 29).

Moreover, other issues separate Occidental feminists from North African women.

According to Nawal al Saadawi, Egyptian psychiatrist and author, the problems of Arab

women stem in large part from the struggle against domination and exploitation exercised

by international capitalism over human and natural resources.

> Our past experience has always shown that any strengthening of the links
>
> that bind the Arab peoples to Western interests inevitably leads to a retreat
>
> in all spheres of thought and action. Social progress is arrested and the
>
> most reactionary and traditionalist circles in society begin to clamor for a
>
> return to orthodoxy and dogma. The social and economic rights of the vast
>
> majority are subjected to attack, and women become the first victims of
>
> the general assault against freedom and progress. Radical social change is
>
> replaced by superficial modernization processes […] (xxvii).

Saadawi argues that it is in part the lack of understanding by Western feminists of this

issue, that separates them from third world women and makes the latter wary of them,

thus threatening potential solidarities.

But this citation itself presents certain difficulties. Saadawi suggests that

historically there has been social progress for women that is strictly internal to the Arab

world, and further that Western interference has aborted this progress. She postulates this social change without detailing or documenting its existence or attributing its sources to any force. She also takes the traditionalist reaction to Western intervention as a given, without attributing to it the need for self-justification. Nevertheless, the passage highlights the distance between the Western view that contact with the West (even neocolonialist and for economic purposes) would indirectly stimulate social change, and Saadawi's view, that the exact opposite is true. Saadawi goes on to suggest through her critique of the Western path of modernization, that it is not in the interest of the Arab woman to take the Western woman as a model, but rather, that the Arab woman needs to discover her own path of evolution:

> Superficial processes of modernization, whether in the West or the East, will never lead to true equality between women and men in the economic, social, political and sexual aspects of life: Sexual rights as practiced in many Western societies do not lead to the emancipation of women, but to an accentuated oppression where women are transformed into commercialized bodies and a source of increasing capitalist profits (xxviii).

Saadawi thus suggests that the Arab women should choose an evolutionary path that diverges from that of the West.

Gray, in her book *Beyond Feminism and Islamism* (2012), sees yet another barrier between Western feminism and the Muslim woman in the fundamental opposition between Western feminist secularism and the significant role of Islam in North Africa.

Many in the Maghreb feel that the Western concept of gender equality has necessarily led to moral decline in the West (Gray 66) and consequently reject this goal.

By contrast, Islamic feminism arose (according to Dr. Amina Wadud) after (and from) the 1995 Beijing International conference for women. At that time there was a dichotomy (disjuncture) between a religious (Muslim) view and a (secular) feminist view. An outgrowth of the discussions was the development of a pro-faith and pro-feminist view, that is the methodology and philosophy of Islamic feminism. And so, Islamic feminism constitutes one movement affecting change in a conscious manner on the possibilities open to women in North Africa.

While several forces invite reform (as discussed above), the slowness of the struggles for reform in family law as well as the conservative/fundamentalist movements toward a return to earlier positions validates Sabbah's position that there is something deep in the Muslim psyche that sees feminine desire as a "rebellious" force which needs to be controlled.

One of the most radical voices for contemporary reform is that of Ayaan Hirsi Ali. According to her, the problem of Islamic extremism and its confrontation with the West does not come from a distortion of the Muslim dogma, but from the very essence of Islam. And therefore, still according to Hirsi Ali, the question is not, contrary to what many Muslim scholars are asserting, to return to a more authentic Islam (Smith), the problem being with Islam itself; the question is to reform it.

There are several problems with Hirsi Ali's argument. The foremost is Hirsi Ali's lack of authority in this area. As a self-named "heretic" (the title of her 2015 book), while having grown up Muslim, her questioning has led her to leave the faith. Furthermore, she

has no formal training or academic credentials in this area, despite her extensive research and writing. In addition, Hirsi Ali's assertion of the role of human beings in the creation of the *Qur'an* (105) and her affirmation that "the *Qur'an* is not the ultimate repository of revealed truth" (235), run so deeply against Muslim thought so as not to constitute a reformation, but a true break from it. To tell a believer that a sacred text is not divinely revealed is to undermine the very foundations of the religion. Hirsi Ali also fails to explain the historic trend toward extremism, or to even mention earlier periods in history when Muslims, Jews and Christians co-existed (*convivencia*) in the "Golden Age" of the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Although this period has been romanticized, at this time the Muslim world became a major intellectual center for science, philosophy, medicine and education. And scholars, both Muslim and non-Muslim, gathered to translate the world's knowledge into Arabic.

Hirsi Ali does not say who would oversee the reform or how it would be deemed acceptable. Clearly situating herself in the Enlightenment tradition, she universalizes the Western concept of democracy and philosophy. For her, religion does not exist outside of humanity, and so, human dignity prevails over faith. Hirsi Ali holds that critical thinking or philosophical tools must be applied to religion. Using these tools, she wants to bring the Islamic faith into harmony with modernity. Hirsi Ali puts philosophy over faith and asserts that religion must be re-interpreted in accordance with humanitarian principles.

Whereas Amina Wadud works entirely from within the sacred text and Sabbah (2010) presents herself as a woman of faith (how convincing this may be is left to the reader), as we have seen, what Hirsi Ali dismisses is the text as divinely revealed. While Wadud and Sabbah do not deal with radical Islam, terrorism in the name of religion, and

the creation of ISIS, Hirsi Ali argues that the battle against fundamentalism and violence

in the name of Islam will be won not by military means but through ideological combat.[19]

She applies her ideas about reform to the question of women's rights and status,

critiquing in particular guardianship by men, polygamy, restriction of women's legal

rights, the right of husbands to beat their wives and honor killings (143). She stands with

Djmela Benhabib in urging the world not to allow cultural relativism to silence the

necessary condemnation of inequitable laws and significantly of honor killings.

Whereas Sabbah sees the repression of the woman as stemming from the

unconscious view of her, Hirsi Ali faults religious law, but without distinguishing, as

Wadud does, between the original text and later patriarchal interpretations of it.

Moving Forward From Sabbah

The image of the woman as described by Sabbah serves as a palimpsest[20] on

which the writers of the Maghreb work in the contemporary period. What does

contemporary literature reveal about the feminine condition and about the possibility of

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[19] Throughout the Middle East and the wider Muslim world, radical fundamentalists have had a major intellectual, social, and political influence in recent decades. The battle to eliminate terrorism has served as an unfortunate motivator drawing Western attention to Islamic theology and thought, and there has been a burgeoning of contemporary analysis of texts on these subjects.

[20] My use of the term "palimpsest" is based on but differs from that of Genette. While he studied the case of a particular text (hypertext) which distorts or imitates another (hypotext), I examine the evolution of an image across several works and over time. While Genette presupposes a conscious manipulation of a particular preceding text, the authors of the hypertexts that I will examine may or may not be conscious of Sabbah's work or of the texts on which it relies. While Genette codifies and systematizes the various ways in which a hypertext transforms its hypotexts (never innocently done), I analyze how a synthetic image is transformed over time, and what motivates this transformation.

change at the level of the unconscious? In other words, could the paradigm that has been described earlier where sexual desire and its repression are assigned to each gender respectively be changed? Several authors (notably Nedjma in *L'Amande*) depict a Maghrebian woman in rebellion against the traditional notion of the woman (Cheref 93). But the authors confront an aporia: this rebellion itself is part of the traditional image and in the case of *L'Amande* in particular ends in failure. And there lies the significance and the impact of Sabbah's work. For it is only by calling into question the fixed sense of this image which underlies the existing social order that transformation becomes possible.

Sabbah also takes the analysis of the unconscious from the domain of the individual into the realm of the political. It is in this sense that she establishes a link between the analysis of the unconscious and the transformation of society:

> L'intérêt de l'analyse de l'islam orthodoxe en tant que réécriture du corps féminin et du sexuel en général est d'éclairer les composantes que ces visées peuvent éventuellement isoler, digérer et reproduire comme support de nouvelles stratégies sexuelles dictée (*sic*) par l'islam dépendant (21).

The relationship between Sabbah's text and the changes in the condition of the woman, as developed in the texts I am studying (and as described below on the level of politics, space, sexuality, and social roles) suggest a number of questions. Where a transformation of the feminine condition takes place, is it accompanied by a corresponding change in the image of the woman in the Muslim unconscious? How does the collective unconscious change? Is the unconscious always a reactionary force? If the woman is consistently associated with chaos, how can she be permitted to enter a public sphere?

In response to these questions, one could envisage three hypotheses which are not necessarily exclusive. First, the symbolism of the woman undergoes a transformation. Second, there is an increased valorization of the individual, particularly of the woman, in relation to the collective, despite the fact that as Fatema Mernissi explains, Muslim society is based on a contract where individual feelings/passions are controlled by the community and the imperative is the survival of the *umma* (community), rather than the happiness of the individual (Mernissi, *La peur modernité* 91). And thirdly, it is possible that economic and political factors which are pushing toward a transformation of society, end up shifting the conception of the woman to be more in accord with their thrust.

In raising these questions, at once compelling and unexplored, I must examine why I will choose literary texts, rather than for example, historic or sociological texts, for analysis as the object of my study. It could be argued that the latter texts describe social reality in an apparently more direct, more immediate fashion, while literary texts are mediated by the style or conventions of the narrative.

I return to Auerbach to lay the foundation for my discussion of the question of the distance between literary texts, even realistic ones, and external reality. According to Auerbach, in *Mimesis*, each author, by using a unique style, mediates reality in a personal way. It is not the reality behind the text which I will study, but the text itself, which, being essentially fragmentary, constructs its own reality. And so, literary texts are not merely the means to approach the object of my study. Rather, they form the object of my study itself. In other words, as the absence of transparency is itself the subject, it is the narrative process, the narrative devices, and the fashioning of archetypes and codes on which I will focus my attention. I will investigate where the archetypes come from, what

makes them archetypes and how they resonate with the reader, that is to say, the source, essence and effects of these archetypes. I will study how these figures or constructions interplay with narrative types.

I use the term "archetype" in the Jungian sense. The term archetype derives from the Greek *arché*, the first stamp, or in other words, the original pattern or model from which copies are made (*Oxford English Dictionary*). Jung distinguishes the collective unconscious from the personal unconscious in that the former is not a personal acquisition, but is a part of the psyche which is universal and is identical in all individuals. It is made of pre-existent forms, the archetypes. These are initially and essentially unconscious, but can be altered by entering consciousness through myth, fairytale, dream, ritual, and esoteric teaching (Jung 4-53).

And so, I ask, what sort of knowledge can we gain from a literary text that is not accessible in a more scientific text? For my purposes, the interest of the literary text resides in its revelation of models and tendencies which are related to the individual and collective unconscious in North African culture.

The texts' narrative helps to structure the consciousness of the reader. The primary texts that I analyze constitute a very small sample. How representative they are of the general state of the image of the woman in the literature of Muslim society remains to be seen.

In describing the body as "tattooed" by the Muslim ethical code, Sabbah has raised questions about the relationship between surface and depth. The body becomes marked as a liminal space between a public, collective, or social category and a private one. This writing is a discourse which does not produce dialogue in any normative sense:

it is fixed, encoded, ossified. Metaphorically speaking, however she might try, the woman cannot disentangle herself from societies' code because it is embedded in her.

Sabbah's analogy describes writing on the body with an element of power over/punishment and control; it separates body and mind in a traditional sense. Does the writing on the woman's body change her consciousness or only that of others who can view it? As the woman struggles to read herself, might she perhaps gaze into a mirror? What are the limits between the female self and the writing inscribed in her? Examining these questions through a close analysis of two fictional texts which describe women's mirror-gazing is the point of departure of my next chapter.

Chapter Two: Desire and Spatial Dynamics in Rajae Benchemsi's *Marrakech, lumière d'exil* and Nawal Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero*

The Mirror Episodes

Both Rajae Benchemsi's *Marrakech, lumière d'exil* and Nawal Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero* contain an episode where a woman contemplates herself in a mirror. The mirror episode is a classic theme which goes back to the Greek Narcissus, as well as Medusa and Perseus. One of the most crucial points in the narrative of *Snow White* is mirror-gazing. From the medieval *Roman de la Rose* to twentieth century poetry (including Sylvia Plath's "Mirror"[21]), this theme has been widely utilized. Specular-gazing is thus found frequently in literature, and its significance and function have been analyzed by, among others, Carl Jung, Merleau-Ponty and Roland Barthes.

In *Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious* (1969), Jung suggests that the mirror reveals the true self, that which is covered over by our social appearance. Thus, Jung already refers to the psychic splitting which the mirror evokes, and which will be central to the analysis of our texts: "The mirror does not flatter, it faithfully shows whatever looks into it, namely, the face we never show to the world because we cover it with the *persona*, the mask of the actor. But the mirror lies behind the mask and shows the true face" (316). Giovanni Caputo, in "Archetypal-Imaging and Mirror-Gazing" (1) develops this further, claiming that the mirror symbolizes unconscious contents.

While the effects of the unconscious are underlying and powerful, the difficulty of

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[21] I mention this poem in particular because of Plath's familiarity with Jung's concept of the divided self. In this poem, Plath plays with the mirror as a liminal space between the conscious and the unconscious, as she explores themes of disenchantment and the transitory nature of the reflection (Schwartz 2014).

accessing it cannot be underestimated. Freud, Jung, and Breton have included in their work the importance of dream, fairy-tale and myth as providing clues to the contents of the unconscious. Here, I analyze the mirror episodes not only as a literary device, but perhaps as significantly for my purposes, as a way to reveal the unconscious psyche of two fictional women, Benchemsi's Bradia and Saadawi's Firdaous.

While Merleau-Ponty examines the mirror in terms of a stage of psychological development, a context which is not directly relevant to my analysis, he also evokes the mirror in connection with certain thematic associations which are literary in nature: the process of disillusionment, the transformation of the mirror-image into a symbol, and the act of being a spectator.

How does the specular image evoke disillusionment? According to Merleau-Ponty, the child must learn to view the mirror image as unreal, to deprive it of the initial reality which he gave to it (201). Thus, there is a process of disenchantment, a dispensing with the magical belief that in the mirror appears another "I." In this process, the mirror image becomes emptied of independent existence and reduced into a symbol or reflection. In what sense does he become a spectator? The child looks at his image from a distance, and learns that there can be a view-point taken from him: "Reconnaître son image dans le miroir, c'est pour lui apprendre *qu'il peut y avoir un spectacle de lui-même.* Jusque-là *il ne s'est jamais vu…*Pour l'image dans le miroir, il devient capable d'être *spectateur de lui-même*" (202). The child is learning to look at himself from the point of view of another. The limitation of what occurs in this process is evident in Merleau-Ponty's choice of the word "spectator" rather than "witness." A spectator becomes a witness when the spectatorship "establish[es] the true course or meaning of an

event or action or confers significance on it" (Wood 4). Wood further explains that in witnessing one plays a public role, gaining some social authority, a position completely at odds with the very private role of the child here learning to understand his place in society.

Merleau-Ponty explains the myth of Narcissus as a sort of splitting that occurs while gazing into a mirror. Then, a tension takes place between two processes, the knowledge of oneself gained through the gaze at one's reflection, and the simultaneous possibility of alienation when the question occurs—who am I? What I feel myself to be or the image that I see of myself? "En ce sens je suis arraché à moi-même, et l'image du miroir me prépare à une autre aliénation encore plus grave, qui sera l'aliénation par autrui" (Merleau-Ponty 203).

While Roland Barthes does not present a synthetic mirror theory, he sometimes compares the mirror experience with that of photography. As we shall see below, his comments also help to elucidate these texts.

The encounters with a mirror in *Marrakech, lumière d'exil* and *Woman at Point Zero* are significant for reasons that are inherent to the texts: they constitute important pivots in both stories (revealing character, underlying themes and hinting at the direction the plot will take). In both cases, mirror-gazing, an intensely subjective process, takes a moment of extreme solitude and creates from it a sort of inner dialectic. The similarities between the two episodes invite a comparison.

In *Marrakech, lumière d'exil* sensuality and eroticism guide Bradia to plan the seduction of her husband as she gazes at herself in front of her mirror. The mirror itself, two meters tall, a part of her dowry, formerly belonged to the vizir, her great-grand-

father. In contrast with Firdaous,[22] whose relationship with sexuality takes place in the context of prostitution, the origin of the mirror puts Bradia clearly into the social class of the high-born. In a world in which little belonged to her, the mirror is the only object to which she refers as "mine." "Puis, ce qu'elle avait plaisir, me précisa Lalla Tata, à appeler « Mon miroir »" (138). At first, Bradia admires her appearance, then in a dramatic shift, she looks at herself as though she sees another, and thus fails to identify with the image that she observes: "Toute l'intensité de son regard l'avait plongée, à son insu, dans cette chair pâle et soyeuse qu'elle observait comme s'il s'agissant d'une autre que la sienne" (138). The external image produces a psychic response of splitting or dissociation between the image and the "I," as both Jung and Merleau-Ponty have described. But here, the encounter becomes voyeuristic; Bradia begins to role-play a sexual fantasy: the seduction of Hammad. This evokes a phenomenon of modern society : "la jouissance passe par l'image" (Barthes, *La Chambre claire* 182). In the subject-object separation, Bradia seems to adopt the man's gaze. The subject becomes her husband's desire. Caressing her own breasts, and observing herself doing so, she is transformed (as she thinks of Hammad) into a sexual partner for him, the object of his desire. The alienation from self which occurs in this episode prefigures Bradia's later crisis of alienation which leads to her suicide. The seeds of her psychological turmoil are revealed here.

The theme of the alienation from the self, as embedded in an episode of specular

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[22] This name is the Arabic rendition of the word "Paradise" (probably from Arestan or Persian origins). Is there a connotation to Islam's "garden paradise" (of carnal pleasures) in Firdaous' name? As Firdaous is a convicted murderer telling her story just before her execution, would she be going to Hell for murder? Or to Paradise? Does telling your story to a sympathetic listener change how it is understood in the Heavens? Mystère.

gazing, is echoed in Saadawi's *Woman at Point Zero:* [Firdaous comments]

> I glimpsed myself in the mirror. This also had never happened to me
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> before. At first I did not know that it was a mirror. I was frightened when I
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> found myself looking at a little girl wearing a dress that reached down no
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> further than her knees, and a pair of shoes that hid her feet. I looked round
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> the room. There was no one else in it apart from me. I could not
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> understand where this girl had sprung from nor realize that she could only
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> be me (Saadawi, *Woman at Point Zero* 20).

This episode opens at a moment of disenchantment, as Merleau-Ponty has described a feeling that the mirror encounter often brings. Because of her poverty, this is Firdaous' first encounter with a mirror, as a school-aged girl. Firdaous recognizes her face, but is displeased with its appearance. She rejects the embeddedness of her parents within herself, as she notes her deceased father in her nose and her mother in her own thin-lipped mouth.[23] Firdaous, seeing her parents in herself, approaches a dissolution of the psyche. In order to seek a wholeness and self-sufficiency, she is forced to reject her own reflection.

Here the mirror functions as a sign of mimesis; the mirror mediates, presumably with transparency, the reflection of the girl's experience with her life. It allows her to look at herself, as she is, trapped in her own subjectivity. As in Benchemsi, the mirror episode produces a subject-object dialectic. Firdaous looks at herself as an object, instead of looking at herself looking at herself.

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[23] Interestingly, here Saadawi writes against Barthes, who explains in *La Chambre claire* that in a face reflected in a mirror, unlike in a photograph, one never sees the fragment of a relative which comes from some ancestor (Barthes 161).

I recall Merleau-Ponty's remark that the mirror experience is often unsettling as it brings on a troubled form of self-knowledge, a feeling of alienation from one's double. For Firdaous, as in Merleau-Ponty's description (cited above), the mirror experience prepares her for (foreshadows for the reader) the more serious alienation which follows, the alienation imposed by others.

Because Firdaous sees the mirror itself as causing her distress, she focuses her loathing on it directly, rather than on her image, or her situation. She refuses to gaze again at her own reflection in the mirror, even as she uses it for day-to-day purposes: "I was filled with a deep hatred for the mirror. From that moment I never looked into it again. Even when I stood in front of it, I was not seeing myself, but only combing my hair, or wiping my face, or adjusting the collar of my dress" (21). Although the experience of looking into a mirror without noticing takes place commonly because of habituation, Saadawi draws attention to the separation between the sensory experience and its integration into one's consciousness. This phenomenon (paradox) of looking at something without seeing it has been remarked on by Roland Barthes as a mechanism triggered by the photograph which "separates attention from perception" (Barthes, *Chambre claire* 172). Here it is the mirror which provides that function.

Firdaous' choice not to re-experience her act of seeing, is an attempt to forget what she here begins to understand. Clearly, memory prevails over her will to elude it, for in retelling the story to the psychiatrist, she includes the mirror scene, in all its detail. (In fact, each episode in *Woman at Point Zero* happens twice, once when it occurred to Firdaous and a second time on her retelling it to the psychiatrist.) This avoidance of mirror gazing is a sort of messenger-blaming, as if not looking at reality could possibly

alter its existence. But what is it exactly that Firdaous fears to see? Recalling Jung, I find that Firdaous refuses to gaze at the contents of her own unconscious, because what she discovers there is her own vulnerability. The picture of herself as a little girl brings her back to her state of abandonment on the death of her parents.

This episode is one of particular force because Firdaous' self-understanding remains just below the surface. It is a moment of consciousness-pricking rather than awakening. She is all the more traumatized by the fact that her epiphany never becomes fully conscious. As Walter Benjamin writes, following up on Freud's insight: "The more readily consciousness registers […] shocks, the less … likely are they to have a traumatic effect" (see Walter Benjamin "On some motifs in Baudelaire" in *Illuminations*, 162-3). And yet it is of note that throughout the novel there is no distance in Firdaous' voice between the "I" that experiences and the "I" that tells the story. So too, here, even as she recounts the story, the distance of time seems not to provide illumination.

Firdaous' decision to avoid the mirror encounter comes at a price: she can never integrate her individual reality with that of society. And this will lead to her undoing. As in Benchemsi's mirror episode, this segment contains the seed that unfolds as the novel develops. Psychologically, the essence of the problem is contained here, in a sort of disassociative splitting, which affects (bears on) the woman's relationship with society.

Although in both Benchemsi and Saadawi, the woman, (Bradia or Firdaous) sees another in the mirror, the mirror encounter serves two completely separate functions in these texts. In Benchemsi, Bradia studies her erotic double, while for Saadawi's Firdaous, the double is a symbol of alienation from self and society.

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As we just saw, the mirror episodes deal with both the image of woman and the perception of that image. They both contain elements that are linked to the fundamental question of feminine desire. This thesis will further examine how that desire is perceived by the woman herself, as well as by society, how it is dealt with, regulated and confined and in particular, how it is represented in various contemporary texts, here those of Benchemsi and Saadawi. Does feminine desire maintain its subversive quality as described by Sabbah or is there a shift in its representation?

 According to Sabbah, the assignment of certain spaces as feminine and others as masculine stems from a fear of the feminine in the Muslim unconscious, a fear that led historically to the restriction of the space allowed to women. Because woman's desire is seen as insatiable and in opposition to the Muslim ethical code, women have been confined in space ostensibly to protect society from this out-of-control sexuality. To what extent does the assignment of the hazard of sexuality being placed on women mask the vulnerability that men feel in the face of their own libido? A transformation of the representation of feminine desire would implicitly question the underlying presupposition behind the institution of separate feminine and masculine space. Thus, there is an intrinsic link on a historic level between the representation of desire and spatial dynamics, the two major themes which I treat in this chapter.

How does desire operate in Benchemsi's *Marrakech, lumière d'exil* (2002)? In this novel a married Muslim couple fails to find understanding, happiness or wedded bliss in large part because of a divergence in the partner's views of what desire means in a

Muslim ethical system. As Islam is not monolithic,[24] Hammad and Bradia, husband and wife in Benchemsi's novel, while each assuming a Muslim belief, do not share an understanding of what desire is, and this phenomenon leads to a tragic alienation within the couple. Nawal Saadawi in *Woman at Point Zero* treats the uncoupling of desire and sexuality, --or perhaps better put: of pleasure and sexuality. In her novel the distance between sexuality and desire expands to create a complete separation and as the woman's identity is in this process transformed and elided, she becomes an object of exchange. Sadaawi critiques Egyptian society for overvaluing the importance of money versus that of personhood.

Both Rajae Benchemsi's and Saadawi's novels reflect and implicitly critique the notion of traditional spatial dynamics in Muslim society. The Moroccan sociologist Mernissi describes how spatial regulations are integrated into the characters' consciousness: "Si on connaît les interdits, on porte le harem en soi, c'est le harem invisible" (76). Mernissi's invisible harem may be related to Christian Jacob's individual "mental mapping," where our day-to-day actions relate to spatial representations which we make in our minds (Conley 18). Tom Conley in *Cartographic Cinema* (2007) explains the significance of spatial dynamics as it relates to identity: "Who we are depends on our unconscious perceptions about <u>where</u> we came from and may be going […] Identity can be defined in a narrow sense as the consciousness of belonging (or longing to belong) to a place and of being at a distance from it" (3). Thus space and

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[24] Of course, there are certain aspects of Muslim tradition, law and practice relating specifically to the role and status of women that have remained unchanged (and in this sense are monolithic.) For example, a woman's testimony is worth half that of a man (*Qur'an* 2:178, 2:282, 4:176.) Likewise, in marriage, the *Qur'an* refers to the greater responsibility of men in the protection and maintenance of women.

psychology can be seen as intimately linked.

Benchemsi and Saadawi address both the underlying question of feminine desire as well as the institution of feminine space as its historic consequence. They radically but subtly write against the confinement of women in feminine space by showing that feminine space is not necessarily a "safe space" for women. An analysis of spatial dynamics in both novels will show how both writers reveal the dangers of this traditional dichotomy to women.

In both texts a tension develops between the search for freedom even in a transgressive mode and the reality of entrapment, be it in terms of space, social structure or gender roles. Both address the problematic of sexuality within Muslim society. Traditionally, this problematic is based not in individual feelings, but in the will of God as revealed in the *Qur'an*, that is in the sacred representation of sexuality (Bouhdiba 14). This representation is based on a complementary but separate relationship between masculine and feminine, which creates a certain order in the system (Ibid 43). While the avowed purpose of this system is to create harmony in life (44), Benchemsi and Saadawi describe situations where this harmony is disturbed, without any of the characters willfully revolting against God. Love/intimacy and sexuality lead to illusion, disillusion and despair. Both uncouple sex and pleasure-- Sadaawi, in the case of a woman prostitute and Benchemsi, in examining Zahia who has lost consciousness while being raped. Both authors radically speak their truth, albeit via fiction. Both interrogate the myth of the Arab woman and her desire as described by Sabbah, a myth at the center of the Muslim ethical system. They open a distance between this myth and their fiction. They strive for the transition from a myth-based reality to a reality-based fiction. Their fiction constitutes

an interruption in the myth of the Muslim woman. These comparisons justify the overall examination of the two books side-by-side.

At the same time there are differences between the books. Saadawi frames her story with her encounter with Firdaous, a "real" woman, but there is no pretense to realism in the tale itself; this, in the sense that, because Firdaous is herself the narrator ("Let me speak. Do not interrupt me" (9)), and provides the only voice, there is no reference to other perspectives. Benchemsi's work has no similar frame. But there is a plurality of voices: the author, the narrator, and various characters. The styles are also different: Saadawi's work is direct, staccato, brutal and relentless, while Benchemsi's novel is more lyric and literary. Saadawi's work is directly and immediately shocking, and for this her writing is currently censored.[25] Benchemsi's work becomes shocking on analysis. Finally, while Benchemsi work is written in French, Saadawi's is in Arabic.

Desire in Benchemsi

Two interweaved stories form the narrative of *Marrakech, lumière d'exil* (2002)*,* a novel which explores feminine space and storytelling. In one, the narrator frees Zahia, an autistic girl, from a mental hospital. In the other (which occurred many years before the present of the narration but, told in the present tense, fosters an illusion of simultaneity), Bradia seduces her husband before committing suicide. These two stories which at first reading share only the presumed coincidence of coming into the narrator's knowledge beg a question; what is the thread that connects them? Here with the narrator as the

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[25] This is partly why her Arabic work is often published in Lebanon, not Egypt where censorship is rare. Many of her books are translated into multiple languages and published outside of Egypt.

connector, Benchemsi explores a multi-faceted picture of different aspects of the condition of women in Morocco. Exiled from her family in the hospital, Zahia, who no longer speaks, is also prevented from integrating into her community. Zahia is thus unable to express the double suffering of her illness and of her confinement to anyone including the narrator. But the latter, despite this impediment to cultivating empathy, is sensitive to Zahia's estrangement from her family and community and by forming an alliance with the women in Zahia's family, frees her from the hospital, and seeks for her an alternate route to healing, via the traditional practices of Sufism. In the underlying central irony of the novel, Zahia, presumably incurable and irrevocably imprisoned is freed, while Bradia's entrapment in her situation is revealed to be inescapable.

The presence of an autistic girl in the text is not innocent, and may be related to an analogy made by Assia Djebar in *Les Femmes d'Alger dans leur appartements.* Djebar writes: "Ainsi, ce monde de femmes, quand il ne bruit plus de chuchotements de tendresse complice, de complaintes perdues, bref d'un romantisme d'enchantement évanoui, ce monde-là devient brusquement, aridement, celui de l'autisme" (161). If we read Djebar into Benchemsi, Zahia becomes a woman-symbol, her autism a sign of the condition of the woman in North Africa.

Bradia's story is completely different from Zahia's; through the cultivation of a female-centered eroticism she seeks pleasure and integration within the couple. And yet, she finds her end by committing suicide. The juxtaposition of the erotic episode and the suicide is a jarring use of intertextual space. Why does this bourgeois married woman, who kindles her husband's love and desire, and who benefits from the support of feminine friendship and mentoring (that of Dada M'Barka) end her own life? The reader

is surprised by this act, as Bradia is not a victim of abuse, of trauma, or of any other classic Western psychological explanation for such intense suffering as would lead to suicide. The paradox is that it seems that Bradia has everything to be happy. This means that the appearance differs from the underlying reality. In fact, the eroticism is masking the entrapment. Thus desire and sensuality here serve to veil and oppose the underlying suffering.

By opposing Bradia and Zahia's stories, Benchemsi implicitly compares their two entrapments; at the same time the narrator actively contests the idea of Bradia's emprisonment when she comments on the strength and freedom of women of the past: "Elles [Dada Mbarka et Bradia] étaient *entrées en liberté* comme on entre dans un ordre, puissamment armées de l'essence même de leur fémininité" (30). The implicit distance between the narrator's and the author's position opens up the possibility of textual space as an open space of interrogation.

The tension builds in *Marrakech, lumière d'exil* culminating in an erotic episode between Bradia and her husband Hammad the night of *poulet madfoun*. It is at this point that the sentences become shorter, follow more quickly, as though the lovers, out of breath, change the pace of the narration: "Lui offrit ses seins brûlants. Sa bouche humide. Son cou puis son ventre" (150). Here, we drop into interior monologue, first inside Bradia and then abruptly inside Hammad. The difference between the way desire is experienced by each will elucidate the narrative outcome of this event. Bradia begins in a state of fear, as she seems to realize (believe) that her seduction of her husband has an illicit element. She notes that her act is premeditated (149) as though it were a crime. This view is close to that of Fatna Sabbah who, explaining the role of desire in the Muslim

unconscious, acknowledges that sexuality within certain limits (marriage) is licit in

Muslim society, but remarks that desire is illicit. Bradia wants to prevent her partner from

thinking because she feels that words, even words of love, might disrupt the desire she is

trying to evoke: "Non. Il ne fallait en aucun cas le laisser parler. Réfléchir. Penser.

N'importe quel mot, même d'amour, l'aurait ramené à la raison" (150). Paradoxically,

the concern is that any conversation would open a rupture between the couple. Thus, all

communication takes place directly through the bodies of the lovers.[26]

Bradia notes that she feels "sous l'œil de Dieu" (151) and she feels loved by God.

She thinks about the importance of religion for her husband, but not for herself. But she

claims not to be "en faute" (152) even in this regard. As audacious as she tries to be, she

finds there are limits as to what she actually dares: she cannot touch her husband's sex

and she dares not laugh as Dada had recommended, because she finds herself to be in a

"temps sacré" (152).

Neither Bradia nor Hammad truly thinks of the other during this episode; instead,

each focuses on what desire is to them, as though desire itself constitutes a third point in

this erotic triangle, substituting itself for Dada who cannot be present.

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[26] Silence in the conjugal bed has been described as cultural typical by Fawaz Turki in his
1994 *Exile's Return*:

> The relationship between language and sexuality in Arab society is a
> mirror of that between authority and freedom […] Overt sexual expression
> in the conjugal bed is proscribed for the same reason that free discourse is
> proscribed between the rulers and the ruled in Arab culture. And just as
> the father, the teacher, the policeman, and the clergyman are socialized to
> represent state power in the home, the school, the street, and the mosque,
> so is the male its representative in bed. Thus, the repression of sexual
> fulfillment in Arab society is as much physiological as sociolinguistic
> (123).

While Bradia's apparent purpose in desiring silence is to channel sexual fulfillment
through the body rather than in language, Benchemsi describes her as unknowingly
complicit with a cultural paradigm surrounding the power dynamic in her society.

In Hammad's interior monologue, he falls in love directly with Bradia's body: "Transi d'amour pour ce jeune corps frêle et déroutant" (152). He sees her as "matière instable," "défait," "décomposé" (152). Although he had previously experienced his relation to love as condescending, he now finds himself transformed through this sacred initiation. As much as Bradia seeks to prevent him from reflecting, she cannot; through allusions to five separate authors or texts, he reflects on his immediate experience through archetypes of mystical and religious experience. While Hammad's focus is on personal evolution, which may appear to be on a higher plane, in putting his attention on textual models, his immediate experience becomes less embodied. His shift of attention away from Bradia impedes his savoring of the moment. As Bradia stays focused on sensuality and the erotic, her experience is that of being, while for Hammad sexuality is a medium to attain a greater state of spirituality and so his experience is that of becoming.

If love requires the merging of lover and beloved, here two separate voices reflect the duality and separateness of the relationship, while each experiences love in a different way. In Arabic, there are at least twenty different words for love, among them: *hubb* (love/seed), *ishq* (the spiraling of love or distraught love, extreme or overwhelming), *wadd* (solid, rooted, faithful love) and *hawa* (passion, plunging/crashing into love). While Bradia seems to experience *hawa,* her husband feels *hubb*. Her passion is closely related to the purely erotic, and her sense of power at this very moment. His love, as we will show, is related to the idea of a seed, the seed of growing spirituality. Thus, on another level, even though their bodies connect, there is a growing disconnect. While the couple shares a physical space (contact), their psychic space is disjointed. Although the episode consists for the most part of interior monologue, one utterance from each lover remains in

quotes, as though to emphasize its importance. Bradia exclaims, "Si je n'y arrive pas ce soir, jamais je n'y arriverai" (150), while Hammad comments, "le langage de l'amour et celui de la foi exaltent les mêmes saveurs!" (154). As Bradia's quote emphasizes her will as motivating the episode, it implicitly raises the question of *quaid*—or women's intelligence.

Quaid represents the feminine intelligence or will when used to gain sexual pleasure even while it simultaneously undermines the Muslim ethical system. Here, the term is not used, nor is Bradia's will clearly subversive. Even though all her will is focused on the seduction, the seduction is not illicit. It appears quite the opposite, as both find the sacred in the sexual act: "Elle pensa à la religion si importante pour son époux mais ne se sentit pas en faute" (152). The question of *quaid* is however suggested as Bradia seeks to gain some control in the sexual realm of her life. Furthermore, traditionally in Muslim society, the bond between the couple was purposefully weakened (via repudiaton, polygamy) and it was the patrilineal lines that were dominant. Fatima Mernissi explains, "[…] whenever cooperation between men and women is inevitable, as between members of a couple, an entire array of mechanisms is set in motion to prevent too great an intimacy from arising between the partners" (Mernissi 140). So, arguably Bradia's quest to strengthen the bond between herself and her husband through sexual contact contains within it an element transgressive to the traditional Muslim ethical code.

Hammad's comment which evokes the intersection between eroticism and spirituality is closely related to several of the intertexts which he proffers: 1) Ibn Arabi (1165) and the Persian Lady Nizam; 2) Al-Suyutî (1445); 3) *Le Collier de la colombe* (The Ring of the Dove) by Ibn Hazm (994-1064); 4) The flowers of Ali al Baghdâdî (a

reference to *Les fleurs éclatants dans les baisers et l'accolement* of the 14th century) and

5) *Les mille et une nuits* (d. 910). Let us begin by examining the relation between the Sufi

Ibn Arabi's text, *Tarjuman al-ashwaq* (the interpretation of desires), inspired by the

Persian Lady Nizam, with our text. In *Tarjuman al-ashwaq*, Ibn Arabi meets on two

occasions with Lady Nizam, the second of which takes place during his pilgrimage to

Mecca (hajj).[27] As an image of knowledge and love, echoing Ibn Arabi's view of Nizam,

Hammad describes Bradia as "la quintessence de tout savoir. Toute connaissance" (154),

this a pure abstraction and mystification of a woman who, in our case, had a very limited

education.

Thus, it appears that Bradia's view of the sex act, or the seduction which she so

desired, is in accordance with the way in which Sabbah views desire, while Hammad's is

more consistent with Sufi thought. As no direct communication occurs between the

couple except through their bodies, the divergence of views reflects an ultimate rupture,

just at the moment of bodily union. Hammad's evocation of Nizam and the *hajj* also

explains the direction of his ruminations and foreshadows why in the next episode he

decides to make the *hajj*. As Bradia is not privy to the intertextual allusion, which

provides the transition between seduction and pilgrimage, a *hajj* is not the next logical

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[27] On this occasion his encounter took place at the *Ka'abah,* the cuboid building at the
center of Islam's most sacred mosque, Al Masjid al-Haram in Mecca. Circumambulation
of the *Ka'abah* is a required part of the hajj, the pilgrimage to Mecca which is one of the
five pillars of Islam. Ibn Arabi describes this meeting in the following passage:

> One night I was performing the ritual circumambulations of the
> *Ka'abah*…suddenly a few lines of verse came to my mind. I recited them
> loudly enough to be heard…No sooner had I recited these verses than I
> felt on my shoulder the touch of a hand softer than silk. I turned around
> and found myself in the presence of a young girl, a princess from among
> the daughters of the Greeks. Never had I seen a woman more beautiful of
> face, softer of speech, more tender of heart (Corbin 148).

step for her, and she refuses to accompany her husband. The mediation of Hammad's experience through intertextuality produces a distance between his direct experience and his understanding of it. In one intertextual reference, *The Ring of the Dove*, for example, Ibn Hazm lays out the various ways in which love occurs, including defining a lover's gaze. He also explores the obstacles that can occur between lover and beloved. Hammad is thus aware of an idealized or theoretical approach to love. He compares his experience with this approach, and finds his experience even more satisfying: "Il pensa aux nombreux ouvrages sur l'amour et l'érotisme mais même *Le Collier de la colombe* d'Ibn Hazm lui parut moins puissant que son ardeur" (154). As Hammad's reflection passes from erotic to spiritual texts which treat love, he finds his own experience more in line with the latter. His reflections on these intertexts bring him to the spiritual experience of hearing the silence at the core of his thought. The entire progression of this analysis is away from Bradia and toward a sacred emptiness.

Bradia's experience is far less cerebral, and more rooted in her body; nevertheless, even her experience is not without a model, an idealized version, in Bradia's case, provided by Dada M'Barka in a lesson on seduction. Even in the heat of the moment, Bradia too judges to what extent her actual experience conforms to this model, and to what extent it falls short: "[…] elle le serra très fort et pensa à Dada. Mais elle n'osa pas rire. Elle n'osa pas profaner ce temps si solennellement sacré. Elle n'ose pas non plus approcher de ses doigts tremblants cet organe encore palpitant entre ses cuisses" (152). Thus, she dares not follow Dada's instructions to the letter. It is of note that the laugh which is withheld from the lips of Bradia, later comes forth out of the mouth of Zahia as she attends the Sufi shrine: "Après plus de deux heures, je m'apprête à

sortir quand, levant ma tête vers Zahia qui continuait ses circonvolutions, je la vois qui

rit. Avec rien ni personne mais elle rit. Je regarde machinalement vers Bahia et Lalla Tata

et, en larmes, elles me font un signe pour me signifier qu'elles l'avaient déjà remarquée"

(182). This disembodied laugh, which is in neither case connected with humor, haunts the

narrative. In both cases it is the sign of an inappropriate affect, but one deeply connected

with the characters' humanity. The dislocation between laughter and humor can be seen

as rooted in a contemporary socio-cultural phenomenon in the Arab world. In his article

"Emile Habibi: The Mirror of Irony in Palestinian Literature" (1993), Akram Khater

explains:

> It is rare to find laughter in the works of modern Arab poets or novelists.
>
> The reality of military and political defeat, social decay and dislocation—
>
> both physical and psychic—overwhelm and permeate modern Arabic
>
> literature to an oppressive extreme. It is as if laughter particularly from a
>
> sense of irony, has become an illegitimate or untenable response to the
>
> problems of the Arab world (75).

Thus here, although the laughter finally is released through the lips of Zahia, its

hollowness can at least in part be explained by this context.[28]

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[28] According to the Sapir-Whorf hypothesis, the structure of a language affects the manner in which its speakers conceptualize their world. Following this theory, it is possible to find an association between the dislocation of laughter in this text, laughter not as an expression of aliveness or connection, but as a form of bleakness or stultification, and the nature of formal Arabic as it is described by Fawaz Turki: "Formal Arabic neither lives nor is lived; rather, it is a lingo reflecting the deadness of spirit of a society and a class that possess formality but no form, rhetoric but no style, dissimulation but no grace" (121). In a larger sense, laughter generally has a social function; one laughs at another's humorous comment to show that one understands and sees the remark from the same point of view as the speaker. Laughing at one's own jokes has always been seen for this reason as in poor taste. Laughter, in a normative sense, thus brings people

It is interesting that at the conclusion of the erotic episode the interior monologue which slips into and out of *discours indirect libre* ends. The reader is therefore most intimate with the couple, understanding their thoughts and feelings, just as they are most intimate with each other. The distance between the reader and the couple is three-fold: first narrative, as we are told the story through a chain of female storytellers (from Dada M'Barka to Lalla Tata to the narrator,) second temporal, as the story took place about 40 years before the narrative present, and thirdly geographic, as Laroua, in her master thesis, argues the intended reader is Occidental. (This argument is based on the fact that quotes from Arabic sources are all translated, rather than being left in Arabic with French footnotes.) But the erotic episode collapses or eludes these distances: the narrative frame is not recalled, the episode is written in the present tense, we find ourselves in a bedroom in Marrakech, thus producing an effect of nearness or intimacy between reader and characters.

Bradia's story is told to Lalla Tata through Dada M'barka (Bradia's slave). But in an echo of *Arabian Nights*, Lalla Tata (Bradia's sister) hides herself under Bradia's bed just before the love-making begins. The presence of the sister under the bed violates Western notions of privacy, marital relations usually being a private and secret matter. So Lalla Tata, who tells the story to the narrator had at least two sources of knowledge.

As Lalla Tata hides under the bed, she can listen but not see. Of course, there would

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together, and while it is not always subversive, it often serves to define an in-group that might hold a different view from the dominant cultural viewpoint. Returning to Turki's comments on the "repressive constraints that formal Arabic places on the soul of Arab culture" (124), Turki emphasizes that the politics of Arab society as well as the nature of formal Arabic, impose a "guarded" and "stylized" (124) demeanor. While the relationship between formal Arabic and the mutilated laughter of our text may be problematic, it is worth considering as Turki, writing from within Arab culture, seems to valorize it.

be no way that she could know what is in the characters' heads—only the omniscient narrator could know that. Thus, the realistic frame is destabilized by the contradiction between what Lalla Tata (or even Dada M'Barka) could have known and what the reader knows. Although this might appear to be a clumsiness on the part of the author, it seems to me that Benchemsi is here emphasizing inter-textuality over the realism of the narrative frame. In other words, by providing this detail, Benchemsi deliberately invokes an association of her text with the earlier *Arabian Nights*, even though the analogy is not exact; in *Marrakech, lumière d'exil* it is the sister hiding under the bed who becomes the storyteller, rather than in *Arabian Nights,* where it is Sheherezade, the lover. Benchemsi separates the roles of lovemaking and storytelling, while her hypotext in this case combines them into the function of one character.

This story (a story of Bradia's life) is told to the narrator while she is visiting with Lalla Tata in one room for dinner, storytelling, sleeping, and breakfast. The space where the narration takes place is extremely constricted while the story of Bradia's wedding, the only time when she is allowed to traverse the street, is recounted: "J'éprouvai une joie quasi enfantine à l'idée que nous allions dormir dans la même pièce. Celle-là même où nous avions mangé. Celle-là même où je venais d'écouter encore une fois l'histoire de Bradia" (53). The contrast between constricted and expansive space highlights the question of spatial dynamics in this novel.

In both episodes where sexuality appears, Bradia's seduction of her husband, and Zahia's rape, it has dire consequences; following it, Bradia commits suicide, and Zahia becomes autistic. Benchemsi describes the blind Allal in his exclusion, loneliness and isolation, how he reaches out for intimacy, toward Zahia's body which has already

surrendered its consciousness, in an act which can only further restrict her subjectivity

and do violence to her already vulnerable being:

> C'est en effet un amour incontrôlable et inespéré qui l'avait contraint à
> diriger la main de cette jeune fille sur son sexe en érection. Elle avait alors
> perdu connaissance et Allal, envoûté par le vertige de ses sens, l'avait
> pénétrée à son insu (95).

In a larger sense, this rape exposes the flaws of a society which has failed to include its

most vulnerable members; Allal transfers onto Zahia the violence done unto him by

Maghrebian society.

> Pour ses bains, deux fois par semaine, le mardi et le vendredi, il jouissait
> d'une sorte de largesse collective de la part de tous les riverains. En effet,
> un accord tacite avait été conclu par les ferroniers qui payaient pour lui à
> tour de rôle. Ils semblaient ainsi s'acquitter d'une dette envers son défunt
> père […] c'est pourquoi ils maintenaient cette distance sourde entre eux et
> *l'aveugle* […] La culpabilité était donc bel et bien là (88-9).

The narrator herself fails to blame Allal for the rape: "Or Allal, lorsqu'il avait entraîné

Zahia, alors âgée de treize ans, dans un rapport sexuel, n'avait en fait pour seul crime que

sa sensualité d'adolescent altérée par une terrible cécité" (84). And so, paradoxically,

despite his act, Allal is portrayed as a figure with whom the reader can sympathize. If

rape has become "the transparent sign for something else" (Jean-Charles 44), here it is for

a sickness in society which excludes its weakest members, even men, if they are disabled.

In this novel, sexuality is framed as part of a power-dynamic, rather than as an

intimate act of love. Sexuality produces a violence on its participants; rather than

soothing and bringing together, it alienates and divides, having a disruptive effect on personhood. Sexuality becomes a site of conflict, the effect of the resulting trauma, the onus of the pathology, is gendered and falls primarily on the woman. Zahia's silence, which may be related to the traumatic silence of the survivor, is called instead, "autism." Zahia's body survives, her personhood does not. In Bradia's case, neither does.

While neither Zahia nor Bradia overcomes this force, the narrator takes a position of strength in her attempt to rescue Zahia from the consequence society has imposed on her illness. The network of women and their storytelling fosters the narrator's courage and resilience.

Saadawi's Treatment of Desire

The uncoupling of desire/pleasure and sexuality is taught to Firdaous by Sharifa who grants her permission to feel pleasure in sensual everyday matters, but not through sexuality; it is a transgression for a prostitute to feel pleasure in sex. This lesson is part of the initiation that Firdaous undergoes at the hands of Sharifa, who functions as her teacher:

One day I asked Sharifa:

'Why don't I feel anything?'

'We work, Firdaous, we just work. Don't mix feeling with work.'

'But I want to feel, Sharifa,' I exclaimed.

'You will get nothing out of feeling except pain!' (56)

All the lessons that life teaches Firdaous, this one included, are contrary to what the dominant culture holds. The subjectivity of feeling, an essential element of personhood,

is denied to her. She scorns the married woman whom she feels is less respected by a man than an upper-class prostitute. While the novel describes Firdaous' internalization of a morality opposed to the dominant one, neither her inner process of transformation nor her taking on the role of a prostitute is in itself judged so dangerous to society that punishment is given. It is instead when her distance from the dominant morality applies to financial exchange, that she is brought to prison to be executed.

> The feel of the notes under my fingers was the same as that of the first piastre ever held between them. The movement of my hands as I tore the money to pieces, tore off the veil, the last, remaining veil from before my eyes, to reveal the whole enigma which had puzzled me throughout, the true enigma of my life […]
>
> 'They said, 'You are a savage and dangerous woman!
>
> 'I am speaking the truth. And truth is savage and dangerous.' (98-100)

Firdaous herself realizes that she is not condemned for murder, but for another reason:

> I knew why they were so afraid of me. I was the only woman who had torn the mask away, and exposed the face of their ugly reality. They condemned me to death not because I had killed a man – there are thousands of people being killed everyday – but because they were afraid to let me live (100).

Although Firdaous slaps a prince before her imprisonment, it is not this act of violence which causes her incarceration. Violence is part of the quotidian in *Woman at Point Zero.* As long as Firdaous obeys the laws of prostitution, respecting the exchange of sex for money, society does not intervene. The prostitute occupies a certain niche in

society, a niche that is permitted. Even Firdaous' murder of the pimp who tried to control

her is overlooked, as her make-up and demeanor are middle class. It is not for murder that

she is condemned to death. Rather, it is for her lack of respect for the guiding principle of

exchange (upon which society is based) and her refusal to see herself as an object of

exchange, that she is judged to be dangerous.

While Benchemsi does not treat the problematic of exchange, the novels share the

question of the internalization of exterior codes of morality versus the assuming of a

personal code. I have already discussed how in terms of sexuality Bradia and Hammad

have internalized two opposing (but both authentically Muslim) views of sex. The

narrator in Benchemsi's book upholds a view of personal freedom which opposes the

dominant view of society that mentally ill individuals should lose their freedom to keep

society safe. Her view opposes that of the doctor's.

Spatial Dynamics in the Maghreb

Spatial dynamics is highlighted in Benchemsi's novel which takes place in

Morocco. According to Mernissi, the Muslim tradition utilizes space to control women's

sexuality (Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil* xvi). Mernissi compares her own view with that of

George Murdock in his 1965 book *Social Structure*.

According to George Murdock, societies fall into two groups with respect to the

manner in which they regulate the sexual instinct. One group enforces respect of sexual

prohibitions during the socialization process, the other enforces that respect by external

precautionary safeguards such as avoidance rules, because these societies fail to

internalize sexual prohibitions in their members. According to Murdock, Western society

belongs to the first group while societies where veiling exists belong to the second (30).

Mernissi disagrees, affirming that where feminine sexuality is considered active, rules of seclusion and surveillance prevail. Whether it is Murdock or Mernissi who accurately explains the origin of this phenomenon, it is clear that in Muslim societies space has been divided into feminine and masculine domains. Mernissi further explains: "The institutionalized boundaries dividing the parts of society express the recognition of power in one part at the expense of the other. Any transgression of the boundaries is a danger to the social order because it is an attack on the acknowledged allocation of power" (Ibid. 137).

Traditionally in the Maghreb, the two spaces, a masculine space, exterior, (the street, the university, politics), and a feminine space, interior (home, marriage, *hammamat* (baths), the veil), have been irremediably separated. The public space, a masculine space, has always been considered superior, that is, more highly valued and of greater significance (Bourquia 40). The mobility of women varies as a function of their social status, then age, and their ethnic origin (Rhissassi 80-1) and certain treatises of Hisba restrict according to tradition the hours and the places where women are permitted outside the home (Bouhdiba 240).

While over time, some of the restrictions have softened (in some countries more than others), the division between masculine and feminine space is still recognized both by scholars and by residents of the Maghreb. Sophie Bessis in her 2007 book *Les Arabes, les femmes, la liberté* explains the relevance in the contemporary period of this historic division:

> En cinquante ans, les femmes se sont rendues visibles, même si la rue

n'est pas devenue leur domaine et demeure un espace avant tout masculin. Elles y marchent plus vite que les hommes, pour ne pas sentir l'avidité de leurs regards et parce ce qu'on ne leur reconnaît pas le droit de s'y attarder. Se promener sans but précis, pour le simple plaisir ou par désœuvrement, demeure presque partout le privilège des hommes. On ne les voit pas non plus aux terrasses des cafés. La chose est encore inconcevable […] (45).

Spatial Dynamics in *Marrakech, lumière d'exil*

Benchemsi's title directs the reader immediately to the importance of space, and more specifically, the city, in her work.[29] The title's emphasis on location suggests a question: To what extent does geography dominate destiny (compare Conley 3)? Or, put differently, how does the author's focus on Marrakech interplay with the life stories of her characters? For Benchemsi, the description of Marrakech that opens the novel supplies more than local color, does more than set the tone. It enlarges the question of what it means to be feminine and Arab, not only for a person, but for a space. Benchemsi

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[29] The oxymoron in the second half of the title calls for interpretation. Virginie Laraoua in her master's thesis explains the title as referring to the narrator's exile from and return to Marrakech. Although the importance of the narrator's journey to France, which precedes the present of the narration cannot be underestimated (be it autobiographical or to give her a new perspective), other interpretations are possible. I see the title as referring directly to Dada M'Barka (Bradia's Black slave) via the following fragment of a text: "La douloureuse nuit de sa peau s'était transformée en une cinglante étoile. Expulsée de l'immensité noire, elle avait su arracher sa lumière au jour […] Exilée loin des siens. Loin de sa terre, loin de ses odeurs. Loin d'elle-même" (144). Through its open nature, the title poses the notion of the unstable center. Does it refer to an exile from France, from the Maghreb or from sub-Saharan Africa? Is it the narrator's exile or Dada M'Barka's? Where is the center in relation to the diaspora? Replacing a center and its periphery is a mosaic of women's lives.

uses a daring image to describe Marrakech itself as a feminine space: "un vagin cosmique" (18)[30]; that it is feminine and sacred at the same time, implies that the feminine can be sacred. Benchemsi does not directly explain why she sees Marrakech as feminine. However, the narrator melts into Marrakech, drawn into its space. The author's reference to Marrakech as a uterus, "une incommensurable matrice" (180) implies a return to something that is fundamental, to the womb of the mother[31], a primal state, from whence you draw compassion. As the time in the womb is suspended time, it proffers the sentiment of a "temps d'éternité" (18).

Benchemsi contrasts the center and the margin of Marrakech. In its geometric center lies the burial place of the famous Sufi saint Ibn Al Arif. While its center is depicted in its holiness, at the margins of Marrakech, in "le fond d'un couloir qui séparait leur *riad* traditionnel de la rue" (86), dwells, the excluded, the marginalized, the blind Allal, who will rape Zahia, thereby causing her to become ill. The geographic location of these two individuals reflects how they are seen and treated by the people of Marrakech. Exile can occur not only by being cast outside of a society, but also by dwelling at its margins, a position from which ultimate separation from the community is only a step away. The tension between exile and belonging is a central one in this novel. The narrator herself has experienced both exile and belonging having lived in Paris for many years.

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[30] Here, a sort of oxymoron, the most private combined with the universal, a word associated with desire, combined with that for order (kosnikos: order, universe), a lyrical expression sexualizing or eroticizing space. Benchemsi uses a graphic or taboo word, a word not used in public discourse, and relates it to the largest of public spaces, the cosmic. This use of language seems to be intended to shock the reader. Does it have an element of Orientalism—in describing a city as having a seductive quality?

[31] Maybe alluding to the Arabic term for uterus, which is "raham" and which has a cognate in "compassion" ("rahma") and one of the attributes of God.

On her return to Marrakech, she becomes part of a close-knit community of women, sharing in their storytelling, and engaging in their lives. Zahia, as an illegitimate daughter, lived the beginning of her life in a sort of internal exile, excluded from mainstream society, before being shut up in a mental hospital. Finally, she reintegrates into society to a certain extent, by becoming part of the mentally ill community which seeks healing through the Sufi tradition. And Bradia lives in an interminable exile from public life, the street, the masculine space, while at the same time remaining deeply embedded in her family.

Using contrast as a literary device, Benchemsi also employs spatial dynamics, the opposition between restricted and expansive space and between sacred and non-sacred space, to sharpen the contours of her novel. In terms of the overall structure of the novel, the freedom that the narrator has to move within the space of Marrakech contrasts with the restricted space of the two main characters: Zahia (confined to the hospital), and Bradia (confined to her home). Benchemsi's major marker for sacred space is that the body melts into it and becomes one with it. Thus, the relationship between body and space is determinative. Both the ancient square *Jemaa-el-Fna* and several Sufi shrines fall into the category of sacred space.

In the opening episode, which takes place in *Jemaa-el-Fna*, the narrator watches as Bahia tattoos henna on women's hands. This square, actually triangular, was founded in the 11th century and is one of the main cultural spaces in Marrakech. *Jemaa-el-Fna* means "the mosque at the end of the world." As the narrator passes through *Jemaa-el-Fna,* she experiences the tension between the sensation of melting into nature and remaining separate from it: "Comme pour lui éviter de s'effondrer" (1) […] "L'empêcher

de se mêler au sol mouvant de l'antique place *Jemaa-el-Fna* " (1). And it is in this

opening episode that the narrator, outdoors in the open air, experiences melting into

space: "J'ai soudain la sensation de devenir transparente. Presque légère" (13) and further

on, "une délicieuse sensation d'abandon me plongea très vite dans une extase sans fin.

J'étais moi-même la place. J'étais moi-même la multitude de bruits divers enivrants. Mon

corps se dilata. Se liquéfia. Devint lui-même l'infini" (14). And yet further on, "J'étais le

monde et le monde était moi" (76). These experiences present an annihilation of the self

or the ego, in favor of a union with nature. They occur spontaneously, without the benefit

of a Sufi teacher, simply on the narrator's interaction with sacred space. In this altered

state, the narrator experiences ecstasy, a joy which is to be compared to the intense

sufferings of the other main characters. Being and becoming merge. In a variation on this

theme, the narrator later on also finds the boundaries between herself and others in the

novel blurring: "J'étais un peu elle et elle était un peu moi" (103).

Benchemsi is drawn to mysticism as an appeasement to the world's suffering.

References to mysticism frame the novel, occurring as just noted in its beginning, as well

as at its close, when the narrator visits Sufi shrines. The blurring of boundaries of the self,

as well as the connection with Sufi saints, through visiting their shrines, sheds hope on an

existence otherwise rooted in deep sadness. The saints mentioned are all dead, and have

left only their poetry or their bodies to posterity. The novel, although valuing their

presence in Marrakech, is thus not an example of hagiography: the suffering of its main

characters, Zahia and Bradia, does not lead to a route of purification or redemption.

Benchemsi does not address the question of how saints become sanctified. Instead, she

focuses on the issue of to what degree the religion that is omnipresent penetrates the lives

of the three women in the novel: the narrator, Bradia, and Zahia. Mystical experiences pervade the life of the narrator, as seen above. The evoked mysticism is ineffective in saving the life of Bradia, it fails to sustain or nourish her, partly because of her lack of education in it. For Zahia, the suffering that mental illness brings is a harbinger of "déchéance." Triggered by an illicit sexual experience (a rape), Zahia's mental illness leaves her at the borders of what it is to be human, rather than elevating her. And as the novel closes, the narrator's hopes of a miraculous healing for her at the Sufi shrine of Bouya Omar remain unfulfilled.

I return to the question of Bradia, who remains strictly in feminine space. Her access to the street is only through the hands of a male servant, Ahmed, who charges dearly for this service. After the erotic episode, Bradia discovers in her husband's absence a taste of lesbianism, available to her through her access to the feminine space of the terrace: "Les terraces étaient la rue des femmes" (163), via which she reaches Latéfa. But this expression of sexuality, hinted at in the text, and frowned on by Dada M'barka, appears too transgressive to assuage Bradia's alienation. There are in fact two references to lesbianism in the text. In one, Bradia's family worries that her relationship with Dada M'barka has turned in this direction, and consequently threatens to end it:

> Bradia avait un amour sans bornes pour Dada. Au point que sa belle-mère pensa un moment les séparer. Le scandale fut tel qu'elle menaca de retourner vivre auprès de ses parents. Hammad s'en mêla et tout se calma mais non sans une certaine tension (70).

The second reference is to Latéfa's dancing at Bradia's wedding:

> Seule une femme, vêtue d'un cafetan de brocart rouge, semblait la

regarder non seulement avec intérêt mais presque avec passion. Une jeune

femme brune d'une grande beauté et chez qui Bradia crut reconnaître ce

petit rien élégamment dévergondé. Elle avait dans les yeux une sorte de

malice attendrie qui dérouta Bradia. Consciente de son pouvoir de

séduction sur la jeune mariée, elle se leva et avec beaucoup d'audace et de

sensualité se mit à danser (65).

A reference to Latéfa reappears when Bradia reaches her through the terraces. But their

relation is left to the reader's imagination. The wedding, when the meeting occurs within

the community, and the terrace provide thus an opening to another kind of sexuality, but

one that ultimately does not provide a solution for Bradia's alienation.

Bradia finds her spatial boundaries clearly delineated and imprisoning, isolating her

from society, and limiting. Residing in a private home, I characterize her space as non-

sacred. The narrator contrasts her own experience of Islamic architecture with that of

Bradia, emphasizing thus the subjectivity of that experience. The differing response to the

architecture is not only individual in nature, but also, represents a shifting relation

between the woman and space over time. The narrator, for whom the walls do not create

an insurmountable barrier, grows to love the architecture, while Bradia, who lived much

earlier on, when the architecture was impenetrable to women, grew to feel imprisoned by

it. Thus the passage of time and the loosening of restrictions that come with it mediates

the individual experience: "Ainsi ce qui toujours fut à mes yeux un havre de paix et de

magie n'était qu'une immense prison pour Bradia qui, cela nous paraît tellement

impensable aujourd'hui, n'avait pas accès à la rue" (161). The street is indirectly

associated with dreams in the following passage:

> Comme si cette mosaïque de zelliqes qui recouvrait tous les murs de cet
>
> immense palais avait pour rôle particulier d'interdire l'accès au rêve. De le
>
> quadriller. L'emprisonner. Les terraces étaient l'unique source de vie et de
>
> lumière (160).

Bradia obeys the regulations of this strict division, and other than on her wedding day when she walks to her husband's home, remains in feminine space, which is richly described.

To the objection that her feeling of being restricted is not a problem specific to the Maghrebian or even to the Muslim woman, I suggest the author's emphasis on the description of physical space and architecture and their clearly defined boundaries is an important aspect of the text. Notably, Bradia is simultaneously obedient and resistant to the traditional Maghrebian gender roles. She is obedient to the rules of spatial dynamics, but transgressive through her smoking and drinking to traditional codes of behavior prescribed for women. This tension is one of the most intriguing aspects of her character. The distinction that Bradia makes points to how profoundly significant the rules of spatial dynamics are to Maghrebian society. Even Bradia, who is by nature a rebel, does not consider violating the spatial codes.

In the following chapter which presents Bradia's suicide, no longer are we privy to Bradia's innermost thoughts, as the *discours indirect libre* ends. As the space allotted to Bradia constricts, she finds herself ultimately isolated in a vinegar cabinet,

> …se rendit [elle] au *bit al-qoss*, et là elle ferma la lourde porte de bois,
>
> alluma et se rendit, elle n'y était jamais entrée mais elle en connaissait
>
> l'existence, ou *hri*, une conserverie où étaient stockés des aliments de

toutes sortes dont les jarres pleines de vinaigre […] (164-5).

where, deprived of liquor, she drinks herself to death. It is only in the episode of suicide itself that we discover that someone has denied her her liquor. The mother-in-law? The husband? The text does not specify. Benchemsi celebrates freedom, even transgressive freedom. Without freedom comes despair.

The text offers little direct explanation for Bradia's tragic crisis of alienation. One sentence, the words of the family doctor, gives a reason which lacks resonance: "En réalité sa depression était due principalement à sa stérilité. Cornette de Saint-Cyr, le chirurgien de la famille, était formel" (163). (It is noteworthy that the doctor's utterance is not quite *discours indirect libre* as we are not inside his mind, overhearing his thought, nor is it a quote as the marks of this type of discourse are missing. It falls somewhere in between.) This explanation reduces her crisis to the inability to become a mother, a reason totally understandable in any society, but particularly in Muslim society where a *hadith* proclaims, "Paradise is found at the feet of mothers" (Benhabib, *"L'automne des femmes arabes* 9). By saying that the doctor was being categorical, the author takes a deliberate distance from this explanation, if not treating it with irony. It is not a coincidence that the French male doctor lacks insight into Bradia's character. The real explanation lies elsewhere as evidenced in the text. The constriction of the space allotted to Bradia, finally, leaves her no room to exist. To put the question on the level of spatial dynamics is at once to politicize it, by taking it out of the realm of the individual, and putting it into the realm of the collective. As Fatima Mernissi writes, "Muslim women, illiterate and educated alike, are coming to diagnose and verbalize their problems— previously identified and labeled as being emotional—as being essentially political"

(*Beyond the Veil* xiii). Here specifically, a careful reading of the text moves us away from the emotional explanation given by Cornette-Cyr, to one which points toward the structure of the society of Bradia's time.

Even though Bradia has always obeyed the rules of remaining within feminine space, space itself has betrayed her. Even as she boldly seduces her husband, this seduction begins with the further constriction of her space. Because of her husband's fatigue, she suggests that the couple skip the traditional dinner with the family, to be served instead in their two-room suite. Bradia experiences her life in "un espace comprimé entre deux parenthèses trop étroites" (158). Of the limitation of her permission to traverse space, she complains, "Je n'ai que vingt ans et mon espace est déjà si réduit quand la vie est si vaste!" (159). If Bradia experiences her life as though her existence falls within parenthesis, this comparison not only points to her confinement in space, but refers to this space as though it is secondary in nature, as though she has become somehow an aside. Bradia's space dwindles in size, until in fact, there is no room left for her, and so she meets her death.

Spatial Dynamics in *Woman at Point Zero*

For Bradia, the presupposition in the Muslim unconscious that feminine space is a safe space for women, initially appears to be valid. Benchemsi argues though, through her tale, that this correlation may be illusory because for Bradia even the inside of her own house was not a "safe space." Saadawi's book echoes this questioning of the safety of feminine space for women. In fact, her book dares to turn the traditional notion of feminine and masculine space on its head. In a shocking revelation, Saadawi's Firdaous

describes her awareness that the only "safe space" is the street, a "masculine" space. Each time she enters the confines of an interior space, a feminine space, with a man believed to be her protector, she is subjected to sexual violence. By contrast, on the street, if only for a short period, she is free. "For the street had become the only safe place in which I could seek refuge, and into which I could escape with my whole being" (51). Mernissi describes the traditional Islamic view of what it means for a Muslim woman to appear on the street; in *Beyond the Veil* (1987) Mernissi writes that respectable women simply do not appear on the street, only prostitutes and insane women do. Further, such an occurrence is considered "provocative and offensive" (143). There is a certain paradox in the juxtaposition of the two texts. This results from Mernissi looking from the outside at the prostitute on the street, while Saadawi looks from within the prostitute's subjectivity. According to Sabbah, the separation of space was not created at its origin to protect women, but to protect men from the destructive feminine. The entire question of how the division of space affects women was developed much later as counter-discourse to the traditional one.

In the street Firdaous becomes an anonymous member of a crowd. If no one focuses on her, at least no one turns on her with a violent act:

> All of them were in a hurry, rushing along, oblivious of what was
> happening around them. No one noticed as I stood there alone. And
> because they did not notice me I was able to observe them well (40)…
>
> I was amazed by the huge number of people filling up the streets
> everywhere, but even more amazed to see they moved like blind creatures
> that could neither see themselves, nor anyone else. My amazement became

even greater when I suddenly realized that I had become one of them (41). The others' blindness at first has a protective aspect toward her and shields her; when she is seen she becomes an object of violence. Or perhaps, throughout the book, she never is seen for who she is, the blindness of the crowd in the street pervading the story. If Firdaous melts (or becomes lost) in the crowd, it is with none of the transcendence with which Benchemsi's narrator merges with space and those around her. While Benchemsi's narrator reaches toward the sacred, Firdaous's experience is profoundly immanent; in dissolving into the crowd she loses a kind of sight, the sight of each person's individuality, in a sort of "déchéance." While earlier I compared Firdaous with Bradia, here, a comparison is to be made between Benchemsi's narrator and Firdaous. While the latter becomes a sort of woman of the crowd, Benchemsi's narrator is closer to, but not exactly like, a flâneur; Benchemsi's narrator gazes at, stares, with a panoramic view, while Firdaous loses the power of the gaze as she traverses space. (Benchemsi's narrator, though, lacks the nonchalance of the flâneur; engaged from the heart, she acts on the situations that she observes.)

The crowd, a symbol of modernity and anonymity, is described by Saadawi as a new experience, a birth into a world which provokes both pleasure and fear (41). In the crowd Firdaous describes herself as a pebble, "non-existent" (41) for others. Interestingly, it is as a pebble in the crowd that Firdaous avoids suffering. Her existence as part of the crowd is a passive one, where her gaze is suppressed: "There I was, just a pebble which someone had tossed into its waters, rolling along with the crowds that rode in buses and cars, or walked the streets, with unseeing eyes, incapable of noticing anything or anyone" (41). Thus, not only is Firdaous denied the subjectivity of feeling,

she is also denied her own gaze. Without this, she is denied the status of ocular witness. Or, perhaps better put, in a dilution of witnessing, (witnessing without vision), she recounts her own and others' objectification. She experiences again the alienation she felt in front of the mirror, being part of the crowd and yet existentially alone. If the novel recounts the formation of an identity (we recall the "Who am I?" of the mirror episode), in public space, identities become ignored and hold no function. But Firdaous struggles against this lack, eventually establishing her own point of view, but one which, based on her own experience, differs radically from the dominant and accepted morality.

In Saadawi's text, the only inter-subjectivity lies between Firdaous and the psychiatrist-narrator. Besides that relationship, dominant structurally, but limited to a few hours temporally, Firdaous does not share a construction of the meaning of her experience. In Benchemsi's text, I have analyzed how the lack of inter- subjectivity between Bradia and her husband is an element which leads to her suicide.

Conclusion

This chapter analyzes the production of the image of woman in two contemporary texts. To what degree do these representations imitate that of earlier texts as described by Sabbah and to what degree do they diverge from it? Are these authors complicit in the transmission of the classic image of women in the Muslim unconscious as described by Sabbah, or do they depart from it as innovators and creators?

Elements present in the Muslim unconscious of earlier centuries exist even in these contemporary texts. This suggests that the collective unconscious has a continuity over the course of history. As much as both Benchemsi and Saadawi strive to actively

transform the representation of Muslim women, seeds of her classic image remain even in their texts.

As noted earlier, Bradia's focus on seducing her husband crystallizes the image of the woman preoccupied by sexuality, and therefore constituting a danger to the Muslim ethical system. And although Firdaous' occupation as a prostitute is examined from within her own subjectivity, it still reinforces the image of woman as the ultimate sexual object. Her position, in opposition to mainstream society, conforms to the characteristic of woman as positioned contrary to the Muslim ethical system.

But, overall, two developments do occur. First, the uniformity of the image is fractured, and other representations become possible. *Marrakech, lumière d'exil* presents a mosaic of women and their lives. Some of these other representations (besides Bradia and Dada M'Barka) are significant as they counter Sabbah's image of woman-reduced-to-sexual desire. The narrator, for example, is as Westernized as one can be, having lived in France and become a teacher of literature. She is concerned with story-telling, women's relationships, spirituality and women's entrapment and freedom.

Second, the female gaze on herself as alienated, represents a rupture with and a questioning of the conventional image. I have remarked on this phenomenon in the mirror episodes. In Bradia's case, as I have already shown, this female gaze is contaminated by the male gaze. It is also of note that Firdaous' voice is mediated by the narrator-psychiatrist.

Overall, I find that the woman's struggles as described in these two texts are both based on the structure of society and existential. Structurally, the confinement in female space brings a form of suffering. But, existentially, the alienation from the self is also a

separate, but equally keen suffering. For her part, Benchemsi finds hope in Sufism. Does Sufism produce an integration of the fragmentation present in self and in space leading to wholeness and healing? How does the Sufi view woman? Using Benchemsi's *Controverse du temps* (2012) and Ahmed Toufiq's *Abu Musa's Women Neighbors* (2006) as a starting point, these questions will form the basis of my next chapter.

Chapter Three: Two Sufi Love Narratives

A Brief Outline of Sufism

It is significant that Fatima Mernissi, the Moroccan sociologist who devoted her life to studying the question of the Muslim woman's position in society, recently revealed a change in the direction of her interest. Mernissi's current interests include the boundaries of cyberspace and Sufism. She says: "Sufism is key in transforming [this] idea of movement and regenerating oneself" (Khan "There Are Over 50 Words For Love in Arabic Language, While English Has Only 12"). She refers to the re-emergence of *Adab*, a way of dealing with others that has roots in the 9th century Arab world, under the Abbasids. In *Adab*, one treats the stranger as one's equal in order to learn through communication. And so, Mernissi emphasizes the importance of the exchange of ideas as a sort of movement. Mernissi quotes Ibn Arabi who said, "The principle of the universe is movement…if it stops moving it will return to non-existence."[32]

Sufism is a living path of inner transformation, leading to self-knowledge, states of spiritual ecstasy, and a transcendence of the ego. It is a path of intense work by the individual to pass beyond an automatic, unconscious approach to life, toward a way of resacralization or re-enchantment of the everyday (Grinchpun). Sufism emphasizes polishing the heart, as the site which reflects the light of conscience (Skali, *Le Souvenir de l'être profond* 35). Sufism posits the possibility of union with the divine, a belief which involves higher states of consciousness for the individual. According to Faouzi

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[32] This citation echoes Heraclitus who insisted on constant change in the universe: "One cannot step twice into the same river, nor can one grasp any mortal substance in a stable condition, but it scatters and again it gathers; it forms and dissolves, and approaches and departs" (Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus* 53).

Skali ("Living Spiritually in the Present Time"), the metaphor of tasting is key in Sufism.

For just as one might know the chemical composition of honey, its origin and symbolism,

none of this can substitute for the experience of tasting it.

Sufism involves an internal journey, where one tries to render transparent the

blockages which separate us from our true essence. One learns to discover or melt away

the traps of the ego.

The term Sufi probably derives from the Arabic word for wool, "Suf." Wearing

coarse wool became a mark of the simplicity of Islam's beginnings and a gesture against

the temptations of luxury. There are some who make the argument that "Sufi" comes

from the Arabic word for purity "Safaa'," but that does not make sense since Safaa's

relative adjective would be "Saafi." Sufism utilizes *dhiker* as a practice. To practice

dhiker is to participate in an activity which induces consciousness of the divine presence

or love. *Dhiker* may include recitation, singing, music, dance (including Sufi whirling of

the Mevlevi[33] order), incense, meditation and trance. In Sufi poetry, the state of rapture

that is sought is often represented in the language of physical love or drunkenness.

The history of Sufism includes a chasm between Muslim orthodoxy and Sufism

which some have viewed as irreconcilable (Waugh 19). While the orthodox emphasize

God's transcendence, the Sufis, while acknowledging this aspect of the divine, place an

emphasis on intuitive perception and the experiences of the heart. While orthodoxy

emphasizes the exterior element of ritual, Sufism places importance on the interior or

esoteric aspects of these practices (Skali, *Le Souvenir de l'être profond* 29). Because such

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[33] The Mevlevi order is a Sufi order founded in Quonya Turkey by the followers of Ialal ad-Din Muhammad Balkhi-Rumi, a 13th century Persian poet. Dervishes spin in circles around the Shaykh like planets revolving around the sun (Esposito, *Oxford Dictionary of Islam* 268).

personal experiences vary from individual to individual, Sufism has resisted any attempt

to define it. This emphasis on personal experience puts Sufism by its very nature into

conflict with any rigid, institutionalized, religious structure. Moreover, Sufism situates a

key locus as being between the Sheikh or teacher and the individual. And so, the loyalty

is to the teacher, rather than to the imam. And for these reasons it has been considered

dangerous by any religious institution which seeks control and uniformity of dogma.

Faouzi Skali writes that Sufism is not a branch of Islam, it is the heart of Islam

(Ibid. 118). Throughout history, however, Sufism has been marginalized, persecuted, and

suppressed. As far back as the 17th century, Majlisi, a powerful Iranian Shia cleric of the

Safavid era wrote a treatise in refutation of Sufism. As a result of this treatise, Sufism

was divorced from Shiism. Majlisi's view that the imams are mediators and intercessors

between man and God, stands in sharp contrast to the Sufi view that each individual has a

direct and intimate relationship with the divine. When the Iranian sultan Husayn Shah

(1694-1722) came under Majlisi's influence, Majlisi asked and was granted the expulsion

of all Sufis from Isfahan (Momen 115). In Persia, during the Safavid dynasty, Sufism was

perceived as a threat not only to Shiism, but also to the ascendancy of the dynasty.

Sufism was critiqued as conflicting with both "the letter and the spirit of an authentic

Islamic worldview" (Shihadeh 10).

Other accounts of the violent oppression of Sufism abound. In 922 AD Hussein

al-Hallaj of Baghdad, a Sufi teacher, was accused of heresy and executed.[34] It is

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[34] And in the 20th century Kamal Ataturk of Turkey banned Sufi monasteries and rituals.
More recently, there have been many attacks against Sufi shrines and practices. In 2006,
Basij leveled a Sufi meeting house in Quom and 1200 Sufis were arrested. In 2013 Iran
relentlessly persecuted the Gonabadi Nimatulahi Sufis. In 2009, the mausoleum of the
Sufi poet Nasir Ali was devastated in Isfahan. This attack has been explained by the

commonly believed (and so described by Sabbah in her 2010 edition) that it was his

proclamation "I am the truth" (ana al-haqq ie., God),[35] that led to his execution. Sabbah

writes: "Son crime? Il aimait trop Allah, et d'une passion qui anéantissait les hiérarchies

repères de l'ordre orthodoxe. Par le biais de l'amour, il se confondait avec Dieu […]"[36]

(Sabbah, 2010 20). Carl W. Ernst, specialist in Islamic studies, explores al-Hallaj's

proclamation and other similar statements made during states of ecstasy in his doctoral

dissertation at Harvard University which was later published as *Words of Ecstasy in*

Sufism (1985). According to Ernst, Al-Hallaj's statement is an example of *shath:* "the

overflow of sublime spiritual knowledge which may seem strange in speech" (Ernst 21).

One of the most important subjects of *shathiyat* is the nature of self-hood, as a goal of

Sufism is for the ego-consciousness to melt away under the impact of the divine.

Al-Hallaj's proclamation takes this ideal to its limit, positing the union of human

and divine. Shocking as this may seem, it becomes more understandable put into the

context of Sufi beliefs. The Sufi feels such an intimate connection with the divine

presence that his will is taken up by God: "And My servant continues drawing nearer to

Me through supererogatory acts until I love him; and when I love him, I become his ear

with which he hears, his eye with which he sees, his hand with which he grasps, and his

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concern of the rulers of Iran on the resurgence of reformist protests. And on October 25, 2010 an al-Quaida affiliated group bombed a Sufi shrine in the Punjab province of Pakistan.

[35] There is an element of Christianity here as well. The evangelist John, in 14:6 attributes the phrase to Jesus: "I am the way the truth and the life…"

[36] The Syrian poet Adonis writes in *Identité inachevée*, reflecting a similar theme "My mysticism is clear and drained of any religious content […in it] there is no difference between us humans and that which we refer to as God. From this premise, Man can attain a level of ecstasy, which connects him to the quintessence of this universe, beyond masks, veils, or any other sort of physical impediment" (trans. by Franck Salameh).

foot with which he walks" (Ernst 10 cites William A. Graham's *Divine Word and Prophetic World in Early Islam, A Reconsideration of the Sources with Special Reference to the Divine Saying or "Hadîth Qudsî"*).

According to Professor Ernst, however, it was not Hallaj's proclamation alone which led to his death, but his recommendation that those who could not make the *hajj* build a replica of the Ka'bah, circumambulate it and give a feast for orphans and clothe them (Ernst 106). It was based on this pretext that his death was decreed. Ernst explains that Hamid, the governor of Wasit who presided over the trial, told the caliph: "Commander of the faithful, if he is not put to death, he will change the religious law, and everyone will apostatize because of him. This would mean the destruction of the state" (107). Here, we see that the ruling class, having justified its status by having been decreed by God, finds that in any flexibility in religious principles its own position would be put at risk, an argument historically not limited to Islamic states.

There is a shocking irony in the intolerance shown to Sufism, which teaches tolerance. It seems to me that it is the fear of chaos (*fitna*)[37] that causes the cracking down on al-Hallaj's modification of the *hajj* (that is, his suggestion that the obligation of the hajj could be performed outside of Mecca). The fear is that in any loosening of the rituals of orthodoxy the whole system might crumble and that through certain Sufi beliefs—to emphasize the inner commitment rather than the outer tradition—the system is put at risk. The threat of the loss of control to those in power was too great to tolerate.

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[37] "Fitna" has been defined as "testing," for example, putting gold into the fire to separate out the pure from the impure. It has several meanings including the temptation of idolatry or sedition (Firestone 160). As we have seen earlier, Fatema Mernissi has translated *fitna* as disorder or chaos, in particular that provoked by a sexual disorder and initiated by women (Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil* 31). *Fitna,* however, is much broader in meaning than this and includes anything that might cause schism in the community.

<u>Gender and Sufism</u>

According to Ibn Arabi, an Andalusian Sufi and philosopher born in 1165, men and women share an equal ability to reach spiritual completeness (Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy* 9). Abdelwahab Boudhiba, author of *La Sexualité en Islam* (2004), writes that the Sufis believe that it is through the woman's body that man can find God. Ibn al-Arabi in *Bezels of Wisdom* (1980 trans. R.J. Austin) explains that the Sufi's goal is to be annihilated in God, in order to achieve union with the divine. The Sufi believes that in sexual intercourse, man is annihilated in woman, in a type of annihilation in God (Hoffman-Ladd 88).

While this belief is a far cry from woman's role as a destructor of the Muslim ethical system, it situates woman in a teleological position, and thus still constitutes a form of objectification. But in a broader sense, Sufi beliefs enlarge the possibility of what it means to be female, as the Sufi is female in his or her relation to God (Ibid. 91).

While the Sufi view of woman diverges with that of Orthodox Islam, how does it compare with that of Islamic feminism? The traditional belief is that Sufism arose within Islam in the 8th-9th centuries in an ascetic movement. Another view traces the pre-Islamic roots of Sufism back through early Christian mystics. This view has been challenged by Carl Ernst as a misinterpretation by nineteenth-century European scholars who failed to recognize the power and force of Muhammad's prophecy because of their anti-Islamic bias.

While Islamic feminism is situated at the crossroads between the modern movement of feminism and a rationalist approach toward Islam, Sufism contains a sort of "féminisme avant la lettre," an ancient system of belief based on a mystical view. The

interpretations of Sufi texts and practices do not always contain identical notions of gender. Scholars on Sufism and gender fall into two main camps: on the one hand, those who believe in gender complementarity (Nasr, Murata), and on the other, those who are more egalitarian (Shaikh and her reading of Ibn Arabi). Seyyed Hossein Nasr is a Shaykh of the Maryamiyaa Sufi order in the United States. He is the author of "The Male and the Female in the Islamic Perspective," a chapter in his 1987 book *Traditional Islam in the Modern World.* Sachiko Murata is the author of the 1992 book *The Tao of Islam: a sourcebook on gender relationships in Islamic thought.*

Both Nasr and Murata explain that in the Sufi tradition there is an analogy between what occurs on the macrocosmic level (the locus of manifestation of the names of God) and on the microcosmic level (its reflection in the cosmos). The Sufis often quote, "God was a Hidden Treasure wanting to be known, so he made the Treasure manifest" (Murata 33). On the macrocosmic level God is both absoluteness and majesty (*jalil* qualities) and infinity and beauty (*jamil* qualities). As the human being reflects God's names and qualities, according to both Nasr and Murata, on the microscopic level, the male reflects *jalil* (active) qualities, while the female reflects *jamil* (receptive) qualities.

Both scholars also explain that within both the male and the female, there is also a duality. That is to say, both masculinity and femininity have within them positive and negative poles. By the negative masculine, Murata refers to "drive conquest, domination, control and exploitation" (325). By the negative feminine, she means the soul that craves intimacy before awe and that is comfortable with "appetite, anger and this world" (325).[38]

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[38] Nasr describes the same polarity in slightly different language:

Sachiko Murata explains that many texts which refer to male and female designate certain collections of qualities, rather than biological gender.[39] Murata questions how to define her role as a woman writing on gender in Islam. She rejects categorically the idea that hierarchy can be interpreted out of Islam, or that it is possible or desirable to "undermine Islam's patriarchal structure" (322). Instead, she reveals another agenda: to foster understanding of the macroscopic view of the world and in particular that of the Divine Feminine (324).

Sa'diyya Shaikh, for her part, while appreciating the complex view of Sufi gender constructs presented by Nasr and Murata, enters into a dialogue with them in her 2012 book *Sufi Narratives of Intimacy: Ibn Arabi, Gender and Sexuality.* In a March 30, 2013 YouTube video (Sahib https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nc-fanNmtjs) Shaikh tells the story based on a *Qur'anic* passage (2:30-32) that before the creation of mankind the angels cried because they knew that man would shed blood. But, according to the *Qur'an*, God knew something that the angels did not know, and that according to Shaikh is the potential of humanity, each one of us, male and female, containing inside us *al-*

> The female is at once Mary, who symbolizes the Divine Mercy in the Abrahamic traditions and the beatitude which issues from this Mercy, and Eve, who entices, seduces and externalizes the soul of man, leading to its dissipation, although in Islam Eve is not the cause of man's loss of the Edenic state. The female is at once the source of concupiscence and the theater for the contemplation of the Divinity in its uncreated aspect. Likewise, man is at once the symbol of the Lord and Creator and a being who, having lost sight of his ontological dependence upon the Lord, would seek, as a usurper, to play the role of Lord and Creator while he remains a mortal and perishable being (Nasr 49).

[39] "If certain Muslims evaluate 'women' negatively, the problem may be that they are unable to see beyond surface appearances and elementary Islamic teachings […] In other words, they cannot distinguish between the symbol and the symbolized, or the object and the quality incarnate within it. They cannot grasp that the primary thrust of the discussion concerns male and female qualities, not men and women" (Murata 322).

Insan al-Kamil (the complete Human). *Al-Insan al-Kamil*, the "ideal prototype for being human" (op. cit. 71) is androgynous, a polished mirror of divine attributes. Although both Nasr and Murata also share an understanding of *al-Insan al-Kamil*, Shaikh interprets Ibn Arabi's views on this subject to mean that Sufism supports a universal ideal that "makes the same demands of men and women" (Ibid. 205).

Shaikh cites Ibn Arabi: "In other words, everything that a man can attain— spiritual situations, levels or qualities—can be attained by women if God wills, just as it can be attained by men, if God wills" (Shaikh *In Search of Al Insan* cites Ibn Arabi *Al Futuhat al Makkiyya* 1911). These divergent views demonstrate that just as Amina Wadud argues that the *Qur'an* and *hadith* have been open to interpretation through patriarchal eyes, Sufi texts too are vulnerable to be read according to the bias of the scholars' own viewpoint and place in history. But, a larger point needs to be made. That is, that in the dialogue between Nasr, Murata and Shaikh, one sees a view of gender in Islam that is much more complex and much richer than that present in the orthodox view. According to all three, the woman reflects divine traits. While the image that Sabbah distills from so many classic texts is severely reductionist, the type of discussion that we see among the scholars of Sufism is much more nuanced, respectful, and potentially powerful.

The notion of *al-Insan al-Kamil* and its implications for gender in Islam according to Ibn Arabi should be compared with Wadud's use of the idea of *khalifa* to understand gender in Islam. Wadud explains that the purpose of the human being, both male and female, is to act as an agent of God on earth (*khalifa*). Wadud bases her understanding of this concept on a *qu'ranic* verse. Before the creation of mankind, God announces, "Verily

I will create a *khalifah*, vicegerent on the earth" (2:30). According to Wadud, the fact that God stated this as His intention shows that *khilafah* (trusteeship or agency) is at the core of mankind's purpose on earth. Furthermore, she explains that this agency, or moral responsibility, is inclusive in terms of race, class, and gender (Wadud, *Inside the Gender Jihad* 32-37). Shaikh's reading of Ibn Arabi and Wadud's understanding of *khalifa* use different paths to arrive at similar conclusions about the role of gender in Islam. Both critique the conflation of Sharia (Islamic law) with *fiqh* (jurisprudence). Both use metaphors about pregnancy and birth to describe God's creation of the world (Kecia Ali 213 and Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives* 125). And both find that the self in Islam, regardless of gender, bears an equal responsibility to fulfill the divine will. Shaikh and Wadud also find that both men and women are endowed with the "innate spiritual capacity" (Shaikh op. cit. 227) to act in harmony with God's plan, although Shaikh (interpreting Ibn Arabi) places a greater emphasis on the equal potential of men and women to achieve God realization, while Wadud accents the equal responsibility of both genders to act on earth as moral beings, that is striving towards social justice through Islamic practice. The views of Ibn Arabi and other Sufi writers offer texts which may nourish Islamic feminism, as these two separate paths may find other points of convergence.

The View of Two Contemporary Sufi Orders on the Creation of the *Mourchidat*[40] in Morocco

Today in Morocco there are two main Sufi orders: The Qadiri Boutchichi Sufi order headed by Sheikh Hamza and the Justice and Charity order also called Al Adl Wal

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[40] Female guide

Ilissana (AWI) which was started by the now deceased Abdessalama Yassine, an ex-member of the Boutchichi Order. Yassine left the Boutchichi order because of its apparent lack of political involvement. The Boutchichi order has an "amicable" relationship with the monarchy. And, in fact, Ahmed Toufiq, one of the authors I will study, a member of the Boutchichi order and a novelist, is the current minister of Islamic affairs. This is a position of great influence as the Friday sermons given by the imams in Morocco are all written by the ministry of religious affairs. In his 2015 book *Sufism and Politics in Morocco*, Abdelilah Bouasria, himself a member of the Boutchichi order, criticizes Yassine for not having understood the true relationship between the Boutchichi movement and politics. According to Bouasria, while the Boutchichi order appears apolitical, it actually engages in a sort of kryptopolitics where its dissidence is "inscribed in a hidden register of paranormal acts and discourse" (11). AWI, for its part, positions itself openly in resistance to the government through visible methods, and remains an illegal, but tolerated movement. AWI rejects violent methods, secret activity and reliance on foreign forces.

These two Sufi orders have taken different positions concerning a new role available for women in the mosque. King Mohammed VI launched a training program for *mourchidat* which permits women on completion to be advisors to other women in the mosques as well as to prisoners. They can act as an imam in a mosque, but cannot lead the prayers (Sakthivel 10). Many hope that the *mourchidat* will encourage a more moderate Islam. The first class graduated in 2006.

Although it was Mohammed VI who instituted the *mourchidat*, Ahmed Toufiq, as minister of Islamic affairs, is a senior advisor to the king. Toufiq expressed his optimism

regarding the role of the *mourchidat*: "Their role can go far beyond what is expected—far beyond what the imams in the mosques are expected to do" (Rausch 3).

While Toufiq, as a member of the Boutchichi movement, supports the *mourchidat*, AWI sees this new institution as government propaganda. They see it as an effort by the government to control religion, and even to undermine their movement which has been training women in Morocco for informally for many years. One of the most controversial aspects of the work of the *mourchidat* is that it involves "self-structured movement in the public sphere and that the work is unmonitored" (Rausch 13).

Toufiq's *Abu Musa's Women Neighbors*

Two contemporary Moroccan novels treat the theme of a woman who falls in love with a Sufi master: Benchemsi's *Controverse des temps* (2012) and Ahmed Toufiq's *Abu Musa's Women Neighbors* (1997). Looking at these two books, side-by-side, raises certain questions: How is love described in contemporary Muslim society? Are there any obstacles to love specific to this society? What is the relationship between love and Sufism? And perhaps most essential for my purposes, how does the Sufi view of what it means to be female and Muslim differ from Sabbah's 1982 view? As Sabbah describes woman in a series of classic text as incarnating desire without love, how do these texts contrast by showing two central women characters capable of deep and profound love?

The relation between Sufism and politics is paradoxical and of interest. Sufism is by nature apolitical. Yet, Toufiq was appointed minister of religion in Morocco, to some extent in order to combat the growing power of Islamism in the Maghreb. While in the past Sufism was so controversial that it was forced to remain hidden, currently the

Moroccan government is actively supporting it in order to combat (neutralize) the

politicization of religion through Islamism. Morocco is not alone in turning to Sufism to

fight radical Islam. In Chechnya President Ramzan Kadyrov has encouraged a Sufi

revival to combat the rise of radical Islam, because of the Sufi message of tolerance

(Parfitt). This revival has both a positive and a negative aspect. In the sense that it

replaces the former Soviet Union's repression of religion in the name of atheism, it offers

a new religious freedom. But, the "freedom" comes at a price. In the State's support of

Sufism it also takes on a measure of control, at least in a symbolic sense. The *ziker*

celebrations (in particular dance) have become signifiers whose signified is to be

interpreted by the government. Under post-Soviet Russia, this ritual was interpreted as a

signifier of Chechen aggression, "the dance and trance of the rebels" (Chivers).

Currently, *ziker* is resignified by the Kremlin, as a tool to keep Chechnya under control. It

is not clear from the literature to what extent the government has tried to infiltrate Sufi

sects or to control their teachings. But, it is evident, that the repression of religion has

been replaced with its manipulation both through a language of propaganda and through

financial support. (It is of note that at the opening ceremony of the new 20 million dollar

mosque in Chechnya President Kadyrov (the son) stressed his loyalty to the Kremlin.)

  Benchemsi's text, at first reading is non-political, a simple tragic love story, in the

tradition of *La Princesse de Clèves.*[41] Toufiq's work, on the contrary, analyzes power

relations. Toufiq's novel can be divided into three parts. In the first section we meet

Shamah and learn of her rise from servant-girl to palace-living. Her association with

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[41] In Benchemsi's *Controverse des temps,* Madame de Lafayette's *La Princesse de Clèves* and Andre Gide's *La Porte étroite,* a lover refuses the beloved because of a perceived tension between the realization of love and virtue, while the obstacle does not consist of a legal, or widely accepted morally held belief.

water and purity is established when as soon as she brings a bowl of water to Al-Jawra'i
he decides to wed her that evening. In the second section one-by-one the women of the
hostelry are introduced, each chapter bearing as title a woman resident's name. In the
third section Shamah's love for Abu Musa is sketched. Then, after the city is overcome
by drought, Abu Musa and the women of the hostelry bring rain through prayer.

A central contrast in this novel is developed between worldliness and corruption
(embodied by the governor, the tax-collector, and Tudah) on the one hand, and
spirituality and innocence (Shamah, Abu Musa), on the other. This opposition can be
seen in the juxtaposition of two sentences about the governor, his tax-collector and
Shamah: "The vile Governor and his insolent tax-collector were both merely fangs and
claws from the corporeal world, that grotesque ghoul. Seen in such a light, Shamah was
not of this world at all, but of its very antithesis, the world to come. That is why she never
cried" (128). Here, Toufiq transforms both the governor and his tax-collector via
synecdoche into vicious animals. He puts forth a metaphysical vision where the corporeal
world is separate from the spiritual one, and represented by a jinn demon, the ghoul, a
shapeshifter that eats human flesh. The Arabic ghoul, a type of jinn, predates Islam (Al-
Rawi 45-69). As jinn can take the form of other living creatures, including humans,
Toufiq thus questions whether the tax collector and the governor even have a genuine
human nature, or have simply assumed a human form. The ghoul often disguises himself
as a human to lure his prey, as the governor and the tax collector misuse their power to
financially and spiritually destroy Ali. Shamah, by contrast, is associated not simply with
the forces of good in this world, but is put on an even higher spiritual plane. Associated
with the non-corporeal world, Shamah is the opposite of Sabbah's (1982) woman. In her

lack of tears she displays a serene disposition and fortitude in the face of adversity. The structure of society is created by corrupt (corrupting) forces which hold power over innocence. To counter all the corruption, so that we are not left in a state of utter despair, the presence of Sufism offers a redemptive, powerful and protective influence.

The government's corruption can be seen in the excessive taxes and in the injustice in the way in which taxes are applied (here in order to reduce Ali to penury as the governor desires to seduce his wife, Shamah) as well as through oppressive and detrimental central control of the economy. Governor Jarmun's attempted seduction of Shamah shows her vulnerability to the misuse of power. This constitutes a critique of an era that has been identified by Stefania Pandolfo as the 14th century (The Post-Apollo Press on *Women Neighbors*). It challenges those who claim that Muslim literature is incapable of being critical in a socio-political sense.

The attempted seduction/rape occurs in an episode presented through analepsis. At this turning point in the text, Shamah's only salvation is via Abu Musa's mystical powers, which cause Governor Jarmun to be overcome with a scratching fit, and so the latter allows Shamah to depart. It is Shamah who afterwards figures out that while her husband Ali was with Abu Musa at the cave by the sea, Abu Musa's scratching fit worked as a talisman, to protect her.

The character of Shamah contrasts with that of the other women in the hostelry, all of whom have a reputation of having either opposed the Muslim ethical order or having been excluded from it. They are women without any connections, any husbands or family, and so at risk of falling into low ways in order to survive. Shamah, by contrast, is portrayed in her purity, as well as in her spiritual and striking physical beauty.

Shamah is described as associated with water: "By now Shamah's heart had turned into water and reverted to its original form, the one from which every living thing is created" (121).[42] This citation refers to the water that existed before the world was created: "We made from water every living thing (21:30) and also "And it is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and his Throne was upon the waters" (11:7).

Water, in Islam is associated with cleansing and purifying, as described in the *Qur'an* (5: 7-8): "O you who believe, when you prepare for prayer, wash your faces and your hand to the elbows; rub your head and your feet to the ankles." Water helps one arrive at a state of *tahara* or purity. Thus, the connection of Shamah with water emphasizes her high spiritual state, where not only is she described in her purity, but like water, she can purify others.

Shamah is linked in particular with the sea; feferring to her husband Ali, the text states:

> She it was who had sent him to the sea, with the idea of placing him in front of a mirror of her own self, she being like the very sea whose waves strike the shore and return to their place of origin […] Anything to do with the purity of the sea was a reflection of its Creator, in all His beauty and majesty (165-6).

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[42] I note that the root definition of Sharia (Islamic law) is the path to water, source of life (*Amina Wadud: "Islam, Feminism and Human Rights"*). Before Islam arrived in Arabia, the *sharia'ah* was a series of rules about water use: the *shuraat al-maa* were the permits that gave the rights to drinking water (De Chatel).

That Abu Musa and Shamah are kindred spirits can be seen in his association with the sea (next to which is located his cave, and near which he will be buried). The sea in Sufi thought is a symbol of the unfathomable abyss of the divine (Schimmel 167).

In the end of the novel Shamah becomes a metonym for the city of Salé. "Shamah had the impression that the city of Salé was going through the same period of trauma as she was; it was feeling the same pains. She may even have imagined that she had come to encapsulate the city as a whole or that both of them were sharing the same portion of divine justice" (298).

When Shamah hides from her husband Ali her night at the governor's house (to protect him from doubts about her faithfulness) she disrupts the communication between them. Despite her good intentions, he begins to suspect her and this leads to his vulnerability to seduction. Just as in Benchemsi's *Marrakech,* the lack of communication between the partners disrupts love and leads to "void" and "abyss" (295).

When Shamah fails in her quest to elevate Ali spiritually, he goes astray and is seduced by a leprosy-ridden woman and so forced to leave Shamah and the city. While we are privy to her inner dialogue, all in quotes rather than in *discours indirect libre*, we never enter Ali's head. Thus, the entire story is told from Shamah's point of view; it is her subjectivity that is privileged as opposed to Ali's: we never find out what Ali is looking for. His character is far less developed than hers. The feminine quest for spiritual elevation both for herself and for her partner is in line with Sufi philosophy and goes contrary to Sabbah's 1982 vision.

A deep friendship with Abu Musa replaces Shamah's love for Ali: "Shamah was now convinced that, ever since she could remember and long before she had ever met

Abu Musa, her own fate had been determined by his actions. He was her guardian angel"
(297). Shamah's relationship with Abu Musa differs radically from the love interest
between Ilyas and Houda in Benchemsi's 2006 novel, *La Controverse des temps*. First,
Abu Musa is an ascetic, who worships alone in a cave, while Benchemsi's mystic, Ilyas,
participates in collective rituals. Second, Shamah has a long life story with several
marriages before she meets Abu Musa. Shamah's love is subtle but strong, based on
gratitude, respect, and a form of worship. Benchemsi's Houda's love is entangled with
romantic love: as we will see, Ilyas debates both marrying her and accepting her as a
disciple. While Ilyas ultimately rejects Houda, Abu Musa welcomes and encourages
Shamah: "Two or three times a week he used to come and knock on Shamah's door.
When she opened the peephole, he would greet her and she would respond. He would
then give her a smile and depart" (296). While in both novels the Sufi is male, this may
be accidental, as in Sufi history stories of women saints abound (among the more famous
Rabia, Mu'adha, Fatima of Nishapur (Schimmel 34-53)).

The cities' drought in the final chapter of *Abu Musa's Women Neighbors* can be
seen as a spiritual thirst, just as in Benchemsi's *Marrakech* the desert ("Le désert est le
véritable arrière pays" (12)) can be seen as representing a barrenness associated with
spiritual seeking. This interpretation is consistent with traditional Muslim symbolism as
Annemarie Schimmel explains that the prophet himself has been described
metaphorically as a great rain cloud. Rain is called *rahma* or "grace, mercy" (Schimmel
131).

Toufiq also evokes the question of governmental control over spiritual authority.
There is a certain irony suggested in the text in the governor's belief that he can force

God to send rain through his power over imams. This is seen when the governor orders the imams to lead prayers for rain in the mosque, and when rain fails to fall he confines them to their quarters in punishment. Toufiq here also suggests a certain impotence present in the orthodox spiritual leadership, an impotence later to be contrasted with the deep spiritual force of Sufism, as exhibited by Abu Musa.

The governor also controls and specifies the explanation that is to be announced in the mosque for the drought. The decree to be read in all of the mosques includes the following: "Of all the reprehensible acts that are at the root of the current disastrous situation, including the lack of rainfall, the direst is the effrontery that people are displaying toward their rulers and the way they continue to defy the rulers orders, […]" (308).

Thus, the governor manipulates the popular belief that the cause of the drought is spiritual in nature in order to increase the people's submissiveness to him, rather than to God's rule and the principles of morality. By placing this pronouncement in a mosque, the author says that not everything spoken here comes from a legitimate source, but shows instead how rulers manipulate religious language and religious space to tighten their control. Toufiq's ironic attitude is one of scathing critique toward the misuse of religion to increase the power of the ruling class.

The governor succeeds in replacing the speech of the men of religion with his own discourse and their silence: "The Governor behaved in exactly the same way with a number of preachers and men of religion, until he had managed to silence them all" (309).

When Toufiq puts the blame of women for society's ills in the mouth of the corrupt governor, he questions this entire line of discourse: [the governor had claimed that] "the reason why the rain had stopped falling for so long was because of the sinful behavior of the women" (322). Toufiq thus shifts the blame for society's blights from woman to a corrupt governmental structure and a misuse of language in false and misleading propaganda (even if it is uttered in a mosque). And so, his text constitutes a powerful counter-discourse to Sabbah's description of a historic view of woman—that she needs to be controlled to prevent her from destroying the Muslim system. Instead, here it is the forces that seek control that constitute the source of society's ills. The rules of feminine segregation are also implicitly critiqued as Toufiq puts their support in the mouth of the judicial counselor. Abu Musa is criticized for disobeying these rules: "Women do not go outdoors to pray for rain! Heresy! The whole thing is a blot on our city!"

"Watch your words carefully, revered Shaykh," the Chief of Police interrupted sarcastically, "Maybe their prayers will bring us some rain!" (320).

In fact, it is through the prayers of Abu Musa and the women of the hostelry that the drought is lifted from the city. It is interesting that Abu Musa and his entourage first leave the city and then instead of entering the mosque, remain in its courtyard. It is as though the troupe's social marginality is reflected in its spatial marginality. During Abu Musa's ecstatic prayers, the group is in a state of *hal,* or transitory mystical state, a trance generally understood to be the product of a Sufi spiritual practice. The trance state is brought on by the repetition of the prayer that Abu Musa offers, and the women echo, numerous times:

Praise to God Almighty!

O God, take pity on their weakness.

Praise be to God Almighty!

O God, look down upon them.

Praise be to God Almighty!

O God, take pity on their weakness (316).

The movement of Abu Musa and the women is one of circumambulation, "as though there were some kind of pole in the middle of the mosque" (315). This movement continues throughout the trance and evokes the circumambulation of the *Ka'abah* during the *hajj*. The recreation of the act of circumambulation (traditionally performed seven times in Mecca during the period of the *hajj*) outside of this traditional framework, recalls the innovation of al-Hallaj, which was judged, as we saw earlier, too transgressive to Muslim orthodoxy to be acceptable. Furthermore, Abu Musa, through his circumambulation of the mosque, suggests that he is not a new center, but that the mosque, the traditional sacred space, remains at the center. In the act of circumambulation, he remains a pilgrim, come to seek divine grace.

One of the most notable aspects of this trance is its contagion. It spreads from Abu Musa, to the women of the hostelry, to the surrounding Sufis who chant, and subsequently to the thousands of onlookers. If the contagion has a meaning, it seems to be that the trance need not be only an individual phenomenon, but has the power to transform society for the better. Although I have described Abu Musa as Sufi, in fact the word Sufi itself only appears in this novel in connection with the small group of devotees who join Abu Musa and the women in this trance episode. Unlike the women who

incessantly chant after Abu Musa (the prayer quoted above), the Sufis chant a single word "Huww" (318), which "made the entire courtyard vibrate" (318).

In the trance state the women seem to gaze at the other-worldly creatures, as though their sight had taken on a paranormal dimension: "Their hands were raised to the heavens, and their gaze was such that they seemed to be staring at angels that had descended so far from the heavens that they almost touched the earth" (316). Here the narration remains third-person omniscient and the point of view never shifts to that of Abu Musa or the women themselves. It is as though the narrator takes on the gaze of the onlookers. The narrator's gaze thus observes the women's gaze, and with the "as though," the narrator clings to the realistic mode, perhaps in order not to alienate the reader.

The exceptional nature of the event was remarked on by the onlookers: "There were those who said that on a day like this even mules would give birth" (317), a metaphor to describe simultaneously the occurrence of that which is impossible in nature, and the fruitfulness of this experience as described through a birth metaphor. It is as though an aporia (the mule) finds a release into passage.

Water imagery is recurrent and is seen in the women's tears: "Every one of them burst into tears and wept profusely from tear ducts that everyone assumed to have dried up forever" (316). Furthermore, this imagery is evoked as the Sufis fall to the ground as part of the trance:

> Some of them collapsed to the ground and rolled around in the dust as
> though begging for forgiveness from some monarch. Some of the people
> watching were anxious to give them some water, but the Sufi leaders

stopped them. "Don't give them water," they said. "They're currently sipping the choicest wines of heaven!" "Leave them to their thirst," said others. "Eventually the heavens will take pity on all of us who are thirsty" (318).

This motif is consistent with the overall purpose of the prayers, to end the drought, both the physical one as well as the spiritual thirst of the people of Salé. Just as Shamah was described as associated with the water principle, water here and even thirst, is associated with cleansing and purification.

The inner transformation of these women through trance and prayer results in their acceptance by society. Although several imams had led prayers previously, prayer-as-social-convention does not bring rain. What the governor fails to understand is that the mere mechanics of prayer will not bring rain. In this we see that the inner realization of the Sufi ascetic Abu Musa serves in the end to save the community. His renouncement of exterior conformism and integration within society, leads to a transcendence which in the end is valuable to society. These prayers purify the women of the hostelry in the eyes of the cities' residents: "Women of the city fell on the Hostelry's women as though they were angels from God himself; they were all anxious to acquire one of them as a second wife for their husbands" (318). If the women of the hostelry initially crystallized the image of the woman as seen in Sabbah (1982) ("followed by a group of women whom many of them had long since assumed to be possessed by devils" (314)), they are,

through the power of love in Sufism and through prayer, collectively transformed and

redeemed and become instead saviors of the community.[43]

Although it is Abu Musa leading the women's prayers through a call-and-

response ritual, the women are leading those of the community:

> So powerful was the women's trance that it reached out to the thousands
>
> of men and women who were watching them from the edge of the mosque.
>
> Paens of praise and alleluias rang out and people starting hugging each
>
> other as though they had just been liberated from the chains of hell itself
>
> (317).

This fictional episode, radical as it is, recalls a historic event, the leading of

Friday prayers by Dr. Amina Wadud in 2005 in New York, and raises some of the same

questions. Just as Abu Musa led the prayers outside of the mosque, Amina Wadud,

having been refused by three mosques (and an art gallery)[44] led prayers in a church. The

novel precedes the actual event by eight years. In a one hour panel at Chautauqua

Institute's 2011 discussion "Jewish, Christian and Muslim Women seeking Clergy

Equality" (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eiQruyqyZlw),[45] Dr. Wadud gives some

background on her decision to take this ground-breaking step. Amina Wadud explains

that her activist work is consistent with her scholarship. In *Qur'an and Woman* (1992)

she explores the distance between the *Qur'an*, which favors justice, and its patriarchal

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[43] The theme of the woman-savior echoes the Sufi poem of the Persian poet Attar (1145-1220) in Ilahinama (Schimmel 85). Here an oppressed woman is seen as saving the king from drowning during a dream. The function of water is the inverse of that in our text.

[44] Which had received a bomb threat

[45] It is clear from this video that similar issues exist in the context of all three of the major monotheistic religions.

interpretations. In this video, Wadud explains this distance as applied to the question of women leading prayers. According to her, the *Qur'anic* text and *hadith* do not exclude women from leading prayers, rather it is the socio-political context or tradition that opposes it. Wadud underlies the discord between the core Islamic belief that God is everywhere, and its distortion in the traditional assignment of space in the mosque, where the area closest to the prayer-leader (*imam*) is reserved for men, while back rows, attic, basement and areas outside the mosque are reserved for women.

To the extent that Wadud knows that God listens to the prayers of all of his supplicants wherever they might pray, one might question why she feels that it is so important to fight for central space. Two possible answers come to mind. First putting her theory into practice, Wadud is trying to model what an Islam which returns to its source would look like. Second, as pointed out by a panelist at the Chautauga Institute's discussion, the community always watches sacred practices, as what happens in the mosque spreads through the rest of society into the boardroom, into the home, into the congress, etc.

This explanation sheds light on the trance episode in the *Abu Musa's Woman Neighbors* and perhaps supplies an explanation of the meaning and significance of the contagion. The trance state, brought on by the intense spiritual practice of one individual, Abu Musa, through a process of contagion, spreads waves/vibrations of spiritual elevation throughout the community. In both the video and Toufiq's text, the message is that the charged nature of the sacred space spreads to influence the rest of society.

Both Wadud's historic action in 2005, and the trance episode in Toufiq's novel take place in a political context. Wadud explains in the video that after leading the mixed-

gender prayer service, she turned down forty requests a day for interviews in order to remain low-profile. These invitations point to the surprising and newsworthy nature of her act. Wadud does not deny that her act had a political aspect: in her attempt to alter the use of space and the role of woman in Islamic prayer she tried to shift the paradigm of power in the community (the very definition of politics). But in her refusal to grant interviews, she displaces the attention from herself and allows it to rest on her act.

It must be noted that Wadud does not mention any allegiance to Sufism. But while she cites the textual sources for her act as the *Qur'an* and *hadith*, the text of Ibn Arabi is there also to support her. Ibn Arabi argues directly that men's and women's equal spiritual potential has a number of practical implications:

> Women can set legal precedents, can lead mixed prayer congregations in prayer, can be teachers and leaders on the Tariqa with both women and men as disciples, can attain the highest level of leadership by being the axial saint (qutb) of a period, and so forth (Shaikh, *Sufi Narratives* 214).

Dr. Wadud's service was both preceded and followed by opposition. Before the event, Wadud received death threats prompted by *fatwas* (legal opinions by Islamic scholars) issued against her. According to these critics, Islam forbids women to lead prayers unless it is solely in front of other women. The explanation given is that of the potential for *fitna,* or in other words, the possibility for the sexual power that women possess to cause uncontrollable desire in men, a source of social chaos (*The Woman-Led Prayer That Catalyzed Controversy*). During the service itself fifteen protesters gathered outside the Synod House of Cathedral of St. John the Divine, the Episcopal church in Manhattan where the prayers were held. One had a poster asking for the event's

organizers to be cursed by Allah ("Woman Leads US Muslims to Prayer"). These reactions give some indication of the shock which Dr. Wadud's act produced upon the Muslim community.

The brouhaha surrounding this event can be compared to the discussion which ensues in Toufiq's novel between the governor, the chief of police, and the judicial counselor. In the novel, the Shaykh argues that:

> Even if these women were full of virtue, even if their prayers were to bring us rain, the fact that Abu Musa took them out of the city is still a direct infringement of proper practice. Indeed, it is sinful. Even if rain does fall as a result of their intervention, nothing will grow from it, neither crops nor flowers. It will merely fill the mouths of serpents with yet more poison (320).

The triple repetition of the "even if," sets up a hypothetical where the speaker cannot be proved wrong. His statement becomes categorical opposition to the consideration that any good can come from violating spatial codes. In its tone of strong and absolute condemnation, it evokes fundamentalism. The shaykh appears to see himself as a guardian of the status quo. Using figurative language, he tries to pass on what he holds as an unquestionable truth. And so, he turns the symbolic value of water on its head, by imagining a water that does not purify, but instead brings poison.

In the novel the Sheikh's prediction is not supported by the text. God, the ultimate arbiter, favors the women's prayers:

> A West wind blew up, something they had not experienced ever since the drought had started. Rain started to fall, first in drops and then in a deluge,

it was careening down. Unable to believe what they were seeing and

hearing, they rushed outside to make sure it really was rain. Leaving their

homes, they let their heads and bodies become soaked as the rain streamed

down all over them. Knocking on each other's doors, they exchanged

blessings and hugs, wept tears of joy and pondered the meaning of the

transcendent moment (321).[46]

No such direct divine intervention followed the prayers of Dr. Wadud.[47]

In a larger sense, at the core of the debate around these issues is the question of

whether Muslim women should have the same privileges as men in the practice of their

religion, whether they will take positions of spiritual leadership. Can a woman bear the

sacred and how can she express her sacredness in the community? The comparison of the

historic event led by a pro-faith, pro-feminist woman and the literary episode influenced

by Sufism hints at a possible convergence of these two approaches. This view of woman

developed by Toufiq in this novel, therefore, constitutes a sort of native recuperation of

the feminine image, a "feminism" not of Western origin, but stemming instead from the

Sufi view of women.

Benchemsi's *Controverse des temps*

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[46] The overflowing of water and the overflowing of ecstasy are etymologically (in Arabic) related. When a lot of water overflows a narrow bank, it is described as *shataha*. And so, when the ecstasy of a devotee becomes powerful, and overflows the bounds of rational understanding, he speaks in *shath* (Ernst 12).

[47] To be fair, what Dr. Wadud was praying for was far less tangible: tolerance, forgiveness, and through her symbolic act, the recognition of women as fully human. The text of her *khutbah* (address to the community) is on pages 249-253 of *The Gender Jihad*.

As its title indicates, *Controverse des temps* from its very beginning focuses on layers of history in Meknes, Morocco. As the narrator, Najia, and her friends traverse the architectural geography of the city, they begin to discuss its history. The novel opens with an episode in Place al-Hadim, a public square, and follows with one in the catacombs built by Moulay Ismaïl, a 17th century despot. The narrator, Najia, tells a story which reflects on storytelling, the violence of Moroccan history and the questionable possibility of democracy in its future. Najia and her friends form a group of elite intellectuals whose discussions structure the first two-thirds of the novel. The debates are reminiscent of those which might take place in a seventeenth century French salon, in terms of their sophistication and erudition (and at times superficiality), but here they occur in the open air of the city.

As Najia traverses the city to visit the *zaouia* of the master Sufi Lahbib Darqaoui and later the tomb of Sidî al Hadî Ben Aissa, and Shaykh al Kamil, we get a hint of the importance of the sacred, and in particular of Sufism, in this text.

The repeated references to Moulay Ismaïl (as the focus of Najia's research), known primarily in history for his violent and cruel nature, point to contradictions and complexities in his character; Benchemsi's characters tell stories about other aspects of his life, his support for scholarship through the copying of books, and his building of churches. Strangely, Benchemsi does not explain why as a Muslim he was building churches or why this was to his credit. The controversy of the title may refer to the controversy regarding Ismaïl, in Benchemsi's writing no longer a unidimensionally cruel despot, but a man with many facets: "Moulay Ismaïl n'était plus le despote sanguinaire et barbare mais bien un continuateur d'un certain Ibn Tumert pour qui le savoir, la foi et le

pouvoir avaient, ou du moins devaient avoir, le même destin" (57). Najia universalizes

the case of Ismaïl by saying: "Nous puons tous tantôt la rose tantôt le sang […]" (58).

Through her discussion of Ismaïl, she raises questions about collective memory and the

questionable judgments of recorded history.

It is within this context, that Benchemsi introduces, as friends of Najia, the two

would-be lovers, Houda and Ilyas,[48] a married Sufi. How does Benchemsi describe the

lovers' desire for each other? What is the effect of love itself on these two characters?

How do the obstacles to their love unfold?

While Houda eventually approaches Ilyas with an expression of romantic love,

she expresses her desire initially in terms that would be appropriate for interest in either a

teacher or a lover. Prior to meeting Ilyas, Houda felt foreign to the world of faith and was

not even certain in her own mind whether she was a woman of faith herself:

> Ilyas est un homme de foi pensa-t-elle. Est-ce que je sais seulement ce que
>
> cela signifie? Ai-je la foi moi-même? Mais il n'y a pas d'explication au
>
> fait de ne pas avoir la foi. Ou bien l'ai-je sans le savoir ? Alors peut-être
>
> est-ce véritablement une grâce ? Jamais je ne me suis vraiment posé la
>
> question. En fait cet univers m'est tout à fait étranger (104).

Houda is drawn to Ilyas as though to clarify her own position relative to these questions.

Houda's initial desire for him is described as heat and lightening: "Quelque chose qui

demeurait informulable fit de nouveau basculer tout son être. Elle se sentit fiévreuse.

Agitée. Une inquiétante nervosité gagna tout son corps mais sans rien retirer à une ardeur

réelle et à une grande émotion" (107). As in *Marrakech lumière d'exil*, but differently,

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[48] This is a very unusual name for a Muslim; Ilyas (sometimes Elias) in the Arabized
form of Elijah, Greek Elias, used exclusively by Arabic-defined Christians.

desire does not soothe or calm, but introduces a state of instability. Love brings on an inner combat, almost immediately, first in Houda, later in Ilyas: "Des signes de plus en plus évidents lui parvinrent sur sa vérité intérieure mais elle préféra à nouveau les évincer et les repousser dans cet espace insondable où raison et déraison se démènent dans un combat sans merci" (108). Her own agitation makes her question her potential effect on Ilyas, he so filled with peace before their encounter: "Ai-je le droit, pensa-t-elle soudain de dévier, ou simplement de perturber une telle harmonie? (109)" We witness not a passing fancy, but the beginning of a passionate longing.

To show that this is a state of grand passion, Benchemsi compares Houda's love to summer lightning which ravages a blue sky. The description of Houda's love is written in a lyrical and traditionally romantic fashion, evoking nature to describe her inner state: "Les océans se dressent et réveillent leurs sirènes. Les tonnerres grondent et arrosent de leurs eaux abondantes l'aridité de nos vies […]" (111). As in Proust,[49] Houda sees her love as an incurable sickness. She contrasts her inner turmoil with what she perceives as his inner peace. And so, Benchemsi's description of love in this novel is heavily influenced by Western literature, and markedly distinct from what we see in Rumi, a 13th century Persian poet, theologian and Sufi, and in the philosopher Ibn Hazm's *The Ring of the Dove* (1022), a work on courtly and profane love. In Rumi, love itself is a route to spiritual evolution, and the beloved merges in his poetry with the divine. In *Layla and Manjun*, (a love story from the 12th century later popularized by the Persian poet Nizami

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[49] "Et cette maladie qu'était l'amour de Swann avait tellement multiplié, il était si étroitement mêlé à toutes les habitudes de Swann, à tous ses actes, à sa pensée, à sa santé, à sa vie, même à ce qu'il désirait pour après sa mort, il ne faisait tellement plus qu'un avec lui, qu'on n'aurait pas pu l'arracher de lui sans le détruire lui-même à peu près tout entier : comme on dit en chirurgie, son amour n'était plus opérable" (Proust).

Ganjavi) and *Ibn Hazm* it is the obstacles to love which create illness, in particular madness.

This dichotomy must be nuanced by a reference to Attar's *Conference of the Birds*, a 12th century tale, told by the Iranian Sufi poet Farid ud-Din Attar. Here, love itself (as in the Western view) is the cause of great distress:

"Love is not a pleasure garden, it is agony that leaps/ Into your spirit, carries out its work that makes you dear/ To yourself and to Him ready to spark the Way in you/ That lives beyond belief and unbelief, that merely reaps/ Religious piety. With love you shall change, /" (30). In this tale, love is also described as an "infection," when the sheikh falls for an idolatrous woman (33). But it is not love itself, independent of its object that is associated with illness, it is love for a woman who draws the sheikh astray from the right and true path, the path of a seeker of God's grace.

For Houda, it is the awakening of love itself which is destabilizing. The Western influence, rather than relying on Maghrebian literary sources, leads to a discourse which the reader finds familiar, almost to the point of being trite. Benchemsi's detailed celebration of Moroccan history, and the city of Meknes' geography, contrasts with her description of love, which is more typical of the literature of France. It appears that Benchemsi relies on the Western imaginary rather than the local imaginary to create her discourse on love. We see from a comparison of texts that the experience and description of love is a culturally mediated phenomenon.

The transformation that love brings to Houda is described metaphorically in the text with her sprouting of wings. When she expresses initial distance from faith to Ilyas, "je n'ai pas la foi, me semble résumer mon rapport à Dieu" (118), this difference in

positions on faith, between the couple, rather than alienating them, serves to bring them together. Through his love, she becomes a seeker:

> Des ailes lui poussèrent confondant son âme d'oiseau de proie, autrefois armé d'un savoir contemporain plein d'assurance, à celle craintive et angélique, que lui conférait un univers dont elle ne percevait les enjeux qu'à la lumière de son amour pour Ilyas. Un vrai duel était engagé et, de prédatrice qu'elle était, elle devenait la proie d'une âme double et confuse (189).

The language of birds is considered by the *Qur'an* to be a special language: "And Solomon was David's heir. And he said: O mankind! Lo! We have been taught the language of the birds, and have been given all things. This surely is evident favour" (27: 16). In alluding to this "language of birds" there is a recognition that the divine and the human are so far apart that a special language is needed to try to relate them. The development of Sufi symbolic poetry seems to have been an effort to bridge that gap on the level of language.

The wings in Benchemsi's text are a synecdoche for the bird, whose wings allow it to soar in a process of (spiritual) elevation. Thus both the language of the birds (as referred to in the *Qur'an*) and their physical capacity for flight symbolically associate them with spiritual transformation. As the distance between man and the divine is great, man must be transformed to bridge it and approach God.

In a text which refers to Sufism, the sprouting of wings cannot fail to evoke the well-known story of the Simorgh told in the "Conference of the Birds," Attar's text referred to above. (Benchemsi even alludes to this tale earlier in her novel (65)). In this

allegory the birds (who go in search of the Simorgh) symbolize spiritual seekers. Thus, Ilyas inspires Houda's transformation from doubter to spiritual seeker in this passage.

Furthermore, the sprouting of wings may also refer back to a story told earlier in the novel where two Sufi saints (Sidi Aldelkada al Iilani and Shaykh al Kamil) metamorphose into birds in order to deliver letters to Mecca. This story serves to further strengthen the connection shown in Sufi thought between human-bird metamorphosis and an elevated spiritual state.

The duel within Houda (referred to at the end of the above citation) echoes the *jihad* within Ilyas; in both cases, love rips apart those who experience it.

> Il faisait totalement nuit lorsque Ilyas parvint à la zaouia. Il s'installa à l'angle droit du patio, croisa ses jambes et invoqua son seigneur avant la prière du soir. L'image de Houda submergeait ses prières et il la repoussait, incapable de comprendre son état intérieur. Une flamme irisait sa personne physique. Son corps. Mais l'incandescence de ses feux éclairait le mouvement impétueux d'un combat, pourtant réel, mais dont il n'était plus sûr de sortir victorieux […] Il la vénérait littéralement et seule la sacralité qu'elle lui inspirait le protégeait, mais pour combien du temps ? du précipice de la chair (190-1).

The combat to which this passage refers is later described by the narrator in the following terms: "le combat intérieur; le grand *jihad* entamé depuis longtemps et qu'il se refusait à transgresser" (204). In *La Voie Soufie* Faouzi Skali defines *jihad* in the following manner: "[…] l'âme évolue en fonction du "Jihad," de l'effort qu'elle fait contre elle-même pour sortir de l'emprise du monde sensible et s'élever dans la

hiérarchie spirituelle" (40). Ilyas' battle, described in a long internal monologue, is between the desire to marry Houda, or carnal desire, and the will to progress on his spiritual path. He believes that the physicality of a carnal relationship would degrade the relationship's spiritual origin and essence: "Par moments il me prend l'envie de la demander en mariage mais cela n'aurait de sens ni pour Fatiha ni pour les enfants. D'autant que toute la spiritualité qui définit cette relation risquerait de s'effondrer. C'est peut-être cela qui m'effraie" (194). He sees sexuality as an obstacle to his path toward God: "Pourquoi, mon Dieu, rétrécir davantage mon chemin vers vous? […]" (191).

Partway through his inner debate Ilyas contemplates an alternative way to make Houda a permanent part of his life--through initiating her as his disciple:

> Or il avait lui-même l'autorisation d'initier à son tour et cela augmentait la complexité de sa situation. 'Ô seigneur, quelle terrible épreuve ! Suis-je vraiment digne d'une telle confiance ? N'est-ce pas là un trop lourd fardeau pour mon âme ?' Cependant, et cela il l'appelait de ses vœux, il se sentait la force sinon le devoir d'initier Houda à la grande littérature mystique et à l'histoire de la pensée arabe et islamique, et il entreprit de le faire. Mais il n'était en réalité sûr ni du rôle qu'il lui assignait ni du sien propre. En amour la parole parle d'elle-même dans les contrées douloureuses de l'épanchement des cœurs. De leur exil (192).

His inner debate glides into a discussion with the narrator on the subject of his inner *jihad*:

> Il me prend une peur effroyable, m'avait-il confié, chaque fois que je tente, par la mémoire tout du moins, d'approcher son corps. Mon désir

> brûle au contact de son innocence. Une lumière aveuglante nous
>
> enveloppe et par la grâce de Dieu, abolit tout vouloir en moi. Une force
>
> irrépressible m'attire et, avec la même violence et la même détermination,
>
> me rend impossible tout accès à son être. Je suis un homme libre,
>
> cependant ! Libre et ô combien seul face à un tel *jihad* (192).

The same debate (conflict) is put in the mouth of Hiba, a friend of Houda, when the two discuss the possibility of Ilyas' loving the latter: "Mais rends-toi à la raison, Houda: Il t'aime. Oui il t'aime. Mais tu le sais bien, il est engagé, n'oublie pas que pour les soufis le respect des préceptes religieux est capital ! Et il est marié de surcroît !" (204). The lyric repetition of Ilyas' dilemma within three separate narrative structures, interior monologue, dialogue between Ilyas and the narrator, and dialogue between Hiba and Houda, strongly suggests that this is the core tension in this novel.

What is remarkable in these descriptions is their lack of consistency with traditional Sufi thought, where, as described above, love, including physical love is a route to the realization of the divine. It is of note that Fatna Sabbah, in her 2010 edition, devotes a chapter to le grand *jihad*. She, however, places this chapter within her section on the "discours othodoxe," rather than the "discours soufi." That is to say, and here I agree with Sabbah, the idea of a conflict between sexual desire and spirituality is more typical of an orthodox Islamic thought, and not characteristic of Sufism.

And so, it is most surprising that the narrator does not take a distance from the internal strife in Ilya's heart: "Ses tempêtes intérieures dues à sa passion pour Houda s'avéraient invincibles ; irrépressibles. Et, si la loi ne lui interdisait pas de la prendre comme seconde épouse, son engagement personnel auprès de son maître et vis-à-vis de

lui-même et de la Voie étaient (sic) une réelle barrière" (204). This view of a tension

between the Sufi path (or spirituality) and sexuality pervades the text.

Is it possible that a Western view of the distance between sexuality and

spirituality has infiltrated this novel? Or, has the view of woman as temptress and

destructress of the Muslim ethical system drowned out the view of woman in Sufism,

even in a text purporting to present a Sufi love story?

What is Ilyas' view of Houda and of woman in general? Ilyas does not see Houda

as an individual, but as the eternal feminine: "[…] l'éternel féminin Houda l'incarnait

vraisamblablement pour toujours. Elle était son éternel féminin" (153) and further on

"Emblème même de la fémininité et de la plénitude, sa beauté et sa spiritualité innée

l'avaient élue au rang de Reine du monde à ses yeux" (190). This discourse is reminiscent

of the idealization of woman in Western medieval literature, and constitutes a form of

objectification, through the abstraction of an individual into a category.

Ilyas does evoke the image of woman as described in Sufism, woman as

salvation: "Elle seule me sauvera de moi-même" (169) and further on "La femme est le

pilier de toute humanité" (169). Ilyas goes so far as to describe Houda as a "théophanie"

(226) or manifestation of the divine.[50] But, as we have seen, in this text a tension exists

between this image and a more traditional view of woman as temptress. Can Ilyas'

problem best be described as a contamination related to his view of woman or does his

difficulty lie with sexual love itself, independent of its object? Can love be envisaged

separately from its object?

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[50] The Sufis have described the theophanic experience as the vision of a woman, the
female figure as the object of *ru'yah*, or the vision of God (Brown).

The two questions are entangled in the text. Ilyas muses, reflecting his internalization of the myth of the overpowering woman, "Ainsi, la femme dès lors que l'on en perçoit l'intemporelle puissance, subjugue et envoûte" (191). At the same time as fearing her power, he fears the "précipice de la chair" (191). Thus, he fears both woman and sexuality.

Ilyas links weakness and abstinence and questions his attraction to the latter: "Mon abstinence n'est-elle pas l'expression d'un déshonneur? D'une lâcheté à l'égard de sa personne?" (191).

This citation indicates a certain defeat within Ilyas' victory against Houda, a false spiritual victory because it brings suffering and leads away from love. His spiritual longing becomes an obstacle to the couples' happiness.

Love in Sufi Thought

Thus, Benchemsi's characterization of spirituality is quite different from that shown in Toufiq where spirituality brings salvation and joy. In Sufism, as described by Faouzi Skali in *La Voie Soufie,* love is a privileged path to liberation from the ego and to realization of the divine. Two kinds of love are possible. In the first, one transfers self-love onto another. But a second type of love consists in transcending the limits of the self. This type of love seeks nothing in return and leads to spiritual elevation (172-3). Benchemsi fails to explore love as an element that leads to spiritual elevation, while Toufiq does touch on this aspect of love.

Both Benchemsi's and Toufiq's novels represent love differently from how it is characterized by two classic Sufi authors, Rumi and Attar (in *The Conference of the*

Birds). In these earlier texts, love, whether for a woman, a teacher or God is depicted as a fire that through its burning annihilates the Self and so leads to spiritual elevation. We see this clearly in Attar's *The Conference of the Birds* in a section entitled "The Valley of Love." Attar writes: "Love is not something to be borne, to work out, to reasonably apply. Love is fire: […] The face of a lover is inflamed […] To love be transparent, ready to give all or, you have none of love's flame" (72).

Another story in Attar's book invites a comparison with Ilyas' dilemma, though these texts are at different narrative levels. In a more poetic, or parabolic, register, San'an's story in *The Conference of the Birds* depicts a Sheikh passionately drawn to an idolatrous woman. This tale shows an extreme expression of Ilyas' dilemma with Houda. The sheik must choose between his faith and the woman as temptress. His love is so fierce that he follows the woman even though she, as a symbolic demand, in order to see how far he will go, asks him not to follow Islam. Woman here is the perfect representation of Sabbah's woman, (as described in 1982) even though Attar is a famous Sufi writer.

In the end, through the prayers of his disciples, San'an is still redeemed, and the idolatrous woman repents. One is left with the impression that going astray after love is an understandable and even forgivable offense.

While the sheikh at first sacrifices his faith to love, Benchemsi's Ilyas chooses to sacrifice Houda to faith. In the centuries which elapse between the writing of these two texts has love grown pale? In Benchemsi, Ilyas says he has signed a contract with God and gives this as a reason for which he cannot marry Houda. If legalism obscures love,

Ilyas seems to have forgotten that one signs a contract with the Devil, not with the forces of light.

Can Houda be compared to the idolatrous woman? Houda, as I have shown, is a seeker in her own right. And so, the stories are not exactly parallel, although the opposition between sensuality and faith is present in both.

Conclusion

These two Sufi love stories deviate from the classic tale of the love between master and disciple. In this classic tale, the disciple is like the apprentice painter who follows to the letter the instruction of the master on how to mix and create colors. The colors correspond to the various degrees of knowledge realized by the disciple in his initiatory progression (Skali, *La Voie soufi* 141).

Here, in both cases, this bond between woman and master is made of intense attraction and love and is spiritual in nature. Shamah becomes part of the spiritual troupe of Abu Musa and enters an ecstatic trance state under his direction. Houda also participates in group prayer and *dhiker* with Ilyas. But a true initiation is lacking for both women. If we return to the bird metaphor, in contrast to Attar's *The Conference of the Birds* where the seekers arrive at the end to meet the Simorgh, the flight here is aborted. Somewhere along the way, a rupture occurs in the link between the woman and the Sufi master.

The importance of the master-disciple relationship in Sufism cannot be underestimated. Skali cites the emir Abd el Quadir who explains: "On ne peut faire confiance au combat spirituel mené en l'absence d'un maître […]" (Ibid. 138). To be

more specific, Skali defines three levels of spiritual combat, the combat of piety, that of rectitude and that of unveiling by intuition. It is the third or the highest level which is impossible without a teacher. And so the failure of these relationships to progress toward discipleship is not only a failure of love, but an impossibility for the women in these stories to attain the highest spiritual advancement.

There are two ways in which Sufi beliefs touch on the image of woman. First, as the object of love of a Sufi, she can help him realize the divine. Second, as seen above, she herself can be a student of Sufism, a disciple and/or a teacher. In Toufiq and Benchemsi the possibility of both and the failure of both co-mingle. In both, it is men who hold and control knowledge of the sacred. Abu Musa's benevolence and use of his mystical powers to protect Shamah (especially when the governor tries to seduce/rape her) must be noted. In addition, the prayer episode in Toufiq's novel (as seen above) shows women as incarnating the sacred. However, in neither work is the woman chosen as a disciple to whom secret knowledge is transmitted. Because of this exclusion, certain questions are not even raised: does the sacred held by women vary from that held by men? Would a woman Sufi teach differently? Love differently? Speak or write differently? Writing against Zoulagh, who finds in her 2014 dissertation that writing itself is taboo to North African women, I find that the new taboo, yet to be crossed, may be to become a bearer of the sacred.

While Sabbah (1982) showed woman reduced to her sexuality, these texts open the possibility of woman with a sacred essence. But woman's true potential here is not fully developed, and a large distance separates the image of woman in these two contemporary texts from what Ibn Arabi envisaged for her in the 12th century.

      Nevertheless, the possibility of a relationship between the women and Sufism provides an alternate image and identity for woman as compared with that in Sabbah's 1982 vision. In a culture where Western feminism has been rejected, the Sufi view of women has over the centuries enlarged the definition of what it means to be female and Muslim.

Chapter Four: Boualem Sansal's Search for the Mother

At first view, the work of Benchemsi and Sansal, two of the authors who are the object of this study, do not invite comparative analysis, particularly regarding the image of the woman. Benchemsi's works inhabit in large part a feminine space; she writes from within a female subjectivity. Her "I" reports from the margin, in order to observe the inner space of a claustrophobic marriage (as in *Marrakech, lumière d'exil),* or to describe a dead-end love story (as in *Controverse des temps).* Sansal focuses in large part on the contemporary political; what is the role of radical Islam in today's world? How do mourning and melancholia affect memory, in particular collective memory? What is the meaning of man's search for the father? For the mother? Sansal's work has received greater recognition than Benchemsi's—having just received Le Grand Prix de la Francophonie (June 2013), the 2012 Prix du Roman Arabe, and having been nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature.

And yet they both deal with what is excluded and not critiqued by their own society. They both question the unreflective way in which society perpetuates itself and the image of woman within it. They both critique Maghrebian society from within and from a humanist perspective. They both problematize the status quo. They both confront the question of how art arises in a space where *ta'a* or obedience is key and reflection was banned as far back as the Abbasids. Their work implicitly deals with the question of the role of the artist in determining the construction of identity and gender in Muslim society.

While both authors' work contain elements which may be viewed as radical from within the cultural context, there is a difference between them in this regard. Benchemsi's critique of her society is more narrow, as it focuses on the condition of the woman, and less direct, more subtle, as it is embedded in the story. She, as well as her work, is integrated and accepted in Moroccan society.[51] Sansal directly critiques Algerian society and fundamentalism. The radical element is immediately visible in his work. Sansal, in addition to his writing, shows a fierce independence; he does not hesitate to take positions that sometimes irritate the Arab literary establishment.[52]

Sansal in a 2012 interview in *World Literature Today* entitled "A Rustle in History" directly critiques Arab women's resistance to the *status quo* for not having gone far enough. He explains:

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[51] In 2013 at the museum of the Palmeraie of Marrakech there was a celebration of Rajae Benchemsi's work ("Le Printemps Culturel De La Palmeraie De Marrakech : Rend Hommage à L'Ecrivaine Marocaine Rajae Benchemsi"). In addition in July 2015 the King of Morocco gave medals to a group of Moroccan outstanding figures. He put the medal for the artistic work of Faria Belkahiya into the hands of his widow, Rajae Benchemsi. While the king was not directly honoring her work, her presence at the gathering indicates her favor with the court ("Throne Day: HM the King Hands Distinctions to Group of Moroccan and Foreign Outstanding Figures").

[52] *Rue Darwin,* one of the novels to be analyzed in this chapter, was awarded the Arab Novel Prize in 2012, given by the ambassadors of the Arab countries to honor a French book by an Arab writer. But the award money (15,000 Euros) was denied to Sansal because of his decision to attend the International Writers Festival in Jerusalem, despite having been warned by Hamas not to go. Later, an unnamed person from Switzerland offered to donate 10,000 Euros to Sansal in lieu of the prize, money which Sansal decided to donate to an Israeli medical charity that serves Palestinian children (Berman).

This story evokes the relationship between literature and politics, as well as that of the author to his text. If structuralism has tried to reduce the significance of the latter, it can by no means be nullified. An author such as Sansal who speaks his truths not only through his writing, but also through his actions, can only give more power to his message.

In the Arab world, women's resistance always stayed within the grounds

of tradition, *jihad*, or refusal to change. Even when they fight for modern

issues like work, sexuality, abortion, etc., they always base their demands

on strict respect of tradition. But the Arab world needs revolution, not

compromise, to enter modernity and be open to the universe, the other, the

unknown.

Benchemsi, for her part, confronts the traditional representation of the Arab woman in

literature, where she finds a misleading weakness. She explains in an interview in 2006

for *Evene* entitled "Il n'y a pas de plus grande jouissance que la jouissance intellectuelle"

that in *Marrakech, lumière d'exil* she presents "des femmes fortes, qui organisent leur

vie. Elles ne sont pas du tout à l'image totalement fausse de la femme arabe et

musulmane des années 70."[53] In other words, in her work she is consciously trying to

alter what she sees as the traditional representation of the image of the woman. It is in

large part because of the self-consciousness of Sansal's and Benchemsi's writing, its root

in history and its political implications that looking at them side-by-side is justified. This

chapter focuses on two of Sansal's books about women: *Harraga* (2006) and *Rue Darwin*

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[53]It is not entirely clear to which representations of Muslim and Arab women Benchemsi refers here. Does she point to novels or media representations? Films or textbook portrayals? Sources from the West or those from within Arab countries? Some have argued that in the late 1970's women in general were subject to *symbolic annihilation*, where the media paid little attention to their issues (Tuchman 8). Others (Meyers 12) argue that media images were "fractured", that is inconsistent and contradictory.

It is true that certain 1970's novels took an Orientalist perspective toward Muslim women, such as the sheik romance novels where Muslim women act as "foils" for the independent Western heroine (Teo 224).

On the other hand, it was in the mid-1970's when Assia Djebar interviewed women in her native region of Cherchell later inserting this oral history into *Fantasia.* "La Nouba des femmes du Mont Chenova", a film by Assia Djebar, appeared in 1977. In both cases Djebar depicts women's resistance to patriarchy and their desire for power and expression.

(2012*)*. To this point, the critical reception of Sansal's work has focused, in particular, on *Le Village de l'Allemand* (2008), while his texts on the woman in Algerian society have received less attention.

Sansal's work is significant for this dissertation as I argue that he writes on an archetypal level, connecting deeply with the collective unconscious of his society. In analyzing several works by Boualem Sansal, we find stories that take place not merely on the individual level, but that carry resonances as archetypes. In *Rue Darwin*, Sansal explores the quest for the Mother, while in *Le Village de l'Allemand*, he describes the quest for the Father. In the first book, the son, when he discovers the Mother, embodied sequentially in three different women, witnesses her death repeated three times. It is thus clear that we are dealing with a motif rather than a specific narrative event. It is interesting to note that just as traditionally the sexes are separated by gender in space, in *Le Village de l'Allemand*, it is men who are present both as narrators and as characters, while *Harraga* is inhabited almost exclusively by women.

Harraga

In *Harraga* Sansal deals with a mother-daughter relationship, albeit not a biological one. Here, the female narrator, Lamia, a physician, welcomes Chérifa, a young unmarried pregnant woman into her home. Lamia becomes a mother figure, as does the nun who appears at the end of the novel. We see in the narrator a woman who is self-aware and reflective, capable of telling her own story. At the same time, the depiction of Chérifa, sexually promiscuous, vagabond and irresponsible embodies the model that

Sabbah has evoked as traditional, in particular where the woman evades the control of the Muslim ethic. Chérifa is what Muslim society most fears.

"Harraga" is an Arabic word referring to those who illegally attempt to leave North Africa and in the process, burn their identity papers. The harraga flees North Africa because of its repressive politics and/or the lack of economic opportunity. Thus, the title gives the novel a collective dimension by refusing the personal. It represents a mass movement, a type, an oozing forth, via any method possible, an escape. Harragas are daring, willing to risk their lives even if in the process they lose a part of themselves, their North African identity. Harragas seek to hide in anonymity. There is an excitement in the term, almost a frenzy in the adventurousness of it, but a sadness in the destruction of an aspect of self.

The notion of harraga reverberates throughout the book. Only Sofiane, Lamia's brother, is a literal harraga, having disappeared from North Africa, but Lamia herself, as well as Chérifa and her child Louiza and perhaps even the novel itself become harragas.

The novel leaves its native Algeria and goes West, because Sansal's books are banned in his country. While its characters remain in Algeria, its corpus is exiled. It takes large risks in its critique, like a harraga. Its author risks persecution for its sake. This novel, instead of being written in chapters, is written in acts, giving it a theatrical feel. It is filled with poetry and has an entire section devoted to the placement of the camera in film. In it the main character repeatedly talks to a figure from fairy tales—Bluebeard—whom we will discuss more in depth later. And so, the novel, refuses to be a novel. It has burnt its identity papers.

The word "harraga" itself gains significance in this text in its association with forgetting. When Lamia gets angry with Chérifa, she castigates her with a single harsh word. One suspects that Chérifa's subsequent flight is due to the shame and dishonor that the word evoked. Lamia herself cannot remember what she said, until the end of the book, as she faces Chérifa's tombstone and it all comes back:

"Avec mon feutre, j'ai ajouté sur la pierre tombale une ligne que le soleil effacera avant la tombée de la nuit : *Sa maman qui l'aime et le mot que je lui avais jeté à la figure m'est revenu en mémoire : harraga. "Tu es une harraga, voilà ce que tu es et comme telle tu finiras!"* (312).

"Harraga" is thus also not just a word, but the word which signals Chérifa's eternal exile, rupture, departure from the narrator's home, but not her heart. While it seems at first that it is because of Chérifa's intractable, recalcitrant disposition that she cannot stay with Lamia, her departure in fact, boils down to one word, the fatal word— "harraga"—a word which undergoes a slippage of connotation during the course of the novel; the word "harraga" is at first an insult in both Lamia's and Cherifa's minds, only to be redeemed and invested with new meaning later on by the author. In the very end of the novel, through a poem, Sansal recuperates the image of the harraga, associating it with the washing of memories ("nous laverons nos souvenirs" (316)) or purification, and an almost Baudelarian search for the unknown: "Nous irons par des chemins nouveaux/ Nous chercherons où poussent les fleurs/ Où vont les oiseaux" (317). Instead of a term of insult, "harraga" becomes an image of hope: "Ainsi rêvent les harragas." This poem that closes the novel also evokes Baudelaire's "Invitation au voyage" directly, in its final

stanza which transforms the "harraga" from the other (her brother, Chérifa) to a word describing herself:

"Mon enfant

Mon amour

Mon cœur, ma vie

Comme ta mère, ma fille

Nous serons des harragas" (317).

The Bluebeard Intertext

On first reading the Bluebeard reference seems to have nothing to do with the overall theme of harraga. In Sansal's *Harraga* Bluebeard functions as Lamia's imaginary friend. And what is the connection between the image of Bluebeard and Lamia's relationship with Algeria and the notion of harraga? She speaks to him throughout the novel, associating him with a shadow that comes and goes in an empty house across the street. Because of the loaded nature of this tale, the evocation is by no means innocent. Speaking about the shadow, Lamia says:

Je l'ai baptisé Barbe-Bleue. Un souvenir d'enfance, l'âge des belles lectures, mais aussi une donnée sociale cruelle et bête des temps modernes, les barbes occupent le pays et ses banlieues, ici et là-bas, par delà les mers et les religions, ne laissant à la vie sauvage qu'une paille pour respirer (41).

What is the relationship between Lamia and Bluebeard? Why, of all fairy tale figures, does Sansal choose him as her imaginary friend? In order to explore these questions, I will first look briefly at the Bluebeard tale itself as well as its reception.

The Bluebeard tale has gone through many variations and rewritings[54] and has provoked much critical attention, particularly in recent years. In her 2004 book, *Secrets Beyond the Door,* Maria Tatar explores the metamorphoses of the Bluebeard tale, all of which retain the central elements of the temptation of prohibition, and the character of Bluebeard himself, including his past crimes, however they may be interpreted[55]. According to Tatar (6), the Bluebeard tale, stemming from an oral storytelling tradition, like others tales of horror, contains practical advice and a moral: it directs us to consider the hazards of courtship and marriage. It is of note that Tatar sees the Bluebeard tale as a variant of *Arabian Nights*, where in the frame story, the King Sharyar also executes a succession of wives, after discovering his first wife's infidelity. Regardless of whether Bluebeard's tale might have been inspired by *Arabian Nights,*[56] what is more interesting is that the structure may reflect a universal theme in the collective unconscious. In either case, the two cultures treat the male character differently. While King Sharyar is transformed and redeemed through contact with feminine storytelling, Bluebeard,

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[54] Including among them, the version of Perrault, Vonnegut, Margaret Atwood's "Bluebeard's Egg," Angela Carter's "Bloody Chamber," and Jane Campion's "The Piano."

[55] As Bluebeard's story speaks to discovering the truth about the past (Tatar 110), it has an interesting resonance with another of Sansal's novels, *Le Village de l'Allemand* (2008), which centers on this theme.

[56] The dates of the translation of *Arabian Nights* by Antoine Galland (1704) and the publication of Perrault's tale (1697)—presumably based on the life of the 15th century Gilles de Rais—are so close that it is difficult to determine.

although becoming a cultural icon (Tatar 132), remains a figure of fear, who never sees the error of his way. This difference may say more about how the feminine is seen in the two cultures than about the king or Bluebeard as mythical figures in themselves. As Mernissi points out repeatedly, the feminine in Islamic civilization is associated with acute intelligence, power, and force. By contrast, in the Western story of Bluebeard, his wife is depicted as weak-willed, lacking cleverness and needing rescue.

According to Freud, just as dreams reveal our unconscious fantasies and desires so do fairy tales. Bruno Bettelheim in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1989) develops this idea to show how fairy-tales help children allow unconscious material to some degree to come to awareness, and so have a protective effect on the unconscious mind (which no longer is overwhelmed by this unprocessed content).

The Bluebeard tale is particularly interesting because it contains within it a double or contradictory morality. Tatar points out that the Bluebeard tale evokes the biblical tale of Eve, and the classic one of Pandora, where the moral appears to be that woman's curiosity is transgressive and brings misery. I further note that in all three stories knowledge (or science) is antagonistic to submission. It seems as though subjugation would bring happiness, while freedom offers only doom. But, Bluebeard's authority differs from that of God (in the story of Eve) and Zeus (in that of Pandora).

A second moral is present in the Bluebeard story. In the Brother's Grimm version when Bluebeard returns from his trip, the barbarity and lack of proportionality of his intended punishment for his wife transforms the tale into one with a modern precautionary moral on abuse, the violation of trust, and violence within intimacy, and it is this which probably sparked so many feminist re-writings. In part, in this tale, the

female investigative gaze on the closed room filled with male secrets is what becomes transgressive. In the tale, Bluebeard gives his wife two sets of keys, one which she has permission to use, and the other which she does not. But, on defying his orders and entering the taboo room, the wife by accident drops the key to the room on the floor where it becomes bloodstained, and afterwards won't wash clean. It is this blood-stained key which provides the evidence to Bluebeard of his wife's disobedience. In his analysis, Bruno Bettleheim makes a leap when he interprets the blood-stained key as a loss of virginity or sexual infidelity, a transgression to be severely punished. This interpretation justifies Bluebeard's violence. The more modern association of this story with domestic violence de-sanitizes it, arguing that domestic violence is unjustifiable.[57]

If we have already evoked many times the masculine fear of the feminine in Islam, her *quaid* (intelligence used against the Muslim ethical system), her ability to seduce and to produce *fitna* (chaos), here Sansal brings to light the feminine fear of masculinity at its worst (as Murata might describe it, the negative *jalil,* the negative masculine: the desire for power and control).

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[57] It is interesting to note that in the Disney version (*Grimm's Fairy Tale Classics Bluebeard Episode 16*) the original story is altered to show that the character flaws of arrogance or "taking on airs" which developed in Bluebeard's wife (here named Josephine) cause her husband's displeasure and justify her loss of marriage and castle in the end of the tale. This revisionist moral is given at the end of the tale by the male narrator: "Josephine's dream was gone, but something far greater had taken its place: her newfound wisdom. For a moment she had been a princess, but she had forgotten to be caring and trustworthy. The treasures of her dream had vanished, but her new riches of love and trust would last forever." This moral is nowhere to be seen in the original Grimm's version. In fact, in that version Bluebeard's wife inherits the castle and riches and remarries. Disney tries to sanitize the story, teaching that it is only internal flaws that lead to one's downfall and that the outside world and marriage are safe if one stays humble and pure.

The reference to Bluebeard contains within it an intertextual allusion to the fairy tale as well as a cultural allusion through the beard itself to Muslim men, and perhaps to the Islamists.[58] The beard as a symbol is associated both with being masculine, and being Muslim, as a *hadith* states, "Leave the beard and trim the mustaches" ("Trimming the Beard Is Sunna, Not Haram"). According to Ashraf Khalil writing for BBC news, "In the Arab and Muslim world, facial hair means far more than just style and grooming. It's a sociological signifier, a shorthand that often tells you who you're dealing with and what they're all about before they can even speak" (Khalil, Ashraf). Jonathan Sell in *Metaphor and Diaspora in Contemporary Writing* (2012) explains the beard as simultaneously being a symbol of Muslim identity in the Western world, and for Westerners a metonym for radical Islam and terrorism. Sansal directly connects the figure of Bluebeard with evil, in the following passage: "Mais bon, rien ne dit que Barbe-Bleue est barbu, je l'ai imaginé ainsi, nommé ainsi, parce que la barbe est ce qui symbolise de nos jours le mal qui guette, le mal qui ronge, le mal qui tue" (41). It appears that Sansal is using the figure of Bluebeard to evoke the Islamists, and by doing so he implicitly compares their violence to domestic violence. Where one might expect them to act as family members (members of the *umma*), that expectation is betrayed. The questionable authority of Bluebeard is echoed by the Islamists' misuse of power.

Lamia's intimate but imaginary relationship with Bluebeard also raises the question of the figure's symbolic use with a twist; is it possible that Sansal is also evoking Islamophobia? Does Bluebeard in some sense inspire Islamophobia, the post

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[58] Bluebeard has already been associated with systematic violence in Struck's *Blaubart's Schatten* (1991) and with ISIS itself by Valerie Ogden in her 2015 article "ISIS Butchers; Medieval Serial Killers on Steroids."

9/11 anxiety with which the West and the Islamic world look at each other?[59] I recall

Lamia's association of Bluebeard with "panic" (38). Is it possible that she has developed

a sort of paranoia toward this bearded figure? A paranoia that Chérifa, not sharing,

dispels with by going to confront the actual neighbor across the street, behind the

shutters, and returning completely unharmed? Because of the identity which Lamia has

imagined associated with him, has she created fear in her mind, a fear which has arisen

without any true contact or communication? In essence, he is a projection of her

obsession, fears, maybe her desires as well. And so, is this not the core of Islamophobia?

A caveat renders this interpretation problematic: Lamia is not a Westerner. But

symbolism is not such a literal science.

It is interesting too that in Hamid's novel *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2008), a

bestseller written in the style of a parable, the main character, Changez, after having

grown a beard to show his rediscovery of his Pakistani identity, witnesses another man's

beard becoming the object of an Islamophobic perception.

> Last June, on a hot day in London—hot enough to remind me of Lahore—
>
> I got on the Tube and found myself in a crowded carriage with one empty
>
> seat. Nobody moved to take it, which seemed strange because several
>
> people were standing. Then I noticed the fellow in the next seat over. He
>
> was, I guessed, of Pakistani origin, with intense eyes, a prayer cap, a loose
>
> kurta, and the kind of moustache-less beard that tabloids associate with

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[59] According to the Atlantic Monthly (October 15, 2014), the birth of the word *islamophobia* occurred in 1910 when Alain Quellien used it to criticize French administrators for their treatment of Muslim colonists. The term was first used in English by Edward Said in 1985, and entered general usage in a 1997 Runnymede Trust report entitled "Islamophobia: A Challenge for Us All."

Muslim fundamentalists. He could have been my cousin. Look at this

racial profiling, I thought to myself. Here's this fellow, perfectly harmless,

and everyone's staying clear like he's planning to kill them. And then they

wonder why Muslims in Britain feel ostracized (Sell 71 quotes Hamid).

This citation describes the effect of an Islamophobic gaze in an enclosed and

crowded space. The narrator watches the crowd that implicitly has gazed at the man of

Pakistani origin. But what draws the narrator's attention first is not the bearded man, but

the empty seat next to him. And so, it is less the gaze, than the void, the vacuum, the

refusal to all contact that symbolizes the Isalmophobic perception. In this sense Hamid's

text echoes our own: the denial of contact produces a projection of the viewer's fears

onto an otherwise presumably benign person, creating an identity (having no basis in

reality) through an identification with a stereotype.

In *Harraga* Sansal has rendered Bluebeard a passive object to be manipulated. He

becomes a confidante to be spoken to, but who never speaks. He evokes, haunts, exists in

a phantasmagoric world. Sansal has turned the tables on Bluebeard. Just as Grimm's

Bluebeard desires to create art in the aesthetic display of six of his dead-wives' bodies,

art has re-created him, redefined him. While once he collected women as "fetishized

object [s] to be looked at" (Tatar 119), here he becomes the object to be observed by the

woman-narrator and through her, by the reader. This is significant because it implies in a

larger sense a re-working of traditional symbolism. Sansal uses the Bluebeard figure in an

unconventional manner; he dislodges a familiar tradition. This forms a part of his overall

thematic as well as his stylistic originality.

Lamia and Chérifa

While the Bluebeard reference is an example of intertextuality, evoking resonances between text and image, another passage brings together text and music, and poses the question of artistic taste. This passage begins with the annual Spring cleaning, a ritual of purification or purging. In its physicality, cleaning takes on a certain rhythm, a cadence, a beat. It is one of the rare places in the novel where the two women become "nous":

> À vingt heures, nous n'étions guère avancées, la confusion était totale. Nous avons ri, chahuté, rivalisé de vitesse, nous nous sommes lancé des défis, nous avons crapahuté, donné vaillamment de la serpillière, du torchon, du plumeau, soit, mais sans joie véritable, sans conviction (Sansal 157).

The words in this passage dance through a sonorous musicality. Some of the syllables and sounds recur in a sort of internal rhyme. The verbs chosen indicate a ludic aspect to the cleaning process: "rivalisé de vitesse," "lancé des défis." In the two sequences, one of verbs, and the other of objects used for cleaning, it is almost as if the commas themselves are dancing.

There is also a contrast between the banality of the act and the determination and energy that are given to it. The women are immersed in the flow of it. Speed, defiance and valor, usually attributed to warriors, become associated with the women as they clean. There is a contrast between the "valor," a term generally linked with male courage, and the tools of the trade, listed (as were the verbs) in an accumulation—the mop, the lace, and the duster. This contrast produces an effect of humor. But just as the reader

begins to smile in amusement, the author cuts off this effect, almost as though one has misunderstood—"mais sans joie véritable, sans conviction." The cleaning becomes a kind of dance, and is an appropriate segue into the evocation of music.

Here, sound is not the only sense evoked. First, certain aromas are described, and the sense of taste, though metaphorically, is also referred to: "La soirée fut agréable avec un arrière-goût d'amertume. Elle avait bien commencé, l'odeur du grésil mêlée aux senteurs lénitives du thé et des loukoums nous avait gentiment soûlées" (158). And when their energy runs out, in order to wash away the sadness and bitterness, Lamia begins to introduce some music. She begins with Rachmananoff, a Russian composer, known for his technical difficulty, "pour nous ouvrir le cœur et nous éveiller aux beautés du monde" (158). Lamia thus ostensibly seeks to produce the same effect on herself and on Chérifa. But one must also ask, isn't the invitation to listen to music also an invitation to discover oneself through constructing a subjective response?

While Sansal does not specify the piece, he details the difference in the effect of the music on Lamia and on Chérifa. Lamia feels that

> [q]uelque chose d'immense, de très ample, de subtil, s'est propagé dans la maison, du bonheur, de l'extase, des rêves en or, des mystères merveilleusement agencés. Dans cette vieille demeure repliée sur ses secrets, l'écho du beau a des harmoniques surnaturels (158).

But Chérifa's experience is totally different:

> Quand j'ai rouvert les yeux, j'ai vu la gueule de Chérifa, elle avait mal au cœur, elle s'apprêtait à degobiller sur la carpette. La grande musique n'est

pas son rayon, elle ne savait pas que la chose existait et cela bien avant

qu'elle ne vînt au monde (159).

This episode, very richly sensual, but not sexual, nevertheless recalls the erotic episode in *Marrakech, lumière d'exil.* In both, while the two people participate in a sensual experience, they experience it so differently that it leads to a rupture between them. Or, in other words, the subjective nature of the experience (which points to the various possibilities for the reception of art), leads to limited intersubjectivity.

Lamia offers Chérifa pleasure through music. So when the Rachmananoff fails in this regard, she surmises that this Russian bourgeois composer is too foreign to Chérifa, and she switches to a series of French and local singers. Charles Aznavour sings in his romantic, rich voice in a predominantly nostalgic, swoon-inducing style. His themes are bitter-sweet: the passage of time, the loss of youth, remembering love. But despite the emotional intensity of his work, it fails to move Chérifa. So, Lamia moves on to the fado of Paredes: performed on a 12-string instrument, the Portuguese Coimbra guitar, this expressive music without words remains mainly in the minor keys with their mournful tones and evokes feelings of resignation or melancholy. Yet, again, Chérifa fails to connect with this art. Next the music of the Syrian composer and pianist Malek Jandali fills the air. This dramatic music with its Middle Eastern flavor and touch of mysteriousness has crisp, clear tones. It is generally more positive emotionally, with a strong beat.

Jandali believes in the soft power of music to act as a bridge, transcending borders, and bringing peace. He intends his music to have cultural impact and to work as

a unifying force across geopolitical divisions (Kabango). But even Jandali's music, written with the above intention, does not bridge the gap between the women.

And so, Lamia moves on to the more traditional folk songs of the Berber Idir with their penetratingly beautiful tones. But even this "[…] était encore loin de ses oreilles" (Sansal 159). As each musician has his own unique style, language (French, Arabic or Berber), and rhythm, the repeated changes produce an effect of discontinuity. The discontinuities in the music reflect Lamia's and Chérifa's struggle in finding a connection.

Later on, Lamia will act as teacher, systematically introducing culture in an effort to "civilize" Chérifa. But if through the Spring cleaning Lamia has attempted to domesticate Chérifa, here it is only the most passionate and sensual music that moves the latter; the level of detail given to the description of this song, "La Putain et le flûtiste", and the tale it relates (compared to the simple inventory of the music that precedes it) make it prominent. The song, whether real or Sansal's invention, is not an exact mise-en-abîme, but has enough resonance with Chérifa's life to move her. "The Flutist and the Whore" is a story of passion and violence, with which Chérifa connects. In this story the woman is forced into the life of a prostitute, and even a man's love cannot save her. That even fleeing doesn't save her either, is interesting in a novel which concerns harragas.

The question of musical taste is here connected with its characteristic of resonance. In physics resonance occurs when two vibrations have nearly the same period. That becomes metaphorical here, where the essence of the musical story has a resonance with Chérifa's identity.

À la première note, Chérifa est tombée en transe, une danse je veux dire,

une houle monotone comme un été pourri qui ne finit pas, un rite

tellurique d'avant les Évangiles, violent et saccadé qui brusquement vire à

la bourrée de soudards de retour de la guerre (161).

Chérifa's experience with music is raw, unmediated by any former exposure.

Lamia wants to initiate, to lead, to teach, to use music to create a bond between the women. And she both succeeds and fails. She succeeds in finding music that moves Chérifa, but fails in sharing that pleasure with her. Instead, she again changes the music (to Kabyle music) producing yet another discontinuity: "J'ai communié comme j'ai pu, je me suis trémoussée sur la chaise le plus lascivement, puis ardemment, et j'ai tenté quelques youyous qui ont tourné en eau de boudin. Chérifa a déploré mon ignorance, je lui gâchais ses transports" (161).

Specific composers or pieces of music become associated with one or another of the characters, and function as a means to help develop their identity. While Lamia's taste is broader, more cultivated, Chérifa's is narrow and exclusively identified with music with a story of passion. Both characters demonstrate their sensitivity to be strongly affected by music. The use of musical references in the text gives it texture, makes the episode come alive. While various composers or singers are referred to, only one specific piece is named, putting the emphasis on musical style. The use of music points to the contrapuntal quality of the relationship between Lamia and Chérifa. The women are like two melodic lines which maintain their independence from each other.

Just after the Spring cleaning episode, Lamia tries to systematically instruct Chérifa through exposing her to art and history. But again, instead of sharing a common passion, their alienation deepens:

> Tout cela est un autre monde pour Chérifa, un monde inconnu, factice, ramassé dans les puces des siècles et des millénaires passés. Elle le regardait avec des yeux de hibou réveillé par un grand tintamarre […]
>
> J'ai senti que Chérifa s'est éloignée de moi. Elle me regardait comme si j'étais une étrangère ou une parente chez qui on découvre incidemment un penchant pervers. C'est là que j'ai compris ce que désespérer veut dire.
>
> La culture est le salut mais aussi ce qui sépare le mieux (174-5).

While Lamia wants to liberate through education, Chérifa finds the process of molding to be oppressive in itself. Representing an oppositional discourse, Chérifa refuses to become a part of the reproduction of culture and presents instead a resistance to it. Following Foucault[60], I find that Chérifa is both what Muslim society represses and what it has produced.

It is as though the original image explored by Sabbah, though no longer considered the universal feminine, has here become crystallized into a single dominant character, but one who drives herself into destruction and the novel to its seemingly inevitable conclusion. At first, Chérifa seems associated with youth and its characteristic moodiness:

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[60] De Lauretis, *Figures of Resistance* 12

Il y a le reste, Chérifa n'en manque pas, la jeunesse, l'ignorance, les

espoirs en bois, les mauvais rêves, que sais-je encore, les sautes d'humeur,

l'esprit de révolte, les atavismes. C'est une caractérielle, véhémente et

aggressive là, et l'instant d'après vaseuse et renfrogneé. L'amour, le sexe

et le tintouin aussi, ça travaille, ça obnubile, ça démolit, ça écorche. Elle

est jeune, elle est sauvage, l'appel des sens est au-dessus de ses forces. J'ai

fait mon deuil de ces tourments mais il fut un temps où je me roulais à

terre comme une droguée en manque (153).

At this early point in the novel, Lamia and Chérifa seem separated by a process of

maturation which has not yet taken place for Chérifa, rather than through the essence of

their characters. But the association of Chérifa with sexuality and disorder, present here,

is developed throughout the novel, until in the end, Chérifa's mere presence produces

fitna itself. Having sought refuge in a convent, Chérifa's arrival is described as the

narrator repeats to the reader what the mother superior told her:

Chérifa s'est installée au couvent comme elle l'avait fait chez moi et ainsi

qu'elle l'a fait chez les filles de la cité. Je dirais une invasion, suivie d'une

destruction systématique des repères accumulés par l'habitant au prix des

plus grands sacrifices. Elle avait huit de tension, neuf mois de grossesse, la

peau sur les os, mais en quelques jours elle a transformé un cloître

moribond en hall de gare à l'heure de pointe. Son linge battait le vent dans

les meurtrières et son parfum radioactif avait chassé les odeurs d'encens et

de suie qui se croyaient tenaces à bon droit. Les religieuses avaient du mal

à la suivre, elles ne pouvaient en aucun cas l'attraper (257).

If a convent evokes the image of order itself, through constituting an opposing force, Chérifa evokes chaos. The fact that Chérifa has three times the same effect—on Lamia's abode, on the dormitories of the young women, and then on the convent, shows that it is part of who she is, rather than a simple narrative event. The passage above is not without humor, in particular in the opposition between the cloister described as lacking vitality or vigor, which becomes transformed into a train station at traffic hour and Chérifa, whose personal force shakes up the quiet and unanimated nunnery. And similarly, the image of the nuns chasing Chérifa without success around the convent has an element of slapstick.

I recall that according to Sabbah, the feminine poses a threat to the social order of Islam. If rebellion against patriarchal structure could be almost a foundation of feminism, could we explain *fitna* as a term needing re-habilitation in a feminist perspective?

Functioning both as a character and as the narrator, from the beginning of the novel, Lamia has appeared to be lucid and grounded in reality. As the narrator, Lamia is sophisticated, educated, and fiercely independent. She has a defined style that reflects her personality. Through her straight-talking and incisive remarks, as well as her extreme confidence, she convinces herself that her lucidity is absolute. Through her critique of Algerian society, she becomes, perhaps, a *porte-parole* for the author. Lamia has something to say about everything, and makes pronouncements, as though she is a bearer of the truth. For example, she says: "Les petites gens ne respectant rien, ses études finirent dans le grenier où elles ont nourri des générations de souris avides de savoir. Enfin bref, le monde est ce qu'il est est, composé de savants et d'ignorants, ce que l'un construit, l'autre le détruit" (80). And further on: "Oui, voilà, Alger est une catin, elle se donne pour mieux prendre. Un mois d'amertume pour cinq minutes de plaisir est son

tarif" (98). Here we see Lamia's sardonic wit, which holds within it a critique of her society, including the role of women, the effect of Islam, and the importance of taking a critical distance in order to make judgments, subjects I will return to later. What is unusual about this critique is the figurative language used, which leaves to the reader the development of the metaphor. In the above citation, the suffering imposed on the Algerian people is depicted as willfully imposed (rather than accidental), and associated with sexuality. The city is involved in an exchange with its inhabitants, but it is Alger that makes the rules, in a game in which its inhabitants do not stand a fair gamble.

But, at the same time as she gives voice to these sharp and controversial insights, Lamia, as a character, is lonely, closed upon herself, and disengaged from outer society. She compensates for this by building an imaginary inner world. "Et pourtant, elle me faisait peur, cette solitude. Jalouse, vindicative, elle me voulait tout à elle, se murs ne cessaient de sa rapprocher en fronçant du sourcil" (35). In the passage that follows the women's listening to music, Lamia describes herself as dancing naked or covered with fig leaves around a brasier surrounded by fantoms: Chérifa, Louiza, Sofiane, Yacine and the flutist and his girl, among others (162-3). Does this episode constitute a break with reality or can we see in it the use of poetic license by a narrator who also claims to be a poet, and (through the author's pretense) to have written the poetry contained in the novel?[61] As a narrator whose construct of reality sometimes wavers into fantasy, she becomes to some extent, unreliable. And Lamia's lack of connection with reality seems

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[61] The ruptures in style between prose and poetry in the novel thus do not represent a shift in the identity of the narrator. This shift takes place only once, between the section "au lecteur" and the rest of the novel.

to progress, until in the passage cited below where Chérifa visits "Bluebeard," Chérifa's grasp of reality contrasts with Lamia's rupture from it.

The final rupture between Chérifa and Lamia occurs not over the museum visits, but after a discussion about the neighbor that Lamia has named Bluebeard. In a dialogue between the women, Lamia's responses seem to break with reality and stem more from her fantasy relationship with "Bluebeard" than from a natural response to Chérifa's comments.

—Je suis allée dans la vieille maison.

—Où ca ? …répète !

—Là…en face!

—Quoi??...répète!!

—La vieille maison!! Le monsieur m'a fait des signes de sa

fenêtre…je suis montée…

 —Barbe-Bleue???!!!

—Un vieux tout gentil.

—Quoi???...répète!!!

 —Le vieux monsieur!!! Tu es sourde???

—Il a une barbe?...elle est bleue?

  —Non, des cheveux blancs sur la tête et de gros verres sur le nez[…]

Il m'a offert ce collier, regarde…c'est celui de sa fille, elle est morte il y a

longtemps.

—C'est lui qui le dit, peut-être l'a-t-il égorgée comme les six autres.

—De quoi tu parles, c'est sa fille unique, elle avait dix ans!

—Je parle de ce que je sais!

—… (181-3).

This is truly a "dialogue de sourds." For Lamia, the confrontation with a reality different from her fantasy does not at first cause cognitive dissonance. She cannot cleanse herself of her image of Bluebeard, because he constitutes an intrapsychic force in her unconscious, a negative animus figure.[62] For Chérifa who is unaware of Lamia's Bluebeard fixation, it appears that Lamia has suffered a break with reality, a "madness" (184). But Lamia, for her part, sees in Chérifa's innocence and trust a lack of awareness (184).

The relationship between the characters is in fact more complex than mere opposition.[63] There is a tension between their love for each other and their alienation. Although in *Harraga,* unlike in Benchemsi, love is not expressed in a romanticized or lyrical fashion, Lamia demonstrates her love for Chérifa by devoting her entire life, after the latter's disappearance, to a search for her whereabouts. And Chérifa, on her deathbed, refers to Lamia as "mother" and leaves her baby, Louiza, to Lamia's care.

And in the episode where they discuss Bluebeard, there is a certain lucidity within Lamia's fantasy world, and a certain lack of conscience in Chérifa's lucidity. So, there is both lucidity and blindness in both of them. Lamia says to Chérifa: "Et toi inconsciente! Ceux qui sont morts ne se doutaient pas, eux aussi! Tu vis où? Il y a la guerre ici et ça ne

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[62] Marie von Franz in *Man and his Symbols* (1964) by Carl Jung, specifically cites Bluebeard as an example of a negative animus figure.

[63] I recall here Sansal's allusion to the biblical allegory of the grain of wheat, which he explains evokes death and resurrection (preface 11). In this allegory which refers to the seed that degrades itself and resurrects as a new plant, we find an example of dialectics, just as in the relationship between Lamia and Chérifa.

date pas de ce matin! On a presque oublié qu'on pouvait mourir de façon commune et mademoiselle sort, se balade, parle aux gens…boit du chocolat!" (184).

It is in the climax of the dispute over Bluebeard that Lamia insults Chérifa (185), uttering a word which is withheld from the reader until the end of the novel because Lamia does not remember it. The repression of this word into her unconscious recalls Freud's theory that it is the memory of traumatic events that is pushed into the unconscious for self-protective reasons. It is not until Lamia is faced with Chérifa's tombstone and so is forced to confront the latter's death that she remembers the forgotten word: "harraga."

The connection between the word "harraga" and the unconscious lies in Lamia's relationship to the idea of what Algeria is. For when Lamia remembers what the word was that she said, her entire relationship with the Algerian reality changes: [Lamia prays to God]

> Ce pays est gouverné par des gens sans âme, ils ont fait de nous des êtres à leur image, petits, méchants et arides ou des révoltés qui se recroquevillent dans la honte et l'insignifiance. Nos enfants souffrent, ils rêvent de bien, d'amour et de jeux, ils les entraînent dans le mal, la haine et l'oisiveté. Ils n'ont que ce moyen pour vivre, se faire harraga, brûler la route, comme jadis on brûlait ses vaisseaux pour n'avoir pas à revenir (314).

It is at this point that Lamia's prior reality of acceptance becomes a false reality or fantasy. The new reality that she takes on replaces her former reality. In the past she was critical of harragas. Lamia didn't agree with her brother Sofiane's decision to leave Algeria:

Et pour finir, Sofiane. À sa première cigarette, il s'est mis en tête

d'émigrer coûte que coûte, le plus loin possible. 'Mieux vaut mourir

ailleurs que vivre ici!' Hurlait-il alors que je m'évertuais à le raisonner. 'Si

on ne peut pas vivre chez soi, pourquoi aller mourir chez le voisin?'

Disais-je sur le même ton. C'était mon argument, le seul que j'avais sous

la main. Je voulais dire que mourir n'est pas le plus difficile, le problème

est d'apprendre à vivre, le lieu est une question accessoire (52).

In accepting Algeria as it is, Lamia criticizes the *harragas* for their departure. But later

on in the novel, as Lamia begins to face the flaws and difficulties in Algeria, she sees the

reality is the need to get out, to escape. Chérifa did it by dying. And so, it is only in the

end of the novel when Lamia is forced to embrace this new reality that she too becomes a

harraga, even if she does not yet leave Algeria, but becomes an outsider within Algeria.

It is the realization that she has been living in a fantasy, Algeria lost in a falsity, that

Lamia represses throughout the novel, by shifting the word "harraga" into her

unconscious. And this explains why, in the end of the novel, when Lamia has accepted

the true reality she feels ready to let go of the fantom world which she has created in her

mind, a readiness expressed in her final prayer:

S'il te plaît, mon Dieu, rappelle à toi les fantômes de la maison, Moustafa

et compagnie. Ils méritent le repos, la vie les a trahis et la mort les a

laissés à la traîne, je crois qu'ils sont fatigués d'avoir tant erré. Ce sont

mes amis, ils m'ont soutenue quand moi-même j'étais une ombre sur les

murs, mais à présent j'ai un bébé à élever, j'ai besoin de fraîcheur et de

lumière (315).

Despite the alienation between the women, the novel closes with a hopeful future, with the passage, as seen above, from shadow into light.

Image of the Woman in *Harraga*

Returning to my central question, I remark that neither of the women in this novel takes on a conventional image. Each in her own way is very different from the traditional image of the woman in Muslim thought, as defined by Sabbah (1982), a being defined by her excessive sexuality and opposition to the Muslim social order. Although I have noted some association between Chérifa and *fitna,* it may be more accurate to state that both characters constitute free spirits in different ways, Chérifa through breaking the codes of society about sexuality and marriage, as well as the rules about staying in one place rather than living a more nomadic lifestyle, and Lamia via her opinions and criticism of Algerian society. Chérifa is more defined by what she rejects than what she is, that is in a negative or foil manner. Lamia is clearly defined and defiant, with a great deal of substance to her character.

Lamia criticizes her society for its religious hypocrisy: "l'islam fabrique-t-il des croyants, des lavettes ou seulement des terroristes? La réponse n'est pas simple, les trois peuvent être d'excellents comédiens" (47). She further criticizes the disproportionate share of the work done by women: "Le jour même, j'ai tout compris de l'économie arabo-islamique: au boulot comme au foyer les hommes causent, les femmes bossent, et il n'y a de repos dominical pour personne" (48-9). Another example of her pronouncements is her remark on the difficulty of being an independent woman in Algeria:

Ce faisant, j'entrais de plain-pied dans la pire des engeances en terre d'islam, celle des femmes libres et indépendantes. Dans cet état, il est préférable de se dépêcher de vieillir, d'où mes petites rides. Sous la bannière verte, la vieillesse n'est pas un naufrage pour la femme mais un sauvetage (50).

In yet another pronouncement, thought but not spoken at the time of the meeting with Sister Anne, Lamia says:

Juger est comme respirer, on ne doit jamais se départir de ce pouvoir, nous le tenons de Dieu, il est toute notre humanité, il ne faut/ni le sous-traiter/ ni l'accorder à je ne sais quel vent, levé on ne sait comment par on ne sait qui. Au diable la tolérance quand elle rime avec lâcheté!" (305).

Here the characteristic humor of Lamia is replaced by the voicing of a deep truth; Lamia exhorts us to make judgments, and not hide behind the mantra of cultural relativism.

As the narrator, Lamia's voice controls the tone of the book, which becomes almost like an accumulation of defiance. As the novel contains little dialogue, her voice is dominant throughout. The female persona that Sansal creates thus departs from the image of woman that Sabbah presents in her 1982 book. For, this is not a text of submission, as one might expect from a woman narrator. Lamia has created a space for herself in the margins of society, and there she is her own boss, with the freedom to hold her own point of view. As we have seen, Lamia pushes her separation from society to the point that she begins to separate also from reality. In Chérifa, whom she loves, she has discovered someone outside herself who could reconnect her with reality.

Rue Darwin: the Mother-Child Relationship

In _Harraga_ Lamia desires to establish a mother-daughter relationship with Chérifa: "[Lamia says] Trêve de charades j'ai un problème pratique à résoudre! J'ai à me faire aimer de Chérifa, j'ai à lui faire comprendre que je l'aime, comme mon enfant, de toutes mes forces, de toute ma faiblesse" (149). The question of motherhood is also central to _Rue Darwin._ The narrator of this book is seeking more than the "real" birth mother, in order to define his identity, his place in society, and his relationship with her, although he certainly is looking for these. I refer back to Carl Jung's _The Archetypes of the Collective Unconscious_ (1959) to deepen our understanding of what the narrator seeks. Here Jung devotes one chapter out of six to developing psychological aspects of the mother archetype. Thus, we see that in the formation of the unconscious, the position of the mother is less a marginal than a structural issue.

Jung writes that the influence of the mother comes from the archetype projected onto her (Jung 83). According to him, the mother archetype is internal and is associated with homecoming, shelter, fertility, maternal solicitude, female authority, secrecy, the abyss and fate.

Following Jung, I find that the narrator is looking for a locus on which to project these attributes. Because none of his three mothers in themselves resonate with these characteristics, his search can only find resolution in the death of these figures. And so, the mother, for her part, is not defined exclusively through her relationship with the child, but in the manner in which she expresses or embodies these maternal attributes, from a Jungian standpoint. Not all women embody the mother archetype. It is when the woman takes on these attributes that she becomes a mother figure, whether or not she takes care

of a child. Her suitability as a locus of projection situates motherhood, in Jung's view, in the gaze of the observer rather than in the woman's subjective self-definition. This is consistent with Sansal's interpretation in *Rue Darwin* where the mother-child relationship is defined as it is experienced in the mind of the narrator.

In *Harraga* the treatment of this question is slightly different, residing more in the gaze of the mother-child dyad toward each other. In *Harraga* the question of motherhood is associated almost principally with the shaping of the child's character through the transmission of values and knowledge. How does the mother shape the child's education and identity? Can the mother shape the child? Does the child acknowledge the mother as mother?

In *Rue Darwin* it is the narrator, Yaz, who longs for a relationship with a mother. This novel, in a manner reminiscent of Camus' *L'Étranger*, begins with the death of the mother. While the relationship between Lamia and Chérifa is described in all of its intimacy, that between Yaz and his three mothers seems to be in each case distant, a missed opportunity to connect, an unfulfilled yearning: "Il est une chose que je regrette amèrement, je n'ai jamais dit ni à l'une ni à l'autre, 'Maman, je t'aime.' Je ne les ai jamais prises dans mes bras." (Sansal 254).

Yaz's Three Mothers

Three women characters are all mother figures for the narrator: maman, whose death opens the novel, Djéda who acts as a grandmother, and Farroudja, who in the final episode reveals herself to be his birthmother. "Maman," who in the beginning of the novel we learn to be Karima, adopted Yaz when he was very young. A traditional

mother-archetype, she is self-effacing and lives for her children: "Elle désespérait de revoir ses enfants de son vivant. Son rêve était un jour, une heure, toute sa marmaille autour d'elle, et, si possible, la marmaille de la marmaille […]" (26). If "maman" is defined by the intense and all-consuming love that she has for her children, there is, at the same time, something pathological in this love which consumes the narrator Yaz:

> Je crois bien en définitive que j'ai seulement aidé maman à porter
> l'immense amour qu'elle vouait à ses enfants. J'ai dû sentir, à un moment
> ou un autre, que ce poids était en train de l'écraser. Alors, j'ai aimé mes
> frères et mes sœurs d'un amour de forçat, si fort que j'en ai oublié de vivre
> (29).

And further on Yaz seems totally involved with his relationship with "maman" and her family: "M'occuper de maman avait fini par être ma seule activité. Je commençais tôt le matin, avant d'aller au bureau, j'y pensais toute la journée, […] (31)."

Djéda, literally "grandmother," whose real name is Sadia, is the feared head of the Kadri clan. Her power is based not only in lineage and position, but moreover on the commerce of prostitution. Described as inflexible and cruel (66), she creates and controls a culture based on the commodification of love, where her status is that of unquestioned and unquestionable leader.

Djéda is associated with the empire which she controls and further with colonization itself:

> La prostitution en maison de tolérance venait d'avoir ses lois qui
> l'organisaient, la protégeaient, elle entrait officiellement dans l'économie
> du pays. Lalla Sadia avait vu juste, l'évolution des choses sous l'empire de

la colonisation fera que ce commerce connaîtra un immense

développement. Elle en sera la reine, le symbole absolu (56).

Djéda's association with the power of the colonizer, as well as her own wielding of power comes to express, in a more general sense, a transfer of this force to the feminine: "Le temps des femmes avait commencé. La tribu sera un monde au féminin où les hommes ne seront que des ombres furtives" (56). This citation reflects the significance of this theme in the novel as a whole. At first glance this shift of power to a world of women seems to diverge from Sabbah's view where an entire system makes woman submit. But if we examine the question more closely, we find that the commodification and objectification of women not only continues in the value system of Djéda's world, but defines her microcosm. In fact, the falling of the human into the role of the object in this text, goes beyond or outside of the category of gender. Later in the novel the narrator comments: "J'étais une sorte d'objet témoin. Ma place était au musée" (89), and again, "Nous cessâmes d'être des êtres humains" (102).

What defines Djéda is not her gender, but her power:

"Mais qui donc a jamais pu percer un quelconque secret de Djéda? Elle, ce n'est pas une femme, ni un homme, personne ne peut l'égaler ou lui résister une fraction de seconde" (76). In a patriarchal society the idea of a woman wielding power is subversive. Djéda does not resist this model, but re-enforces it, by failing to give subjectivity to the women under her control. By pimping out these women, she has undermined her own potential solidarity with her gender and betrayed her sex.

Djéda creates an organization or machine with which her identity is so inextricably linked that she becomes gender-neutral. Though inherently sexual, the

machine she creates is depicted by Sansal as a pure instrument of power devoid of any pretense to eroticism.

There is a suggestion of irony in that in some sense Djéda is a creation of the colonial system, a system whose ideology historically argued that in rendering the Algerian woman European, the total submission of Algeria would be assured (Orlando, *Of Suffocated Hearts and Tortured Souls* 28). This system succeeded in producing a figure departing from the Orientalist notion of the Algerian feminine, but the end-product was not the one expected by the colonial power: Djéda created her own dystopia, fully assuming the role of a power figure. Even though the text says that it is the time of woman, the text does not present a new model of how to be a woman in power. Instead, Djéda reproduces how the masculine has traditionally viewed woman, as an object of commodification. And the image of the woman remains consistent with what Sabbah found in her 1982 text: "L'homme est une bête abominable, et cette bête vit en troupeau, or la vie en troupeau c'est ça, dévorer ou se faire dévorer, dominer ou être dominé, et dans cette affaire la femelle est une bête à part, inutile et déplorable, cruelle et insatiable" (Sansal 676).

It is not until the second part of the novel, after the death of both "maman" and Djéda, that Farroudja reveals the secret of Yaz's birth. If "maman" is self-effacing, she is surpassed in this characteristic by Farroudja, who has lived her whole life sacrificing herself to this secret, that it is in fact she who is his birth-mother. A prostitute in Djéda's bordel, she is powerless even to keep her own child, and becomes complicit in guarding the secret, so that he could have a better life.

Because biological motherhood is such an embodied relationship, looking at motherhood through the child's gaze, as does Jung, is particularly suited to an understanding of Sansal's work which, to a certain extent, disembodies motherhood, making it less a question of biological truth, and more a subjective reality.

The narrator's sense of self seems to stem from his relationships with the women characters. Or, perhaps better put, the ambiguity in these relationships creates a questioning within him as to his true identity.

His search for the mother permeates the novel. What is relevant to Yaz's identity is not who his father is, but who his mother is. In fact, there is very little said about who his father might be; it seems almost as though this question lacks relevance. It is as though Sansal is suggesting that matriarchy is actually the right order of things, and that it should define identity.

Yaz belongs simultaneously to two worlds, each ruled by a distinct mother, and he feels torn between them: "Il en était ainsi, j'étais de deux familles, deux mondes que tout séparait, et la vérité qui pouvait les réconcilier en moi était inaccessible, personne ne le savait, ou ceux qui la savaient ne la diraient pas, elle les aurait détruits" (Sansal 157). The connection between family and origins is explored by Sansal: "On ne vit pas que de questions, on a besoin de savoir qui on est et d'où on vient, c'est la moindre des choses" (159). In his intense searching, at first, the narrator discovers only a void:

> Je découvrais que mon père n'était pas mon père et il venait de mourir ;
> que ma mère n'était pas ma mère et elle venait de disparaître ; que ma
> vraie mère était une inconnue qui m'avait conçu avec des inconnus de
> passage dans une maison interdite et elle avait disparu à son tour. Ne

restait que Djéda et plus tard j'ai découvert qu'elle n'était pas ma grand-mère mais la sœur aînée de ma grand-mère, laquelle n'était pas plus ma grand-mère que son fils n'était mon père.

J'ai dû me demander qui j'étais, d'où je venais, et quel mauvais sort m'attendait. Quelles autres questions ? J'étais l'enfant du néant et de la tromperie, je devais me sentir bien seul et triste. Et écrasé par la honte, comme je l'ai été tout au long de ma vie (69).

Just at the close of the first part of the novel the narrator explains:

Je me sentais tout drôle, j'étais comme un vase brisé dont les morceaux ont été dispersés et dont on vient par miracle de retrouver quelques pièces, que l'on a rapidement recollées…le vase reprend forme mais il manque l'essentiel, le contenu, ma vérité. Notre vérité. Et la vérité n'est vérité que lorsqu'elle est dite, en entier, sans fard ni détour" (214).

Sansal's metaphorical representation of the narrator as a shattered vase, reconstructed without its original contents, bears a striking resemblance to a passage in Frantz Fanon's book *Peau noire, masques blancs:*

J'arrivais dans le monde, soucieux de faire lever un sens aux choses, mon âme pleine du désir d'être à l'origine du monde, et voici que je me découvrais objet au milieu d'autres objets.

Enfermé dans cette objectivité écrasante, j'implorai autrui. Son regard libérateur, glissant sur mon corps devenu soudain nul d'aspérités, me rend une légèreté que je croyais perdue et, m'absentant du monde, me

rend au monde […] Je m'emportai, exigeai une explication…Rien n'y fit.

J'explosai. Voici les menus morceaux par un autre moi réunis (88).

The metaphor of disintegration and reintegration common to both texts, is situated in the context of the objectification of the colonized by the gaze (in the case of Fanon) or the silence (in the case of Sansal) of the oppressor. In both cases, the individual is filled initially with spirit (in the case of Fanon) or with truth (in the case of Sansal), but in the process of violent transformation is recreated emptied of the substance of the true or original self.

It is noteworthy that the novel is divided asymmetrically, the first part, which contains a silence, described by Sansal as the "omerta" (214), the silence of the Mafia, being much longer than the second which contains the revelation of the secret of Yaz's birth. That the lengthier part of the novel concerns a silence suggests that silence, usually associated with a lack of communication, may in itself bear a message. And so, Sansal explores what the message is that this silence holds: truth is only truth when it is spoken. Or, in other words, unmasking a hidden truth is like finding your way through a labyrinth, long and laborious, but the truth itself, like daybreak, reveals itself in a moment.

In the case of Farroudja, the distance between a mother-child relationship known and acknowledged internally and one accepted and codified by the state produces discomfort, frustration and sadness for the narrator. Sansal shows that it is possible to know a truth that others do not recognize:

J'ai eu du mal avec l'administration de l'hôpital, mur aveugle, sourd et

rêche comme une râpe, on ne voulait pas me donner la dépouille mortelle

de Farroudja pour l'emporter et l'enterrer dans notre cimetière de

Belcourt. On m'a dit : "Qui es-tu pour qu'on te la donne, cette

malheureuse?" "Je suis son fils," ai-je répondu, et j'ai précisé: "C'est ma

mère," mais, mes papiers d'identité disant autre chose, on a refusé de

m'entendre et on m'a éconduit. À qui s'adresser?" (230).

As much of the narrative space deals with Yaz's relationship with a dying mother,

one must ask whether the way that woman is portrayed in this novel, in a manner which

gives the mother-figure so much importance, is also reductive. Woman here seems to

gain her significance through her role as mother, and in this capacity, as a source of

identity. In other words, if Yaz defines himself in terms of his relationship with the

mother, the mother, for her part, gains significance as a character, because of her identity

as Yaz's mother.

Reading *Rue Darwin* as Allegory

The triple repetition of the death episode of the mother, suggests that we have

moved from narrative space to mythic space, as this episode is no longer merely a

narrative event, but a motif. Mythic space brings into narration key elements of the

unconscious.

A fourth female figure, Faïza, eventually becomes, in place of Yaz, the lineage

bearer to Djéda's empire. Like Farroudja, she is a revealer of secrets but unlike her, she

does so in a cold, hurtful, way. One of the children under Djéda's rule, her temperament

is described by Sansal as "fine et trop machiavélique" (84). At a crucial juncture she

travels to Miliano, a town in Aïn Defla Province, Northwestern Algeria, and later to

France. It is during these voyages that she undergoes a transformation:

> […] elle ressemblait à une petite Française racée, toute belle et mignonne, elle parlait un français dépourvu d'accent et de sous-entendus qui nous glissait sur l'oreille, nous n'y comprenions que pouic, elle se coiffait en bouclettes, portait des rubans de couleur, se tenait droite comme un I, était astiquée comme une mariée (85).

And further on :

> Elle ne s'exprimait qu'en français et en anglais avec l'accent suisse. Elle ne savait plus un mot de notre belle langue, ignorait notre phalanstère et ne pensait aucunement à la grande maison. J'imaginais qu'après cela elle serait définitivement transformée en petite Européenne distinguée qu'elle serait perdue pour nous (86).

Faïza's elevation through her adoption of French culture and language is explained by Frantz Fanon in the following passage: "Le colonisé se sera d'autant plus échappé de sa brousse qu'il aura fait siennes les valeurs culturelles de la métropole" (*Peau noire, masques blancs* 14). Faïza had thus assumed the culture and within it the language of the colonizer, and in that process chosen to ally herself with the French, and distance herself from her former companions. As Frantz Fanon writes: "Parler, c'est être à même d'employer une certaine syntaxe, posséder la morphologie de telle ou telle langue, mais c'est surtout assumer une culture, supporter le poids d'une civilisation" (Ibid. 13). In Faïza's eyes, the children of the house of Djéda had become her inferiors: "Elle nous jetait de l'ombre, nous étions invisibles, trop catastrophiques à ses yeux, on eût dit qu'elle craignait qu'on la polluât avec nos plaies et nos bosses" (Sansal *Rue Darwin* 86). Just as Frantz Fanon writes in *Peau noire, masques blancs* that society confronts the Black man

with the dilemma to turn white or disappear, here a separation by class has taken place, in

this case, one not necessarily of ethnic or racial origin, but of allegiance. Faïza's

separation from the other children of the phalanstère was complete, and she lost any

intention to use her newly found power as their supporter: "Elle n'était plus notre Faïza,

elle avait perdu les qualités qui faisaient d'elle notre championne, ce regard mobile et

cynique, cette énergie possessive, cette voix impudique […]" (Ibid).

Djéda's alliance with the French included the period of the collaboration when

she bought her property in Vichy. This only serves to highlight the moral bankruptcy and

utilitarianism of her reign. And it is in this setting that Faïza's character is ultimately

formed: "Cette demeure somptueuse, elle l'avait acquise pour la mettre à la disposition

du Maréchal et de ses ministres, et voilà que notre Faïza y séjournait à son tour en

princesse du Sud" (Ibid).

Faïza, treated as a princess, bearing golden suitcases and surrounded by servants,

by allying herself with the power of the colonizer and of Djéda, has become the new heir

to power; she will be the new head of the legal house of prostitution, and, I argue, a

figure representing internal colonization.

While classic colonization refers to the domination and exploitation by a

geographically external colonizer of a majority of a nation, internal colonization is a

process of social oppression where one's own people are colonized as the "other."

Internal colonization is a term applied often to Russian ethnography and has been studied

by Alexander Etkind in his 2011 book. Etkind explains that both types of colonization are

forms of cultural hegemony and political domination. Internal colonization may seem to

be an oxymoron, as colonization indicates an "aggressive confrontation of alien forces"

(7). But in internal colonization one force has become alien to itself.[64] Thus, the term

applies to our text where the character most assimilated to French culture, Faïza, becomes

alienated from her own Algerian people as she begins to rule over them.

Several questions stem from this analysis as well as from a study of the structure

of the text. There seems to be a pattern that appears, where the search for the mother

becomes the repeated experience of her death. The novel opens with the death of the

mother (Karima), and contains a second death in the middle (Djéda's) and closes with yet

a third (Farroudja's). There is an absence of father figures. How do these themes

interrelate with the problem of colonization which is the setting in which the story of

Yaz's childhood takes place? Is this a socio-political novel or a psychological one?

In order to answer these questions, I refer to a theory which Goff and Simpson

present in their 2007 book *Crossroads in the Black Aegean.* According to these authors,

the colonized is stuck in a child-like stage, and cannot progress into full adulthood:

> To be a colonial subject, in Fanon's account, is not only to be constituted
>
> by the Oedipus complex, in the way that psychoanalysis claims that
>
> absolutely everybody must be, but it is also to be trapped within that
>
> complex, to be unable to 'progress' through it, by means of identification
>
> and introjection, into full subjecthood. The colonial subject is constituted
>
> and arrested as a child, albeit a very useful and fearsome one (99).[65]

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[64] The term goes back to the historian Vasilii Klievchevsky who in 1904 wrote that Russian history is "the history of a country that colonizes itself" (2). According to Etkind, Russia is seen in this citation as both the subject and the object of colonization.

[65] Goff and Simpson rely on Fanon for their theory, reading a relationship between colonization and the Oedipal myth into a text from *Les Damnés de la terre* (1961). Fanon writes:

The suspension of Yaz's development at the moment of the mother's death, which has been seen as the coming of age of the child,[66] now becomes clear. The absence of the father and dominance of the theme of the desire for the mother serves as another indication that this story is a variation on the Oedipal drama; post Oedipus, the father no longer lives. But Sansal is not fundamentally a writer of psychological drama. Instead, this novel explores the relation between the socio-political and the psychological. Although not a single French person inhabits the novel, the theme of the effect of colonization on Algeria is critical, and in reading the novel as an allegory, the socio-political becomes dominant over the psychological.

The novel can be seen as a description of the crushing effects of colonization on Algerian society. The entire microcosm set up by Djéda is permitted only by the French legalization of certain houses of prostitution. Mimicking the colonizer's dehumanization of the colonized, Djéda treats the prostitutes in her control as her property, even, as we have seen, assigning their children to be raised by the parent she chooses. The mother-

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> The look that the native turns on the settler's town is a look of lust, a look of envy; it expresses his dreams of possession—all manner of possession; to sit at the settler's table, to sleep in the settler's bed, with his wife if possible. The colonized man is an envious man. And this the settler knows very well; when their glances meet he ascertains bitterly, always on the defensive. They want to take our place! It is true, for there is no native who does not dream at least once a day of setting himself up in the settler's place (Simpson and Goff quote Fanon 98).

In interpreting this passage, Simpson and Goff make a bit of a leap, commenting: "The Oedipal dynamics in this scene are quite evident" (99). On the other hand, the rest of the analysis of Goff and Simpson regarding the way in which being colonized arrests development in a general sense rings true.

[16]This belief is common to the Yorubas who see the death of the mother as signifying the breaking of the umbilical cord and so the final passage of the child into adulthood (Ibitokun 9). Although the Yorubas are from Nigeria and West Africa, it stands to reason that this belief is not limited to their culture, but makes sense in a larger context.

child bond is not respected by Djéda who views the child of the prostitute as as much her property as the mother. A pivotal episode which follows the introduction of Djéda into the novel, highlights the distance between the narrator in the *présent de l'énonciation* and the consciousness of the child who he remembers being. Later on, the narrator will come to a fuller understanding of the importance of this contact between Djéda and Farroudja:

" '…Je vous en prie, Lalla, rendez-le-moi!...pas lui encore, je vous en supplie!

-Tais-toi, malheureuse, que ferais-tu d'un enfant dans ta situation?

--…"S'il vous plaît…Dieu vous bénisse…s'il vous plaît…' " (Sansal 67).

This moment is doubly ironic. First, the narrator is not aware at the time that the child being discussed is he, that Farroudja is thus his birth-mother and that Djéda has taken him away from her for her own purposes. A second irony is introduced in the framing of the story where it is not the venality of Djéda's position which is considered criminal, but instead Farroudja's act of *lèse-majesté* toward Djéda as well as the former's having betrayed her given word, presumably a promise of silence. The prism used gives all the moral authority to Djéda, an attitude which only makes sense if one understands that the text reflects Djéda's point of view. Outside of Djéda's moral (or perhaps better put amoral) framework, her act is an aberration.

Another example of irony or better put hypocrisy in the novel is the association of Djéda with religion. She seems to have it both ways, categorically rejecting religion so to that she can hold her own world view, and simultaneously manipulating its symbols in order to associate herself with the sacred and portray herself as better than the others:

Djéda ne voulait pas de religion chez elle, elle en monopolisait l'exercice.

'C'est assez que mes gens croient en Dieu, davantage ça rend

fainéant et querelleur,' disait-elle. Quand elle priait, c'était pour le

bonheur de tous et quand elle égrenait son chapelet, qui ne la quittait pas,

elle comptait de même les péchés de chacun (58).

Furthermore, Djéda manages to transfer in a symbolic sense the burden of the

guilt of the house of prostitution onto la hadja, while keeping all the control in her own

hands: "[…] Djéda était une sainte femme, le chef d'une honorable tribu, c'était la hadja

qui tenait la grande maison, la citadelle, c'était elle l'horrible tenancière, l'infâme

maquerelle" (65). Again, it is impossible to miss the double irony. First, regarding

Djéda's "saintliness" and second regarding the choice of name for the woman who held

the only other key to the house of prostitution, a woman whose personal name is replaced

by the indication that she has completed the *hajj*.

Not only is Djéda's phalanstère under the domination of colonization, but the

effect of this dynamic is destructive to the individual raised within this society. Like a

shattered vase, the narrator lives a life of mourning for his true self ("Vivre n'est que

porter le deuil de soi" (45)).

In light of all of this suffering is there any redemptive message in *Rue Darwin*? I

find that it is in the construction or perhaps better put re-construction of identity that

Sansal creates a powerful message of hope.

In this text three centers of gravity describe the conceptualization of identity. The

first is the grandmother, Djéda's conception of identity. Heavily influenced by the

colonizer-colonized relationship, and the objectification or dehumanization of the

prostitute, who Djéda cannot recognize in the role of mother, this conception of identity

values only the continuation of the lineage, the tribe, and the existing lines of power. Consistent with these notions, Djéda removes the narrator from his birth mother's care and has assigned him to be her grandson.

A second conceptualization of identity is subject centered, as in the long Western tradition from Descartes to French existentialism. Identity is based on self-knowledge. The central question becomes "whom am I?" I see Western influence injected by the author into this text when the narrator asks this question. The narrator's conceptualization, however, is larger in nature than the existential one.

A third conceptualization, as described by Fatima Mernissi, is a new development, a synthesis of the traditional community or umma-centered identity, and the Western one, the "individu adîb." That is, the individual who has a strong sense of community. The narrator of *Rue Darwin* exemplifies this type of individual. The tension between the conceptualization of the grandmother and that of the narrator lies at the core of this novel.

My analysis of *Rue Darwin* connects with my central questions in looking at the character of the grandmother as a pivotal figure whose actions based on her worldview serve to destabilize the life of the narrator. In both *Harraga* and *Rue Darwin* hope is constructed by setting forth on the path towards lucidity. In *Harraga* as we have seen, Lamia's struggles to acknowledge the truth in her relationship with Algeria and with an uncomfortable remembrance and a letting-go of phantoms. In *Rue Darwin* what the narrator seeks becomes ephemeral; his search for the mother does not lead to a meaningful connection with another being (impossible because at each juncture where he finds her she is dying) but a search for a truth within himself, a reintegration of his sense

of personhood. The principal characteristic of the mother-child relationship as described in these two books is instability. And so, the search for the mother reveals itself to be the search for a fantasy, an archetype, an elusive source from which one struggles to create a subjective reality and identity.

Conclusion

Diversity in the Woman's Image: Sufism, Fundamentalism and the Arab Spring

> I've been trying, since my very early childhood,
>
> To spawn a space filled with jasmine.
>
> So I set up a "lovers'" sanctuary,
>
> The first of its kind in the history of the Arabs,
>
> A place intended to be welcoming of lovers,
>
> And I erased all the ancient wars
>
> Between women and men,
>
> Between doves and those who slay doves,
>
> And between the marble and those who lacerate the whiteness of
>
> marble…(Nizar Qabbani[67] trans. by Franck Salameh from "When Will
>
> Someone Finally Announce the Death of the Arabs?" (1996)).

In this passage from Qabbani the poet expresses a utopian vision of a new possible relation between the sexes. Instead of a separate feminine and masculine space, Qabbani proposes a refuge for lovers, a cultural space defined by the scent of jasmine, with its aromatic and healing properties. He introduces a model of "erasure," of wiping clean the long history of discord. Erasure indicates not the creation of a palimpsest, but a new beginning. Qabbani's poem is radical, trying to examine and expunge the opposition of three binaries: that between the sexes, that between peace and the slayers of peace (the most traditional symbolism of the dove), and between purity and bloodiness.

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[67] Qabbani was a Syrian diplomat, poet and publisher (1932-1998).

Qabbani's idealism is ruptured in the line that follows the epigraph: "But alas, they shuttered my 'lovers'' sanctuary." Shuttering indicates closing off the windows to view, rendering the transparent and open, opaque and dark. In this line the existence of Qabbani's sanctuary becomes fleeting, an ephemeral taste of a paradise not to be.

Qabbani's poem gives one example of new associations for the woman in Arab thought. As we move forward, the strongest statement that can be made is that the image of woman, is no longer, if it ever was, homogenous. From the view of woman in Islamic feminism, through that of mainstream Muslim thought to the most extreme trends of fundamentalism, there is a marked heterogeneity. What has happened to the image which Sabbah describes as embedded in the unconscious, in a seemingly permanent and pervasive way? I have already described my findings in the analysis of several contemporary texts: that even in the work of several authors who are trying to support the evolution of this image, one finds, often crystallized into one character, Sabbah's original description. This supports a view somewhere between Jung's and Fanon's: that new archetypes can evolve, but the original ones never seem to fully disappear. There appears to be a sort of essence in the unconscious that does not easily fade.

To develop this theory further I now look at a few more sources, the first a video from a Lebanese television show embedded in the *New York Times* article of March 13th, 2015 (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bOlpK6Yj5a4&feature=youtu.be) entitled, "Lebanese TV Host Rima Karaki Cuts Short London-Based Islamist's Interview following Insolent Remarks." In this video Rima Karaki, the host, scolds an Egyptian sheikh, Hani al-Sibai, for a long historical digression and for disrespect for her. The image of the talk show host in this video is a far cry from the silent, immobile and

submissive woman of Sabbah's (1982) text. Karaki is strong and assertive. Although she

is not a religious authority, as the sheik is, she controls the show. When he becomes

disrespectful to her, he assumes she will acquiesce to his dominance, his demands, his

"right" to have his voice heard. The image of the woman in his mind is the one of

Sabbah's 1982 text. But the real woman in front of him disrupts his expectations. Hence,

his annoyance.

Almost metaphorically, what the newscaster and the cleric discuss is not the

image of woman, but the passage of time. What he does not seem to understand, is that

there is a limited amount of time in the show, and if he takes too long with each question,

he will not be able to complete the interview. In a symbolic sense, he seems to lack an

awareness of the passage of time, and how this has affected the role of woman.

Furthermore, he wants to speak extensively about the past, while she wants him to move

into the present.

When he refuses to do so, in the end, she cuts off his microphone. While she

cannot stop him from speaking, his voice can no longer be heard. While he desired to

silence her, she has controlled his ability to produce sound that can be heard. The conflict

here is not simply between the male cleric and the female reporter. It is between the view

of woman in his unconscious and how she sees herself.

It is noteworthy or perhaps newsworthy that Karaki's station chose this episode as

a commercial for her show. Why has the station decided to play this clip over and over?

Why does it think that this clip will attract the most viewers? This choice is a reflection

of Muslim society, particularly in Lebanon, being at the crossroads. The station has

obviously sided with Karaki, taking thus a feminist viewpoint and a stand against clerical

arrogance, particularly when it is disrespectful of their representative. This choice must have been at least partially made for its shock value, which would draw in viewers. Not only does Karaki not meet the expectations of the sheik, she will surprise the viewers as well. Although her image constitutes a break with that of Sabbah's (1982) woman, it may revive another classic Arab iconic figure, that of Scheherezade. Karaki embodies beauty and the power of speech. An effect of the station's selection of this clip as an advertisement is that it is shown repetitively, becoming thus a part of popular culture. And therefore, if we use Fanon's definition, perhaps entering the unconscious of this society.

While in Sabbah's interpretation of the orthodox view, woman tries to impede man's path by disrupting the Islamic order, we have seen that the opposite is believed in Sufism, where the woman's body represents a path to the divine. In Sufi mystical poetry every part of the woman's body, in particular the face, reflects the Divine. The Sufi path, as described in the texts which I have examined, offers the possibility of a resolution of the aporia (impasse), presented by Sabbah, where the male and female are forever at odds.

The difficulty in this resolution lies in the status of Sufism in contemporary Muslim society. It is generally believed that numerically speaking, Sufis are a very tiny minority. But, in fact, as no survey has been done since French colonialism, there is an absence of real data or statistics. (The Boutchichi disciples claim 100,000 members (Buasriyah 10)). It is true that Sufis are often persecuted by mainstream Islam (in Saudi Arabia for instance) and frequently lead an underground existence. Even Iran, whose

language Jalaluddin Rumi used, and where he is still venerated to this day, still represses

modern-day Sufis. Sabbah perhaps not unreasonably valorizes the non-Sufi view.

But numbers do not always reflect the force of ideas. Today in the Mashreq[68]

(region of Arab countries to the east of Egypt) Adonis and Qabbani, two Syrian poets,

call for "incinerating" the present[69] (personal communication Franck Salameh).

Incinerating evokes destruction, but also fire, passion, and transformation. Is it not

possible that the Sufi path of love[70] might be the vehicle for this revolution?

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[68] Literally the place of sunrise, and therefore the companion term to the Maghreb, literally, sunset.

[69] Some examples follow: Qabbani writes in "When Will Someone Finally Announce the Death of the Arabs? (1996)":
> I've been trying to set your Texts on fire,
> To set ablaze this accursed language that I was made to don,
> For, some of our poetry is graveyard,
> And some of our language funerary shroud.

And in "I Reject You, All of You (1997)" he writes:
> I reject you, all of you,
> This is the end of dialogue.
> My language has despaired of you,
> And I have nothing left to tell you!
> I have set fire to my lexicons,
> I have set fire to my clothes…

And in "Elegy for the Time at Hand" Adonis writes:
> Chanting of banishment,
> Exhaling flame,
> The carriages of exile breach the walls.
> Or are these carriages
> The battering sighs of my verses?

And in "Sewing Their Lips Shut in Threads Spun With Their Own Hands (2012) Adonis writes:
> "Is this how the West fancies you, O Arab, or is this you:
> An extinguished lamp hanging from the neck of history nearing extinction?"

All translations of above poems are by Franck Salameh.

[70] As described in *The Dance of the Soul* following an excerpt from a poem by Hazrat Inayat Khan, founder of The Sufi Order in the West in 1914 (London):
> I went through hell and

The desire for radical change has also been seen in the Arab Spring. This movement involves an implicit critique of the status quo. While my dissertation focused on women in private space, during the Arab Spring they were also active in the public sphere. Even during this turbulent period, though, the feminine condition remained treated as a secondary concern. It seemed that woman was expected to await the political liberation of the nation before receiving the attention due to her position.

The anthology *Rêves d'hiver au petit matin: Les printemps arabes vus par 50 écrivains et dessinateurs* (2012) reflects this tension between the potential that the Arab Spring had for transformation and its failure to attach a primary importance to this issue. Among the 50 texts chosen, only a few address the feminine condition. This book's premise is somewhat contrived: each text is a response to "une demande […] de trente lignes" inspired by the words "printemps arabes" (7). In spite of this the book is relevant because it raises some issues closely connected to my dissertation: the reigning hypocrisy toward the feminine condition, the symbolism of the woman protesting on the streets, and the relationship between the political and social aspects of the protests.

Derri Berkani, a French film producer of Algerian descent and one of the authors in this anthology, goes back to the Algerian revolution where he finds hypocrisy in the

saw there love's raging fire,
and I entered heaven
illuminated with the light of love,
I wept in love
And made all weep with me;
I mourned in love and pierced the hearts of men;
And when my fiery glance fell on the rocks;
The rocks burst forth as volcanoes.
The whole world sank in the flood caused by my one tear;
With my deep sigh the earth trembled,
And when I cried aloud the name of my beloved,
I shook the throne of God in heaven.

contrast between the courageous role of women in the revolution and their legal status after the war. Political engagement in Algeria thus did not result in social liberation. This contrast suggests the question of whether the engagement of women in the Arab Spring will open new spaces for them, or whether the past model will repeat itself, a question which it is probably too soon to answer.

Moussa Konaté, a Malian novelist and author in this anthology, sees the engagement of women in the Arab Spring as motivated by a social rather than a political purpose. According to him, women entered the public sphere (the street) uniquely for reasons which stem from their realm of traditional influence (the private sphere). Against Konaté, who seems to deny them the political aspect of their revolt, I would argue that in the act of protesting, women see themselves as historic agents of transformation which can be at both social and political levels.

"The Trials of Spring" (http://www.trialsofspring.com/) is a six-part series about women who played important roles during the Arab Spring. The series is presented in a *New York Times* documentary with a feature length film which had its world premiere in the Human Rights Watch Film Festival on June 12, 2015 in New York City. The videos are shocking. Some of the women shown explain that they were not really engaged in politics before the Arab Spring. They entered the movement through peaceful protests or medical service. These videos describe the brutality of the crackdown against these women and how dangerous it was even to call for peaceful activity at this time. The women shown have become icons of courage and energy.

For some, their routes of protest were distinctively and symbolically feminine. For example, in the video "The Brides of Peace," Zaour and her companions chose to

wear white bridal gowns as symbols of peace. Walking to the protest, they covered the gowns with black *abayas* (a loose-fitting full-length robe worn by Muslim women). Once there, one woman called out: "Cheer, cheer for the brides of Syria" as she made the sound used at weddings. The evocation of peace, innocence, love and femininity was no protection. The women were carried away in a military jeep, the wedding dresses taking on a surreal aspect against the horror of a two-month imprisonment.

In the second part of this video Lubna Zaour, one of the protesters, explains that during her actual wedding which occurred some time after this event, she wore a t-shirt and jeans. This symbolized that for her, political action was more significant than her own wedding (Prod. Lauren Feeney).

In this video the mere fact of the women's stepping out of confinement to enter the political sphere is transgressive. But these women take the act of transgression a step further. By using the wedding dress, a ritual object loaded with symbolism, for another purpose, their statement verges on the sacrilegious. While the women rationalize that they use the gowns as symbols of peace, in fact, they have hijacked or displaced the dresses' original symbolism, in a manner that leaves them potentially open to criticism.

In the videos on Arab Spring we see that the women who fought authoritarian governments were not immediately successful, instead, they were repressed, exiled or even executed. But through the video project their efforts have left a trace. And so, their work has been brought into public consciousness and serves as a force to change the image of the woman in Muslim society.

It is hard to write about the Arab Spring without mentioning the variety of outcomes and disillusionment which followed. In many cases, the coalitions that

overthrew authoritarian governments dissolved, leaving regimes ruled by fundamentalists seeking to put into place rigid interpretations of Sharia law. Fundamentalism is a reaction against the weakening of religion, and foreign (especially Western) influence. Fundamentalists want to return to the basics of religion, the original purity, to re-impose the rule that has been relaxed, to assert control. They generally associate women's rights with Western style feminism (Ireland 173).

Some Muslim women in the West feel alienated enough from Western culture in the face of anti-Muslim sentiment that they see something they want to pursue in the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, where rigid gender roles are the norm. These women leave their families and homes, having rejected the Western model for women, and craving a return to living under the rule of their faith in what they believe to be its purest form. This gaze on the self as alienated recalls my analysis of the mirror episodes in chapter two where both Bradia and Firdaous view themselves as alienated from their reflection in the mirror.

I now return to the questions and theories which I put forth at the end of chapter one. When a transformation of the feminine condition takes place, is it accompanied by a corresponding change in the image of the woman in the Muslim unconscious? How does the collective unconscious change? Is the unconscious always a reactionary force? If the woman is consistently associated with chaos, how can she be permitted to enter a public sphere?

While the unconscious has traditionally been seen as functioning in a reactionary mode, following Fanon's definition, it is possible in theory for popular culture to enter the unconscious and transform it. In the example that I have analyzed of the Lebanese

newscaster, through the medium of repetitive viewing, advertisement serves as a possible vehicle for new and diverse images to crystallize into archetypes.

In my research I have uncovered in the transformation of woman's image a tension between on the one hand, a centrifugal force (the will of reformers and writers who want to posit new spaces for women) leading to a diversification of the image and on the other, a centripetal force, harking back to Sabbah's initial description, which has never fully disappeared.

The association of woman with chaos has been very slow to change. In fact, one could almost say that the unconscious, in its reactionary mode, has had its revenge in this area, with women's movements restricted in Syria, Iraq and Saudi Arabia in particular, where the ideal image, especially under fundamentalist rule, remains that of the sedentary wife dwelling exclusively in the home. What is the relationship between the core of fundamentalism and the unconscious? Both transform themselves slowly and with difficulty, despite all rational critique, if at all.

Change in Muslim society seems to have several sources: a changing symbolism of the woman as observed in the texts that I have analyzed, increased valorization of the individual relative to that in the past, and political and economic forces. The question of the valorization of the individual versus that of the *umma* is complex. In *Rue Darwin* we have seen the continued valorization of the *umma* over the individual, through the dominance of Djeda's world-view. But in other texts the individual takes on a greater significance. For example, in *Harraga* Lamia's individualism is valorized, but marginalized. In Benchemsi's work the valorization of the woman is present, but always within the established parameters, without transgression. In Bradia's suicide, it seems as

though her desire for individualism is defeated. Even the limited valorization of the individual that we do find in these texts needs to be seen in the limiting light of their counter-cultural nature. On the other hand, couldn't the video of the Lebanese newscaster discussed earlier be considered a mainstream text?

Finally, I look briefly at how the image of the woman in the Muslim unconscious confronts today's reality, the contemporary socio-economic condition of woman in society. In this regard, the Middle East has not functioned as a monolith. Averroes' and Kemal's argument that a society will blossom when women's status is valorized has been heeded in some countries more than in others. Even in Tunisia, for example, where the 1956 Code of Personal Status, perhaps the most progressive legislation for women's rights in the Arab world, is still in place, the contested image of the woman has been reflected in hot political debate. In 2013 Tunisian women took to the streets to protest the moderate Islamist party Ennahda's proposal to put language in the constitution describing the roles of men and women as complementary (Caught Between Two Identities: Women's Movements in Morocco and Tunisia September 28th, 2013). Subsequent to the 2014 loss of power of Ennhada, Tunisia's constitution was instead modified to include article 46, which supports women's rights, "equality of opportunities between women and men […] in all domains" and the right of the state "to eradicate violence against women" (Tunisia's constitution of 2014).

What we see from this example is that the formation of a coalition of women working together across party lines to implement legislation can be effective (Tunisia's New Constitution—How Compromise Won Out Over Conflict). The self-perception of women as political beings has been critical to this development. We are here far from the

original image of the woman as seen in Sabbah, woman as reduced to a being of pure sexuality, devoid of a spiritual or political aspect.

Overall, while socio-economic and cultural forces push for change at a different pace in each country, there is a movement toward heterogeneity in the representation of women in the literary texts and video clips which I have examined. The Arab Spring, even if it hasn't led to what was hoped for, is significant because it has opened up the possibility of radical transformation in the Middle East. It happened once and it could happen again. The presence of an anchorwoman on Lebanese television is in itself an example of cultural change. Her station's choice to air her putting a cleric in his place as an advertisement for her show reflects a surprisingly progressive outlook. While the representation of woman in the Muslim unconscious as described by Sabbah in 1982 is still noticeable in contemporary texts, other images have crystallized, remarkable in their diversity: some originating from the imagination of contemporary novelists and poets, others stemming from Sufism, others yet arising from Islamic feminism. In the epigraph to this dissertation we have seen that woman's desire was evoked by Sabbah as positioned contrary to the Muslim ethical system in early texts from within the masculine imagination. Writing on this palimpsest, the novelists, poets and videos which I have examined, evoke female desire as expressing a will for agency, spirituality and motherhood. Woman is no longer reduced to a positionality at odds with Islamic traditions and codes, but instead is engaged with renewing and redefining her identity in their context.

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