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Moroccan Women's Writings: Rethinking their Female Body and Sexuality

By Hanane El Aissi¹

Abstract

The nineteen eighties and nineties marked a turning point in Moroccan women's campaign against gender discrimination and patriarchal hegemony. During this period, Moroccan women's writings moved beyond the archaic subjects that had been dominating the literary scene during the sixties, such as the call for women's education, women's work in the public sphere and women's domesticity issues, having as a goal to start addressing some of what was considered taboo issues such as the question of the female body, sexuality, and teenage pregnancy. The emergence of such writings heralded an awakening of a feminist consciousness that reflected new and revolutionary feminist perceptions. They provided a feminist definition of the question of the female body and sexuality, beyond common patriarchal views. From the 1980s on, women's literature unmasked women's unique feminist approach to writing their bodies and celebrate female subjectivity against what was considered to be unmovable norms. In this context, the very concept of a woman's body and sexuality remained a taboo that resisted critique. The female body remains submerged in patriarchal discourse that not only neglects it but renders it a passive entity that finds its meaning only within the boundaries of male language and desire. The female body was always represented through the system of patriarchy as a source of temptation and pleasure; hence the view that it should be controlled, protected, and veiled. However, the development of women's feminist consciousness entails in its tenets, new perceptions of the female body and sexuality. Within this context, this paper examines Moroccan women's new feminist consciousness of their bodies and sexuality by providing an analytical study of some feminist works by Fatima Mernissi, Soumaya Naamane Guessous, and Ghita El Khayat. Through their feminist writings, such writers attempted to transgress this taboo subject and go beyond the patriarchal assumptions about the female body and sexuality.

Keywords: Female body, Female sexuality, Consciousness-raising, Moroccan feminism, Morocco

Mernissi: Raising Moroccan Women's Consciousness of their Body and Sexuality

The question of the female body and sexuality has been part and parcel of feminist theory and criticism. Mernissi compares the complexity of analyzing this issue to a Moroccan soup

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(harira), for it involves a variety of inconvenient materials². However, she managed to challenge this complexity when she published *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (1975). Such a book has had a great impact on rising feminist consciousness among Moroccan women as it brought them into an awareness of their body and sexuality. It contributed to the transformation of women's consciousness in the sense that it has spawned a radical critique of Arab Muslim society's claims and views about women by unraveling such controversial issues in the modern Muslim society such as female sexuality, sexual segregation, the division of sexual space, and the dynamic relationship between the two sexes. As Mernissi notes,

Beyond the veil is a book about sexual space-boundaries. It tries to grasp sex as it materializes, as it melts into and with space and freezes it in architecture. It started from a harmless question: Why can't I stroll peacefully in the alleys of the Medina that I like and enjoy so much? I came to wonder how the Muslim society designs sexual space, how it projects into space a specific vision of female sexuality.³

To provide insightful answers to these questions, Mernissi explores the depth of the sexual dynamics of Muslims and their field of co-existence, co-habitation, and interaction. The male-female relational patterns become the most essential elements in their multifaceted communities. Mernissi undermines the patriarchal definition of female sexuality and the body by reclaiming the very concept from a feminist (Marxist) perspective. From the onset of her book, she takes offense against Muslim modern society, which is built upon male monopoly and gender hierarchy, suggesting that there is a latent contradiction between what the Muslims actually do in their daily life and the representative discourse they produce about themselves. This contradiction is highly apparent in their treatment of women and in their approach to the question of women's liberation. For instance, as Mernissi points out,

as a modern state Morocco is a member of the United Nations and signed the Declaration of Human Rights...However, as a Muslim society affirming its will to keep the family under traditional Muslim law, Morocco promulgated a code that, whenever possible, dutifully respects the seventh-century *sharia* (divine Law).⁴

The modern era's demands cannot be implemented given the impossibility to adapt them to traditional Muslim law. The first Moroccan "Moudawana"⁵ of 1957 is much highlighted since it is written from a male perspective, basing its laws on a traditional male interpretation of Islam and on Imam Malik's doctrine. This instance reveals the contradiction and the inconsistency in Morocco's situation, an account of its violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which Morocco had ratified. While accepting radical changes in many economic and scientific domains, Moroccan society still remains conservative and resistant to any social change in its perceptions of sex roles and sexual identity. This incoherent position is due, for Mernissi, to the mandatory requirements of being Arab, Muslim with the will of achieving sexual equality. In this

² Fatima Mernissi, "Prologue", *Corps au Féminin*, ed. Aicha Belarbi (Casablanca : Le Fennec, 1991), p. 7

³ Fatima Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male- Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1987), p XV.

⁴ See *Beyond the Veil*, p.12

⁵ This is an Arabic word meaning the Family code in which the rights of men, women, and children are prescribed.

sense, Mernissi argues, there is an intrinsic contradiction between the political interpretation of Islam, and the gender equality that is claimed to subvert its message and law. She explains further, there is a fundamental contradiction between Islam as interpreted in official policy and equality between the sexes. Sexual equality violates Islam's premise, actualized in its Law, that heterosexual love is dangerous to Allah's order...The desegregation between the sexes violates Islam's ideology on women's position in the social order: that women should be under the authority of fathers, brothers, or husbands. Since women are considered by Allah to be a disruptive element, they are to be spatially confined and excluded from matters other than those of the family.⁶

Such a position reveals Mernissi's secular view. It also highlights the fact that sexual equality is incompatible with the Islamic premises, for it foments the social order of the Muslim society, where women's sexuality is considered ravaging and even harmful. As asserted by Raja Rhouni, "Mernissi's standpoint in this book is clearly secularist. At this stage of her scholarship, she unambiguously considers that Islam is based on a fundamental principle of sexual hierarchy and segregation."⁷ Within this secular feminist perspective, Mernissi negotiates painstakingly the question of female sexuality and gender equality.

Mernissi discovered that marriage is major means of subjugating women not only by their husbands, but by mothers-in-law and other male in-laws as well. Consequently, she finds it necessary to relate and justify Muslim attitudes by looking back to the roots. Unlike the contemporary Muslim marriage that nips female sexuality in the bud, the pre-Islamic one celebrates women's active agency morally and sexually in many marital unions. In addition to these institutionalized constrains, sexual segregation is another means that attempts to control female sexuality. Muslim societies, Mernissi argues, are based on the division of male and female space. The Male dominates the public space, while the female is imprisoned in the domestic space, the household. Whenever they dare to penetrate public space, women must veil themselves to assure their invisibility. Therefore, the question of space division in Muslim society suggests with evidence how the latter encourages the binary opposition that privileges men over women to preserve social order. This institutionalized segregation of the sexes accentuates what Mernissi describes as "sexual anomie".⁸ Mernissi's critique of the concept of female sexuality's false image elucidates that the latter is constructed through the discourse of patriarchy. Certainly, Mernissi's conceptualization of female sexuality from a feminist secular perspective represents a challenge to conservative patriarchal views of female sexuality and, it stimulates Moroccan women's consciousness of their sexuality, beyond sexist gender stereotypes. However, Mernissi's feminist theorization of female sexuality has been subject to many critiques. For example, Katherine Bullock rebuts Mernissi's views and regards her argument about such a sensitive topic inconsistent and deficient. According to Bullock, Mernissi considers the Moroccan woman as a prototype to judge and define female sexuality and its control all over the Muslim Arab worlds.⁹ Mernissi is also trapped in a homogeneous analysis of Islam manifested in the advancing of its exterior implication that concerns a maltreatment of women and their sexual difference in the Moroccan context, ignoring its inherent message and principles that are beyond map boundaries. Bullock argues:

⁶ Ibid., p.19

⁷ Ibid., pp. 166- 165.

⁸ See *Beyond the Veil*, p. 148.

⁹ Katherine Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes* (Herndon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2002), p.152.

Mernissi is conflating what she finds in Morocco with normative Islam. Not all Muslim societies, nor even all classes, have secluded, segregated, or veiled women, and the extent to which Muslims view women as sexualized beings needing male control is a topic for anthropological/sociological study of particular groups of people in specific times and places, not for a theory about 'Islam's view of women.'¹⁰ Bullock's critique of Mernissi challenges not only her approach to female sexuality in Islamic tradition, but also stresses her misunderstanding of Islam as a spiritual religion.

Despite Mernissi's critique of female sexuality in Islam, she does represent the most influential radical analysis of this taboo issue, whether in Morocco or in the Arab-Islamic world. Despite her theory's shortcomings, Mernissi has succeeded in increasing Moroccan women's consciousness of their identity, subjectivity and sexuality, and their characterization within their Islamic society. As Sadiqi suggests: "This discourse has sought to politicize women's collective consciousness of their oppression."¹¹ Women's subordination, for Mernissi, is due also to the patriarchal Muslim definition of active female sexuality, which makes veiling and sexual segregation necessary to control the female body. Thus, raising such issues creates a feminist consciousness that challenges all patriarchal definitions of both the female body and female sexuality. Although Moroccan women have started to unmask the patriarchal ideas about female sexuality since 1975, it is Mernissi who first approached this issue from psychoanalytic and sociological perspectives.

Naamane Guessous and AitSabbah: Speaking Back to Moroccan Masculine Power

The development of women's consciousness of their sexuality may be assumed to reach its epic proportions with the publication of Soumaya Naamane-Guessous's bestselling book, *Au-Delà de toute Pudeur: la Sexualité Féminine au Maroc* (1988). Naamane-Guessou [*Beyond Decency: Feminine Sexuality in Morocco*] has discussed Moroccan women's sexual consciousness and has broken the silence about female sexuality, which until recently, has been considered a taboo in Moroccan culture. Her book evinces how the question of the female body and sexuality within the Moroccan culture and society are still an indecent subject to talk about. In her study, Naamane-Guessous responds to the masculine tradition by unveiling its prejudices and breaking out its silence about such crucial issues. This masculine convention perpetuates and deepens women's marginalization by defining the woman via the biological features of her body and reducing it to a corporeal status that should only entertain, amuse and succumb to the man. To subvert these patriarchal views and values about the female body and sexuality, Naamane-Guessous undertakes a detailed study about Moroccan women's sexual life that includes the question of virginity, menstruation, and sexual pleasure or orgasm. From the very beginning of her book, Naamane-Guessous highlights the extent to which patriarchy controls and suffocates everything relating to the female body and sexuality. According to Naamane-Guessous, Islam, unlike other religions, doesn't oppress female sexuality or pleasure; on the contrary, it insists on both men and women's legitimate right to sexual pleasure.¹² Rather, Islam celebrates the beneficent effect of sexual satisfaction for Muslims of both genders. However, in Moroccan society, only patriarchal

¹⁰Katherine Bullock, *Rethinking Muslim Women and the Veil: Challenging Historical and Modern Stereotypes* (Herndon: The International Institute of Islamic Thought, 2002), p.152.

¹¹ See *Women, Gender and Language in Morocco*. P. 24.

¹²*Ibid.*, p. 7

traditions and social norms define female sexuality and the body and set rules that control the female body from birth to adulthood.

Like Mernissi, Naamane-Guessous presents the sexual manifestations of feminine / feminist consciousness in the sense that she discusses the nature of Moroccan women's consciousness of their body and sexuality beyond the patriarchal system. She refutes the patriarchal assumption that depicts woman as Satan—a source of chaos—that can destroy social order if not controlled. For this reason, she interviews women from different classes and ages to shed light on the sexual treatments and attitudes that shape them within the patriarchal Moroccan society. Through these interviews, Naamane-Guessous discovers that Moroccan girls and women have no education either about sexuality, their own body, sexual organs, or their physiological changes. Sexual discrimination is established between the sexes from early childhood. While boys learn how to control and dominate, girls learn how to keep silent and be submissive.¹³ These two last criteria are expected to characterize their ideal beauty.

In her book, *La Femme dans l'inconscient Musulman [Woman in the Muslim Unconscious]* (1984), Fatima Mernissi who published the book with the nickname Fatna Ait Sabbah interrogates the legitimacy of these criteria that define women's beauty in a Muslim context. As she asks,

Why are silence, immobility, and obedience the key criteria of female beauty in the Muslim society where I live and work? ...What does beauty have to do with the right to self-expression? Why, according to the canons of beauty in Islamic literature, does a woman who does not express herself excite desire in a man?¹⁴

AitSabbah or Mernissi dismantles the elements of these questions by analyzing two distinct discourses that characterize Islamic tradition, that of “the erotic discourse and the legal discourse.”¹⁵ She clarifies the extent to which these two discourses define a woman as a subservient sexual object. Legal discourse represents Islam's legitimate sources of the Koran and Sunna and provides the primary basis for defining concepts such as desire, love and the female body, whereas erotic discourse entails the literature that attempts to shed light on the questions of sexuality, sexual fulfillment and genitalia. Through an analysis of some passages from the Koran and from the Arab erotica literature, AitSabbah uncovers what she calls “the religious erotic discourse.”¹⁶ This exercises both divine and male power on the Muslim woman and renders it as “an omniseual woman: a voracious crack.”¹⁷ Within this framework, the Muslim woman is regarded, as explained in *Beyond the Veil*, a source of disorder and temptation that should be in the possession of man, “the representative of and the guardian of Muslim order,”¹⁸ who sets rules for governing her body and sexual desire. For Ait Sabbah, this patriarchal vision is reinforced and legitimized by orthodox discourse which defines woman as “a category whose human dimension is ambiguous. Woman is defined in terms of her function, her relationship to man. As an entity, she is a land, she is a real estate; she is inert.”¹⁹ Such a categorization negates the Muslim woman's self-identity and social existence and considers her, instead, an object whose sole function is to

¹³Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁴Fatna Ait Sabbah, *Woman in the Muslim Unconscious*, trans. Mary Jo Lakeland (New York: Pergamon Press, 1984), p. 3.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 23.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁸Ibid., p.35.

¹⁹See AitSabbah, p. 44.

satisfy men's sexual pleasure: "her other dimensions, especially the psychological, economic, and engendering dimensions, are not reduced or marginalized; they are nonexistent."²⁰ The erotic discourse which also adopts a scientific approach perpetuates such a categorization of women and reiterates the religious discourse's premises by depicting the Muslim woman as "exclusively a physical apparatus".²¹ In this respect, both orthodox and erotic discourses stress the Muslim woman's powerful sexual desire. As mentioned before, Mernissi suggests that female sexuality is considered active, hence sexual segregation; seclusion and the institution of marriage are made necessary to control and anticipate its destructive effects on the social order.²² The Islamic discourse's perception of the Muslim woman as being only a body prevents anything that tries to destabilize the social order such as woman's expression or mobility into the public space and reinforces instead silence and obedience as paramount criteria for her beauty. As Haidah Moghissi confirms,

...woman's expression of her desires and the pursuit of her interest contradicts the interests of man and challenges man's God given rights over woman...The susceptibility of women to corruption, in this view, explains the obsession with sexual purity in Islamic cultures and justifies surveillance of women by family, community, and state.²³

Such surveillance, in Ait Sabbah's view, is ingrained in man's consciousness and unconsciousness at birth via the instructions of the orthodox discourse.

Naamane-Guessous identifies in her fieldwork the root of such negative attitudes towards the female body. It goes back to the period of childhood when both girls and boys are deprived of sexual education to acquire sexual discrimination instead. As Susan S. Davis argues, "boys are preferred to girls at birth. Since girls will ultimately marry out of the family, and also represent a constant source of danger to the family honour, they are less desired than boys."²⁴ During infancy, sexual hierarchy is established in the mind of both girls and boys. Girls are indoctrinated by their families to believe that they have no authority over their bodies or their sexuality. They are advised during their puberty to protect their bodies and their genital organs more than their own eyes, not for their own sake, but for the sake of future husbands. According to Naamane-Guessous, during puberty and with the first menstruation, the female body becomes a source of problems and anxiety. At this stage, girls learn that these corporeal natural changes are shameful and taboo and are not talked about in public. As in the Western context, Kate Millet points out, "the event of menstruation, for example, is largely a clandestine affair".²⁵ It is surrounded by silence and fear because it is a clear signal of the girl's mature body. In this respect, all the cultural and the religious ceremonies that the family prepares for this event are to highlight the importance of virginity in a girl's life. As Millet argues, "all patriarchies have hedged virginity defloration in elaborate rites and interdictions".²⁶ It is clear that such negative sexual education that is marked by prohibition

²⁰Ibid., p.25.

²¹Ibid., p. 45.

²² See *Beyond the Veil*, p. 30.

²³Haidah Moghissi, *Feminism and Islamic Fundamentalism* (London: Zed Books, 1999), p. 20.

²⁴Susan Schaefer. Davis, *Patience and Power: Women's Lives in a Moroccan Village* (Rochester and Vermont: Schenkman Books, Inc, 1978), p. 19.

²⁵Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics*, (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), p. 23.

²⁶Ibid., p. 24.

and inhibition is due to a patriarchal ideology that reduces women's identity to their sexual organs. Abdessamad Dialmy sheds light on this question with reference to the Moroccan context:

Woman has become the totality of *farj* (or *vulva*) because *farj* is an opening and signifies fragility, that is, a lack. Evidently, this negative meaning became mechanically linked to the woman as a result of the subjection of the Arab mind to a patriarchal logic that is predicated on considering the female a lacking being, and therefore in diminishing the woman and belittling her. Furthermore, the reduction of *farj* to the woman, and to her sexual organ at that, expresses this negative diminution that the concept of sex has undergone in Arab and Islamic history, namely, its movement from the status of scientific concept and from a valuable status into what is without meaning and without value.²⁷

Such patriarchal logic shapes the consciousness of both men and women, within the Muslim Arab society, and it accounts for sexual hierarchy. This negative definition of women's identity as a "lacking being" produces sexual oppression and maintains male authority over women's minds and bodies. Naamane-Guessous explains that this negative image of viewing women as subordinate sexual objects has its roots within patriarchal society—including the family. Most of the time, the relationship between the father and his daughter is based on power and decency not on respect and dialogue. As Davis suggests, "even in the presence of her father, a girl will never make eye contact, keep her head slightly inclined, and not initiate conversation."²⁸ These traditional customs invade the girl's consciousness from the onset of her puberty and render her submissive and obedient to male authority—the father and the elder brother within her family, and later on the husband.

The root cause of this conventional belief and attitude towards women stems from the patriarchal representation of the female body as a symbol of honor and communal dignity. This is why the veil and sexual segregation have become mandatory in Islamic societies in order to suffocate women's sensual energy. By breaking the taboo of Moroccan women's sexuality, Naamane-Guessous tackles also the question of the veil as a symbol of keeping women in seclusion by covering their body. As she claims, "ces efforts pour contrôler le potentiel sensuel que représente le corps de la jeune fille, se sont longtemps concrétisés dans le port du voile."²⁹ The veil has turned out to be, in Moroccan society, an instrument of oppressing women rather than a sign of religious faith. According to Naamane-Guessous, most girls wear the veil for fear of either disobeying their fathers or subverting the hierarchical familial order. As she argues, "certaines portent la *dejelleba* sous la contrainte de leurs père ou de leurs frères qui jugent indécentes les toilettes actuelles. Cette contrainte illustre bien le rapport de hiérarchie auquel se trouve soumise la jeune fille à l'intérieur de la famille."³⁰ [Some girls wear *dejellaba* under the constraint of their fathers or brothers who consider the current clothing indecent. Such constraint illustrates well the hierarchical relationship to which the girl is subjected within the family.³¹] The veil, in this context, is emptied of its religious and spiritual significance and becomes a tool that is imposed on the girl without any logical justification. Marnia Lazreg argues that, "there is no religious or moral ground on which to justify the forced induction of a girl into the culture of veiling. When she wraps a scarf over her young daughter, a mother conveys to her the belief that her body is an object of shame or

²⁷Abdessamad Dialmy and Allen J.Uhlman, "Sexuality in Contemporary Arab Society", p.14
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/23178870>, accessed on 20/12/2013 05:37.

²⁸ Susan S. Davis, p. 23

²⁹See Naamane-Guessous, p. 27

³⁰See Naamane-Guessous, p. 28

³¹ My own translation

special concern for others.”³² Again the fear of the female body’s seductive power constructs the veil as another tool that accentuates a woman’s denial of her body, and alienation from herself. The veil as such turns out to be a visible sign that restricts a woman’s freedom and objectifies her body, for the latter is described as a source of temptation that should be protected and controlled. All these cultural constraints that the family imposes on the girl are inevitably expected to suppress her sexual desire and render it possible only within the legitimate sacred bond of marriage.

Thus, by going beyond the veil, and beyond propriety, Naamane-Guessous elucidates the extent to which these traditional rules affect the sexual relationship between the wife and the husband within the institution of marriage. Most of Naamane-Guessous’s interviewees claim that marriage is the last resort to get some freedom from the constraints of the family.³³ Such girls enter marriage without any emotional feelings for the future husband, for it is the father (the wali) who has the authority to choose the suitable man for his daughters. As Fatna Ait Sabbah suggests, “Muslim marriage is an exchange of a woman between two men, the wali and the future husband.”³⁴ Such marriage that existed in Morocco before the reform of the Mudawanna reveals the extent to which the Moroccan woman had no right to choose her sexual partner inside marriage. In this respect, Naamane-Guessous finds out that most girls that enter such traditional marriage at an early age have no sexual education before. In other words, they find many problems in expressing their sexual needs and desires with their husbands. Some of Naamane-Guessous’s interviewees confess that their sexual awakening begins during the wedding night when the taboo of sex is broken for the first time, for the whole family of the bride is waiting to see the blood—the proof of virginity and honor. However, some of these interviewees describe sexual intercourse during this night as a sort of rape that has a negative effect on their sexual life. The question of sexuality within these conditions becomes for the woman a duty and a heavy burden, rather than a source of pleasure. Within the institution of marriage, such women think that their main role is to satisfy their husband’s sexual pleasure and bring up children. Others consider sexuality as a powerful tool to subdue men and render them submissive to their will. In this sense, sexuality does not signify sensual pleasure, and most of these women don’t know what an orgasm means. This is because of the negative patriarchal attitude towards feminine sexuality and the body.

Not only does phallogentric domination pervade women socially, economically, and politically, but also sexually. Early marriage, sexual segregation, and sexual dissatisfaction are but traditional norms and customs to subdue women and control their body. As Carla Makhlouf advances, “the need to control women is traditionally addressed in Morocco by premarital seclusion, early marriage and a wedding ritual that requires proof of virginity.”³⁵ Thus, the conceptualization of female sexuality as being a source of fitna and chaos renders these male-oriented rules that govern female sexuality and body from birth, natural and necessary to maintain the social order. As Amal Rassam asserts, “the codes of female modesty, veiling and seclusion are thus all seen as solutions to the need to ‘protect’ society from the possible consequences of female sexuality.”³⁶

³²Marnia Lazreg, *Questioning the Veil: Open Letters to Muslim Women* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), p. 29.

³³See Naamane-Guessous, p. 64.

³⁴See AitSabbah, p. 35.

³⁵ Carla Makhlouf Obermeyer, “Sexuality in Morocco: Changing Contests and Contesting Domains.” <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3986662>, accessed on 20/12/2013, p. 243.

³⁶Amal Rassam, “Towards a Theoretical Framework for the Study of Women in the Arab World” *Social Science Research and Women in the Arab World* (Paris: Unesco, 1984), p.129.

Nonetheless, from the 1980s onwards, many Moroccan women have started to redefine their sexuality in their own way, and manifestations of their feminist consciousness of sexuality have become palpable. In the view of Naamane-Guessous, the effects of television, satellite dishes, and the mass media have paved the way for many women to transgress the patriarchal cultural values that have shaped the minds of their family members and society as well. For example, Rassam cites a survey which concludes that 65, 3% of such women have had sexual intercourse before marriage, and among them, 38,6 % have lost their virginity. Most of these women are educated; they belong to the young generation and their age is less than thirty.³⁷ This category of women has experienced sexual pleasure by engaging in pre-marital love affairs. However, most of the time, sexual affairs are kept secret and surrounded by anxiety and fear. Although these women have managed to subvert their families' cultural beliefs, they cannot challenge the ambivalent inconsistent male attitude of their partners toward such sexual intercourse. It seems that on the one hand the Moroccan man enjoys such pre-marital encounters, but on the other hand blames it on the woman whom he considers as a mere sexual object without virtue. As Obermeyer points out, "the importance of premarital chastity in the context of power lineage structures, translates into a system of double standards. While it is considered natural that men have strong sexual needs and can seek satisfaction with many women, good women remain virgins until marriage and have limited interest in sex afterwards."³⁸ In this respect, women's sexuality is vulnerable to patriarchal dominance and codes both inside and outside the institution of marriage. Unfortunately, this cultural norm, which permeates Moroccan social institutions, suffocates women's sexual desire and turns them into mere sexual objects. In this context, these women are experiencing what Martha C. Nussbaum calls "sexual objectification of one person by another, the seeing and /or treating of someone as an object. In all cases, the objectified person is a sexual partner or would – be sexual partner."³⁹ Indeed, Most of Naamane-Guessous's interviewees assert the reality of this male objectification, especially within the context of sexual relationships where they are reduced to what Naamane-Guessous describes as the triangle that connects the womb, genital organs and the vagina.⁴⁰ The reduction of women to their genital dimensions voids sexual intercourse from any noble emotions to transform into a trade of the female body.

It seems clear that Naamane-Guessous's book suggests a development of Moroccan women's new perception of their bodies and sexuality beyond social and historical constraints. Her book focuses on a particular aspect of consciousness that is manifested in the rise of women's consciousness of their bodies and sexuality. Such a consciousness challenges existing phallogocentric privileges and construct instead sexual equality and sexual freedom. Naamane-Guessous's analysis of such a taboo subject within Moroccan society is in attempt to produce an alternative mode of thought that defines and gives new meanings to the female body and sexuality. As she suggests, young women should be aware of the patriarchal ideology that seeks to identify them as mere sexual bodies without souls or minds. Women, on the contrary, should impose their existence by their intelligence and intellectual production, not by embellishing their bodies with cosmetics to seduce men and succumb to their desires. Like Mernissi who "urges women to throw away expensive face creams in favor of the invigorating 'elixir of youth' that is

³⁷See Naamane-Guessous, p. 196.

³⁸See Obermeyer, p. 243.

³⁹Martha C. Nussbaum, *Sex and Social Justice* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 123.

⁴⁰See Guessous, p. 258.

writing,”⁴¹Naamane-Guessous encourages Moroccan women to write their bodies and sexuality beyond the misogynist discourse in order to hold sway over their own life and generate change.

Moroccan Women: A Literary Voice of their own

Apart from sociological essays, Moroccan women have disseminated their feminist views on such questions through fiction. For instance, Ghita El Khayat, the first Moroccan woman psychiatrist in Morocco, endowed Moroccan women’s literature with her novel *La Liaison*, one of the most intriguing novels that stirred woman’s consciousness about her body and sexuality in an explicit and original way. As Najib Redouane asserts, “Lyne Taywa’s love affair is presented as one of the hardest and most daring female writings in Morocco”⁴²Lyne Taywa was the pseudonym under which El khayat signed her novel in 1985. The word “tywalyne” is a Berber word that is fraught with metaphorical significances. It means literally “my eyes” and metaphorically “my love”. Indeed, the question of love and sexuality permeates the novel from the beginning to the end. For this reason, the author was obliged to write it under the pen name of Tywalyne because she didn’t feel free: “Because I was not and I did not feel free, because my education was fiercely rigid, which explains the violence of the book»⁴³[]However, in such a novel, the heroine challenges the rigid conventions of patriarchal Moroccan society to give vent to her feminine feelings of love and desire, whereby she acquires a new female consciousness. As Wafaa Malih argues, «I am a delicious body; I create a delicious language, deep in its thought, immersed in affection, that is my writings, and that is me the female”.⁴⁴ With an explicit and “delicious language”, the heroine of *La Liaison* expresses her feelings that are amalgamated with love and hate, delight and sorrow. From the outset of the novel, the heroine confesses her feelings of love and desire for a man whose attitude towards her is ambiguous and confused. She aspires for a platonic mutual love; yet she only loves without being loved. She reflects, “love is a project for two persons, in our case it was personal and unique, for he did not love me »⁴⁵ Such an insight demonstrates the heroine’s growing awareness of the nature of her liaison with her lover who can never recognize a woman’s noble feelings. As she describes him, “poor, crazy and depraved man who could never believe in the splendor of a woman who love!”⁴⁶ Through her sexual experience with her lover, she comes to acquire what her mother hasn’t shown her in her childhood. « My mother taught me nothing and I learned nothing except a fake realism. I spent twenty years after my dislocated adolescence trying to get back on my feet. »⁴⁷ The heroine confirms Guessous’s argument that most women in Morocco lack sexual education and have no control over their body or sexuality. El Khayat depicts the heroine as a woman suffering from a lover who desires solely her body. Detailed descriptions of her sexual intercourse with her lover point out the lover’s rigid emotions and lack of affection for her. Although the heroine feels ecstasy during the sexual intercourse with her lover, she cries out for platonic love. Many times, she accuses: “I am sick of

⁴¹ Anne Meneley, “Review of Women’s Rebellion and Islamic Memory” *Women, the Family, and Divorce Laws in Islamic History*. Vol. 25, No. 2 (Winter, 2000), pp. 614-617. JSTOR Web.

⁴²Najib Redouane, *Ecriture Féminine au Maroc : Continuité et Evolution* (Paris : Harmattan, 2006), p. 117.

⁴³Ibid., p. 10.

⁴⁴See Wafaa Malih, *Ana AlOuntha, Ana AlMobdiaa [I am the Female, I am the Creator]* (Rabat, Dar Al Alman, 2009) p .12 (My own translation).

⁴⁵See *La Liaison*, P.53

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 67

⁴⁷Ibid., p.68

having sex without love”.⁴⁸ Suffering and pain dominate the whole novel. The heroine, who is the sole narrator in the novel, is totally conscious of her manipulating lover who treats her as an inferior object/body of desire. Such liaison is shaped by alienation and objectification, the narrator’s search for true love all throughout the novel leads her to succumb to her lover’s desires and whims though she recognizes that he can throw her away as “ a stained handkerchief that should be used no more than once.” Her passion is so overwhelming that she cannot tolerate his absence. To preserve him beside her, she obeys his orders and grants him what he desires. As she states, “of course I did everything he told me and much more.”⁴⁹ Through such experience, the narrator reveals the extent to which her lover named X controls and dominates her body and sexuality. She questions such a masculine control : “Comment une femme peut-elle tirer plaisir de ce qu’un homme lui imprime sa domination ? ⁵⁰ [How can a woman get pleasure from a man who dominates her?]⁵¹ This liaison brings the heroine into a new consciousness about her body and sexuality. Her consciousness of masculine power structures the novel; she stops many times to reflect from her own perspective on the nature of such a liaison: “La liaison c’est le lien indispensable pour vivre car sans elle quelque chose manque même avec un conjoint, des enfants, un foyer et des grandeurs de toute sortes.⁵² But she insists on the fact that her relationship with her lover should be very special. She notes: “the particularity of this love affair, which made me lose control over time and events, is essentially passionate.”⁵³ The heroine’s life is filled with love but also with tragedy. The tragedy of such love is manifested deeply in its inability to create a new life. But it has created the heroine’s consciousness of her submissive situation to a man that doesn’t deserve her love at all.

Ghita El Khayat’s novel *La Liaison* has transgressed the taboo of sexuality and contributed to raising women’s feminist consciousness of their bodies and sexuality by advancing a call for a liberal discourse on female sexuality. Her novel elucidates her being influence by the feminist sexual revolution in the Western world during the 1960s and 1980s. This revolution was part and parcel of the women’s liberation movement and implied women’s sexual freedom and experience. As Bell Hooks notes, “women’s liberation was often equated with sexual liberation.”⁵⁴ Sexual liberation in the West was conveyed through the proliferation of special novels that celebrated women’s sexual pleasure and desire. For instance, D.H Laurence and Henry Miller’s novels raised Western women’s consciousness about female sexuality beyond established traditional values. “They urged women to initiate sexual advances, to enjoy sex, to experiment with new relationships, to be sexually ‘free’.”⁵⁵ In the same context, El Khayat has raised Moroccan women’s sexual consciousness about sexuality by depicting woman’s feelings and sexual pleasure during the sexual intercourse, while portraying the woman’s vibrant body and “fired heart” with love and passion. Nonetheless, as a psychoanalyst, El Khayat dismantles the surrounding conditions that govern man and woman’s liaison in a conventional society such as Morocco, where woman’s sexual desire is pushed to a secondary position.

In her book *le Monde Arabe au Féminin*, El Khayat asserts that woman in the Arab Muslim society is denied her sexual desire; she is only an object used to satisfy man’s sensual pleasure. As she argues, in the Arab world, the woman is just the bed of pleasure of the man and not the partner

⁴⁸Ibid., p.83

⁴⁹See *La Liaison*, p.98

⁵⁰ Ibid., p.99.

⁵¹ My own translation.

⁵²Ibid., p.94

⁵³Ibid., p.101

⁵⁴Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory from Margin to Center* (London: Pluto Press, 2000), p. 148.

⁵⁵Ibid.

of exchange in all the confines of pleasure.⁵⁶ This is very clear in the novel where Tywalyne's lover treats her as body and not as a human being that is in dire need of love and tenderness. In this book, El khayat carves out a niche for herself to stand out against patriarchal definition of female desire. El Khayat criticizes Sheikh Nefzawi's biased interpretation of female pleasure in his *Perfumed Garden*. As she argues, it is, alas, more than widespread that the woman is an undoubted danger, there are innumerable Arab scholars who have insisted on the danger it represents, and Sheikh Nefzawi is no exception."⁵⁷ According to El Khayat, approaches to female desire and sexuality prove the extent to which the Arab Muslim women are regarded as inferior being in comparison to male desire, which is privileged both on earth and in heaven. In this context, she criticizes also Abdelwahab Bouhdiba's description of paradise's "Houris" who wait impatiently for their worldly masters to offer them great sexual bliss. El Khayat's main concern with the question of sexuality stems from her conviction that women's liberation movement can take place only when woman has been granted the right over her body. As she points out, "women's liberation necessarily goes through their sexual fulfillment, and, if psychoanalysis has been one of the sources for feminism, in spite of all its insufficiencies in terms of women, it is because it allowed the right to desire and pleasure."⁵⁸ Like Mernissi, Guessous, and Belarbi, El Khayat considers women's consciousness of their body and sexuality as part and parcel of their liberation. In fact, such women have created their own language and their own writings to claim their body consciousness from a feminist perspective and beyond what Julia Kristiva calls the confinement of the public order, the symbolic, which is phallogocentric.⁵⁹

Women's feminist consciousness entails in its folds body consciousness. As Winnie Tomm asserts, "every person's consciousness includes body consciousness."⁶⁰ Moroccan women's writings about the body as sexuality articulate a crucial strategy to inscribe new reflections and perceptions of the female body and sexuality through the medium of language. According to Tomm, "to emphasize women's bodies in language is not to fall into a depressing biological determinism. Rather it is to celebrate the reality of women as embodied knowers. It is to acknowledge desire in will."⁶¹ Within this literary production and linguistic framework, Moroccan women have created their own feminist language as an alternative to the phallogocentric language. Wafaa Malih considers such writings as an attempt that can allow women to recover their femininity through writing their bodies through a feminized language.⁶² According to her, such women have produced a communicative feminist discourse that has unveiled their situation and paved the way for their awakening. However, Moroccan women have made use of multiple strategies to convey their feminist consciousness.

⁵⁶Ghita El Khayat, *Le Monde Arabe au Féminin* (Paris : Harmattan, 1985), p. 50.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸ Quoted in Evelyne Accad, *Sexuality and War: Literary Masks of the Middle East* (New York: New York University Press, 1990), p. 233.

⁵⁹ Cited in Wikipedia, "Julia Kristiva," accessed on March 12, 2013.

⁶⁰Winnie Tomm, *Bodied Mindfulness: Women's Spirits, Bodies and Places* (Waterloo and Ontario: Wilfred Laurier University Press, 1995), p.124.

⁶¹Ibid.,p. 125.

⁶²Wafaa Malih, *Ana Al OunthaanaanaAl Mobdiaa*[I am the Female, I am the Creator] (Rabat: Dar Al Alman, 2009), p. 16.

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