
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Shifting Narratives: Gender in Moroccan Cinema

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| ABSTRACT

This paper endeavours to examine four cinematic works crafted by directors from Morocco, specifically Farida Benlyazid's *Women's Wives* (1999), Yasmine Kassari's *The Dormant Baby* (2004), Latif Lahlou's *Samira's Garden* (2007), and Hamid Zoughi's *Kharboucha* (2008). Through the lenses of feminist theory and discourse analysis, this exploration delves into how contemporary Moroccan cinema has been reshaping the narratives surrounding femininity and masculinity. This cinema has not merely offered new avenues for representation to women directors; it has profoundly challenged and transformed conventional portrayals in film production. The Moroccan filmmakers in question emerge as active agents in challenging local cultural and social limitations, striving to play a crucial role in the "liberation" of women while also portraying masculinity in a state of turmoil.

| KEYWORDS

Female-hood, Male-hood, Gender Identity, Cinematic Discourse, Subalternity, Representation.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

This research study examines gender politics in Moroccan movie production by both males and females. The objective is to analyse and scrutinise the portrayal of femininity and masculinity in Moroccan cinema, while identifying instances where Moroccan filmmaking generates novel patterns of representation. Moreover, it primarily seeks to illustrate how cinematic discourses have evolved, to some extent, in favour of women to the detriment of males. The primary objective is to reveal the degree to which males are as marginalised and misrepresented as women. In other words, how emerging trends in Moroccan film empower women and contest established gender role expectations. This research article will investigate if Moroccan filmmakers, regardless of gender, have proposed alternatives to the prevailing paradigm of women's portrayal in cinematic works, particularly those produced by male filmmakers. Furthermore, the study seeks to present an analysis of how Moroccan film production has transformed and redefined the depiction of gender concerns.

The films selected for analysis are Hamid Zoughi's *Kharboucha* (2008), Latif Lahlou's *Samira's Garden* (2007), Yasmine Kassari's *the Dormant Baby* (2004), and Farida Benlyazid's *Women's Wives* (1999). The four films offer a distinctive viewpoint on gender identity, notably portraying females as powerful figures while marginalising males. Furthermore, the filmmakers have embraced a novel perspective in depicting the cultural, social, and political narratives around gender creation. I aim to examine and generate fresh fears over these fabricated images and their empowering and disempowering consequences.

Essential concepts such as femininity, masculinity, gender identity, subalternity, and cinematic discourse are pivotal to my approach. The films of Zoughi, Lahlou, Kassari, and Benlyazid, produced over the past two decades, prominently feature gender construction as a significant issue, potentially reflecting feminist concerns. My contention is that gender identification is shown differently in the four films to challenge the conventional gender norms assigned to women and men based on their sexual identity.

Motivated by feminist awareness, the filmmakers have significantly advanced the exploration of new dimensions of identity. Indeed, as seen in the films, novel methods of representation and perception have been showcased.

The portrayal of women in the examined films is substantial, indicating that they are neither misrepresented nor under-represented. Empowering women via cinematography is a crucial element in the filmmaking process of these films. The film makers have amplified women's voices while depicting males in a manner that negates the societal benefits attributed to them in a patriarchal culture. Consequently, it is reasonable to assert that male identity is discursively deconstructed and, as a result, lacks mechanisms of authority. This study employs several theories. My methodology for analysing the four films is deconstructive. My analytical readings are grounded in concepts from feminist cinema criticism, discourse analysis, and post-colonial critique. My method is distinctive in its interpretation of films as innovative visuals through analogous cinematic discursive forms, as well as the subtleties of meanings assigned to the comparable views of female and male filmmakers. The objective is to examine the construction and deconstruction of gender identity by Moroccan filmmakers. The chosen methodology is an author-reader orientated approach. My objective is to critically and aesthetically analyse the discursive efforts of films. This paper also focuses on Moroccan cinema as a postcolonial realm, examining the contributions of both female and male filmmakers, as well as the principal theories and methodologies employed in analysing its discursive constructions. I present key issues and discussions in modern Moroccan film, contextualising them within the post-independence period and the broader historical narrative of the nation.

This paper also opts for an analytical approach, applying the theories addressed before to examine the films under consideration. Their purported emancipatory tendency and the novel gender views they offer are essential to the thesis's study. Kharboucha by Zoughi examines the conflict between genders, focussing on their inherent traits, and how the inequitable connection engenders a resolute opposition to patriarchal ideologies from women. Secondly, Lahlou's *Samira's Garden* examines the influence of sex and sexual identity on the self-perception of both genders, so delineating the bounds and limitations of self-definition. Third, Kassari's *The Dormant Baby* primarily examines the construction of subaltern identities in the context of centre-periphery dynamics, with a particular emphasis on women as dual subalterns in my study. Fourth, Benlyazid's *Women's Wives* exposes the underlying conflict between the sexes and proposes a potential escape from their metaphorical confinement.

The portrayal of gender has incited a vigorous discussion on the formulation of femininity and masculinity in film. This study seeks to address many topics pertaining to gender portrayal in cinematic works. What is the attitude to gender in female and male cinema? To what degree have Moroccan filmmakers effectively articulated women's concerns? Do subaltern women possess a voice in Moroccan cinema?

1.1 Moroccan Cinema and Gender

I will try to present an overview of Moroccan film, the idea of gender, and the principal theoretical assumptions that have been articulated about cinema. To construct a coherent and argumentative approach in this paper, it is essential to examine the evolution of cinema production in Morocco, focussing on subjects, technical production methods, and the organisations that provide financial support for film creation. While my primary emphasis is on films from the past two decades, it is essential to succinctly examine the Moroccan movie industry from 1956 to the present, as this approach will provide varied viewpoints and fresh ideas for analysing the subject of this article.

Numerous causes have evidently influenced Moroccan film. Notable among these are filmmakers, governmental money, international financing organisations, and primarily the Centre Cinématographique Marocain (CCM). Furthermore, the portrayal of gender issues has been integral to filmmakers' works since Morocco started its film production for both television and cinema. Furthermore, the portrayal of both genders, whether overtly or subtly, has been a fundamental aspect of every film made. However, Morocco lacks a critical analysis of the representations of both genders. The foundation and evolution of the filmmaking industry in Morocco, from independence to the present; prevalent gender theorisation; the interplay of discourses; and the expressions of subalternity have been the primary focus of investigation.

In his book *Postcolonial Images: Studies in North African Cinema*, Roy Armes (2006) analyses the political and cultural framework of the film industry in the post-independence period. He presents a valuable analysis of North African film in the post-independence era that seeks to challenge and disrupt the rigid geographical and chronological frameworks. Immigrant, Third, national, and Militant cinemas are classified as distinct types that arose post-1970s. Films from Algeria, Tunisia, and Morocco were presented under these titles, alongside works from directors predominantly located in the West, including France, the Netherlands, Belgium, and the United States.' An examination of gender identity, devoid of insights into the evolution of the movie industry, would yield an inadequate analysis of the subject matter. Moroccan cinema is considered a burgeoning industry, as it has significantly advanced in both production capabilities and the volume of films produced compared to other Maghreb nations. Consequently, several films made address social, economic, and political themes that resonate with the genuine concerns of Moroccans.

'Third Cinema,' a genre that originated in the 1960s, warrants theoretical examination, as nearly all cinema produced in the Third World is classified under this framework. It is essential to succinctly address the primary facets of this genre, as the films I plan to analyse are profoundly engaged with identity politics. The disparity in gender representation in film is a political issue that necessitates re-evaluation through a non-gendered cinematic approach. Men and women are crucial to movie creation, prompting discussions about their depiction. Feminist movements have significantly focused on the importance or insignificance of women's representations in cinema production, given their profound commitment to advocating for women's rights and enhancing their portrayal in media. Furthermore, feminists primarily concentrate on critiquing what is perceived as the detrimental portrayal of women, so actively striving to rectify this unfavourable image. Consequently, several critical texts are created to illustrate the negative characteristics attributed to women in cinematic representations. This study focusses on the significant role of film in shaping and rebuilding the identities of both genders, highlighting its impact on the portrayal of gender differences.

Gendered subalternity has been a central subject explored by critics of subaltern studies. It is crucial to provide the fundamental formulations established by these critics on the condition of what they termed the doubly isolated and subjugated women in society. The restoration of women's agency and identity was central to the critical studies and writings of subalternists. Consequently, they posed a question that interrogated the existence of subalterns broadly and women specifically, so choosing to seek a response 'from below'; namely, can the subaltern articulate their voice?

Cinema, as a profoundly discursive discipline, should be advocated for grounds of coherence and consistency. The recommended films should be critically analysed using established theoretical frameworks in social sciences; therefore, it is essential to provide the key conceptualisations that influence the construction and propagation of power.

1.2 Screening Moroccan Cinema: Postcolonial Morocco: Building a Cinema.

Postcolonial Moroccan film has been primarily shaped by the cinematic legacy of France. The French coloniser established a cinematic framework and model that Morocco adopted; production techniques and institutions remained mostly unchanged until Morocco's independence in 1956, since French colonialism has had a significant historical and cultural influence on Morocco. The French utilised film during the late protectorate era as a propagandistic instrument to sustain their dominance over the colonised and to instil a belief in their togetherness under French governance. Sandra Gayle Carter (2009), in her book *What Moroccan Cinema?*, underscores this assertion '*The Protectorate led to cinema being housed under the Ministry of the Interior because the French saw cinema as a propaganda tool to direct the population in a way more in tune with the mission of the Interior.*', France, hence, developed a cinema that would serve its colonialist aims under the cover of establishing a national and local cinema. Another dimension that shaped cinematic production at this period was, as argued by some critics, the French orientalist constructs on Morocco. Films produced in the earlier time by the French focused on the exotic aspects of Moroccan life, because the aim was introducing the 'other' to the 'self' as an alien who needs cultivation. On this imaginary orientalist tactics, Edward Said (1979) argues that 'Orientalism expresses and represents that part culturally and ideologically as a mode of discourse with supporting institutions, vocabulary, scholarship, imagery, doctrines, even colonial bureaucracies and colonial styles.' Indeed, General Lyautey, who was in charge of Moroccan Culture affairs at the time, encouraged the production of films that praised the French colonial empire and promoted the colonial agenda which was cast as a Mission Civilisatrice.

The cinematic advancements and innovations introduced by the French during the late colonial period in Morocco significantly facilitated the emergence of Moroccan film production in the post-independence era. Despite the significant impact of French cinematic concepts on Moroccan filmmaking, the substantial advantages of that era for the postcolonial Moroccan film industry should not be overlooked. Despite Morocco's official declaration of independence in 1956, French presence and influence remained a significant aspect of Moroccan life. The new authorities of Morocco utilised film to propagate beliefs that were both imperialist and nationalist. Following 1956, Moroccan cinema was characterised by a tendency of creating films that advocated for unity among the populace based on the foundational principles of the nation-state, including Islam as the predominant religion, the integrity of Moroccan territory, and the monarch as a symbol of cohesion. However, the requirements of audiences were disregarded by the films produced, indicating that filmmakers were less connected to Moroccan viewers and more aligned with the objectives of the new state. Furthermore, independence signified that Moroccans assumed control over the management of the different organisations governing and creating audio and video media; nonetheless, there was no substantial alteration to the rules and processes that prevailed throughout the protectorate. Consequently, Moroccan cinema persisted in functioning under the 'French tutelage' and guidance. (Said, 1979).

Moulay Ahmed Alaoui, Minister of Tourism between 1979 and 1980, speaking at The Congress of the International Association of Scientific Cinema in Tangier (1968):

It is not a question of whether cinema is for us a diversion. Certainly, it is necessary to be entertained, but in the periods of construction or restructuration one must, above all, educate, train and instruct. . . . In the realm of training in a country such as ours where it is necessary to train in a very short time period the largest number of workers possible, cinema is an important factor. For the masses, it is a means of spreading

knowledge. In effect . . . thanks to the cinema, the masses can become conscious of the modern era in which they live and thus live at the level of their era.

In such early time, Moroccan policymakers were aware of the great importance of cinema for state building. Hence, the first task was to have cinema workers trained and skilled in all areas related to cinematic production. On the other hand, there was a necessity to have a national cinema production, because the consumption of foreign productions has been dominating the scene, and hence officials sought to support local productions that would meet the needs and desires of the masses in a mediated era.

In the last two decades, Morocco has become a leader in the Maghreb in establishing a cinematic industry which reflects the shifts and changes in society. Due to the growth of films production-- Moroccan filmmakers produce two or three full-length films a year-- attendance at theaters has increased. Among the notable films of this period we find *Love in Casablanca* (Un Amour à Casablanca, Abdelkader Lagtaa, 1991), *Searching for My Wife's Husband* (A la Recherche du Mari de ma Femme, Mohamed A. Tazi, 1993), and, recently, *Marock* (Leïla Marrakchi, 2005) and *Casanegra* (Nureddine Lakhmari, 2007), all of which have achieved immense commercial success.

The main obstacle that has been facing Moroccan cinema industry from the very beginning up to now was the lack of reliable and stable resources to fund films. The CCM as a state institution is still struggling with finding strategies to finance an industry that generates little income and exclusively dependent on state financial assistance. Moreover, with the mass use of technology devices, the number of movie theatres has increasingly dropped off and led to deepen the crisis of the industry which relayed partly on the attendance of the audience to boost incomes. Moreover, Cinema has not been transformed into an industry that generates income but persists as a burden on the public finance. Convincingly, critics believe that Moroccan cinema has greatly progressed in terms of production and content. The number of festivals that are held every year is symptomatic of this noticeable advancement. Moreover, Morocco being called 'Hollywood Africa'¹ is not really resulting from vacuum, yet a reality that shows the country's international fame as a locale for filming, and recently a major regional producer of films. Evidently, nowadays, Moroccan films are shown in most famous cinema festivals in the world, such as Canne, Berlin, Cairo, etc.

All in all, Moroccan cinema has largely progressed recently in tandem with the development the country undergoing in various domains. Indeed, in the age of globalization and mass used technology, cinema has become an indicator of countries' progress.

1.3 The Moroccan Cinema Centre (CCM): Institutionalizing Cinema.

The Moroccan Cinema Centre (MCC), which was brought into being in 1944 and restructured in 1977, has been assigned the organization and promotion of the film-making industry in Morocco. Besides, The Centre is also in control of implementing rules and regulations in all the professions of the cinematic domain. The French after somehow taking over and controlling Morocco started establishing the institutions that would serve their mission which combines soft and brute power. So, the establishment of the CCM as an institution for cinematic production was a major instrument and end for them, because they convincingly knew the power of media at the time. As a result, they co-operated with Moroccan authorities to issue a decree for setting up a local body for cinema under their control.

A Dahir of January 8, 1944, modified by Dahirs of March 15, 1945, and November 29, 1949, states in its first article: 'A CCM ...has as its object the production, distribution and projection of cinema films 'as well as the construction of a cinémathèque. This organism is a public establishment given a civil personality and financial autonomy' as mentioned by Carter G. S, in the book of *What Moroccan Cinema? (2009)* Nevertheless the French establishment of different institutions played great roles in facilitating their process of exploitation; what the French, in fact, did was highly sophisticated and beyond the then Moroccan traditional political system capability to grasp.

According to Maillot, the formation of the CCM in 1944 was a turning point in the history of cinema in Morocco. Yet, the State took over cinema production and came to play the role of a producer and distributor rather than simply a content controller. Indeed, the CCM played a major role in institutionalizing Moroccan cinema and made it a key locomotive in the historical changes that Morocco underwent in the 20th century. Moreover, that historical role can be seen obviously in the amount and the themes of films produced in/on Morocco, and this hardly could be the case elsewhere in the ex-colonized countries of the Maghreb.

Since the Moroccan CCM was created while Morocco was still under colonialism, it was a mere replica of the French CNC (National Cinema Center)²; thence, it followed the French *modus operandi*. The newly created Moroccan institution was given the mission of institutionalizing and regulating cinema in the country. On the charges attributed to the CCM, Carter Gayle (2009) states:

¹ Morocco has become one of the most attractive platforms for filming for many filmmakers. Various international and well-known movies have been shot in Morocco--particularly in Ouarzazate Studios--like *Alexander* (2004), *Babel* (2006), etc.

²Stands for: The French National Centre of Cinematography

it was responsible for licensing producers and productions; controlling importation, export, production and distribution; controlling the proceeds of film exhibitions; preparing and distributing tickets among exhibitors; organizing professional and technical training; contributing to deciding how much tickets and rentals should cost; arbitrating between different branches of the cinema field; organizing national and international festivals to encourage Moroccan film; creating a national library of films; encouraging creation and development of cinema clubs; circulating Moroccan experimental films; producing, distributing, and exhibiting films and Moroccan filmed news; making films for public institutions; and building studios and labs for filmmaking.

In the late 1960s, the CCM set some new goals and made several revisions to render itself more effective. This era was considered a turning point in the history of the CCM, because new laws were issued to enhance and Moroccanize this institution's production. Also, different accords of cooperation with national and international organizations, and bodies of support were signed. However, these numerous changes did not transform the general view that the CCM was functioning inefficiently, because many of the much-needed renovations were never put into action.

During the first decade of the 21st century, considering the significant technology breakthroughs and several regional and worldwide film festivals, the CCM has recognised the imperative to enhance its operational processes in terms of both quantity and quality. Consequently, this era is acknowledged as a transformative moment in Moroccan cinema; several films were created, various filmmakers debuted, and films received financial and institutional support. Furthermore, it is important to acknowledge that discussions regarding a recognised Moroccan cinema that would portray Morocco's image globally commenced during this period, particularly with the inception of various film festivals; for example, the Marrakech International Film Festival has emerged as a reflection of Morocco and its cinematic output internationally. With the different cinema festivals Morocco holds per annum, cinema-makers regard the cinematic production as insufficient and, hence call for more productivity. Nouredine Sail(2014) -- the current General Director of the Moroccan Cinematographic Centre—expressed in an interview with the MAP³ during the 8th edition of the International Film Festival of Marrakech his ambitions to make Moroccan cinema highly productive; he states 'The Moroccan film production can be increased to 20 films per year,' the words of this Moroccan official articulate clearly the potential plans that Moroccan cinema has to follow. Sail, on the potentialities of making a real progress in cinema, added that 'this is achievable financially and technically if we take into account the number of filmmakers and experts of the 7th art of high-level available in Morocco and its various laboratories.'

Due to the creation of the CCM, Morocco has achieved a global and honourable reputation for the films produced and exhibited in almost all renowned world cinema festivals. Today, owing to this semi-governmental apparatus, a promising cinema is established, and a noticeable progress is taking place in Morocco. Due to the role, it plays in presenting Morocco to the outer world, this institution has recently gained respectable attention, and, therefore, requests for backing it up are articulated openly.

1.4 Moroccan Cinema: Male and Female Filmmaking

Moroccan film, as an emerging field, clearly exhibits gender representation, warranting an analytical discussion and critical evaluation of the roles assumed by men and women in the industry's development.

The inception of film in Morocco was predominantly a male-dominated sphere. An excellent approach would involve examining the pioneers of cinematic production and thereafter presenting the significant personalities in filmmaking in chronological order, highlighting their impact on the industry. Therefore, as proof of male leadership, the first Moroccan movie was created by Mohammed Ousfour in 1958, *Le Fils Maudit (The Damned Son)* which narrates the story of a young boy who suffers abuse from his parents, ultimately becomes malevolent and, in the end, murders his fiancée. Ousfour significantly laid the foundation for Moroccan cinema, utilising limited production resources, and therefore cultivated an audience that seeks local content by screening his small films in cafés and neighbourhoods. Another earlier Moroccan film-maker is Larbi Benchekroun; he was one of the first-generation of filmmakers, and considered to have made one of the first films after independence. His first film was *Notre Amie l'Ecole (Our Friend the School, 1956)*, which is an 11 minutes short film for insisting on children's education and the risks of being out of school. Indeed, the first films produced directly after independence had had a tendency to focus on building the newly independent Morocco.

Mohamed Tazi B.A., Latif Lahlou, and Ahmed Mesnaoui are considered to be the most prolific and productive film directors of the earlier period. The first studied in France, and came back to Morocco in 1961 and began working in television in its first days because the RTM⁴ needed people to produce programs and films, and after moved to work for several years with the CCM. His first film was *La Mosquée de Tinmel, (The Tinmel Mosque, 1964)*, which is chiefly a documentary of Moroccan historical monuments. The second one is ascribed approximately six films during the early period; one of his first films (*Fourrage, 1966*), which is mainly

³ Stands for: Maghreb Arabe Press

⁴ Stands for: Radio et Television Marocaine

about the rural and the peasants' life. The third is credited with roughly twenty-two films during this early period of filmmaking in Morocco. The famous film Mesnaoui produced is *Silhouettes aux Fils d'Or (Silhouettes of Gold Threads, 1967)*, which is about Moroccan culture and traditions that are represented through bourgeois family lifestyle; the aim was a sort of promoting a new image of Morocco to the outer world. By and large, the early films made by Moroccan directors were meant to contribute to portraying a modern society; hence, the major drive was didactic and instructive.

Since the 1990s, Moroccan filmmakers have mostly concentrated on the particularities of Moroccan society, therefore addressing daily and societal concerns. The new generation of filmmakers has pursued a divergent route from that of their predecessors. Various filmmakers adjusted their endeavours to enhance the attraction of their films to both their audience and their own experiences. Nabil Ayouch and Nour-Eddine Lakhmari are the most current prolific film-makers; they have contributed greatly to the recent rise of Moroccan cinema industry. Ayouch was born in Paris in 1969 and has French nationality, and this dimension has affected his career as a film-maker for he came with a sophisticated and realist tendency which was lacking in Moroccan cinema. Among his famous films we find *Mektoub*, *Ali Zaoua*, and *Prince of the Streets*.etc. As for Lakhmari, he was born in Morocco in 1964; he realized his first film, *Né sans Skis aux Pieds (Born without Skis on His Feet, 1997)*, which revolves around an Arab emigrant who celebrates his new home's national holiday by bleaching his hair to look Norwegian. His second movie was *Le Regard (The look, 2005)*; it deals with a French man who returned to Morocco fifty years later to overcome his regret about his activities during colonialism; his other and most recent film is *Casanegra, (2009)* which is about the socioeconomic conditions of Casablanca inhabitants; the film reflects a realist image of Moroccans daily life.

Here I sought to provide a brief sketch of the main Moroccan male film-makers who are considered as prominent figures by the public; others are not mentioned for reasons of their limited appearance in the public sphere as well as their minor contributions. The following is also a brief introduction to the prominent female film-makers figures in Moroccan cinema.

As for cinema in the feminine, the intention here is to provide a survey of the well-known female film-makers figures. First, starting with the early generation, the first Moroccan female film-maker is Farida Benlyazid who was born in 1948 in Tangier. She studied literature and film in Paris and has produced several films, including *Poupées de roseaux (Reed Dolls, 1981)*, *Une Porte sur le Ciel (A Door to the Sky, 1988)*, *Ruses de Femmes (Women's Wiles, 1999)*; which I intend to work on in this thesis, and *Casablanca, (2002)*,etc. Besides, on her cinematic works, Benlyazid (2009) was asked in an interview in Cologne International Women's Film about the portrayal of women in cinema and the confinements that tie them up; in answering she insisted that through her films she wants to explore the hidden world of women and expose it to the outer world via cinema, she adds, that the two worlds system that exists in Moroccan culture-men and women- is what urged her to be a voice for the voiceless women.

Indeed, Benlyazid worked a lot in her movies on the major aspects of Moroccan society. One of her major concerns has been the overlap of tradition and modernity and the role they play in confining the progress of society that is located in the crossroads between the modern west and the struggling third world. Moreover, she admitted her hybrid nature that is composed of the traditional and the modern. Also, she repeatedly declared that women in Arab countries are oppressed not by religion but by the culture that grew up with it, which has no roots in Islam. Generally speaking, Benlyazid's cinematic themes revolved around the issues that touch Moroccan daily life, such as, gender relations, religious aspects etc.

Another Moroccan diasporic film-maker who has become currently a prominent figure in cinema-making is Yasmine Kassari—was born in 1972, in Oujda. Since 1991 she has lived in Brussels. Among her famous movies we find *Chiens Errants (Stray Dogs, 1995)*, *Quand les Hommes Pleurent (When Men Cry, 2000)*, and the movie which is to be analyzed in my thesis, *L'enfant Endormi (The Dormant Baby, 2004)*. Kassari, in her film, is really concerned with the socioeconomic conditions of Moroccans; that is why the issue of immigration is the main theme in two of her movies. The experience of Immigration that Kassari has lived with her family has a great effect on the development of her career as a film-maker; hence her movies have a strong realist tendency.

Narjiss Nejjar was born in 1971, in Tangier, and now lives in Paris. Her main movies are: *Le Septième Ciel (Seventh Heaven, 1999)* and *Les Yeux Secs (Dry Eyes, 2003)*. The last movie, a well-known one, is about the phenomenon of prostitution in Morocco; particularly in special areas that are known for having high number of prostitutes.

Indeed, there are other female film-makers whom I have not mentioned here, but the aim is to shed light on the ones who are well known in Morocco and abroad.

On the whole, female and male film-makers alike enjoy, in the new Morocco, more freedom and, therefore, have the same opportunities to achieve their hopes and goals. Ultimately, discrimination, as viewed by feminists, is no longer that sensitive issue that faces women nowadays, for they have their say in every aspect of Moroccan life. Thus, evidently, we have a cinema of multifaceted nature where the views of the feminine are expressed as freely as the masculine.

2. Gender, Cinema and Discursive Practices

2.1 Defining Gender

The concept of "gender" is inextricably linked to gender studies and feminism, necessitating their concurrent examination. Awareness of gender gained significant impetus with the onset of the feminist movement in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in the United Kingdom and the United States. The movement aimed to advocate for equitable rights regarding contracts, marriage, and property for women. Subsequently, the emphasis of the movement transitioned to matters like activism, the acquisition of political power, including women's suffrage, and subsequently, advocacy for women's sexual and economic rights. The concurrent emergence of consciousness regarding gender and feminism led to a significant convergence in the meanings of the two concepts. Feminism is inherently linked to discussions of gender, as it was feminists who pioneered gender awareness by contesting the socially created roles, behaviours, and characteristics deemed suitable for men and women. By elucidating the concept of gender, feminist theorists were able to ascertain the origins of social inequity between men and women. They devised innovative concepts to contest the established norms. Patriarchy is seen as the primary source of women's oppression in society, as this hierarchical structure privileges males over women, seeing women as submissive and attributing to them lesser intellectual and physical qualities. Consequently, they have experienced diminished privileges and received no acknowledgement for their contributions and accomplishments.

With the evolution of the feminist movement, the circumstances of women underwent more examination, revealing new concerns. The notion of gender was regarded as the root cause of women's imprisonment and the principal obstacle to their freedom, hindering their recognition and respect within both the household and society at large.

The notion of gender is well-known among scholars in the human sciences, cultural studies, feminism, and academia at large; however, it is frequently conflated with the term sex, which denotes biological differences—male or female—thereby obscuring its precise definition as a social construct, a topic that will be elaborated upon in the subsequent paragraphs.

Prior to defining the term gender, it is essential to acknowledge that this idea has engendered several debates and intense discussion among academics. This illustrates, on one side, the diverse fields and perspectives from which gender is examined, and on the other, the absence of consensus among researchers over a singular definition that incorporates all theoretical frameworks. This phrase was initially introduced in linguistics to indicate the gender of a noun as either feminine or masculine. Subsequently, the phrase was employed to denote the cultural element embedded in sexed bodies. An examination of the meaning of "gender" will enhance comprehension; Webster's Dictionary (2014) defines gender as:

1- : a subclass within a grammatical class (as noun, pronoun, adjective, or verb) of a language that is partly arbitrary but also partly based on distinguishable characteristics (as shape, social rank, manner of existence, or sex) and that determines agreement with and selection of other words or grammatical forms.

2 -: the behavioural, cultural, or psychological traits typically associated with one sex.

The initial definition, which examines the term from a linguistic standpoint, is confined to distinguishing between feminine and masculine nouns. The second definition, extending beyond linguistics to encompass aspects of psychology, sociology, and anthropology, elucidates the true meaning of the term gender. An individual's gender encompasses not only their masculinity and femininity but also their behaviours, cultural attributes, and psychological characteristics. It is evident that there is no singular reference to biology, suggesting that the interchangeable use of gender and sex is invalid. According to the second concept, gender may be characterised as the social mechanism of categorising individuals into masculine and feminine based on their biological sex.

The classification of genders into masculine and feminine is a complex process influenced by societal pressure, resulting in the delineation of roles and the assignment of distinct values to each gender. Gender serves as a mechanism for maintaining power dynamics between the two groups and allocating societal positions. The impact of gender is evident at the linguistic level and in its representation of gender. The subjugation of women to males is evident in any language from a linguistic perspective. The prevalence of male dominance throughout several fields and facets of life appears to have diminished in contemporary society, however remnants of this patriarchal influence persist in everyday language usage. For example, if the word "bachelor" is used to refer to a single man, it doesn't have a negative connotation, while using the word "bachelorette" to refer to a single woman has a very negative connotation.

Simone De Beauvoir, in the *Second Sex* (1949), implicitly tackled the concept of gender even though the naming was not coined at the time. Her famous quote sums it up clearly "one is not born a woman but rather becomes one". In other words, womanhood is not a state of being but a process of societal becoming. De Beauvoir's formulation distinguishes sex from gender and suggests that gender is an aspect of identity culturally and socially acquired. The distinction between sex and gender has been crucial to feminist efforts to expose the dichotomous nature of the two concepts; sex is understood to be the invariant, whereas gender is

the cultural meaning and form that the body acquires. It is no longer possible to attribute the values and social functions of women to biological necessity, and neither can we refer meaningfully to natural or unnatural gendered behaviours. All gender is, by definition, unnatural and a mere construct. Moreover, if this distinction is applied, it becomes unclear whether a given sex has a necessary consequence for becoming a certain gender. (Butler, 1986)

2.2 Gender as Performance

Judith Butler, the founder of Queer and performativity theories, has added a new insight to gender and elaborated more on the construction not only of gender but even of sex. Butler notes that feminism and sociology more generally have come to accept a model, which she calls the heterosexual matrix, in which sex is seen as a binary biological given – you are born female or male – and then gender is the cultural component which is socialized through the person on that basis. Her argument is that we should break the connections between sex and gender that is, the body does not determine one's gender or identity. (Butler, 1990)

In questioning sex, Butler argues that the binary division of people, into males and females, has a history, and if the scientific discourses have formed our view of the duality of sex, then it is not a universally fixed term. History of science and sexuality has shown that this view of sex did not develop without discussion and dispute and particularly the well-known fact that some people are born and cannot be categorized as males or females. For instance, Hermaphrodites show that there could be at least a third category—genderless and sexless.

Butler, therefore, goes on to argue that the binary nature of sex is seen as a given, but this is itself a construction and a way of viewing bodies. The ways that one thinks and talks about gender and sex, Butler notes, tend to 'presuppose and preempt the possibilities of imaginable and realizable gender configurations within culture, we are constrained by existing discourses.' (Butler, 1990) Most humanist views of human beings see gender as an attribute, which – once internalized by culture – becomes fixed, a permanent part of that person's self. But Butler prefers 'those historical and anthropological positions that understand gender as a relation among socially constituted subjects in specifiable contexts' (Butler, 1990). In other words, rather than being a fixed attribute in a person, gender should be seen as a fluid variable which can shift and change in different contexts and at different times.

Performativity is one of the most important theories developed about gender. Butler claims that gender is performative. One's gender is acquired through the repetitive acts and practices he or she performs based on the sexual difference. She states:

Gender, then, is a performance— and nothing more. "There is no gender identity behind the expressions of gender; identity is performatively constituted by the very "expressions" that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1990).

Butler here is arguing that we do not have a gender identity which informs our behaviour; on the contrary, that behaviour is all that our gender is. Then we can conclude that what we do is the determinant of our gender and not the opposite, the doing here means the tasks, the behaviour and all what a person performs in his or her life to meet the social expectations.

Gender construction is a significant process that influences our comprehension of the surrounding environment; it entails the establishment of gender norms and the assignment of roles to individuals. Butler is typically referenced in discussions concerning gender and sexual identity; her theories of performance and performativity are pertinent to the portrayal of gender in Moroccan film, since they address the separation of roles between the sexes. Gender roles are enacted repeatedly, both in life and movies, until they are perceived as inherent. Butler notes:

Performativity must be understood not as a singular or deliberate "act" but, rather, as the reiterative and citational practice by which discourse produces the effect it names. (Butler, 1993)

The aforementioned remark illustrates how the recurrence of an action confers a sense of normalcy upon it. While Butler articulated this remark in an attempt to establish a connection between gender performance and the embodiment of the body, it remains pertinent to a discourse on gender as a social construct that attains its normalisation via recurrent actions and behaviours.

2.3 Gender as Socialization

Gender is going to be tackled, in addition to performativity, in the light of socialization theory which accounts for the disparity between the two sexes, in terms of gender roles. First based on the work of Simone De Beauvoir *the Second Sex* (1949), this theory asserts that gender roles are learned in a process called socialization which is defined as "the means by which social and cultural continuity are attained" (Clausen, 1968). This process includes introducing all the values, norms as well as gender roles from one generation to another through different institutions ranging from family, school to media. Klaus Hurrelmann a theorist of socialization states:

... It is not present at birth but arises out of social experience and interaction; it both incorporates and is influenced by the individual's location in the social structure; it is formed within institutional systems, such as the family, school, economy, church; it is constructed from the materials of the culture; and it is

*affected by immediate social and environmental contexts. In other words, the self-concept achieves its particular shape and form in the matrix of a given culture, social structure*⁵.

While Hurrelmann discusses socialisation broadly, his assertion is as applicable to gender roles, which are similarly integrated. It is crucial to comprehend the process by which young children acquire their gender identities, ultimately shaping their identities as men or women. Parents promote their children's play by providing games deemed socially appropriate for their gender, so reinforcing traditional gender-specific activities and discouraging engagement with those of the opposite gender. In this manner, children acclimatise to the gender that corresponds with their sex, as they acquire behavioural norms through language, play, and traditions designed to teach values and behavioural rules, so equipping them to fulfil appropriate societal responsibilities. The school plays a significant role in moulding gender-related attitudes and values through its methods, curriculum, and discourse, sometimes in an inequitable manner towards females. In Morocco, although the educational system underscores the significance of equality and equal opportunities—specifically the right to education for all, regardless of gender or geographic location, as enshrined in the Constitution—the school environment perpetuates a broader negative perception of girls and women. This often perpetuates a collection of biases and assumptions rooted in sexual differences. This is evident at both levels: educational performance and school accessibility, which are reportedly male-dominated in terms of both enrolment and achievement. An examination of educational methodologies and textbooks would likely reveal that women's representation is not as assured as men's; women are often rendered invisible in both images and texts. When present, they are described using sexist language imbued with patriarchal preconceptions that devalue women's worth and experiences, hence perpetuating societal stratification rooted in sexual differences. In addition to family and school, language plays an important role in determining gender relations. In fact, women are encouraged to be silent in many different contexts as it is the case with all the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups who take part in "the culture of silencing the repressed" in (Friere,2005) words. This culture can cause the "dominated individuals to lose the means by which to critically respond to the culture that is forced on them by a dominant culture" (Friere, 2005).

Research has proven that girls are more verbal oriented than boys because they start talking one month earlier, compared to their male counterparts, yet as they grow, they resort to silence, either because their talk is not heard or is not taken seriously. Fatima Mernissi in this regard, states in the *Forgotten Queens of Islam* that she was punished just because she dared to talk to the *fquiha*⁶.

One day when I was little and came home from the Koranic school with feet swollen by the falaqa (a device that holds the feet in place so that the soles can be beaten), my grandmother, who always tried to teach me how to be happy, asked me "but little one, what exactly did you do? I held back my tears of humiliation and started to formulate my answer: "I wanted to say to the Fquiha (teacher)... And my grandmother, who had over 50years of the harem behind her, interrupted me before I could even finish my first sentence:

This indicates that a child cannot speak, especially a female one, she then continued:

Child, do not bother to go further. You committed a very grave fault. You wanted, you, to say something to your Fquiha. You do not say something at your age, especially to someone older. You keep silent. You say nothing. And you will see, you won't get any more beatings.(Mernissi, 1993.)

This exemplifies how youngsters, particularly girls, are compelled to remain silent while possessing views they wish to express. The stigma surrounding women's discourse, rooted in traditional civilisations, impedes women from speaking and, as a result, from assuming impactful positions within their communities. In a patriarchal culture, men assume the burden of speaking for women, asserting their understanding of women's needs and desires. Restricting women's freedom to expression fosters assumptions and biases rooted in sexual difference, hence fostering hierarchical stratification that positions women as subordinate to males. Men in this equation leverage societal advantages and endeavour to preserve their standing. Key positions and renowned jobs are predominantly assigned to males, resulting in their prestige and economic power. However, this does not imply that women's contributions to society are insignificant; rather, several thinkers have emphasised the vital position women occupy within their communities. Kassim Amine (1863-1903) is considered one of the first Arab reformists who called for education and an equal treatment for women as a first step to achieve a developed Egyptian society where social justice reigns. (Kassim,2011),

This discourse on gender reveals an agreement among gender theorists on its social and cultural construction. Consequently, culture and social norms are regarded as the foundation for building gender, necessitating a significant emphasis on culture when addressing this topic to avoid false generalisations. Each community possesses distinct specificities and traits, and what is true for one civilisation may not be relevant for another. Any discourse on the term gender must examine the social and cultural aspects to encompass all linked elements that intersect to establish specific gendered connections. Consequently, women are accorded significant importance as they constitute half of Morocco's population; thus, any endeavour to establish an equal society without

⁵Klaus Hurrelmann. *Social Structure and Personality Development*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 5.

⁶ The *Fquiha* in Moroccan context refers to the religious female instructor.

addressing and eliminating the existing gender binaries is certain to fail. Conversely, the portrayal of gender in media, especially in film, is a critical focus for feminists; so, the primary objective is to analyse the identity politics of femininity and masculinity in Moroccan cinema.

2.4 Third Cinema: Identity Politics Observed

Illuminating third cinema theory is essential, especially for theoretical and philosophical purposes. The films in question are creations not originating from the West, so they fall under the aforementioned classification. Cinematic production in non-Western nations continues to address the challenges and concerns prevalent in these regions. Moroccan Cinema is regarded as a third cinema, characterised as a popular cinematic expression that mirrors the socio-cultural and political challenges of the developing globe. Most films created in this category aim to reflect and amplify social and economic transformations within a certain nation. Consequently, the evolving circumstances of women are also incorporated. At now, Moroccan filmmakers have sought to alter and undermine the conventional power dynamics rooted on the notion of gender disparity. What constitutes "Third Cinema"? This is a key inquiry that need to be posed while examining postcolonial film. Films categorised as 'Third Cinema' seek to reveal colonial and postcolonial power dynamics, highlighting historical injustices while also mirroring contemporary cultural realities. The films aim to reflect evolving national identities and amplify marginalised voices via cinematic tales that are inherently liberating and emancipatory in both explicit and tacit ways. At the end of the 60s, a new genre of cinema emerged as a counter-discourse to the western cinematic style that has been dominating the scene. A group of Argentinian film-makers produced a film that was completely different from the common films that characterized the period. Solanas and Getino realized the movie *La Hora de los Hornos* (Hour of the Furnaces) in 1968; which was the first film that paved the way to 'Third Cinema' as a genre at large. This film is considered by critics as a militant film in which political and social issues are posed in a way that shocks the audience and revolutionizes their perception. Moreover, as the American critic Robert Stam has put it, when commenting on the movie, the film is made 'in the interstices of the system and against the system...independent in production, militant in politics, and experimental in language'. (Burton,1990) Indeed the movie is completely new in terms of themes, starring, and script. The movie paved the way to new ways of making cinema; that is committed and revolutionary.

After the production of the film, Solanas and Getino wrote what was called a manifesto to 'Third Cinema' entitled *Hacia un Tercer Cine (Towards a Third Cinema)*. Given the political divisions that came from the Three Worlds Theory, they tried to establish the essential paradigms that would frame 'Third Cinema' and made it theoretically and practically different and unique. The models that this genre aimed to establish were mainly anti-American ones, for the founders were leftists and believed in a 'Third World' that would raise locally and by itself.

'Third Cinema' is seen as a mechanism for raising local, cultural, and societal issues. The above concept referred to a cinema of cultural and political decolonization of the Third World that was defined in opposition to the cinema of Hollywood (First Cinema) and the so-called 'auteur cinema' (Second Cinema) in Europe.

The role played by men and women film-makers in 'Third Cinema' production was at the heart of debates about the articulations of women and men voices. After this genre had been coined by male figures, different females emerged and produced films that had third-worldist cinema features; the major themes that dominated the feminine cinema were, mainly, about gender inequality and cultural and social issues that touched women's and men's lives. Among the famous female-film makers that have been considered as part of this movement, we find the Lebanese Heiny Srour, the Cuban Sara Gomez, the Senegalese Safi Faye, the Indian Prema Karanth, the Egyptian Atteyat El-Abnoudi, the Tunisian Selma Bacchar, etc. Most of them, questionably, have adopted an approach that aimed at restoring women's agency and decolonizing feminine narratives in the postcolonial era through feminist aesthetics.

Can we talk about a third cinema in Morocco? The first reference to answer this question lies in Cinema Clubs that Morocco witnessed in the seventies, and, most importantly, in The Khouribga Festival (Rencontres Cinématographiques de Khouribga) that started in 1977. The latter, has been gathering films from Africa, Latin America, and Asia; the festival is referred to by critics as a 'Third Cinema' festival, because the themes of the movies shown touch upon developing world issues and challenges. However, due to censorship and other difficulties, the festival could not show just movies that are considered under the umbrella of 'Third Cinema'; hence the festival shifted to open approaches and started exhibiting films made for market-related purposes.

On the emergence of 'Third Cinema' in Morocco Valérie argues that "Moroccans began to experiment with themes, challenging the politics and conventions of their society as they sought answers to postcolonial colonial problems such as poverty, illiteracy, and corruption." (Valérie, 2011) This quotation makes reference to the manifest changes that Morocco underwent in the 1980s; especially with the opening of political atmosphere that the King Hassan II adopted after the so-called 'years of lead' (which witnessed a massive repression of freedom of expression). Making reference to 'Third Cinema' here is not random choice but a necessity, for the thesis tackles an issue that is still a major problem facing the so-called 'Third World' countries; that is gender

inequality. However, although my analyses of the four movies do not shed light directly on the main characteristics of this genre, an implied investigation is implicitly undertaken.

2.5 Picturing Gendered Subalternity

The concept of the 'Subaltern' is theoretically derived from the works of the Italian Marxist intellectual Antonio Gramsci. Later, the term was used by South Asian historians who explored the agency of the politically and socially marginalized and oppressed men and women as opposed to colonial and elites' dominant discourse. In a series of essays published by the Subaltern Studies Group, the Subalternist historians have incessantly endeavoured to recover a history of subaltern agency and resistance from the perspective of the masses rather than that of the colonizer and the official narratives. Great attention was paid to the roles played by women in society in pre-, mid- and post-colonial eras. The main driving assumption that the subaltern critics started from was that subalterns, peasants and illiterate people in general and the double-suppressed women in particular-- have shaped the history of India, yet they were marginalized and relegated to passivity. Moreover, they argued that western orientalist discourse had played a clear role in victimizing the colonized women through what Spivak terms 'the epistemic violence' (Spivak, 2010) and thus added to the patriarchal existing frame. Moreover, differently put, the Indian author and political activist [Arundhati Roy\(2004\)](#)- who was born on 24 November 1961- goes further to problematize the position of the so-called subaltern; she maintains that 'there is really no such thing as the voiceless. There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.' Clearly, Roy refers to a point that many postcolonial and subaltern critics have somehow glossed over in their writings; that is the so-called subaltern has been speaking all the time yet were unheard or were politically silenced.

On the problematic of definition, different are the views that critics hold on delimiting a precise definition of subalternity. Spivak states that the subaltern is the one 'removed from all lines of social mobility.' (Spivak, 2004) Thus, the subaltern is someone who has a low rank in a social, political, or other hierarchy and also means someone who has been marginalized or oppressed. At the core of subalternist debates, there emerged questions about the status of women in historical and societal formation. Later, amid heated disputes, subaltern women conditions have become another major focus that has great importance --particularly from a feminist perspective. Thus, the main task was recovering women's voices and finding an answer to the multifaceted question: what does it mean to be a woman in India?

In the context of significant discussions on the role of the subaltern in historical development, a novel area of investigation has arisen concerning the depiction of the subaltern in film. The latter serves as an efficient mechanism for both expression and suppression; hence, it is crucial to address its articulations and disarticulations of gendered subalternity.

Cinematic productions are regarded now as the most potent medium for amplifying the voices of the subaltern. Consequently, several critical analyses have been conducted on the portrayal of the subaltern, whether male or female, in Indian cinema. The enquiries on the portrayal of the subaltern mostly focused on elucidating how peasants, illiterate individuals, and women were represented to the public. The primary objective was to elucidate the degree to which the visual domain has facilitated the reclamation and expression of marginalised desires and identities.

This paper aims to examine the role of Moroccan film in either articulating or disarticulating the goals of female subalterns, utilising the paradigms of Subaltern Studies. In the four films, it is apparent that subalterns, represented by women and marginalised males, are shown in manners that articulate their concerns and fears. In the opening of the four films, women are afforded an empowered position, and their voices are graphically expressed and conveyed to an audience that is culturally predisposed to a subordinate perspective.

Men, especially those from disadvantaged backgrounds, are perceived and shown on par with women; they express their experiences under the dominance of the affluent class. It is important to acknowledge that, considering the socioeconomic situations of the Moroccan populace, the majority of male residents are entrenched in poverty and substandard living conditions (both in rural and urban regions), rendering them quintessential subalterns.

Considering the prevalent idea that cinema is an aristocratic medium, the pertinent concerns are: does Moroccan film positively or adversely contribute to the articulation of subalternity? How does it address the subaltern? The responses to these enquiries will be examined comprehensively in the subsequent section of this article, accompanied by illustrations and critical commentary.

The new realism trend in Moroccan cinema has significantly amplified the expression of marginalised voices. Morocco, as a third-world nation, is predominantly characterised by marginalised and oppressed entities due to the oppressive and degrading socio-economic and political conditions that hinder individual and societal advancement.

2.6 Cinema as Discursive Formations

Discourse analysis is an approach that has been widely used in analysing media texts. The concept of 'discourse' is used in many disciplines, yet its popularity owes a lot to social sciences where it has flourished and revolutionized the perceptions of texts be

them textual, visual, or oral. Considering the poststructuralist methods--particularly Foucauldian concept of 'Discourse'-- for reading texts, it is necessary here to shed light on some of the main assumptions of this critical concept. On the play of discourse, Foucault (1981) notes that

In every society the production of discourse is at once controlled, selected, organized and redistributed by certain number of procedures whose role is to ward off its powers and dangers, to gain mastery over its chance events, to evade its ponderous, formidable materiality.

On this, we can sketch a link between the Foucauldian hypothesis and the cinematic discourses that have been generating tough debates about media representation. In other words, cinema is looked at as a generator and producer of a 'discourse' that simultaneously includes and excludes; hence, the power that a visualized 'discourse' can play is of detrimental impact and outcome.

Taken for granted, all representation in texts is a reenactment of social and physical living of beings and things; hence, all texts are mere simulations of reality with almost the same characteristics. In other words, the discourses that circulate via texts could not escape the social frames that raise them from the very beginning. Hence, the lived experiences confine and limit the creation of new ways of representation.

Cinema is one of the current and most sophisticated means of representation in the modern era. It is argued that cinema has its unique mechanisms of visualization that greatly differ from literature, art and particularly from other media tools. Hence, its effectiveness of creating great impact on the audience is clearly noted. Due to the power of the image, we can have either a different perspective or a conformist version of life. Nevertheless, it is necessary here to refer to the play of discourse in cinematic production.

The emergence of Feminist film theory has massively contributed to the study of ways of representation that characterize cinema. Most of critics in this theory, believe that a patriarchal agenda has been dominating all cinematic productions and the male pleasure of looking or gazing was the ultimate drive and goal. Then, gender construction came to be a major concern, for it has a crucial impact on the concretization of imbalanced power relations.

Psychoanalysis is one of the tools that has been used in analyzing cinematic texts. Lacanian film theory came to play a major role in the study of films especially in terms of the audience's identification with the gaze of the camera. Later, Laura Mulvey, through using Lacanian psychoanalysis approach, extended this theory to a new arena of investigation; that is the articulation of gender in cinematic production. She endorses a new perspective on the representation of men and women identities; she concludes that identification with the male protagonist came to replace the identification with the camera lens. The spectator-- through identification with the male protagonist-- is provided with sense of mastery over female objects. In this respect, Mulvey(1989) claims

As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence.

Convincingly enough, Mulvey asserts a revolutionary way of seeing that provides a lucent lens through which to decipher the codes of cinema representative modes.

Mulvey stresses the imbalanced articulation of female/passive and male/proactive roles in cinema. For, a desire for mastery is taking place in filmic representation; in which the active seeks control over the passive one. In other words, as Mulvey puts it, desire is the ultimate locus for men, whereas the female is the looked at passive object. In this regard she points out that

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its phantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (Mulvey,1989)

This remark clearly indicates that Mulvey critiques the scopophilic conventional and patriarchal perspective that objectifies women for male desire. Moreover, she is advocating for a correction of the perception that reduces women to simple sexual objects. She is unequivocally challenging the patriarchal frameworks that govern film, therefore advocating for the desexualisation of women's bodies.

It has been argued that cinema is an extension of the patriarchal practices that exist in factual life. Evidently, in this regard, cinema is used as an ideological apparatus(Althusser,1972), in Althusser 's words, to maintain certain powers. In ways, on the one hand, cinema functions as an oppressive body towards women's desires, for it does not play clear roles in emancipating them from the

social stereotypical shackles. On the other hand, it, arguably, worsens women status through making it mediated to the public via highly sophisticated modes. Thus, cinema, in this respect, is used as a means for reinforcing men mastery over women and engraving into the spectator's mind the established gendered relations between the two sexes.

The emergence of feminist film theory has given a new dimension to media studies. Its major aim is to establish a counter cinema that would circumvent the conventions of male cinema, and bring female viewpoints to the screen. Moreover, they started producing cinematic narratives that represent both sexes from a feminine perspective. On the feminist agenda, Deborah Knight, a feminist film critic, states that «the principal objective of feminist criticism has always been political: it seeks to expose, not to perpetuate, patriarchal practices.» (Deborah Knight, 1995). Clearly stated, the construction of a feminine discourse in cinema is a politically motivated drive. Cinema's discourses turned to binary oppositions where the masculine and the feminine interact to realize social, political, and cultural identities. By and large, the ultimate aim of feminists, through cinema, is depicting women in equal status as men and as a group that is socially different.

In the light of these theoretical assumptions, the question that should be raised here is to what extent Moroccan cinematic production is involved in such discursive practices? Thus, answering this question enables us to situate Moroccan cinema in regard to the wide spread debate about gender biased articulations in cinema in general. Arguably, a brief look at Moroccan movies we find many apparent articulations in which gender identities are constructed within a frame that is socially and ideologically confined. Manifestly, these articulations are mere replica of reality's existing relations; that is women are permanently represented in subjective ways.

Recently, amid debates about women representation in media, and from a feminist perspective, different film-makers, be them female or male, have taken part in producing movies that are discursively competing to the existing males' paradigm that makes of women just objects and subservient creatures. Hence, various movies give great importance to women issues and preoccupations. For instance, first, women have taken roles that differ from those they used to play in previous times; they are active agents with clear cinematic missions and visions. Second, now, there are many female filmmakers; hence women are now at the centre of many movies in terms of starring and also in the ways they are filmed. The movies that, from my standpoint, have challenged dominant patriarchal discourse are: (*Marock 2004*) by Laila Marrakchi and *Veiled Love (Hijab LHob, 2008)* by Aziz Salmy. The First was measured as a radical shift in Moroccan cinema matrix; it adopted a perspective that was seen as a threat to the established norms and models. As for the second, recently produced, the progressive nature that Morocco is undergoing at all levels is manifested through this movie; a taboo issue is staged en scene for the public which was hardly the case in the past. Truly, women ways of representation have now changed debatably to better status due to a feminist discourse that generates heated debates about identity politics in media representation. The discourses that mass media has generated in the contemporaneous era have immensely shaped the lives of men and women. Indeed, cinema is nowadays a medium of competing discourses and ideologies on identity construction. Ultimately, the aim is establishing an arena of reciprocal empowering discourses. Undeniably, in the past male discourses have been dominating media texts; yet, noticeably, a female counter-discourse has been constructed. However, it is compulsory to say that women, in spite of calls for better portrayals, are still looked for as erotic objects due to the market-directed tendency that are based on desire and attraction to the sexualized feminine bodies.

In conclusion, Moroccan film has had significant advancement in recent decades regarding production, subjects, and, notably, social difficulties. Its output has been marked by a propensity to alter the conventional perceptions that define Moroccan literary and creative creation. It has undoubtedly adopted new viewpoints in addressing the cultural and social concerns faced by postcolonial governments. Thematically, it employs diverse cinematic techniques from many groups that aim to politically address social and cultural concerns, such as feminism and 'Third Cinema.' Primarily, it actively participated in the formulation of new discourses that mostly reject established standards. Overall, our film output during the past two decades has significantly contributed to the advancement of a dynamic nation.

3. Gender Identity in Moroccan Cinema

The aim of this article is to examine the diverse, explicit, and intricate representations of gender in contemporary Moroccan cinema. Films can be a fascinating area of investigation, as they can serve as a repository for influential films that illustrate intricate ideologies and discourses that are prevalent in Moroccan society. Films in Moroccan cinema represent women and men in a variety of forms, including the traditional, the pastoral, the urban, and the rebellious. In recent decades, a significant number of films created by male directors have begun to portray women in manners that contest the societal roles traditionally assigned to them. It is important to note that discussing male and female filmmaking presents challenges, as the distinctions are often minimal. Consequently, one may find it difficult to discern between the two, given that both operate within the confines of a patriarchal framework.

Farida Belyazid, an accomplished Moroccan filmmaker, exemplifies the numerous Moroccan cinema creators who have garnered significant recognition in the cinematic landscape of Morocco through works such as "Keid Ensa" and "Bab Sma Maftouh," among

others. The manner in which this female filmmaker presented her themes and issues demonstrates her aim to heighten the audience's awareness of the struggles faced by Moroccan women. She exhibits minimal divergence from her male counterparts. This can be ascribed to the understanding that contemporary filmmakers are acutely aware of the prevailing societal dynamics, wherein patriarchy, nourished by cultural and traditional influences, remains predominant. Therefore, it appears imperative for certain filmmakers to generate fresh representations that reflect the evolving status of women in society, thereby fostering greater opportunities and advancing social justice.

The selection of the films, *Kharboucha* (2008), *Samira's Garden* (2007), *Women's Wives* (1999), and *The Dormant Baby* (2004) is intentional, as they represent both male and female directorial perspectives. Secondly, they convey compelling narratives that profoundly influence the subaltern, regardless of gender. Moreover, what is particularly compelling in these films is the explicit expression of women's desires and aspirations; thus, it is evident that the male is placed in a position of influence that the opposite sex relishes. The identities of females and males intersect and engage within the aforementioned films, offering the audience fresh perspectives on gender relations that, in some respects, diverge from those encountered in everyday life.

3.1 *Kharboucha*: a Locus of Gender Battle

Through a discussion of how female and male characters are portrayed in *Kharboucha*, the primary objective of this section is to address the issue of gender representation in the story. In addition, in order for this study to be relevant, it is going to be done in connection to gender relations, roles, and expectations in Moroccan society. Additionally, this part will attempt to answer the following questions: does cinema reflect Moroccan society? In other words, does it provide fresh alternatives to the current state of affairs, or does it, on the other hand, present a pessimistic outlook on the future of the situation for women?

The first step, which must be taken before entering into analysis, is to offer a summary of the film that is now being discussed. Director Hamid Zoughi is responsible for the film *Kharboucha* (2010). In the 20th century, Hadda was a well-known singer belonging to the genre of "Âita."⁷ This film is about her. *Kharboucha* is the nickname she goes by. She is a member of the Oulad Zayd tribe, which was assaulted by Kaid Aissa, a female member of the Oulad Amr tribe, which is located nearby. Her family was among those who were attacked. Hadda confronted the mighty Kaid Aissa, who had murdered the bulk of her people and seized their wealth and animals, by employing her songs as a weapon in order to fight back against him. After hearing *Kharboucha*'s songs, the Kaid made the decision to punish her by sending her to prison. However, his counsellor indicated that the best option for him would be to marry her. This would ensure that she would no longer sing against him, and her songs of defiance would be forgotten. The conclusion of the film is extremely sorrowful, and this is demonstrated by the manner in which *Kharboucha* passed away given that she was buried alive as a result of her refusal to comply with the regulations of the Kaid.

3.2 *The Representation of Kharboucha*

The beginning of the film is informative; it provides a general idea about the role of rural women because it begins with a scene of the river and then a group of women washing wool and chatting. What is interesting about that is the smile on their faces, which can be interpreted as a sign of satisfaction and happiness. The movie begins with a scene of the river. Presented before us is the initial appearance of the Major character Hadda, who is also known by the moniker *Kharboucha*. She is a young woman in her twenties who is stunning, full of vitality, and bright with happiness. As a manifestation of her reserved nature, she smiled and flushed whenever the other ladies discussed *Dokkali*, the person she was in a relationship with. It is at this point when the audience realises that she has a talent when it comes to singing.

There is no question that these characteristics of personality are the ones that are common in the setting of Morocco, particularly among the females who live in the countryside. This is the reason why the vast majority of the audience will not be startled when they witness situations of this nature since it does not test their expectations. It is possible to detect a contradiction in this picture due to the fact that *Kharboucha* sings, which may be upsetting to certain people. Singing may sometimes be disruptive to the honour of women, particularly when they are in public positions. However, this conflict is expressed in reality. To put it another way, males in the Arab world take pleasure in watching women sing and dance, but they do not want their wives to be singers or dancers. *Chikhats*⁸ live in a society that does not have a favourable reputation for them, and many look down on them without even being aware of the situations they are living in. An example of a *Chikhat* that falls under a broad category is provided by *Kharboucha*. In spite of the fact that they are employed, they are still human beings; they have emotions, expectations, and the right to live a life that may be considered decent.

At the party that is organised by a woman from *Kharboucha*'s tribe, *Kharboucha* makes her second appearance in the film. Prior to this scene, the spectator has been exposed to a submissive character who is not unlike to women in real life. Her goal is to find

⁷ It is a predominantly countryside Moroccan musical genre that has different variants in some parts of the country.

⁸ They are female dancers with traditional clothing, who had been introduced by French colonialism, and now are part of Morocco's cultural traditions.

the man she loves, get married to him, and then enjoy a life filled with bliss that will last forever. However, this causes us to doubt the authenticity of the freedom that she enjoys and brings up a lot of issues regarding the actual circumstances that women faced throughout the time period that the film is addressing. It is also possible to suggest that prior to the Kaid's decision to make war on her tribe, she lacked depth in terms of her role in altering the flow of the movie as well as in her personality. It is for this reason that it is possible to assert that the portrayal of Kharboucha in the beginning of the film is not consistent throughout the entirety of the film or its entirety.

As if to convey the message that the death of her father and other members of her tribe awoke her and compelled her to take a stand against injustice and tyranny, Khaboucha altered her personality from one that was flat to one that was round. She went from being an easygoing person to a strong person who maintains her convictions even in the most difficult of circumstances. Within the framework of patriarchy, we have observed in the theoretical section that women are expected to be kind, quiet, and submissive, among other characteristics. These normative assumptions have been significantly strayed from by Kharboucha in the second portion of the argument.

In spite of the fact that Kharboucha's songs were intended to be pleasing to men and the Kaid, they were utilized to fight against his control over those who were weak and defenseless. In order to reclaim the rights of her people and to stand up to the oppression of the ruler, her voice and the songs that she sings might be interpreted as a kind of resistance. During her conversation with the Kaid, she made it clear that her words are like bullets and firearms. Additionally, she says that even if she passes away, her songs will go on forever since they will be performed by other people as well.

Kharboucha has skillfully prepared a song in which she tells the narrative of her clan and how the Kaid and his supporters were responsible for the extinction of the people of her tribe. A celebration was held at which all of the notable members of the tribe were invited, and she had the audacity to utilize lines that were quite thought-provoking:

Oh, days of misery

Days of darkness and injustice

Where are you little Aissa

Where are your greatness and your honor?

How many men you have killed

How many braves you slaughtered without reason and remorse

You burned crops, stole herds

You dragged women like cattle, and you orphaned countless children

No one would get close to you

As what you did was quite tragic

Where are you little Aissa and where are your greatness and your honor

You thought that your status is eternal

You dismissed men of honor, and you replaced them by corrupt shepherds

Oh, Little Aissa may God punish you

You!! Carrion eater; you assassinated your brothers, and you allowed what is forbidden⁹

In light of this, it is quite evident that the lyrics that Kharboucha chose to incorporate into her song were not just emotive but also bold. Taking into consideration the fact that the Kaid would not hesitate for a minute to murder or punish for insignificant things, let alone criticise him in public, it is certain that even the most courageous of men would not speak such a provocative poetry against a dictatorial Kaid. The sole reason he killed Ghazwani, his servant, was that he had challenged him to shoot a bird in front of his henchmen.

⁹ This is my translation from Moroccan Arabic

In order to exact her vengeance on the Kaid, Kharboucha was willing to give her life for the cause of her tribe and was willing to sacrifice herself. She has been given a powerful voice throughout the film, particularly in the second part, and she has made the most of every opportunity to educate people about the slaughter that the Kaid has done. Kharboucha was successful in accomplishing her objective, and this resulted in the Kaid experiencing a source of torment and unease as a result of her presence. By the time she learnt that Sidi Ahmed, the son of the Kaid, was interested in marrying her, she had demonstrated an extraordinary level of knowledge. In response to this latter's request for her to perform in public, she gave it some thought for a time before finally agreeing to do so, provided that it would be an excellent chance to smear the image of the Kaid.

It would have been possible for Kharboucha to marry the *Kaid* and live a "decent" life; but, she opted not to do so and instead chose to face him regardless of the repercussions. As an instance, when the *Fqih* was informed that the Kaid had murdered his brother, he requested that his companions shift the subject of conversation. It is true that even males were not prepared and restrained to discuss political matters till later. In her song, Kharboucha discussed the scheme that the Kaid had organised against his brother in order to seize his place. The Kaid had been plotting against his brother. Kharboucha was able to uncover political secrets and share them with the general public, which is contrary to the prevalent stereotypes that women are not interested in politics that are prevalent in the majority of patriarchal civilisations where they are prevalent.

Despite the fact that it has been widely said, particularly by feminist critics, that female characters are always characterised as weak and frail, Kharboucha is introduced in the film as a powerful character even when she is in the most critical situations. This means that she does not give up easy even when her life is in danger. Despite the fact that Kaid Ayadi had served her in person and provided her with water and some dates as a show of his good intentions, she refused to forgive him. In the scene when she was imprisoned as a result of the treachery of Kaid Ayadi's guards, she was starving to death and losing her life due to thirst. Taking into consideration the fact that the Kaid is the most influential character in his film, this moment is incredibly crucial since it signifies Kharboucha's victory over the Kaid. As a result, we are able to reach the conclusion that Kharboucha is the most powerful character throughout the entirety of the film.

Due to the fact that women are more likely to be deceitful than males, the term "deception" is commonly linked with women in Morocco and the Arab world in general. In particular, this is represented in a number of Moroccan proverbs, such as those written by Abderahman BelMajdoub¹⁰, which characterise the dishonesty of women. In this sense, the scene that depicts Kharboucha conspiring with the Kaid's wife may cause the viewer to be perplexed since it has the potential to reinforce the concept of deceit. This is because it may serve as a symbol of resistance, which, in turn, can take a variety of forms, including planning. Nobody can deny that Kharboucha has achieved victory over Kaid Aissa. The scope of the camera was put in a way that exemplifies this victory. Kharboucha occupies the stage that is superior positioning which can be seen as the stage of champions. Kaid in that scene looked at the top to see Kharboucha as if to give her middle for her achievement while she looked down at him. Moreover, the fact that all the attendants of the wedding ceremony stood up as a way of greeting and congratulating Kharboucha on her achievement reinforces this idea of victory. (Figure1)



¹⁰ Abderahman BelMajdoub is a Moroccan historical figure who is known for his proverbs which are taken for granted, because he was known for his wisdom.

Figure 1: The Kaid looks top to see Kharboucha while she is looking down. (1:41:28) (Hamid Zoughi,2008).

The last scene is highly significant, as it is in many movies, if not all of them; nonetheless, the director of Kharboucha opted to draw a parallel line between the beginning scene and the closing scene; in both moments, Kharboucha smiles, which may be interpreted in a variety of ways. The grin, in general, can be seen as a sign of triumph and victory (figure 2), but it can also be interpreted as a sign of loss. As a matter of fact, the progression of events in the film leads us to choose the first interpretation, which is not accurate in the case of Kaid. His smile was intertwined with applauding Kharboucha's song, as if to convey the message that after a prolonged struggle with Kharboucha, he could not help but accept defeat and congratulate her on her victory.

Figure 2: Kharboucha smiling while burying her alive. (1:42:16)



It is without a doubt that if we are to engage in what is said in the first half and how socialization prepares both women and men to match their social expectations, we are presented with a female character who undermines all of these preconceived notions. That Kharboucha is an example of a reversal of gender roles is something that may be said about her. They were unable to express the wrath that they feel towards the unfair Kaid, particularly in that scenario where he imposed further taxes on them. To make this point more explicit through Fatima Mernissi (1993), silence is more prevalent among women and girls, particularly in talks that include interactions between people of different sexes. However, it is a quality that is attributed to males.

3.3 Kaid Aissa as a Symbol of Men's Oppressiveness

Examining gender representation in any piece of work requires addressing both genders, as gender encompasses both male and female identities. The choice of Kaid Aissa is rooted in his significance as the primary male character and the initial adversary of Kharboucha, the film's protagonist. Additionally, his presence signifies his role as a representative of masculine gender identity. However, this does not imply that he embodies masculinity, as there are various other factors, including social class and ethnic group, that shape an individual's identity.

The initial concept we can link to Kaid Aissa is dominance; he embodies strength and control throughout the film. Typically, power and authority, particularly at the highest levels, are predominantly assigned to men rather than women, a trend that is prevalent across patriarchal societies, including Morocco. The film remains steadfast in this portrayal, presenting a corrupt figure who orchestrates events to preserve his authority. It further reveals that his rise to power was far from innocent, as it involved the murder of his own brother. That is why it can be argued that his accomplishments stem not from a stellar reputation but rather from cunning and treachery, yet he was still welcomed as a leader of the tribe.

Undoubtedly, viewers of the film may experience confusion, particularly those from cultures that associate deception with women. They will likely be taken aback to see a narrative that depicts the leader of the tribe as a corrupt figure. Tribal norms play a crucial role in Moroccan culture. Typically, the leader of the tribe, who is invariably male, is celebrated and revered, as his masculinity is associated with wisdom and represents the entire tribe. Therefore, challenging the concept of the male leader undermines the foundational principles of this cultural framework. Throughout the film, it can be observed that the Kaid encountered numerous

failures, leading to significant suffering for his tribe due to his misguided choices. Thus, wisdom is not something we can link to the oppressive Kaid.

In contrast to Kharboucha, the Kaid struggled to gain the affection of the populace, as clearly illustrated by the treatment Kharboucha received from the characters in the film. Kaid Ayadi, despite being the first male, embraced Kharoucha and granted her full autonomy to act as she wished, even to the extent of insulting Kaid Aissa. This reflects a dual acknowledgement of both Kharboucha as an individual and the Chikha as a cultural entity. Furthermore, in the final scenes, the audience felt a greater sense of empathy for Kharboucha upon learning about the Kaid's intentions towards her; as a result, they began to echo the lyrics of Kharboucha's songs (Figure 3).

Figure 3: Kaid's retinue repeating Kharboucha's songs. (1:24:06)



Kaid Aissa is a polygamist who entered into multiple marriages without considering the needs and interests of his wives, treating them in a manner akin to servitude, even going so far as to request one of his wives to persuade Kharboucha to marry him. This led his wives to cultivate a deep resentment towards his character. There is a poignant moment when his second wife confides in Kharboucha about her struggles and the circumstances that led to her marriage with Kaid. She mentioned that he married her at a very young age, indicating that she lacked both physical and psychological maturity (Figure 4).

Figure 4: The Kaid's wife complaining to Kharboucha about her forced marriage to the Kaid. (1:19:08)



This highlights another facet of the oppressive nature of the Kaid, as he stripped her of her freedom and the opportunity to relish her childhood like any other child. From a gender perspective, it can be observed that the film draws the audience's attention to harsh realities, such as the practice of early marriage.

Portraying a villainous character doesn't imply a complete lack of positive traits; in fact, there are moments where he displays wisdom by seeking counsel from his followers. He chooses to marry Kharboucha instead of eliminating her, recognising that this decision would enhance her standing among the tribes. Additionally, there are instances where we observe a glimmer of remorse and regret in his eyes for his actions, yet he realises it is too late to turn back. However, one might argue against this notion, suggesting that he was merely putting on an act, particularly when he pleaded with Kharboucha for forgiveness regarding the deaths of her tribe's members.

The presence of the Kaid in the film holds considerable importance, as it is through this character that viewers gain insight into the other characters, particularly the protagonist, Kharboucha. The film director selects him to portray the robust character of the lead role.

3.4 Gendered Articulations in Kharboucha

Indeed, as previously mentioned, the selection of the film Kharboucha is intentional and based on several factors, including the diverse themes it explores, such as tribal culture, Moroccan history, and gender issues. The theme of gender prominently permeates the entirety of the film Kharboucha. Hamid Zoughi created a film that explores gender through various perspectives. The characters he creates largely mirror the individuals we encounter in our everyday lives, and their gender dynamics and perceptions align closely with the commonly held views of society.

The title is the first element that engages the audience in any text, whether it's a film or a literary work, making it essential to consider before exploring the content further. It seems that Hamid Zoughi has opted for the name Kharboucha, a feminine designation that can be interpreted in English as the "Thorny Woman." The choice of this unconventional title can be understood through two primary concepts: either the filmmaker aims to evoke suspense to entice viewers, or Zoughi's film is fundamentally unique, suggesting that the audience is about to experience something truly groundbreaking.

Zoughi's film undoubtedly critiques multiple systems, including the patriarchal structure, by centring the narrative around a female protagonist, specifically a Chikha of Wlad Zayd, and highlighting her struggles. The progression of events in the film, along with her experience of injustice at the hands of the Kaid, effectively elicits sympathy for Hadda Zaydia from the audience. This, in turn, may generate tension among viewers and provoke enquiries regarding the status of this group of women within their society. Once this occurs, the underlying message from Zoughi will have been interpreted. Symbolically, aligning oneself with this woman in the film signifies an inherent acceptance of her within the societal framework.

The film not only explores the theme of Chikhats in Morocco but also raises awareness about the oppression faced by women within a patriarchal society. It can be asserted that patriarchy is not the sole contributor to the oppression of women, as other elements such as social class and ethnicity also play significant roles. However, the impact of patriarchy compounds the challenges faced by women across these various identities.

When Ghazwani was discovered dancing with Tamo, they seized him along with his saved money prior to his marriage to Tamo, who had endured severe beatings. It is evident that the act of singing alone at night remains constant, yet the consequences vary between genders. The oppression of women becomes evident when they are assigned strenuous tasks under the oversight of a male supervisor who punishes them for fatigue. One could certainly propose a counterargument suggesting that colonialism, rather than patriarchy, is the primary factor contributing to the violence against these women, as Wlad Amr does not make distinctions between genders but focusses more on their own interests. However, this raises the question: why is it that we only witness instances of women being subjected to violence?

At times, the film seems to transcend Zoughi's control, occasionally leaving viewers perplexed about whether he is advocating for an idea or critiquing it. This notion of women as cunning can be illustrated through the portrayal of three female characters in the film. Initially, Kharboucha aimed to poison the Caid; subsequently, the Caid's wife colluded with Kharboucha to seek vengeance against him. Finally, Tamo provided food laced with sleeping powder to liberate Kharboucha. What stands out in these three plots is the theme of solidarity among women and their support for one another. Symbolically, when women share common concerns, they come together to strengthen their efforts towards achieving their goals. However, the conclusion carries a somewhat bleak tone, suggesting that despite their collaboration against a common adversary, they are ultimately destined to fail. They all plotted against the Kaid, seeking revenge; however, the film concludes with Kaid Aissa, though humiliated, still alive.

Indeed, this film presents a unique perspective on gender, as evidenced by its portrayal of both male and female characters. Hamid Zoughi's Kharboucha is a film that challenges numerous preconceived notions surrounding Moroccan male directors, particularly the belief that they undervalue women and their contributions to society. Therefore, it can be confidently stated that Zoughi has

largely succeeded in presenting male figures from an alternative viewpoint that challenges the prevailing notion of their perpetual power and dominance. Conversely, it is noteworthy that female figures, as represented in Kharboucha, are presented with new visual dimensions that astonish the audience, particularly males, and dismantle their established perceptions.

3.5 Samira's Garden: Gender and Desire

This section will analyse the creation of gender and sexuality roles, a significant problem for many theorists, notably feminists, through the film *Samira's Garden*. Desire is a significant contentious subject that prominently features in all discussions around gender. The desires of males and females are crucial to one sex's dominance over the other. The film depicts the realisation of desire as a fundamental determinant of identity. I would like to begin with a summary of Latif Lahlou's *Samira's Garden*. Feeling the effects of ageing, Samira (Sanaa Mouzian) is mostly focused on marrying soon. Her father ultimately locates a suitable husband for her, Driss (Mohamed Khoyyi), a widower and childless farmer in his sixties. Upon marriage, Samira learns that her husband is impotent and that he wed her just to conform to societal expectations. Samira finds the entire absence of affection and sexual interest from her husband intolerable, leading her to develop a sexual attraction to Farouk (Youssef Britel), her husband's cousin. Subsequently, her spouse uncovers the essence of their connection and expels Farouk. Samira descends into profound melancholy and frustration, caught between her want for affection and the emotional detachment of a husband who has reduced himself to only her protector.

3.6 Samira: The Locked Door to Erotic Fulfilment

At the film's outset, Samira is depicted as a contemporary woman who enjoys metropolitan living. A voice-over concurrently expresses her mother's aspiration to marry her off soon to a man who would enhance her life. The mother's remarks significantly influence Samira's mindset, ultimately leading her to acquiesce and marry Driss, who is much her senior. This exemplifies a prevalent custom in Moroccan society that compels women to marry promptly upon a man's expression of desire, without soliciting their consent or perspective. Ironically, Samira's portrayal of happiness with her spouse when returning home is really a superficial adherence to customary customs.

Following an extended journey, Samira has returned home, and her role as a wife is set to commence. The initial night was very disappointing, as she and her spouse slept apart. The next day, she assumed responsibility for a large residence and an elderly man in need of care. As seen in (figure 5), Samira's existence becomes focused on it. Furthermore, she was unable to relish her existence as a wife, instead functioning as a servant tasked with managing all domestic responsibilities while regrettably remaining mute.



Figure 5: Samira feeding her husband's father. (17:39) (Latif Lahlou,2007).

In the Moroccan culture, such actions are perceived as inherent to religious and cultural traditions. Within a critical context, this is perceived as a patriarchal restraint that restricts women and relegates them to the role of housekeepers. The female protagonist's role exemplifies an undesirable scenario from a feminist viewpoint, as it reinforces a culture that confines women to a predetermined and specific place. We will utilise Butler's idea of performativity and its influence on the establishment and perpetuation of gender norms; she asserts. Gender is performative insofar as it is the *effect* of a regulatory regime of gender

differences in which genders are divided and hierarchized *under constraint*. Social constraints, taboos, prohibitions, and threats of punishment operate in the ritualized repetition of norms, and this repetition constitutes the temporalized scene of gender construction and destabilization.'(Butler, 1993)

Butler perceives gender roles as simply constructs arising from what she describes as performativity; a theory illustrating how language and speech generate the quotidian behaviours that are seen as true conditions to which both sexes must conform. This part shifts the investigation to a distinct perspective, examining fragmented sexual connections between couples in Samira's Garden via a feminine lens. Samira's discovery of her husband's impotence shocks her, while simultaneously illuminating a dilemma faced by other Moroccan couples. Night after night, Samira is increasingly aware of her husband's sexual frustration. Despite engaging in dialogue over the matter, Driss appears to reject all conversation about it, which is typical of men in general, since a man's sexual inadequacy is one of the most stigmatising facets of his identity in a cultural context such as Morocco. As Samira attempts to caress him, believing that his impotence is only psychological, his evasion of her approaches becomes increasingly aggressive.



Figure 6: Samira gazing at the male body. (33:35)



Figure 7: Samira playing with her body next to her sleeping husband. (58:09)

Faced with the impediment to sensual satisfaction, Samira considers her husband's cousin as a substitute for sexual stagnation. Farouk is perceived by Samira as an object of her sexual desire. During the filming, the heroine gazes at him; hence, this transforms

the conventional view of women as just objects of desire and observation (figure 6). The female character, in this context, seeks to escape the stagnant sexual environment that many women encounter yet are unable to articulate openly. Lahlou evidently reveals a sensitive subject prevalent in Moroccan society that is seldom or seldom addressed among Moroccans. The man, as an object of desire exemplified by Farouk, signifies a novel viewpoint that starkly contrasts with the prevalent notion that women are predominantly shown as objects of want. The video also highlights the significance of female contact with her body. Disillusioned by her marriage, Samira discovers a means to fulfil her sexual desires via self-exploration. The moment in which she masturbates in the presence of her husband is clearly shown as a danger to masculinity, which is depicted as declining (figure 7). Clearly, self-pleasure in the presence of a guy exemplifies the ineffectiveness and illusion of 'manhood.'

Through the above given examples, Lahlou establishes a new way of looking at gender identities in cinema. The male spectator clearly sympathizes with Driss in his broken manhood and in his state of being looked at, and at the same time identifies with Samira as the gazer and the dominant actor. Obviously, women identity is constructed, to some extent, in a positive way that makes it in equal status to men.

Sexuality serves as a distinct indicator of gender empowerment and disempowerment. Throughout the film, it is evident that males possess vulnerabilities like to those of women; hence, what is ultimately required is a candid discussion on some latent taboos that are frequently shared by both genders. In essence, the negative attributes ascribed to women are predominantly cultural and societal constructs designed for their subjugation; conversely, males are not infallible or inherently powerful, since they too exhibit weaknesses and frailties. Clearly, what is required is only the articulation of men's concealed characteristics, which are consistently obscured for cultural reasons. In this context, sexual activity is recorded in a manner that transforms the conventional belief that males are perpetually sexually engaged. Samira's perspective on her unfulfilled sexual wants reveals a fundamental element that significantly influences the dynamics of interactions between men and women. While Samira appears to embrace her new fate, she ultimately discloses some truths that affect families either positively or negatively. The audience connects with the camera's perspective and the 'female gaze' embodied by Samira. Both male and female viewers are instructed to observe in a manner that elevates the feminine role while diminishing the male one. Male performers are prominently featured throughout the film. Although female characters are present in modest numbers, they significantly influence story development and identity formation. Lahlou is undoubtedly involved in the formulation of a discourse that is esteemed from a feminist viewpoint. He presents a novel perspective on gender articulations that feminist cinema critics have consistently addressed and emphasised.

3.7 Screening Male Impotence

Lahlou's movie is mainly about male sexual identity, which revolves around Driss' impotence and its effects on him and the family as a whole. Significantly, the movie focuses on a key aspect that has rarely been tackled before in Moroccan cinema, couples sexual relationship and its drawbacks. Actually, Lahlou brings to light an issue that is, due to social constraints, talked about only with physicians inside closed rooms. Thus, he has succeeded in opening Moroccan cinema to new doors for creativity.

Shedding light on male impotency is of great importance to my thesis, for the theme dealt with in this movie has clear impact on gender construction. Besides, it constitutes a main part of any potential definition of a gendered body. Driss as a symbol of maleness in the movie has been portrayed, from a manly perspective, in a derogatory way that threatens the patriarch from within. Feminists welcome such a movie for it has an objective depiction of realities that men and women as well experience recurrently.

Men sexual potency is definitely an essential part of what Pam Cook terms 'masculinity in crisis'. When analysing Hollywood movies, he states 'The sexual confusion ...I think, put masculinity in crisis, raising the question of what it takes to be a man, and what the alternatives to male sexuality might be.(Cook, 2005) In the movie, the crisis is manifested in making Driss under the female gazing. Therefore, the female spectator gaze oppresses and control masculinity in its weakest articulation (figure 8). The male impotence is put under a meticulous lens (camera) that reflects an uncovered aspect of conjugal life. Through the eyes of Samira, one can see a sort of a psychological violence against desire, and at the same time a look of scorn to masculinity in demise.



Figure 8: Driss' masculinity is under Samira's eye control. (26:54)

It is one of the unacknowledged taboos that Moroccan culture is reluctant to reveal. It is indeed a well-entrenched societal norm that a guy must conceal his sexual dissatisfaction and melancholy; any admission of such feelings would lead to an immediate undermining of his masculinity. Discussing men's sexual impairment is perceived by guys as a perilous endeavour that may lead to the devaluation of the most dominant and unassailable patriarch, who has been exalted in the recollections of both genders. In *Samira's Garden*, Driss exemplifies the archetype of a guy that society hesitates to expose and examine for any possible discourse. The situation of Driss, as shown in the film, serves as a microcosm that encapsulates the broader societal dynamics.

The topic of male impotence is often overlooked, and when discussed, males frequently idealise their sexual experiences. Lahlou has effectively portrayed a picture that reflects the essence of men's discourse around their own sexual lives. As seen in (Figure 9) and the subsequent dialogue, Driss discusses his sexual prowess and dreams over his new bride with his buddies. Oddly, with a cursory smile, he attempts to convey to them the boundless power he had attained during his intimate moments with his wife. Consequently, his male acquaintances derive much enjoyment and solace from his narratives. In his discourse with friends over his close relationship with his young wife, the subject shifts to a demonstration of a diminished masculinity.

Driss: after the wedding, I came home and did the work of a real man.

Mokhtar: I am so envious of you (speaking with big smile on face).

Driss: I swear that she was screaming out loud, ehh! As if she were being cut to pieces, and yet I regret having done that to her (speaking with excitement).¹¹

¹¹ Translation is mine, unless differently stated.



Figure 9: Driss fantasizing about his male potency with his friends. (23:25)

The film effectively explores a concealed truth that resides within individuals and behind closed doors. Driss rebuffs any discussions with his wife on his precarious circumstances, so exemplifying the conventional mentality prevalent in patriarchal countries. In the daily lives of Moroccan guys, discussing male impotence is prohibited, as it undermines the established 'discourse' that underpins a society that upholds male superiority. In accordance with the Foucauldian paradigm, it is essential to recognise that male sexual impotence, akin to Foucault's observations on the discourse surrounding lunacy and sexuality as taboo subjects, is constructed inside a discursive framework that prohibits any potential transgression. Consequently, individuals, predominantly males, are inclined to operate inside this paradigm due to years of conditioning. In his work, *The History of Sexuality*, Foucault offers a historical analysis of the regulation of sexuality as a discursive phenomenon rather than a performative one; he asserts the primary concern, then, is not to ascertain whether one consents or declines to engage in sexual activity, nor if one articulates restrictions or permits. Regardless of whether one affirms its significance or negates its impact, or whether one meticulously chooses the terminology employed to describe it; the objective is to elucidate the reasons for its discourse, to identify the speakers, the perspectives and positions they occupy, as well as the institutions that encourage such discussions and archive and disseminate the utterances made. The central concern is the overarching "discursive fact," namely how sex is articulated inside speech. (Foucault, 1990)

Foucault seeks to demonstrate that our sexual wants and behaviours do not inherently reveal significant facts about our identities. He contends that it is the language constructed around these wants and behaviours that reveals the underlying reality. According to Foucault, taboo subjects such as sexuality and insanity are only approximations and constructs of our experiences. Consequently, concepts that seem inherent within a certain historical context are only constructs within a broader, artificial framework. He encapsulates the entirety of speech in his renowned assertion termed the 'repressive hypothesis,' which represents the overarching framework of discursive repression. He advocates for the creation of a comprehensive framework to discuss the mechanisms through which society suppresses our sexual drives. He asserts that we must articulate our desire to liberate ourselves from this oppression; to discuss sexuality openly and to derive pleasure from it. Foucault offers a profound critique in his work, *The History of Sexuality*, about the mechanisms through which societies regulate and restrict individuals' perceptions of specific subjects. The film illustrates that Moroccan culture is rife with inconsistencies, where individuals often avoid direct terminology, opting instead for euphemisms that maintain a cosmetic facade. Furthermore, as posited in Foucault's *The Order of Discourse*, discourses are regulated within certain frameworks and limitations; the family functions as an oppressive apparatus that exerts control over its members. The topics for discussion are influenced by the cultural and social discourses that individuals or groups internalise. Male impotence is also a subject that has become a conversation sometimes deemed taboo. Omitting discussions of sexuality signifies a profound cultural and perhaps political framework of discourse.

3.8 Redefining Marriage

In Morocco, marriage is regarded as a fundamental pillar of societal structure. It is typically characterised as a monogamous relationship between a man and a woman, founded on a commitment to mutual love and support, with the intention of maintaining this commitment until death. The constitutional provisions emphasise the significance of the nuclear family for the maintenance and continuance of society. Consequently, illicit and premarital partnerships are prohibited and rigorously regulated. In the era of globalisation, extramarital relationships are considered taboo only in private, however are publicly shown in broad daylight.

The traditional identity of Moroccans continues to emphasise the significance of marriage, particularly for women, in maintaining the family's status. Consequently, marriage serves as an institution that upholds the dignity of the partners and their families. The parents are the initial recipients of all marriage offers from interested families, as they believe this preserves the dignity of the married spouses in the sight of others.

In light of societal transformations, perceptions of marriage as a protective institution are experiencing significant alterations. A woman's entry into the workforce has disrupted conventional views on female roles, resulting in a diminished significance of marriage. Nonetheless, it is undeniable that Moroccans, both male and female, continue to perceive marriage as a reliable vessel for security.

Samira embodies the current lifestyle and aspirations of modern women. She had appreciated a Western lifestyle before her marriage to Driss. In the global world where individuals have access to many resources and lifestyles, nearly all women aspire to a transformative way of life prior to marriage.

The institution of marriage is regarded, as previously said, as a safeguarding entity for both men and women. However, the intricacies of this organisation require further scrutiny and examination. The intricate and multifaceted nature of marriage is often seen with scepticism; yet, feminists have boldly posed challenging enquiries that undermine this institution. Samira's Garden exemplifies the concealed essence of marriage. Marriage is replete with unspoken taboos that remain concealed behind closed doors. Feminists have scrutinised these intricate features and advocated for a revision of the contract.

From a feminist viewpoint, Samira experiences dual oppression. Initially, she has been assigned the position of a wife responsible for managing the household, including her husband, father-in-law, and nephew, and subsequently, the anticipated duty of a mother; unfortunately, in her situation, this remains but a fantasy. Secondly, she finds herself in a precarious scenario where the spouse is only a physical being lacking the essential qualities of a true man. This truth is essential to discussions among feminist critics, particularly radical ones. Moreover, others perceive marriage as a simply repressive mechanism of gendered labour that constrains women's independence and advancement. Furthermore, they referred to the marriage contract as a 'sexual compact' predicated on uneven power dynamics, when the husband assumes dominance, since women are frequently coerced into marriage under repressive social and economic circumstances. Consequently, several feminists contend that the institution of marriage requires re-evaluation. Gloria Steinem, the American feminist author, asserts that Patriarchy requires violence or the subliminal threat of violence in order to maintain itself... The most dangerous situation for a woman is not an unknown man in the street, or even the enemy in wartime, but a husband or lover in the isolation of their own home. (Steinem, 1992) Obviously, Steinem points out to the problems of domesticity that are not visible, yet, however, severely shape the lives of couples. The verbal, sexual, and physical violence practiced at home is of great importance to feminists. Other radical feminists call for the rejection of marriage, for it represents a patriarchal institution that oppresses women and limit their freedom. On this radical feminist aspect, the American feminist and historian *Linda Gordon* maintains that 'the nuclear family must be destroyed... Whatever its ultimate meaning, the break-up of families now is an objectively revolutionary process.' (Gordon,2014). Although she expresses an anti-social norms view, still other women and feminists share her argument.

Lahlou has successfully provided new perspectives on intimate marital relationships. We have been conditioned to perceive external perspectives, which do not accurately represent the true essence of a married pair. He unveils a concealed aspect of the husband-wife relationship that is perpetually shrouded in profound mystery. The filmmaker elucidates a crucial element of couples' lives, representing only one dimension of several intricate concerns. The film presents marriage as an institution with a complexity that transcends the naive notion of a blissful marital existence. In other words, we examine the intricacies encountered by each newlywed pair. The film's central thesis is encapsulated in its portrayal of a world accessible just to those who have experienced it. Impotence is a significant concern that several families encounter but are unable to express explicitly. In quiet, individuals endure and persist in their lives to avoid disrupting entrenched beliefs and habits.

In Samira's situation, the potential solutions for addressing impotence would involve consulting a physician; but, due to the patriarchal framework, Driss declined even to discuss the matter. Another potential remedy for the sensitive issue may be divorce; nevertheless, this is a drastic measure, since ultimately, it is essential to adhere to the social and cultural standards that advocate for concealment.

Overall, Samira's Garden offers profound insights on the institution of marriage and its intricate frameworks. Lahlou has effectively created a fantastic film that portrays the taboo concerns characterising the lives of Moroccan couples. Sex and sexuality are highlighted, allowing the audience to reconsider previously accepted parts of marriage that were taken for granted.

4. The Dormant Baby: a 'History from Below'

This section primarily concentrates on the complex expressions of subalternity. Kassari portrays women as major figures that overshadow males. The plot of the film is comprised of double subaltern women and their subaltern male opposites. Consequently,

it is essential to analyse the film from a subalternist viewpoint. Subaltern identities are provided with the opportunity to articulate their everyday challenges as well as their aspirations and wishes through the medium of the camera and voice. For the sake of contextualizing, it is compulsory to provide a briefed view of the movie at hand. Kassari's film *The Dormant Baby* is shot from the point of view of a bride. The narrative circles around two sisters: Zeineb (Mounia Osfour), the young bride who consummates her wedding the night before her husband, Hassan (Driss Abessamie), leaves for Spain; and Halima, her sister (Rachida Brakni), whose husband Ahmed (Mimoun Abdessamie) is also one of the men to leave. Zeineb now lives with her husband's mother and grandmother. With the passing of time, she discovers her pregnancy, and her mother-in-law decides to put the baby to sleep. Meanwhile, Halima, who lives with her daughter Siham (Nermine Elhaggar), finds herself pregnant as well. The rural community people – and her family in particular – believe Amziane (the only young man left in the area) is the father, and they beat up her and Amziane (Issa Abdessamie). In the meantime, the very rare news the women receive from their husbands is through videotapes sent to them. At the beginning, Ahmed, Halima's husband, refuses to speak; later, we learn that he has left his friends and disappeared. Halima interprets his behavior as a consequence of nasty rumors about her and Amziane. Then, she decides to ask for divorce and leaves the rural community.

4.1. Depicting 'Womaness'

The film starts with the wedding ceremony of Zeineb, who is adorned in her bridal attire and aided by her cousin Halima. From the initial scene, the spectator is confronted with the unmistakable dominant presence of females. The film is predominantly female-led, as Kassari has articulated in several interviews her intention to amplify the voices of the disadvantaged and socially marginalised. In other words, she is engrossed in what the Subaltern Studies Group designates as the 'subaltern.' She has seen the necessity of creating a film 'from below', so achieving a work in which only the subaltern may articulate their voice. The narrative centres around female characters. The objective of the film is to portray the faces and voices of previously unrepresented or under-represented women and men from the marginalised and subaltern East area of Morocco. Despite the portrayal of women as passive in relation to males, it is important to recognise that, from a cinematic perspective, they are the architects of events and the primary shapers of life in that rural locale. The camera depicts women as the essence of life, asserting that existence would cease without them, as they manage all facets of their rural households, including caring for the elderly and children, milking goats, and feeding chickens. Women may have independent lives without the presence of males. Although female characters are shown as immobile and weak in the initial moments of the film, it might be said that the filmmaker's purpose is to illustrate, first, the decline of femininity, then subsequently, its resurgence and empowerment. A stereotypical interpretation of the initial scenes would completely obscure the film's genuine revolutionary meaning.

The myth of *Ragued* pertains to an ancient belief in the Maghreb: when a father is gone (due to emigration or death), a pregnant mother may choose to put her unborn child to sleep, awaiting the return of her husband or more favourable conditions to awaken the foetus. This act can be interpreted as a manifestation of the superstitious beliefs prevalent among impoverished Moroccan women; however, it also signifies a domain devoid of male presence, wherein a robust defiance against any infringement on their autonomy is articulated—therefore, responsibility must be collectively acknowledged. Kassari remarks on the veracity of the legendary deed, stating, "I am indifferent to whether the sleeping child is a myth or a reality." It is a social practice that arises from individuals' adaptability to concealed, underground realities developed over time. Experiences collect, transform into sediments, and ultimately crystallise in cultural forms. I intended for the sleeping kid to serve as a shining symbol illuminating the plight of these women who have been left alone in the country, confronting the absence of their partners. (Kassari, 2011)

The female filmmaker, a radiant figure, emphasises the significance of the act for women, especially in rural regions, since it fosters their independence despite its artificial nature. Males's apathy should be addressed by such practices, whether genuine or fictitious, as this clearly indicates the prominence of women and the obscurity of males. In her analysis of the act of sleeping from a feminist perspective, Florence Martin contends that 'the sleeping child symbolises a profound anxiety regarding maternal inadequacy (the distress of lacking control over one's developing child) and an aspiration to dominate one's reproductive choices.' Women evidently engage in this behaviour as a feminine viewpoint on the methods they should adopt to have a balanced existence. Additionally, Florence asserts that 'putting a kid to sleep is a deliberate, proactive choice taken by a matriarch to manage both the economic and emotional ramifications of the father's absence. Thus women 'sleeping the child is totally a matter of choice and not a coercive one; they tend to manage their life by themselves.

Clearly, sleeping the child (*Ragued*) entails the total absence of men. Women would find in some social and traditional beliefs different ways out for their delicate situation. Through *Agued*, Kassari shows to the reader/spectator that women can live in their own ways without men guiding them. Actually, we have a deep insight into subaltern women's lives. The socio-economic conditions badly add to the miserable situation of women in rural areas.

The scene of women watching their sons and relatives on videotapes sent from Spain (figure 10), is truly indicative of the nature of women and men relationships in Morocco in general and rural areas in particular. In other words, while men are at home the lives

of women undergo severe hardships and cruelties, whereas distance can maintain the lost warm and lovely marriage life. All this is due to the cultural patriarchal practices that conceive of women as mere working machines. Women wish their husbands to be next to them, yet unconsciously they are not satisfied neither with their presence nor absence, since the patriarchal system and the bad life conditions do not meet the necessary and dreamt of desires.



Figure 10: Mothers and wives watching their émigré relatives on a videotape. (40:13)

The region is now nearly devoid of its young and capable males, and consequently its gendered power structure; nonetheless, the patriarchal system persists, upheld by the matriarchs, the elder generation of women. Hassan's mother assumes a masculine role while making choices on Zeineb's upbringing, managing the livestock, and overseeing all domestic matters. Indeed, the hazards women encounter occasionally stem from the control and dominance imposed by other women who are expected to resist patriarchal biases. Kassari's camera has empowered women to express their social, cultural, and political concerns that complicate their everyday existence. Women have articulated their concerns and forbidden aspirations. The lack of men will be examined next under the heading: Redefining Maleness.

4.2. Rural Women as Subalterns

The preferable title that can be used to rename Kassari's movie would be: *the subaltern women speak*. The movie gives voice to women who are considered to be doubly suppressed. Put differently, it sheds lights on the rural subaltern life's hardships and sufferings. Here I would venture to argue that the film being depicted from a feminine perspective is in fact an act of giving voice to subaltern subjects. Indeed, females in the narrative are all filmed in difficult and miserable conditions of living (Figure 11).



Figure 11: Rural women collecting wood for cooking. (44:23)

The above scene is just one of many that show the extreme life that women face in rural Morocco. The voice they are given in the movie isn't to speak for the sake of speaking and being equal, but it is a way out to express their actual realities, aspirations, difficulties and also the severe and poor economic and social life. In (figure12), the fragile infrastructure is symptomatic of the poverty that strikes rural men and women's lives in an era of globalized world and hence communities. They are shown as lagging behind the actual changes that the country has been undergoing in the last three decades.



Figure 12: Rural housing conditions. (36:57)

Poor life conditions, subalternised subjects, and marginalized areas are the main characteristics of this region of the country; hence, we can realistically call it a subaltern life *par excellence*. On the reasons behind Kassari's making of this movie, Valerie Orlando, in his book, *Screening Morocco*, notes that 'Kassari constantly reminds audiences that women's identity and ultimate being are defined as much by masculine oppression as the marginalization, poverty, and illiteracy that are daily realities of the village.' (Valérie,2011)

Given the preceding discussion, I contend that despite the harsh realities faced by women, film provides them a platform to express their problems from their own viewpoint. Nonetheless, they are capable of speaking and acting independently, even in the absence of men. The provision of the camera to Halima and Zeineb for self-filming on the videotape might be construed as an indication of independence and liberty. It demonstrates that they are neither diminished by their illiteracy nor coerced into acquiescing to their confinement inside the restricted feminine area in which they are situated. Orlando observes that for Halima and Zeineb, the camera serves as a tool of confrontation, and filming represents the initial step towards their independence. Kassari effectively empowers subaltern women on two fronts: by providing them with the whole narrative space of the film and by utilising the camera via the perspectives of adolescent female actors. Both approaches provide women an active presence at the price of marginalised males. At the outset of the film, when Zeineb is shown with pride and assisted by Halima, alongside the departure of their spouses, one may see a society of subalterns characterised by the oppression and silencing of women. Halima's departure at the film's conclusion exemplifies the subaltern revolutionary agency that frequently beyond patriarchal comprehension. This form of rebellion might be perceived as a commonplace occurrence in rural families' life; nevertheless, it is, in reality, an act of defiance against restrictive norms and practices. Kassari presents a film that chronicles the evolution of female characters from subjugation to autonomy. This narrative structure aids in reinterpreting the conventional perception of women's complete subservience to a continuous transformation in identity formation. The subject of subalternity is undeniably integral to the revolutionary pursuits of 'Third Cinema.' The film actively addresses political reinterpretations of marginalised identities. Jonathan Rutherford observes that there is no definitive logic that governs and dictates the intricate formation of identity in contemporary evolving paradigms.' (Rutherford, 1990). In essence, identity is not static, and therefore, continuous change is the fundamental constant. He also contends that we are ensnared between the deterioration of traditional political affiliations and the emergence of new identities that are either in development or yet to materialise. Rutherford challenges the culturally entrenched belief that identities are destined to remain unchanged. Indeed, every facet of human existence is perpetually subject to relentless tides of change that no earthly force can halt. This assertion is robustly supported by Stuart Hall in his examination of identification in the Caribbean; he asserts that 'cultural identity ... is a question of becoming as well as of being.' It pertains to both the future and the past. Contemplating Bhabha's idea of hybridity (Bhabha, 1994) (in-betweeness), Hall's thesis suggests that identity is transformative and perpetually subject to new structural formations. The aforementioned assertions pertain to Kassari's film, as it exemplifies the mechanisms via which identities may evolve, advance, and metamorphose across various cultural or social contexts. Subalternity is shown in a transformative and rebellious manner, wherein cultural, political, and economic obstacles have been contested to attain self-determination. Women, as doubly subalternized individuals, are not perceived in a conventional manner despite their arduous existence, since they are active agents striving for their well-being and personal autonomy.

4.3 Redefining Maleness

In *Ragued*, the connotations of masculinity appear to have diminished entirely. Women excel in occupying space while males remain inconspicuous. This indicates Kassari's attempt to construct a tale devoid of the patriarchal figure. In this context, male observers are subjected to an examination that alters their perception of the female identity. This distinctive portrayal of femininity and masculinity posits that maleness is intentionally marginalised to compel women to express and act autonomously. Male characters in the film are afforded restricted agency, resulting in a deficiency of power over women's lives. Initially present in the opening scenes while conspiring to illegally sail to Spain, male characters gradually vanish as events unfold, allowing women to assert their agency independently. Kassari clearly asserts her female authorship in the selection and allocation of roles among actors, so challenging the conventional male dominance in cinema direction.

The theme of *Burning*¹² in the movie is quite indicative of the crisis of males in conceptualizing *manhood* in that rural area and in the country at large. It suggests a lack of accountability among guys. The primary objective would involve land cultivation and familial care; but, contrary to this, they opted for a challenging road that undermines their positions as resilient individuals expected to be industrious and dedicated to their homeland. To burn signifies a deficiency of masculinity and the courage to confront the challenges and adversities encountered by both genders. Despite their potential to generate cash, they ultimately cannot represent their primary objectives, which focus on land preservation, and hence can not serve others' interests. The brave, mainly illiterate spouses want to illegally cross borders out of desperation. Nevertheless, when Hassan's mother attempts to dissuade her son from burning, she enquires, 'What of all this land?' He replies, 'It is devoid of any content.' The term "land" refers to the impoverished earth from which peasants or subalterns express their dire existence, as well as the state that has failed to fulfil the aspirations of young men by providing necessary employment, education, and development to support their families. Consequently, it may be asserted that these individuals bear duty for enhancing life's conditions in collaboration with the state. Manhood, by definition, encompasses the capacity to do duties traditionally associated with males, which are often more arduous than those typically assigned to women. Thus, opting to travel to Europe is an abandonment of their reality, which they ought to confront and enhance by all available methods.



Figure 13: Rural subaltern men meeting to sail clandestinely to Spain. (16:57)

The formation of a group of men to migrate to Europe represents a collective capitulation to everyday living challenges (figure 13). The image offers profound insight into men's complete ineptitude and incapacity; one would assert that they are inherently disadvantaged. Kassari has delineated a critical connection between the socially produced vulnerability of females and the inherent inadequacies of men, whether consciously or inadvertently. She articulates a viewpoint that, without meticulous analysis, would lead to an inadequate comprehension of the underlying message of the entire film. Furthermore, the picture itself reflects the land's potential for fertility and productivity. The few indications of verdancy suggest the potential for arable land. It needs genuine guys who can maximise its potential. These individuals have failed in their purpose and can thus be excluded from the purported masculinity. Kassari notes the importance of burning as a theme. My initial encounter with illegal emigration was on the opposite side of the Western world: the realm of absent dads and mothers abandoned in the rural regions of Morocco. On that side, we exist in a state of perpetual uncertainty, plagued by worry, and ultimately convince ourselves: he will not return home, he will cease to provide financial support, and the distant land will consume him. It will engulf him with its allure: Highways like ribbons, yoghurt with unparalleled hazelnut flavour, and slender, blonde females with emerald eyes.

¹² It is Moroccan term used to describe the clandestine immigration through small frail-boats from North Africa to Europe.

Ultimately, Kassari has effectively redefined masculinity in its decline. The failure to embrace responsibility is the defining trait of a film that has attained significant popularity due to its novelty in casting unprofessional performers and its storyline. The two male performers, Hassan and Ahmed, have imparted a real quality to the film through its subaltern thematic elements.

5. Women's Wives: On Women and Men Brainpower

In the preceding three films, I have contended that women are shown in a manner that subverts conventional representations, while males are not depicted as particularly strong, contrary to widespread belief. This section will further elucidate the film-making goal aimed at empowering women. Consequently, it will focus on the contention that women's depiction in Benlyazid's work is situated between the empowerment of women and, to a certain degree, the disempowerment of males. This section will demonstrate how the film positions both genders in a conflict to establish the female figure of authority on par with, or superior to, males. An overview of *Women's Wives* would facilitate a smooth and effective examination. Farida Benlyazid's film is a compelling rendition of the traditional fable, *Keid Ensa*. The film effectively engages with Moroccan storytelling traditions. The narrative follows Lalla Aisha (Samia Akarriou), a young woman who acquired literacy skills from her father. The Sultan's son, Rachid el-Ouali, is enamoured with Aicha but holds the belief that women lack the intellectual capacity of males. Aicha attempts to refute him by employing various methods and stratagems. Nevertheless, the Sultan struggles to accept it as truth. Upon marrying the Sultan's son, Aicha is sent to a three-year confinement in his cellar as a lesson. However, she quickly devises methods to outwit him.

5.1 Women and Brainpower: Defying Stereotyping Clichés

The film presents Lalla Aicha as an erudite woman who assists her father in commerce. The depiction of an educated female artisan in the city of Fez is rather revealing. Benlyazid's heroine serves as a deconstructive representation of the subservient, harem-like ladies typically depicted in Moroccan and Western literature. The protagonist of Benlyazid is not a typical role model. Lalla Aicha Bent Tajer is gorgeous, educated, and intellectual. She is a resilient and formidable figure against men's perceived superiority, who believe women lack intelligence. To embody such a formidable figure, Benlyazid draws upon the collective memory of the Fassi community to reinforce her feminist perspective. Benlyazid's use of the folktale in her film establishes novel methods of storytelling and narrative progression.

Lalla Aicha employs several cunning and malevolent schemes to subvert the oppressive Sultan's son. An exemplary illustration of a woman's capacity to humiliate a man is seen in the scene where Aicha dons a Sudanese slave costume with blackface and enters the prince's castle; she presents him with a cup of tea laced with a potion, causing him to fall asleep, after which she shaves his beard, a symbol of religion. As a result, he must remain indoors for seven consecutive days to allow his beard to grow. Benlyazid metaphorically subverts conventional gender stereotypes that perceive women as subservient and passive. This deception is effective in reversing gendered characteristics; hence, intellectual capacity is distributed amongst both genders.

The utilisation of orality in *Women Ruses* is really effective. Benlyazid revisits the realm of fairytales to recompose the authentic narratives of women. According to Teshome Gabriel, Benlyazid's filming approaches serve as a custodian of popular memory. The narrative of Lalla Aicha and the Sultan's son in the historic city of Fez serves as an instructive example for women. The production of this fable by Benlyazid references alternative African Maghrebian cinema. Benlyazid employs film that draws from traditions not for the sake of preserving such traditions. Benlyazid's movie aims to reinterpret traditions and utilise oral literature to address contemporary circumstances. Benlyazid's ingenuity is in her capacity to depict narratives where women are no longer compliant and subservient to societal norms. She produces narratives in which women are protagonists and have agency over their fate. Consequently, Benlyazid perceives storytelling as the superior alternative to the official narratives concerning women. Benlyazid portrays her protagonist as a provocative rebellious figure to patriarchal archetypes. Lalla Aicha is acutely aware of the prince's panoptic gaze (figure 14). The prince, positioned advantageously, appears to dominate the area occupied by Lalla Aicha; the Sultan's son employs binoculars to observe and monitor his surroundings. Lalla Aicha, acutely aware of her voyeuristic inclinations, obstructs the prince's access to her exquisite physique. This is seen in the moment where Lalla Aicha dons the veil to obstruct the prince's access to her beauty (figure 15).



Figure 14: The Male Gazing at the female Body. (08:37)



Figure 15: Lalla Aicha veiling her beauty from the Sultan's son. (03:49)

Benlyazid's protagonist defies Laura Mulveys' hypothesis that women as objects of male's gaze are submissive characters to 'be-looked-at'. (Mulvey, 1989) The notion of "to-be-looked-at-ness" is challenged in *Women's Ruses*. Putting the veil on her face shows the inaccessibility of Lalla Aicha to the male gaze and the Sultan's panopticon-like vision. Interestingly, Lalla Aicha challenges the gaze of the Prince and so she does to the audience. Moreover, this is conveyed meaningfully when the Prince kisses Lalla Aicha on her cheek. She turns her gaze to the camera to desexualise the scene in disregard to the pleasure she may have out of the prince's kiss.

Lalla Aicha is not only challenging when she gazes back at the male patriarchal look but also rebellious against conventions when she becomes a gazing subject. She transcends indoor spaces and crosses to outdoor spaces to become a surveying camera of the Old Medina's labyrinths. In a very telling scene, she goes to Hammam completely dressed in a white Haik. In this point in particular, she turns the veil from a code-dressing essence to a sign of supervision and controlling the Alleys of Fez. From behind the veil, Aicha is able to supervise the Prince when he was sitting by the door of the bookshop without being seen (figure4). Here, Lalla Aicha reverses the equation from being an object of the Prince's panopticon-like vision to a subject of gazing and supervising. (Techome, 1989)

In this respect, the veil's significance is twofold. First, it challenges and subverts the male patriarchal authority and becomes an icon of supervision and controlling. Second, Lalla Aisha, a veiled woman in the milieu of Fez, can be read as a cinematic cultural sign circulating in Western Cinema. The veil is no longer an icon of oppression of women as represented in other movies. Thus, it is no longer a constraint to women's freedom, an idea disseminated in the West (by Mernissi for instance). Unlike Mernissi, Benlyazid is fully aware of the functionality of the veil in the milieu of Fez. She uses the veil first to defy the male authority and second to correct the orientalist stereotypes about women. Benlyazid's camera allows access for the voyeuristic eyes of the audience to the harem not to gratify their fantasies but to 'de-haremise' their minds of stereotyped orientalist inventions. Thus, the veil's signification is multidimensional.



Figure 14: Lalla Aicha supervising the Prince. (15:10)

The panopticon-like vision about the harem world is disrupted and mocked. To use Foucault's words, the harem becomes "a frozen space, a segmented, and enclosed space ... in which individuals are inserted in a fixed place, in which the slightest movements are supervised, in which all events are recorded, in which power is exercised according to a hierarchical figure." (Foucault, 1977) . So, the harem's spatial organization in the movie clearly shows this idea of surveillance and panopticon vision. The harem is a space where everybody is a controlling and controlled subject. For instance, the prince uses his binocular to supervise Lalla Aicha. Lalla Aicha, in her turn, uses the veil to supervise the prince. Eventually, the guard of the prince, possibly a castrate, is supervised and supervising the other women in the palace.

Undeniably, this cinematic depiction makes Farida's cinema unique and special in the African Maghrebian world. Her adaptation of oral literature to cinema is successful and inspiring. The narration of a folktale through the consciousness of a female shows Benlyazid's creative cinema, one that reads traditions poetically and politically to serve the present women desires and needs and help in questioning the taken-for-granted male patriarchal stereotyping discursive formations.

5.2 Men and Power: Mythic Tales

To enhance the examination of this segment, we will present the discussion between the Prince and the religious sage to elucidate the film's topic and its principal message.



Figure 15: The Sultan's Son and the sage (Haj Tahar) arguing about women's brainpower. (49:28)

Prince: are women intelligent?

Sage: Of course. They are intelligent, and one must not forget that there are women sages, erudite, and even Sufis.

Prince: But their intelligence is not like men's?

Sage: what do you mean? Sometimes they are more intelligent than men.

Prince: of course, but only from time to time, on rare occasions.

Sage: yes, a woman has children, which she must take care of and raise. That does not leave her a lot of time for other things. Good is woman, and bad is woman, and God says: their ruse is immense. If the truth be known, we should hope that God does not make them our enemies...

Prince: Why are they so stubborn?

The interaction between the two men, illustrated in (figure 15) and the screenplay, offers profound insight into the conflicting attitudes, both good and negative, regarding women's mental capacity that pervade society. This enlightening discourse arises from the tensions the Sultan's son has encountered with Aisha, prompting him to reevaluate his assumptions on women's intellectual capacities. The debate of women's intellect today signifies an acknowledgement of their undeniable strength, which has mostly been influenced by the cost incurred. Deceived astutely by Aisha, the prince perceives no alternative to comprehending this intricate predicament other than consulting a sagacious individual who can elucidate his quandary. Throughout the film, the male is astutely outsmarted and mocked by the lady. The whole film storyline centres on the intelligence of women, highlighting the resulting embarrassment of males. The term, *Women's Wives*, is inherently evocative and addresses a fundamental aspect of gender relations in action. Furthermore, the female filmmaker's primary objective is to create a work that transcends the established boundaries between the two genders in media, especially in cinema. Realistically, the cunning shown in the film is a facet of the cultural and social fabric of society; nonetheless, some women may not perceive these traits as empowering qualities that could reshape their life perspectives. Benlyazid, using her academic background, has adeptly utilised traditional cultural folktales to bolster and advocate for women's rights.

During Aisha's imprisonment in an isolated underground cell, the Sultan's son keeps asking her to give up and admit the power of men over women, yet, firmly, she refuses to admit defeat to his manly fantasies. Meanwhile, on the standing of women from an Islamic perspective, a voice-over articulates the words of religious scholar Rumi¹³ so as to provide a religious aspect of women and men relationship as opposed to a cultural relations; the words claim: "a woman is not an object of desire, but a light from God" this is an evidence of how historically speaking women were treated differently from one age to another depending on the cultural, social, and even intellectual characteristics.

Despite the male protagonist's portrayal as a confident and formidable figure, he is consistently outmanoeuvred by Aisha's cunning. Indeed, the male is ridiculed inside; he confines her within his residence, yet she consistently outsmarts him, aided by other ladies. The female protagonist presents the viewer with an unusually distinct portrayal of women's behaviour in power dynamics. The female audience would empathise with Aisha for her clever and captivating strategies, whereas the male observer would experience profound psychological turmoil owing to the poor portrayal of the male protagonist's defeatism. Women may exhibit power even while incarcerated. Despite years of incarceration, she remains resolute in her ideals and maintains her dignity while fooling the prince. For years in the dungeon, he believes he is degrading her by incessantly posing the same question: "Lalla Aisha, the humiliated one residing in the cellar, which is more intelligent, men or women?" She obstinately reiterates the same response: that males are not more intelligent than women. This response is very detrimental to the prince's psyche, since he is unable to navigate the relationship through rational means and has resorted to patriarchal violence. Benlyazid has produced a film that draws extensively on traditional narratives to establish gender equilibrium between the sexes. Ultimately, males are neither stronger nor more intelligent than women, as she presents a depiction of extreme scenarios in which men appear absurd.

5.3 Gender: Reeling Power Relations

Benlyazid's *Women's Wives* is a film that exemplifies gendered clashes. The initial scene, with a little boy and his sister disputing over inconsequential issues, provides profound insight into the film's overall essence. The subsequent sections in the film, by revisiting the past, concentrate on juxtaposing the intellectual capacities of both genders. The issue of brainpower transitions from conventional cinematic representations to a new dimension inherent in human development; genuine intelligence transcends cultural or societal constructs and is a fundamental attribute shared by humans.

To expand the analysis into more dimensions I contend that, as depicted in the film, neither gender can outwit the other. The prince's reliance on harsh punitive measures exemplifies the purported irrationality of men and, hence, their comic impotence. Conversely, Aisha employs soft power, which proves to be far more successful than physical strength in this context. The prince attempts to demonstrate his superiority over Aisha and, by extension, all women; but, he succumbs to pitfalls of which he had neither prior knowledge nor the capacity to comprehend. As evidence of the aforementioned points, here is an example that illustrates Aisha's ingenuity and the prince's absurdity: with her father's assistance, she excavates a tunnel from her home to the cell, enabling her to lead a respectable life with her father while simultaneously tricking the oblivious prince. Concurrently, for years, she continues to monitor and deceive him throughout his many leisure excursions. Ultimately, she gives birth to three children fathered by her husband, unbeknownst to him. This deception exceeds the prince's comprehension as he receives three children in his castle while intending to marry another lady. In the concluding scenes, upon discovering that he has three children

¹³ Jalal Ad-Din Muhammad Rumi (30 September 1207 – 17 December 1273), was a 13th-century Persian poet, jurist, theologian, and Sufi mystic.

with his imprisoned wife and observing them at home (figure 16), the prince could not help but acknowledge his defeatism in the presence of his astute wife, Aisha. Consequently, he confessed to the mutual possession of intelligence, stating, 'a woman is not the object of desire, but the light of God.' Aisha cynically acknowledges that God has bestowed physical might onto men and cunning upon women.



Figure 16: the prince meeting with his secretly born and grown up kids. (1:22:17)

The prince's astonishment at this revelation is profound, as the deception is entirely inconceivable and signifies the complete downfall of his hubris. Recently, the prince recognises his inability to manage a lady who is quite unlike to those in the harem. The guy, as shown by the prince, is confronted with a new reality that requires a reevaluation of his stereotypical notions of women. The film exemplifies the most effective framework for illustrating the revolutionary construction and conception of gender roles and identities. Benlyazid has presented an inspirational film for other filmmakers with a traditional narrative. The film is characterised by innovative and inspiring representations of gender. The political and feminist significance of the film, Valérie Orlando states : Although appearing to be a trivial fairy tale, Benlyazid exposes elements that resonate with current discussions over the emancipation of women in Moroccan culture. The filmmaker aims to illustrate to her audience that women have consistently engaged actively and equitably in Moroccan social history.' (Valérie, 2011). Convincingly enough, the above quote sums up the ultimate goal behind the movie making. Women have historically been part of past and present formations and thus are not to be relegated to second rate citizens. The prince as a man of high social status is brought to his knees; hence, the common men are not excluded from having the same end.

In sum, *Women's Wiles* provides, from a feminist perspective, a new insight into women/men relationship in its intense form. No one can deny the importance of such theme in Moroccan movies for the emancipation of women from patriarchy and men from their short mindedness towards women. Feminists see in this movie a unique depiction that would serve women's interest in the best possible manners. Moroccan cinema has progressed in terms of gender representation; the classical ways are challenged by new distinctive modes.

6. Conclusion

To round up my rendering of the films, this paper has been devoted to the study of Gender identity in Moroccan cinema. It is a study of how identity is imaged aesthetically and politically in Hamid Zoughi's *Kharboucha* (2008), Latif Lahlou's *Samira's Garden* (2007), Yasmine Kassari's *The Dormant Child* (2004), and Farida Benlyazid's *Women's Wiles* (1999). The main argument is that the representation of males and females is critically exceptional in ways that have shaken the already established modes of cinematic representation, and hence it reproduces new patterns that reinforce marginalised identities. Thus, this paper has come to the fore to criticise, rethink, and revise the foundations of the constructed images of femaleness and maleness.

The first two movies analysed in this paper by male film-makers are symptomatic of the commitment Moroccan cinema has towards the improvement of women's mediated image. Zoughi has provided an energetic movie that contributes profoundly to generating heated controversies on the image of women and men. Through *Kharboucha*, the film-maker has successfully integrated the perspective of women in shaping political and social life. In turn, Lahlou, Through *Samira's Garden*, has presented a theme (couples' intimate life) that is always unspoken about in Moroccan society; actually, he offers a lens through which the audience can see factual realities in fictional narratives.

As far as the two last films are concerned, the feminine touch has been firmly integrated in making the films and also in thematising and starring matters. Kassari's *The Dormant Baby* has exposed the subaltern's beingness as the core of action and depiction. Also it has provided a new way of looking at manliness in its alleged demise and womaness in resurgence. Benlyazid's *Women's Wiles* has targeted the polarities that exist between men and women in terms of their superiority or inferiority to each other. It concludes that men and women are complementary parts to each other.

This paper has attempted to create more anxieties in Moroccan cinema, and its recording and documenting of femalehood and malehood. Although the scope of the paper has not allowed for extending the discussion about the representation of gender complex structures, the rationale of this study takes into account the disturbing questions that have been raised to rethink the Moroccan cinematic representation. Moroccan camera lenses have achieved a lot in terms of improving women image in cinema. The topic of gender identity in Moroccan cinema is very inspiring. The specificity and particularity of this topic as a feminist and a postcolonial issue can be dealt with in a wider context. This is only a first step toward opening the journey of researching the multifaceted aspects and anxieties Moroccan cinema has recently created.

I shall conclude by saying that Moroccan female and male film makers and making, the subject of this paper, have acted collectively, as illustrated in the analysis of the movie above, to establish non-gendered cinema making and portrayal. They have come to follow a unique perspective on male and female cinematic construction; particularly when it comes to women as being the subject of filming.

In the finishing touches of this paper, I have to take the discussion on some remarks. First, other much works has been left unexamined; consequently, Moroccan cinema needs much more investigation and study through focusing mainly on the anxieties and the discursive implications that have been developed recently. In this regard, it should be studied from different angles because of its multipurpose ideological undertakings. Second, I have tried to analyse the movies under scrutiny as literary works; nevertheless, I could not escape falling in a pro-feminism reading. All the movies deserve to be examined under the lenses of feminist theory and discourse analysis because of the cultural, social, and ideological features they carry. It is hoped, then, that this thesis has helped in opening other horizons to the future research.

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