



## Discursive Agency and Literary Visibility: Deconstructing Patriarchal Oppression and Re-narrating Female Subjectivity in Wafa Faith Hallam's *The Road from Morocco* (2012)

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### Abstract

Over centuries, mutely inhibited Moroccan women have been held captives of two oppressive yet mutually collusive narratives: one is religiously conservative and locally patriarchal, the other is hegemonically Eurocentric. Through delving into the feasible prospects of discursive agency and literary visibility, this paper explores the theme of deconstructing patriarchal oppression and re-narrating female subjectivity in Wafa Faith Hallam's *The Road from Morocco* (2012). To trace the liberating potential of writing and probe its rewards of cultural activism and social emancipation, particular focus is put on the unruly contumacy evinced by Saadia, Wafa's mother. This interpretive study re-examines how literary writing is reconfigured as a politically subversive practice of epistemological disobedience aimed to unsettle the patriarchal logic. To demonstrate the transformative power of literary writing as a sign of spectacular resistance, this reading invokes intersectionality theory and postcolonial feminism as profound theoretical and conceptual lenses. The paper concludes that Moroccan women's literature often culminates in paradigm-shifting rearrangements in the cultural politics of male/female power imbalances. Hence, the symbolic power of Moroccan women's writings resides not only in challenging national patriarchal orders and Orientalist circulations but also in transforming the gender-exclusive model of his-story to the gender-inclusive perspective of her-story.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Moroccan women's early literary writings focused on the quest of reclaiming female agency through empowering woman's social emancipation and acknowledging their political contributions to the nationalist history of resistance and decolonial thought (Charef, 2010). As a social practice of intellectual activism, female writing in the context of post-independence Morocco is often connected with the politics of agency expression and literary protest. In their intellectual struggle for historical recognition, Moroccan Women writers critiqued inherited colonial legacies of double female oppression and subverted persisting patriarchal power structures (Rashed, 2021; EL Belkacemi, 2025). By adopting literary writing as a form of epistemological disobedience, Moroccan women writers reinvented groundbreaking paradigms of identity formation and challenged gender-exclusive models of historical knowledge production (Hachad, 2019; Samir, 2024; Afilal, 2025). In the process of authoring their fictional critiques, Moroccan women resisted restrictive constraints of domestic invisibility and

challenged constrictive norms of patriarchal persecution (Menin, 2014; Mehta, 2014; Tazi, 2021). They contested masculinist modes of cultural representation, recorded their historical visibility, and triumphantly vindicated “their contributions during times of national political turmoil” (Diaconoff, 2009, p.4).

Writing here intersects with Edward Said’s (1994) theoretical insights which define it as an oppositional mode of subversive resistance and decolonial ‘counter-articulation’ (p.311). In Wafa Faith Hallam’s *The Road from Morocco* (2012), female writing operates as a deconstructive strategy that overthrows traditional conventions perpetuated by the patriarchal ideology. Arguing against the backdrop of patriarchal orthodoxy, contemporary Moroccan women writers reconsider the emancipatory potential of women’s literary visibility. In their subversive narratives, Moroccan women writers adopt secular modernity and liberal democracy as a conceptual frame of reference to empower female subjectivity in authoring their resistant stories. (Wadud, 1999; Salime, 2011; Lamrabat, 2016; Rddad, 2018, p. 16).

Wafa Faith Hallam’s *The Road from Morocco* (2012) is a non-fictional family memoir that recounts the tormenting tribulations and the afflicting ordeals encountered by the female protagonist, Saadia. In the story, Saadia is forcibly coerced to wed against her will at the age of thirteen. Neglected by her patriarchal father, the ill-fated Saadia is abandoned to undergo an unhealable childhood trauma of sexual defloration which imprints incurably injurious scars in her deeply agonized psyche.

As an immature underage girl, Saadia’s unripe virginity is abusively ravished and victimized at the behest of preserving the highly treasured dignity of her family honor. Saadia’s defying disobedience in declaring her matrimonial severance and releasing herself from the shackles of patriarchal repression reopened new horizons for her daughters, particularly Wafa and Nezha, to travel to America. Deeply attached to the Western ideals of secular modernity and female emancipation, Saadia is defiantly persistent in resisting the hegemonic influences of her local patriarchal norms. As the narrative unfolds, Saadia’s daughters developed a strong desire for fulfilling the American dream by leading a carefree life of extravagant lavishness, hedonistic merrymaking and opulent luxury in diaspora. In this regard, Hallam’s narrative shapes not just the Moroccan literary landscape but also pays tribute to the participatory role of female authorship in producing a counter-fiction of anti-patriarchal resistance and epistemic decoloniality.

In his recently published essay, “The emancipation of a Harem Girl: Resisting the Gendered Division of space in Wafa Faith Hallam’s *Road from Morocco*”, Lamghari (2024) explores how Saadia’s divorce is a transgressive trespass “of the sacred cultural and physical frontiers” (p.1). Nevertheless, what this critical view fails to reconsider is the way Saadia’s persistent tenacity of obtaining her divorce intersects with broader domains of economic upward mobility, social emancipation, and the penchant for autonomous self-determination.

In contrast to Lamghari’s study, my argument contends that Hallam embraces in her narrative the Western secularist mentality of social emancipation. Her crucial concern is to incorporate the Western gynocentric framework to reclaim not only the empowering agency of political visibility but to also unsettle the ultra-conservative orthodoxy rooted in Arab patriarchal cultures. Even Hallam’s narratorial voice in the novel glides towards an alternately secular

thinking trajectory: “a country where the only freedom possible for a woman required that she immersed herself in a foreign culture and embraced it” (Hallam, 2012, p. 38).

Besides, Hallam appropriates English language, as a foreign lingua franca, to convey to wider Euro-Western readerships the poignant calamities encountered by her mother. Besides, Hallam's audacious narrative portrays her mother's stoic endurance and glorious victory in confronting the persisting patriarchal legacies of forced marriage. In his critically acclaimed study, *Le Roman Maghrébin*, the Moroccan critic, Abdelkbir Khatibi, confirms that the use of foreign language, be it French or English, can instigate a form of:

irony which would not only be a form of revenge on the part of the colonized who had been oppressed and seduced by the West, but would also allow the North African writer to distance himself with regard to language by inverting it, destroying it, and presenting it in new structures such that the [non-Arab] reader would become a stranger in his own language (Cited in Alloula, 1986, p. 15).

In the same vein, Hallam, like Chinua Achebe, seems to be fully aware of the decolonial potentiality upheld by English language as a rhetorical means of discursive challenge, epitomizing the assumption that a stonemason's tools can destroy a stonemason's house if properly readjusted and recycled (Cited in Williams and Chrisman, 2013). Similarly, what Lamghari's reading of Hallam's *The Road from Morocco* (2012) lacks are the insightful contributions which Kimberlé Crenshaw's (1989) 'intersectionality theory' might potentially supplement in enhancing the thematic interpretations of the text under scrutiny.

In the narrative, Saadia is victimized not only because of misogynistic rhetorics of gender discrimination that underpin sexist stereotypes of biological fragility and the sexual subordination of women. She is also exploited due to her underprivileged social class, weak marginal position, and lack of economic independence as well as immune intellectual literacy. This article argues that the coalition of various disempowering factors, ranging from female inferiority, home confinement, and patriarchal domination, justify the sexual exploitation and educational deprivation of Moroccan female subaltern. Drawing on Postcolonial feminism and Crenshaw's intersectionality theory, I re-examine, throughout this article, how the intersection of gendered class discrepancies, orthodox religious traditions, and patriarchal authority, maintains the minority status of Moroccan women. By the same token, this current study explores alternative avenues whereby this triangular trinity, conducive to Moroccan women disempowerment, is disruptively contested, destabilized and subverted in Hallam's anti-patriarchal narrative.

Throughout this interpretive reading, the scholarly field of Moroccan women's literary writing is re-appraised as deconstructive strategy of epistemic resistance intended to demolish patriarchal power structures of sexual violence. Furthermore, re-narrating Moroccan female subjectivity outside the normative social constraints and religious restraints, endorsed by male-dominated theology, is also part and parcel of this scholarly inquiry. Indeed, it is in this regard that this article garners authenticity and originality. This article's principal rationale is to contribute to the ongoing scholarly debate on the evolving role of Moroccan women's literature. Beyond paying tribute to Moroccan woman's literary contributions, this article

interrogates the female quest for gender mobility, political recognition, and social emancipation in post-independence Morocco.

## 2. REVISITING POSTCOLONIAL FEMINISM AND AGENCY EXPRESSION IN CONTEMPORARY MOROCCAN WOMEN'S WRITINGS

To dissect how literary writing enhances female agency and inspires the contestation of the patriarchal logic, this paper applies postcolonial feminism as a conceptual framework. Thematically, while Moroccan women writers deconstruct Orientalist stereotypes related to the harem-life of sexual sensuality, racial Otherness, and Arab cultural alterity, they simultaneously dismantle enduring legacies of patriarchal oppression prevalent in Arab Muslim societies (Navaro and Parrilla, 2019, pp. 291-308). Viewed this way, the feminist lens overlaps here with postcolonial theory in a variety of ways. These theoretical intersections are manifested in problematizing compelling issues of representation, female agency, and the counter-hegemonic subversion of the male phallic gaze (Loomba, 1993; Grace, 2004; Spivak, 2015). Hence, as Ashcroft et al (2000) argues, "In all these respects the parallel between the situation of postcolonial writing and that of feminist writing is striking" (p.1). Once conjointly dovetailed, postcolonialism and feminism can forge resisting narratives able to thwart internal patriarchal regime and simultaneously deconstruct Eurocentric grand-narratives emanating from external imperial centers (Ashcroft et al., 2002, p. 93). Besides, postcolonial feminism strengthens the devoiced socio-political concerns of marginalized communities and helps reinvigorate the muted interests of Third World subaltern women (Majid, 1995). It advocates for freewill agency and the autonomous subjectivity of peripheral female categories living outside the geographical precincts of western metropolitan cultures (Mohanty, 1984).

Mohanty (1984) argues that white feminist scholarship is grossly spurious and infested with myriad representational deficiencies or flawed theoretical limitations. It is riddled with stereotypical speculations and fallacious inaccuracies. It neither reflects nor does it capture a truly factual glimpse of the traumatic experiences and socio-economic exclusions routinely encountered by non-Western women (Mohanty, 1984, p. 61). For Mohanty, the sociological formulations of Western feminism replicate the (neo) colonial agenda of discursive colonization and the epistemic violence of cultural imperialism.

In her *Road from Morocco* (2012), Hallam resists the undifferentiated homogeneity of Arab-Muslim women's experiences of female subordination and patriarchal oppression as she invalidates Western monolithic conceptualizations of gender. Hallam embodies her "powerful rebuttal to the claim that [Arab] women were categorically weaker than men" (Crenshaw, 1989, p. 153). In Hallam's narrative, Saadia's rebellious revolt against the Moroccan patriarchal social order epitomizes the theoretical perception of agency underscored by postcolonial feminism. More succinctly, the liberating power of the postcolonial feminist approach is illustrated in contradicting white feminist legacies which perpetually endorse Orientalist civilizing pretexts of "saving brown women from brown men" (Williams and Chrisman, 2013, p. 93; Crawley, 2022). Accordingly, postcolonial feminism proves efficiently applicable in approaching Saadia's quest for social emancipation and autonomous self-liberation. Unlike its Western counterpart, postcolonial feminism emphasizes the pluralistic heterogeneity of non-Western women's distinctive particularities and highlights the complex diversity of their social ambitions and political aspirations (Ashcroft et al, 2013). The Western feminist framework that

imposes on non-European women a trans-cultural rubric, despite their multiple social circumstances, incongruous traditions, and various histories, is itself a colonizing ideology (Mohanty, 1984). This victimizing narrative is indicative of imperialist epistemic violence that is deeply complicit in the colonial history of palimpsestic effacement (Grace, 2004, p.204). Once critically applied on Third World female-authored literary texts, postcolonialism feminism analyses remarkable scenes of female resilience and investigates fascinating stories of anti-patriarchal resistance. Furthermore, the concept of agency, as an actual practice, can have diverse cultural manifestations in the context of human social relations. In his *Sage dictionary of cultural studies*, Barker (2004) conceptualizes agency as a freestanding resolve or a decision-making power to either decline or opt willingly for specific choices and personal preferences in defiance of socio-cultural hindrances or prohibitive religious strictures (p.4).

In Hallam's *Road from Morocco* (2012), agency finds ample expressions in Saadia's unlimited freedom and resolute persistence to achieve social emancipation and transcend spatial and socio-religious boundaries. Agency here is linked to Saadia's desired aspirations to accomplish self-independence in flagrant disregard of the coercive circumscriptions dictated by the oppressive patriarchal power. For instance, the author, Wafa, appears sympathetic in sharing the plight of her sexually abused mother while she chooses to neglect the deep rancorous jealousy felt by her father. "He [Wafa's father] must have felt threatened by her [Wafa's mother] increasing independence and self-confidence" (Hallam, 2012, p. 33).

While she exhibits empathetic solidarity in identifying herself with the liberating cause of her oppressed mother, Wafa never misses the chance to assail her father and launch mordant criticism against his extremist orthodoxy. "His pious arguments infuriated her even more; she hated his religiosity" (Hallam, 2012, p. 23). Apparently, Saadia's challenging defiance in the novel represents Hallam's discursive agency of literary activism. It reveals her explicit yearnings for social emancipation, which will be explored in the subsequent section. In contrast to the monolithic singularity of Western feminism, Hallam's postcolonial feminist novel depicts her gender reformist perspective. Thus, Hallam's striking narrative reiterates the heterogeneous nature of Arab women's ideological orientations by asserting their different socio-economic preferences and espousing the multiplicity of their individual priorities.

### **3. REFLECTING ON MOROCCAN WOMEN'S LITERATURE AND THE QUEST FOR SOCIAL EMANCIPATION**

The growing development of Moroccan women's literature derives its epistemological agency from multiple literary configurations produced by early Moroccan female diasporic writers. Writing from exile with a transnational perspective, these migrant women writers developed profound trans-cultural experiences as they mapped diverse geographies and crossed various cultures around the world (Diaconoff, 2009). Educated abroad, these women immigrants engaged in deep cross-cultural encounters, intellectual exchanges, and intimate interactions with the Euro-Western academia and its influential feminist thought (Belgaid and ElAissi, 2021; Lamghari, 2024). Hence, the scholarly urgency of establishing Moroccan women's writing as a distinctive literary genre of female emancipation is catalyzed, according to Berrada (2008), by the transnational fluidities, global mobility, and adventurous travels of Moroccan women immigrants. To navigate the repressive policies of state surveillance and escape the wrath of theocratic tyranny prevalent at home, diasporic Arab women writers



decided to re-narrate their female subjectivities from across borders (Bataoui, 2022). Their central objectives included overcoming marginal positions of peripheral subalternity and reclaiming their hijacked agency of knowledge production and historical presence. In this vein, Berrada (2008) avowedly reasserts that:

Since the late 1960s, women writers have appeared in the Arab North who no longer want their works to echo prevailing ideologies and discourses simply. The stories of Khunatha Bannuna and Rafiqat al-Tabia in Morocco have a different tone... In other words, North African women's literary discourse has illuminated and continues to illuminate women as real people, not merely as simultaneously exemplary and degraded symbols (p. 237)

Given the potential power of Moroccan female literary writings in inducing political change and reconfiguring social order, Moroccan women embraced writing “so as to become protagonists *in* not simply the spectators *of* history” (Diaconoff, 2009, p.3). In their subversive literary pursuits, Moroccan women writers breached prohibitive taboos, dismantled sexist prejudices of gender discrimination, and transgressed imposed religio-cultural obstacles. Putting implicit faith in the transformative influence of storytelling as a practical tool of inaugurating reconstructive reform and inspiring democratic criticism, women writers have envisaged not just their social roles. They also reshaped political thought, paving the way for the inexorable proliferation of various feminist movements across Morocco (Ennaji, 2016). Through their revolutionary writings, Moroccan women writers invented alternative discourses that called for epistemic inclusivity. They spoke fervently in the interest of gender equality and political democracy. Their feminist agenda targeted the socio-political enhancement of women's rights, including their decisive agency of self-determination (Salime, 2016). Accordingly, Moroccan women's literary discourse constitutes a mosaic tapestry of female-authored texts that explore themes of decolonial opposition and anti-patriarchal resistance. This complex constellation is variously heterogenous in nature as it encompasses a wide spectrum of exquisite narratives, ranging from Leila Abouzeid's *Year of the Elephant: Moroccan Women's Journey Toward Independence* (1989), Fatima Mernissi's *Sheherazade Goes West: Different Cultures, Different Harems* (2001), Leila Lalami's *Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits* (2006), to Wafa Faith Hallam's *Road from Morocco* (2012). All the aforementioned female narratives are concerned with remapping unequally gendered divisions of space. Their liberating scope is broadly expanded to comprise rewriting the lingering colonial legacies and scripturally re-routing the androcentric historiographic records chronicled by dominant masculinist representations. Most of Moroccan women's writings grappled with pressing issues of female social emancipation, the quest for retrieving agency, and fulfilling the hoped-for aspirations of gender equality in post-independence Morocco.

Immediately after independence, Moroccan women embraced the sheltering bosom of writing as a shielding fortress to escape the watchful eye of patriarchal surveillance and suffocating censorship exerted on them (Lamghari, 2024). Similarly, Bhavani and Haraway argue that “We repeatedly re-historicize ourselves by telling a story; we relocate ourselves in the present historical moment by reconfiguring our identities relationally [...] we re-historicize our identities all of the time through elaborate story-telling” (1994, p. 21). Literary writing and elaborate storytelling empowered Moroccan women to assert the material existence of their

gender identity. In extension of this argument, writing also aided Moroccan female communities to challenge the political realities of domestic invisibility and eventually record their historical presence.

Hallam's *Road from Morocco* (2012) recounts a Moroccan woman's painstaking journey towards social emancipation and self-independence. Through disorienting conservative stereotypes of patriarchal oppression and re-narrating female subjectivity beyond the traditional structures of male elitism, Hallam challenges deep-seated norms of parental obedience and fatherly despotism. She also resists the gendered polarization of space and embodies the demand for gender reform as well as the legal rearrangement of marital life in post-independence Morocco (Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006).

If juxtaposed with another Moroccan female narrative, Saadia's experiences of home confinement inside the claustrophobic prisonhouse of the harem resemble those invoked in Fatima Mernissi's classical novel, *Dreams of Trespass: Tales of a Harem Girlhood* (1944). In this narrative, the author presents two incompatible portrayals of the Moroccan harem. While the first describes the harem as a space of subservient docility and spousal obedience, the second depicts it as a contested site of subversive insurgency and defying disobedience. In the case of Hallam's *Road from Morocco* (2012), the unruly contumacy, bravely showcased by Saadia, falls under the second category. Undeterred by the stifling confines of patriarchal authority, Saadia decides resolutely to apply for a divorce and initiate a business of her own in separate isolation from her husband's intrusion.

Undismayed by the socially codified taboos of disgraceful stigma and shameful dishonor, stereotypically attached to female divorcees, Saadia embarks on multiple adventures of love-making affairs and sexual encounters. In this context, Saadia resonates compatibly with Mernissi's ideal archetype of a rebellious woman who labels herself an active agent of change, social transformation, and self-fulfillment. Notwithstanding the afflicting tribulations she frequently encountered en route towards self-liberation, Saadia remains steadfastly persistent and stoic in pursuing her journey of self-independence despite the adamant refusal of her dogmatic husband. To demolish fictionally and abolish legally the constrictive strangleholds of androcentric masculinity and phallocentric patriarchy, Moroccan women writers resorted to literary self-expression. Writing acted as an oppositional counter-strategy to protest against disempowering injustices of sexual exploitation and undermine the erotic objectification of the female body.

Hallam's novel reflects critically on how the imperious supremacy and sexual superiority of the male elite consign women to a subordinate position marked by the peripheral status of socio-political alienation. In his illuminating essay, "Remembering Fanon, Self, Psyche and Colonial Condition", Homi Bhabha reminds us of how "the state of emergency is also always a state of emergence" (Cited in Williams and Chrisman, 2013, p.114). Similarly, the pervasion of male domination compelled Moroccan women writers to devise a gynocentric literary canon which problematizes patriarchal oppression and demands social emancipation. Since the hegemonic presence of dominative power implies the emergence of subversive counter-power, as Foucault (1978) pinpoints, then Moroccan women's literature represents a counter-fiction of anti-masculinist resistance and social liberation (p.95).

#### 4. DECONSTRUCTING PATRIARCHAL OPPRESSION AND RE-NARRATING FEMALE SUBJECTIVITY IN WAFIA FAITH HALLAM'S *THE ROAD FROM MOROCCO* (2012)

Through the liberating platform of literary expression, Moroccan women writers have reclaimed the discursive agency of gender mobility, political visibility, and social emancipation. The production of liberating literary representations empowered oppressed Moroccan women to reconfigure their denied agency. It enabled them to redefine traditional gender roles beyond the Orientalist-patriarchal framework, which normalizes forms of gender inferiority and Arab female docility. Moroccan women's counter-discourse is powerful in deconstructing Western speculative assumptions that speak of Arab women's misogyny. The efficacy of Moroccan women's literature is also reified in contesting images of Arab female bondage and sexual slavery normalized by Western Orientalist feminism and its monolithic representations of gender relations across the Maghreb. In his remarkable commentary, Majid (2011) posits that Hallam's *Road from Morocco* (2012) "upends the notion that women from Arab and Muslim backgrounds are helplessly trapped in male-dominated structures" (p.2). Writing is, nonetheless, reconfigured here as a socially committed political practice, whose symbolic resistance harbors the emancipatory power of feminist cultural activism.

In its attempt to re-narrate female subjectivity, Hallam's text invalidates the conventional portraits of Moroccan women as being submissive housemaids or sexually enslaved odalisques languishing in the harem-life of erotic concubinage. For decades, the patriarchal regime assumed the intellectual prerogative of scriptural record and dominated the literary landscape of fictional representation (Spivak, p. 167). The patriarchal monopoly of knowledge production eclipsed a variety of emerging women's literary voices and relegated their scholarly contributions to the graveyard of historical oblivion (Mernissi, 1994; Spivak, 1985).

Morocco's independence in 1956 heralded the inaugural initiation of women's anti-patriarchal protests against gender-unjust practices of economic exclusion and political seclusion. Moroccan educated women, influenced by the Western feminist doctrine expanding rapidly across the MENA region, instituted an amalgam of feminist associations and women's rights-advocating NGOs (Salime, 2011; Rddad, 2018). Through relentless struggle, Moroccan women exerted lobbying pressure on repressive patriarchal institutions. They strived to eliminate all prevailing forms of female political disenfranchisement, domestic confinement, forced marriage, and the sexual harassment of women at the workplace. Morocco, in the post-independence phase, proposed the first draft of its constitutional amendments. The introduced gender reforms were deeply frustrating for Moroccan women in that they adhered to the patriarchal regime of the Sharia law<sup>1</sup> and perpetuated male-centered jurisprudential theology (Lamghari, 2014; Salime, 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> Sharia law is a religious belief system which constitutes a fundamental backbone of the Islamic jurisprudential tradition and its theological exegesis of interpreting the divine text (the Quran). It decrees a set of specific rights, principles, and duties to organize people's social relations. It illuminates the life of Arab Muslim believers and guide their spiritual and physical behavior towards



Given their gender-exclusive restrictions, the new constitutional amendments proved to be repressive and frustratingly disappointing for Moroccan women. These disempowering regulations undermined women's social agency and denied them autonomous self-control over their bodies. Moreover, the newly ratified ordinances thwarted Moroccan women's quest for social emancipation and gender equality. In her *Beyond the Veil*, the Moroccan sociologist, Fatima Mernissi (1987), posits that the primary draft of the Moroccan family code retained the androcentric policies of unilateral repudiation and unjustified polygamy. In the same vein, Mernissi sees that the first constitutional draft exacerbated the marginal status of Moroccan women and reinforced their peripheral subalternity. It espoused traditional belief systems and endorsed the misogynistic oppression of women as alienated subaltern categories. It further impeded their strong desire for gender mobility in public spaces, "especially with regard to work and education" (Lamghari, 2024, p. 3).

Moroccan women label the art of literary writing as an uncensored playground that offers them a free rein of self-expression and enunciative modes anti-patriarchal contestation. It helps them articulate their neglected histories of female resistance and reclaim their rights of political engagement, economic integration, and social recognition (Kozma 2003). literary writing is the only alternative avenue whereby the silenced concerns of Moroccan women could be revociced in subversive fashions. Hence, the revolutionary potential of literary visibility and intellectual activism in the context of Moroccan women intersect in many ways with the Egyptian feminist, Nawal El-Saadawi (1997), who upholds that "the pen was an effective weapon that I could use against injustice and oppression" (p.4).

With the transnational transference of pan-Arab Islamic feminism, Moroccan women embraced the powerful efficacy of the pen in confronting enduring patriarchal legacies. They protested through writing re-archive their forgotten traumatic experiences and challenge old hegemonic regimes of gender inferiority and sexual discrimination. In Hallam's deconstructive counternarrative, gender dynamics are re-defined within the framework of shifting postcolonial identities and changing subjectivities that often characterize the transnational experiences of migrant Moroccan women (Bekkaoui, 2024). Given its trans-Mediterranean itineraries, Moroccan female identity, in the context of human mobility and global migration, is a matter of *becoming* rather than fixed *being*. Hence, Moroccan female identity is always in a journey of continual transition, self-discovery and incessant flux. This perception contradicts the monolithic view that attests the homogenous singularity of national identity. In fact, the evolving fluidity of human character and subjectivity evokes Stuart Hall's (2015) understanding of identity as a dynamic process characterized by constant change and circulatory mobility rather than stagnant fixity. In Hallam's *Road from Morocco* (2012), this anti-essentialist view is manifested in recounting her mother's adventurous journey towards self-independence and social transformation. As the narrative unfolds, the scenario of female identity reformation is embodied in emancipatory practices of personal change and the making of individual choices. These liberatory inclinations have ultimately contributed to refashioning

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wanted forms of religious sanctity, ascetic piety, moral virtuosity and monotheistic devotion. (See Mernissi, 1987, 1991, 2002; Sadiqi and Ennaji, 2006).

Saadia's previous convictions and reshaping her cultural mentality. Through writing, Hallam (2012) pays venerating homage to her mother's untapped stories of patriarchal oppression and female disobedience. She adeptly excels in reproducing a finely well-embroidered portrait that disorients orthodox patriarchal and Orientalist images of Moroccan women, framing them as indolently exploitable concubines or bedridden odalisques incarcerated in the prisonhouse of the seraglio/harem (Alloula, 1986; Belman, 1989; Grace, 2004).

Drawing on the preceding discussion, the act of writing is no longer deemed here a symbolic or purely aesthetic endeavor of artistic production. Yet, it rather implies, as Bhabha (1994) argues, "signs of spectacular resistance" and civil disobedience that entail decolonial extrication from an externally oppressive force (p.172). While practicing the art of writing, Moroccan women realized the fact that every crisis is an opportunity, and that every state of emergency is a springboard for emergence and resurgence. Writing, therefore, corresponds to a liberating potential of self-emancipation. It participates in dispelling the repressive status quo for it is adopted as a resisting strategy to culminate in subverting and reverting the phallic gaze of patriarchal hegemony.

## 5. DREAMS OF TRESPASS: TRANSGRESSING THE PATRIARCHAL CONFINES OF RELIGIOUS ORTHODOXY AND FEMALE DOMESTICITY

In Wafa Faith Hallam's *Road from Morocco* (2011), writing as deconstructive politics concerned with activist literary agency and the subversion of patriarchal mindscape is a prominent theme. "But first I am going to help you get out of bed" (Hallam, 2011, p. II). Hallam's narratorial voice strives to liberate Saadia from the constrictive constraints of domestic invisibility, sexual exploitation, and patriarchal persecution. In its total entirety, the novel is a transgressive attempt that aims to breach the repressive regulations of male-enforced surveillance and social control institutionalized by the jurisdictional authority of the patriarchal regime. The extract above reveals the indomitable desire of a subdued Moroccan woman struggling to escape the painful agonies of forced marriage and home confinement.

Through the platform of literary writing, Wafa takes her mother on a historically immortal and transfigurative journey of perennial eternity, historical preservation, and self-realization. Stylistically, the present progressive tense, "I am going", suggests an ongoing liberation movement of self-transformation. It reflects the enterprising spirit of psychological catharsis and the restorative relief of spiritual immunity. The story depicts the adventurous odysseys of self-discovery and trans-cultural exploration embarked on by a revolutionary Moroccan female writer, Wafa Faith Hallam. While trying to encourage her fragile and decrepit old mother to record her worth-telling story on a tape recorder, Wafa "turned to the large bay window to draw the curtains wide for the sun to stream through" (Hallam, II). In this context, the discursive inclinations towards rewriting and refurbishing the self are evidently conspicuous. It is through writing that subaltern women's experiences and their yearned for quest of self-emancipation are feasible and attainable. Metaphorically, the act of writing is analogous to the brightening sunlight of freedom since it heralds the flowery springtime of female liberation that ripens the seeds of anti-patriarchal confrontation.

Born into a conservative Moroccan culture, where virginity loss is equated with disgraceful stigma and ignominious dishonor, Saadia's body is sacrificed at the behest of safeguarding the treasured dignity of family honor. "Later that day, the women would be pleased to display the

bloodstained sheet and gown in a big round copper tray—proof of her virginity, her sacrifice at the altar of family honor, which would thence be preserved” (Hallam, 2012, p. 4). In the Arab-Muslim society, the preservation of a woman’s hymen until it is sexually deflowered in the proper context of a legally documented wedlock is perceived of as a compulsory daughterly duty. When looked at from the patriarchal lens, Moroccan women are stereotyped as erotically sexualized docile bodies and underprivileged concubines exploited in the polygynous harem of lascivious lechery. They are labeled as fetishized odalisques available for licentious men who objectify them as a source of sexual gratification (Grace, 2004).

To authorize the sexual victimization of Saadia, her husband, who is twice her age, invokes the divine injunctions and the theological interpretations legitimized by the male-dominated exegesis of the Quran. “He grabbed her more firmly, trying to spread her legs apart, and moved his hand up her thigh, reaching upward her groin and her soft, warm, hairless femininity...Don’t be afraid...you know we have to do this...it is god’s will” (Hallam, 2012, p. 3). This shocking excerpt captures the corporal violence of conjugal phallocentrism and aggressive sexual ravishment imposed on the oppressed Saadia. This erotic scene portrays the traumatic extent to which “the deflowered virgin becomes a lost woman, but the man, like the legendary phoenix, emerges from the fray purer, more virile, better respected” (Mernissi, 1982, p. 186). In this instance, Wafa casts doubt on the political exploitation of religion and the ideological manipulation of the male hegemonic interpretations of the Islamic tenets. Religion, in Hallam’s eyes, is employed as a demagogic artifice to camouflage the epistemic and sexual violence of conjugal rape and misogynistic behaviors of male phallocratic supremacy (Safi, 2006; Dialmy, 2010; AL Aissi, 2020).

The justification of sexual exploitation through the invocation of Islamic theological ordinances echoes what Foucault (1975) terms the “juridico-discursive model of power” (45). Similarly, in his *History of Sexuality*, Foucault (1978) reminds us that “where there is desire, the power relation is already present” (p.81). To fulfil the desire of sexual pleasure, the male elite resorts to the symbolic power of using inviolable divine injunctions to vindicate their potent virility and maintain the aggressive ideology of sexism and phallocentric masculinity. In their jointly co-authored essay, “Colonialism, Racism and Representation”, Robert Stam and Louise Spence (1983) posit that “the logic of sexism leads to rape [and] exploitation” (p.4). Rddad (2018) argues that the gender-exclusive jurisprudence and the patriarchal interpretations of the sacred text have been conducive to the formation of Moroccan women's minority status (p.11).

Overlooking their authentic validity, the speculative inventions of post-prophetic oral heritage (Hadiths) legitimized, in the name of Islamic legacy, “the long tradition of patriarchal tyranny of harem-life and political hegemony” (Rddad, 2018, p.13). Hence, the patriarchal religious interpretations are indicative testimonies that probe the male “manipulative utilization of religion” (Rddad, 2018, p.13) to endorse the social alienation, educational deprivation, and sexual exploitation of women in Arab-Islamic cultures.

Hallam’s *Road from Morocco* (2012) also explores the influential roles played by power imbalances embedded in the ideology of space division. She reflects on how gender spatial discrepancies restructure social relations and shape economic rearrangement of labor (Sadiqi

and Ennaji, 2006; Hallward and Stewart, 2018; EL Boubekri, 2021). Furthermore, Hallam points to the arduous travails Moroccan women are preordained to endure in a typically Moroccan male-dominated household. Following the sequential evolvement of her narrative thread, Hallam reminds us that:

The Young women all helped Lalla (Saadia's mother-in-law) with the household, while the men went to work or school...women in the big traditional patriarchal home in the Medina serve all the men of the house; their meals and attending to the daily chores (Hallam, 2012, p. 8).

In a traditional Moroccan family, women are expected to serve as obedient housemaids compelled to cater to their housewifely duties and family obligations. While females are imprisoned in the domestic sphere and fully dedicated to undertaking the laborious drudgery of household activities, men are dubbed reliable breadwinners for they are required to handle the outdoor tasks. Men, therefore, are appointed as leading paterfamilias who shoulder the immense responsibility of providing favorable living conditions and familial security. It is noteworthy that this double standard gender policy has largely impacted male/female power dynamics and enacted the socio-economic and political inhibition of women. In patriarchal contexts, this gendered polarity is juridically authorized and socio-culturally normalized on the grounds of a preconceived misconception which sees that "a penis worths more than a vagina" (Benrbia, 2016, p. 48).

Expressed with obstinate obduracy, Saadia's social transformation consternates her husband by rebelliously Europeanizing her cultural lifestyle. As the story advances forward, Zahra decides to renounce the old-fashioned thinking trajectories and conventional social codes evocative of the Moroccan traditional culture. "My mother was going through an awakening of her own" (Hallam, 2011, p. 32). Saadia seems resolutely determined to recalibrate her conventional attitudes and radically alter her dress code. Her mimetic emulation of secular modernity and liberal culture, emanating from the Francophone metropolitan society, marks her inaugural pursuit of self-independence and social emancipation.

Saadia's recourse to abortion and the excessive consumption of birth-controlling contraceptives emblemize her confrontation of patriarchal injustices carried out by male maraboutic cults. Saadia's feminist stance rejects motherly roles of childbearing and biological procreation. For Saadia, the female biological function of childbearing turns women into docile servants enslaved by their sexuality and exploited bodies.

Her revolt first expressed itself in her resolution to bear no more children...She got herself a competent doctor and resorted to multiple successive abortions...The event single-handedly signified a new liberation for my mother as well as for millions of women around the world...she never again was going to be a slave of her body. (Hallam, 2012, pp. 23-24).

Saadia's vehement abstention from begetting more offspring seals her regained control over her body and the independent navigation of her sexual agency. This intransigent insurgency speaks to her repudiation of being a sexually subjugated broodmare liable to the exhausting

adversities of mothering and imposed husbandly patronage. According to Saadia's counter-patriarchal upheaval, a woman's socio-political contributions should transcend the legal contours of wedlock. The female power of decisive agency is expected here to operate beyond the restrictive limitations of motherly duties and home confinement. For Saadia, her female subjectivity and social ontology cannot be narrowly reduced to her biologically reproductive function of maternal procreation, spousal obedience, and childbearing. The narrative, however, aspires to remake Moroccan female identity and enlarge the scope of women's gender roles to occupy the realm of social independence and economic upward mobility.

## **6. CONCLUSION**

This paper researches the discursive agency embedded in the liberating potential of writing as a deconstructive strategy of female literary visibility and feminist cultural activism. It surveys the transformative power of epistemological disobedience and creative insurgency inherent in the art of Moroccan women's literary representations. Writing against the backdrop of theocratic orthodoxy and the patriarchal injustices inherited from colonial legacies, Hallam's *Road from Morocco* (2012) emerges as an absorbing literary work. The rebellious tendencies of Hallam's female characters in the novel demonstrate the subversive dimensions of Moroccan women's literature. Inspired by emerging counter-canon gaining momentum in contemporary postcolonial feminism, Hallam's novel is both a critique and a contestation of local patriarchal despotism and Orientalist stereotypes of Third World women disempowerment. While her anti-patriarchal trends challenge hegemonic institutions and male-sanctioned traditions of forced marriage, Hallam's counter-Orientalist themes dismantle Western homogenizing discourses that address Oriental female inferiority. Apart from its anti-masculinist assumptions, Hallam exhibits anti-Orientalist signs of cultural resistance. Her decolonial approach in the novel plays not only on the central theme of female emancipation but also rejects any white dominant prejudices which relegate non-Western women, particularly Moroccan females, to the plight of sexual exploitation and educational deprivation. Indeed, it is in this context that Hallam's *Road from Morocco* (2012) offers a liberating space aimed to undermine old-anchored hierarchies integral to the sexual rearrangement of labor and political restructuring of education.

The growth of postcolonial feminist writings has become a productive breeding ground which empowered female-oriented interpretive communities. Without doubt, this flourishing literary genre continues to allow for the enunciative "transcription of a female intellectual, political, [literary], and religious subjectivity" (Rddad, 2018, 12). In Hallam's *Road from Morocco* (2012), the female character of Saadia emerges as a prominent prototype of agency expression and defiant tenacity. For Saadia, self-determination and social emancipation necessitate defying disobedience and resilient obstinacy. As Saadia shows us, liberation and self-independence entail the risky sacrifice of revolting against the repressive norms of female subordination and patriarchal domination cultivated in ultra-conservative societies.

Through her womanist literary writing as a corrective lens, Wafa has instigated an unprecedented mutation in the cultural politics of man/woman asymmetrical power relations. These discursive outcomes are laid bare in the upside-down reversal of the normalized myth of the 'silent woman' (Tahboun, 2023). Hence, Hallam's *Road from Morocco* (2012) has engendered paradigm-shifting transformations that revolutionized existing patriarchal



frameworks of archiving cultural memory and interpreting national history. Wafa's major contribution resides in transmuting the gender-unjust model of 'HIS-story' to an inclusively gender-democratic stance that prioritizes and speaks of purely feminine experiences and traumatic encounters. By incorporating the poetics of 'secular cosmopolitanism' (Majid, 2011) as a conceptual framework, contemporary Moroccan women writers sought to contest local narratives of conservative patriarchy permeating the Moroccan socio-political spectrum. They further expanded their subversive project of anti-patriarchal resistance into avant-garde gynocentric models of re-narrating female subjectivity. Their fundamental objectives include, but are not necessarily limited to, rewriting female literary visibility and gender mobility outside the normative modes of masculinist literary canons (EL Boubekri, 2020).

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